

# Vancouver Summit: A Missed Opportunity for Peace with North Korea

By [Ken Stone](#)

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In-depth Report: [NORTH KOREA](#), [Nuclear War](#)

*On January 16 in Vancouver, the Canadian and US governments hosted a summit meeting of foreign ministers of twenty Western countries which fought against the DPRK (North Korea) during the Korean War of 1950-53.*

Although the meeting was billed as an opportunity to find a diplomatic solution to the standoff between the USA and the DPRK over North Korea's nuclear program, the military option was never off the table. Donald Trump, president of one of the two countries sponsoring the summit, threatened the DPRK with "total destruction" and "fire and fury like the world has never seen." It's important to note that such threats are violations of international law. Article 2.4 of the United Nations Charter outlaws even the *threat* of force against any state.

North Korea was not invited to the meeting. Neither were China and Russia. The Chinese government termed the summit "destructive."

"It will only create divisions within the international community and harm joint efforts to appropriately resolve the Korean peninsula nuclear issue," spokesperson Lu Kang said to reporters in Beijing.<sup>1</sup>

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov termed the meeting "pernicious and detrimental" and questioned the wisdom of bringing together representatives of the countries which fought North Korea, Russia, and China during the Korean War.<sup>2</sup>

As the Chinese and Russian governments predicted, the summit turned into a bellicose gathering which decided to tighten the screws on the already all-pervasive economic sanctions against North Korea. The Canadian government pledged to donate \$3.25 million to a US State Department program "that will help countries enforce sanctions against the North Korean regime."<sup>3</sup> And there was a concurrent threat from a US State Department representative of interdicting (that is, boarding) ships on the high seas bound for North Korean ports:

"We continue to explore all options to enhance maritime security and the ability to interdict maritime traffic, those transporting goods to and from the [North] that support the nuclear and missile program," said Brian Hook,

director of policy planning at the State Department.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson praised countries which had broken off diplomatic relations with the DPRK and encouraged more to do so. Such bellicose talk and action leads easily to military confrontation. And some have pointed out that the participants at the summit could easily turn into the backbone of a new “coalition of the willing” to launch a pre-emptive, and possibly nuclear, military strike at North Korea’s nuclear facilities.<sup>5</sup>

### North Korea Justly Worried

North Korea is nervous about the USA for several valid reasons. First, during the Korean War, US forces laid waste to the country, carpet-bombing its cities, killing 30% of its population. Secondly, the USA has steadfastly refused to sign a peace treaty to end that war. Instead, it maintains a permanent occupation force of 30000 troops just kilometres away in South Korea and conducts huge, regular, and deliberately provocative military exercises close to the Demilitarized Zone and along North Korea’s coasts, containing a “decapitation” component, specifically designed to assassinate the DPRK leadership. In the event of war, US Central Command automatically takes control of South Korea’s military. So, essentially, a hostile power resides along North Korea’s southern border.

### Canada’s Unhelpful Role

So far, the Trudeau government has not contributed to a peaceful solution. Instead, Canada sponsored the most recent UN resolution in late 2017 levelling further economic sanctions against the DPRK. Such sanctions are often deadlier than bombs. A half-million Iraqi children died due to ten years of US sanctions.<sup>6</sup> Three to four million Syrians were turned into refugees largely due to a Canadian-led economic sanctions regime.<sup>7</sup> As in the case of Syria, the economic sanctions levelled against North Korea also deliberately target civilians and are designed to create a sufficient level of civilian unrest for regime change in North Korea to take place.

### Danger of Nuclear War

Not finding a peaceful solution to the current crisis could be catastrophic. Since 2002, the USA has classed “tactical” nuclear weapons as conventional weapons to be used, at its discretion, in first-strike pre-emptive attacks. These bunker-busting bombs possess up to twelve times the power of the Hiroshima bomb. Today, fingers on those “tactical” buttons belong to three-star US generals in the field. If war broke out in Korea, and nukes were used, the scenario of a radioactive nuclear winter covering the entire planet would be likely.

### What Trudeau Should Do

The Trudeau government could have played a helpful role for peace at the January 16 summit meeting by pushing for a peace treaty finally to end the Korean War. All that exists now is an armistice. It could have helped mentor an agreement between the DPRK and USA to freeze North Korea’s nuclear program at existing levels in return for the USA removing its troops from South Korea and stopping provocative military exercises. The Trudeau government could have set an example in NATO by joining the Treaty to Ban Nuclear

Weapons, which, *unlike* North Korea, it voted against at the UN. Indeed, a number of anti-war groups held several activities in Vancouver concurrent with the summit calling for all of the above points.

At the very minimum, the Government of Canada could stop perpetuating false stereotypes about North Korea.

One is that the “isolated Hermit Kingdom” is the most dangerous regime on the planet. Actually, North Korea hasn’t been involved in war for sixty-five years. During that time, the USA has intervened militarily in over fifty countries.<sup>8</sup> Clearly, the USA is far more dangerous.

Another is that North Korea’s a rogue state. Actually, North Korea has committed few, if any, violations of international law. On the other hand, the USA wantonly disregards international consensus, for example, by unilaterally recognizing Jerusalem as Israel’s capital and by attacking many states, in contravention of international law and its own constitution.

A third is that North Korea can’t be allowed to have nuclear ambitions. However, any sovereign state may possess nuclear weapons. The USA has thousands, ranging from “tactical” (one-to-twelve times the explosive power released at Hiroshima) to “strategic” (up to 1000 times Hiroshima). The USA is also the only country ever to use nuclear weapons in wartime, killing over two hundred thousand Japanese civilians in 1945, *after* the Japanese government offered unsuccessfully on several occasions to surrender. Today, even tiny countries, such as Belgium and Holland have about 50 nuclear weapons each. Turkey, Pakistan, India, and Israel also have nuclear weapons. Why not North Korea?

North Korea observed that, when Saddam and Gadaffi disposed of their weapons of mass destruction, their countries were targeted by the USA. As US Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard noted, while the Vancouver summit was in progress,

“...we know that North Korea has these nuclear weapons because they see how the United States, in Libya for example, guaranteed Gaddafi, we’re not going to go after you; you should get rid of your nuclear weapons. He did, then we went and led an attack that toppled Gaddafi, launching Libya into chaos that we are still seeing the results of today. North Korea sees what we did in Iraq, with Saddam Hussein, with those false reports of weapons of mass destruction...”<sup>9</sup>



The guiding principle at Vancouver should have been that states, which took part in the Korean War, shouldn't repeat the same mistake. Instead, the hosts, Canada's Global Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland and US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, excluded North Korea, China, and Russia, thus ratcheting up east-west tensions. The participants could have looked out of the venue windows and seen protesters' banners reading, "Hands Off North Korea!" Instead, they chose to tighten economic sanctions which will cause hunger, privation, and unemployment among North Korea's civilian population. As Graeme MacQueen and Chris Black wrote recently on this website,

"If we Canadians think a lasting peace with North Korea will be obtained by insulting and starving the population of that beleaguered country we are as foolish, and as heartless, as those who put their faith in bombs."<sup>10</sup>

The likelihood is that we will soon see more ships stopped at sea. Just last month, South Korea seized two freighters, docked in South Korean ports, as part of what it called a continuing attempt to stop North Korea's efforts to evade UN sanctions. The two ships, a Panamanian and a Hong Kong-based vessel, were suspected of transporting oil to North Korea. And according to the latest UN resolution on economic sanctions against North Korea, sponsored by Canada, countries may impound such ships in their own ports. But what happens when ships are boarded in international waters, as suggested by a US State Department official, and those ships are North Korean, Russian, or Chinese?

What happens when the interdicting ships are Canadian military vessels? The Canadian Chief of Defence Staff says Canada has the capability to do so.<sup>11</sup>

Trudeau and Freeland let Canadians down. In Vancouver, they could have tried to stop the US juggernaut for war with North Korea or at least jumped off. They did neither. Canadians need to ponder that failure.

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*Ken Stone is Treasurer of the Hamilton Coalition To Stop The War.*

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/china-scorn-north-korea-meeting-vancouver-1.4482387>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/trudeau-defends-north-korea-meeting-after-russian-chinese-criticism-1.4488960>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/north-korea-summit-vancouver-freeland-tillerson-1.4489166>

<sup>4</sup> "U.S. State Department officials confirmed last week that they will discuss whether to intercept ships headed in and out of North Korea." <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/north-korea-summit-vancouver-1.4488338>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.globalresearch.ca/how-canada-can-lead-north-korean-peace-talks-at-vancouver-summit/56>

<sup>6</sup> Federation of American Scientists; Madeleine Albright, the US Secretary of State during the Clinton administration told Lesley Stahl on the May 12, 1996, edition of *60 Minutes* that UNICEF (United Nations Children's Emergency Fund)- Results of the 1999 Iraq Child and Maternal Mortality Surveys "we think the price is worth it."

<sup>7</sup> In June of 2013, Canada hosted a meeting of the Economic Sanctions Subcommittee of the "Friends of Syria Group of Countries" in Ottawa, where a comprehensive economic sanctions regime was established against the Government of Syria. <http://www.ipolitics.ca/2013/06/24/friends-of-syrian-people-group-to-meet-in-ottawa-tuesday/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://williamblum.org/essays/read/overthrowing-other-peoples-governments-the-master-list>

<sup>9</sup> <https://caitlinjohnstone.com/2018/01/16/gabbard-north-korea-has-nukes-because-they-saw-what-the-u-s-did-to-libya/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.globalresearch.ca/how-canada-can-lead-north-korean-peace-talks-at-vancouver-summit/5625069>

<sup>11</sup> General Jonathan Vance, Chief of the Defence Staff, told The Globe and Mail on Friday that he has "the military capability inside the Armed Forces" to participate in any effort to ensure compliance with UN sanctions. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/china-russia-dismiss-vancouver-summit-as-co-unproductive/article37610583/>

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