

# Feds' purchase of F-35s indicates Canada has given up on peace-building as best route to global security

It's now clear for all to see that militarism has taken over Canada's foreign policy.

Douglas Roche

Opinion



EDMONTON—The government's announcement that it will spend \$19-billion to buy a fleet of F-35 fighter jets jarringly demonstrates that Canada has given up on the idea that peace-building among nations is the best route to global security. It's now clear for all to see that militarism has taken over Canada's foreign policy.

The F-35s coming to Canada are stealth fighters designed for first strike attacks. The government claims that 88 of these warplanes are "essential for protecting Canadians, enhancing Arctic security and national sovereignty, and enabling Canada to meet its NATO, NORAD, and other obligations well into the future."

It used to be that the United Nations' broad agenda for peace, comprising a melding of arms control, economic and social development and vigorous application of human rights, was a top priority for Canada. No more. The government has brought back the Roman adage: "If you want peace, prepare for war."

NATO's demands now trump UN needs; the huge amount of money now going into Canada's defence budget comes at the expense of, among other things, contributing to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, a 17-point program designed to build up human security in the least stable places on Earth.

The old ways of bellicosity were supposed to have been buried by the emergence of the international order, spawning international co-operation, that was cobbled together after World War II. But bellicosity has returned

Defence Minister Anita Anand announced on Jan. 9 that the government had finalized its deal to replace the Air Force's again fleet of CF-18 fighter jets with 88 Lockheed Martin F-35 fighter jets. It's estimated to cost \$19-billion, but will cost about \$70-billion for the entire lifecycle of the jets. *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*



with a vengeance, brought on by the barbaric acts of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The decision to massively upgrade Canada's Armed Forces is but one more outcome of the Ukraine war—a war that started in the first place as a result of the failure of diplomacy to produce common security in Europe.

Russia's relentless attacks on Ukraine have shoved aside any serious pursuit of negotiations to end the conflict. The U.S. wants to crush Russia, and Canada has succumbed to a war mentality. This is exactly the wrong lesson to learn from the Ukraine war.

Perhaps the new Canadian policy of re-armament was foretold, if not driven, by Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland, who, when she was foreign minister in 2017, praised "mil-

itary power in defence of our principles and our alliances." She said she wanted to put it plainly: "Canadian diplomacy and development sometimes require the backing of hard power. Force is, of course, always a last resort. But the principled use of force, together with our allies and governed by international law, is part

of our history and must be part of our future."

The day after this speech, the government laid out a plan to increase the defence budget by 70 per cent over the next decade, thus giving muscle to its declaration that the military are an "indispensable tool" of Canada's foreign policy. Peacekeeping and

international aid were sent into the shadows.

Freeland's decidedly muscular approach to world affairs carried over to her speech last October to the Brookings Institute, a Washington think tank, in which she virtually said goodbye to the rules-based liberal order, the centre of which is the UN agenda for peace. This agenda, now in the process of being renewed by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, has tried to build a world of fairness, i.e., one in which the West does not hog the resources of the world and seek domination over the rest of the world in the five spheres of air, land, sea, space, and cyber.

Lamenting that the entire world is not "peacefully marching together towards global liberal democracy," Freeland pointed to a new paradigm in which we work with our friends to push back against the autocrats now menacing what we construe as our values for peace. The liberal order, so praised during the decades following the end of the Cold War, has indeed turned illiberal. Freeland's answer is not to buttress the political and legal programs of the UN, but to pile more money into arms.

The new reliance on military power has skewed Canada's spending priorities. Instead of foreign policy deciding military requirements, Canada has it backward. The government should have paid attention to the excellent report of the Canadian branch of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, which detailed the harms and risks of the F-35.

Unfortunately, Russia has given Freeland plenty of cause to demand of the ambivalent Justin Trudeau that Canada cough up more and more money for the most modern military technology available. That was not the way of Lester Pearson, Pierre Trudeau, and Jean Chrétien, all of whom held out against the U.S. demands for Canada to increase its military strength.

So strong is Freeland's influence on cabinet's decisions that the government is getting away with also justifying the F35s as a great boon to the Canadian economy. More and more jobs will be created, the government claims. This is highly misleading. Every reputable study on the subject over the past half-century demonstrates that building up the civilian economy everywhere creates far more jobs than high-technology militarism.

Canadian foreign policy is now dominated by NATO's incessant demands for more military hardware. And NATO is driven by the U.S., which has just adopted the highest military budget in its history thanks to the unparalleled lobbying by the military-industrial complex. Russia is the proximate cause of Canada's military escalation, but the reasons for the loss of vision about how to attain peace in a troubled world are much deeper.

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