

Canada Seems to Prefer State of 'War' in Korea, Not Peace

By [Yves Engler](#)

Global Research, October 29, 2018

[Yves Engler](#) 28 October 2018

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Who prefers military might over peaceful discussion to settle a long festering international dispute? Canada, it seems.

It may surprise some that a Canadian general is undercutting inter-Korean rapprochement while Global Affairs Canada seeks to maintain its 70-year old war footing, but that is what the Liberal government is doing.

At the start of the month Canadian Lieutenant General Wayne Eyre told a Washington audience that the North Koreans were “experts at separating allies” and that a bid for a formal end to the Korean war represented a “slippery slope” for the 28,500 US troops there.

[“So what](#) could an end-of-war declaration mean? Even if there is no legal basis for it, emotionally people would start to question the presence and the continued existence of the United Nations Command,” said Eyre at the Carnegie Institute for International Peace. “And it’s a slippery slope then to question the presence of U.S. forces on the peninsula.”



The [first non-US general](#) to hold the post since the command was created to fight the Korean War in 1950, Eyre became deputy commander of the UNC at the end of July. He joined [14 other Canadian](#) officers with UNC.

Image on the right: Lieut. Gen. Wayne D. Eyre, the deputy commander of the United Nations Command, speaks during a change-of-responsibility ceremony at Camp Humphreys, a sprawling U.S. military complex in Pyeongtaek, 70 kilometers south of Seoul, on July 30, 2018. (Yonhap)

Responsible for overseeing the 1953 armistice agreement, UNC has undercut Korean rapprochement. At the start of the month the *Financial Times* reported,

[“the US-spearheaded](#) United Nations Command has in recent weeks sparked controversy in host nation South Korea with a series of moves that have highlighted the chasm between Seoul’s pro-engagement attitude to Pyongyang and Washington’s hard line.”

In August, for instance, the UN force [blocked a train](#) carrying South Korean officials from crossing the Demilitarized Zone as part of an initiative to improve relations by modernizing cross-border railways.

As it prepares to concede operational control over its forces to Seoul in coming years, Washington is pushing to “revitalize” UNC, which is led by a US General who simultaneously commands US troops in Korea. According to the *Financial Times*, the UN force “serves to bolster and enhance the US’s position in north-east Asia at a time when China is rising.” To “revitalize” UNC the US is pressing the 16 countries that deployed soldiers during the Korean War to increase their military contribution going forward, a position argued at a Vancouver gathering in January on [promoting sanctions](#) against the North.

In other words, Ottawa and Washington would prefer the existing state of affairs in Korea because it offers an excuse for keeping tens of thousands of troops near China.

As part of reducing tensions, ridding the peninsula of nuclear weapons and possibly reunifying their country, the two Korean governments have sought a formal end to the Korean War. It’s an initial step in an agreement the Korean leaders signed in April and last month they asked the UN to circulate a peace declaration calling for an official end to hostilities. But, Canadian foreign minister Chrystia Freeland has responded gingerly to these efforts. In response to Seoul and Pyongyang’s joint announcement to seek a formal end to the Korean War in April Freeland said, “we all need to be careful and not assume anything.”

Two Global Affairs Canada statements released last month on the “North Korea nuclear crisis” studiously ignored the Koreas’ push for an official end to hostilities. Instead they called for “sanctions that exert pressure on North Korea to abandon its weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile programs completely, verifiably and irreversibly.” The second statement said UN Security Council sanctions “must ... remain in place until Pyongyang takes concrete actions in respect of its international obligations.”

Global Affairs’ position flies in the face of South Korea, Russia, China and other nations that have brought up easing UN sanctions on North Korea. Washington, on the other hand, is seeking to tighten sanctions.

Partly to bolster the campaign to isolate North Korea a Vancouver Island based submarine was [sent across](#) the big pond at the start of the year. In April Ottawa also [sent a CP-140](#) Aurora surveillance aircraft and 40 military personnel to a US base in Japan from which British, Australian and US forces monitor the North’s efforts to evade UN sanctions. A September Global Affairs Canada statement titled “Canada renews deployment in support of multinational initiative to enforce UN Security Council sanctions on North Korea” noted:

[“A Canadian Armed](#) Forces maritime patrol aircraft will return to the region to

help counter North Korea's maritime smuggling, in particular its use of ship-to-ship transfers of refined petroleum products. In addition, Her Majesty's Canadian Ship (HMCS) Calgary, on operations in the area as part of Canada's continued presence in the region, was named to contribute to this effort."

Rather than undermine Korean rapprochement, Ottawa should call for an official end to the 70-year old war and direct the Canadians in UNC to support said position. Canada should welcome peace in Korea even if it may trouble those seeking to maintain 30,000 US troops to "contain" China.

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