



THE HILL TIMES

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1989

June 30, 2025

The real Mark Carney is about to emerge

The new prime minister needs to come clean with the Canadian public. It is the existential threat of climate change, nuclear weapons, pandemics and forced migrations of peoples that also challenge Canada's security. Mark Carney must think beyond NATO to be a credible leader.

OPINION | BY DOUGLAS ROCHE | June 30, 2025

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EDMONTON—Through adroit sleight-of-hand in signing on to United States President Donald Trump's outrageous demand that NATO states spend five per cent of their GDP on defence by 2035, Prime Minister

Mark Carney has extricated himself from the clutches of the avaricious U.S. president. But Carney now faces the biggest test of his professional career: his credibility. The real Mark Carney is about to emerge.

Carney knows full well that raising this country's military spending to \$150-billion a year—which is what five per cent of GDP would cost—would cripple the government's ability to meet Canadians' needs at home as well as humanitarian assistance abroad. The prime minister plunged ahead with this commitment to assuage Trump, and thus stay in his good graces in order to get a better deal for Canada in the ongoing tariff negotiations.

Because Spain—a NATO member—balked at Trump's five-per-cent demand, Trump instantly retaliated, stating at a press conference, "We'll make them pay twice as much on tariffs." Carney evidently saw that intimidation tactic coming.

The prime minister was also aware that NATO would review the five per cent pledge in 2029, i.e., after Trump leaves office. This means that once Trump is out of power, the five-per-cent demand will lose its force and may fade away. So let's not worry about it today! For the moment, Trump is off our back.

Besides, Carney argues, part of the increased "defence" spending will actually go to ports, transportation, and the development of critical minerals. So all this is good for Canada's economy.

When I say that Carney's credibility is at stake, I do not mean his personal honour. Carney is a principled man, but he has become a pragmatic politician able to outmanoeuvre an opponent, and that is what he has done in the complicated work of re-setting Canada's economic and security relationship with the U.S.

Rather, his credibility will be challenged in measuring how he leads Canada in helping to build the conditions for sustainable peace. His book, *Value(s): Building a better World for All*, was about dedicating the market to help vulnerable people. So far, he has put all Canada's eggs in the military basket as if more armaments is the route to peace with social justice. And he has not once caused this vital subject to be debated in Parliament.

As a former adviser to the UN secretary-general, he knows that the agenda for peace goes far beyond guns and involves vigorous diplomacy, boosting the Sustainable Development Goals, and a sturdy defence of international law. So far, Carney has been silent in these areas.

Worse, his government presented estimates this spring forecasting a 7.1 per cent decrease in Global Affairs Canada's \$8.4-billion budget. That includes an 11.3-per-cent decrease in "development, peace and security programming," going from \$5.6-billion in planned spending in 2024-25 to \$4.9-billion next year. It will be a tragic stain on Carney's place in history if he proves unable to champion the UN Charter's insistence that the "least" amount of money be spent on armaments.

What is most troubling about the prime minister's rush to boost military spending in Canada—at the expense of domestic needs in the health-care field, to say nothing of this country's deplorable low rate of foreign aid and virtual absence in the peacekeeping field, too—is the normalization of war thinking that is now sweeping through the Western world.

Disarmament campaigns are a thing of the past. The UN's "Agenda for Peace," concentrating on preventive measures to avert wars, is swept aside. The 2024 UN "Pact for the Future," which brought into sharp focus the need for a recommitment to international cooperation based on

respect for international law, shows little sign of being actually implemented.

Canadians have a right to expect a higher level of action by Carney in steering the country to greater involvement in building the conditions for peace rather than boosting militarism as the answer to the chaos of today. In order to demonstrate his credibility as an international leader, Carney must now recognize the importance of diplomacy, international development, and peacekeeping.

I am not alone in lamenting Carney's sense of direction. Alex Neve, the outstanding former secretary-general of Amnesty International, who is giving this year's CBC Massey Lectures, has expressed "a sense of dread that protecting human rights, addressing humanitarian needs and responding to the climate crisis are precisely the crucial imperatives that will be sacrificed to fund this massive military spend. We must push back."

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Former Senator Douglas Roche's latest book is Keep Hope Alive: Essays for a War-free World (Amazon).

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