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## **Can Carney reconcile his Davos goals with complicity in the Iran war?**

The prime minister is a highly accomplished man and has already established himself in world leadership ranks. He now needs to elevate the soft power of diplomacy over the hard power of militarism.

### **OPINION**

**BY DOUGLAS ROCHE, ERNIE REGEHR**

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The United States/Israel war on Iran has put Prime Minister Mark Carney on a tightrope: his celebrated Davos speech championed international cooperation and soft power diplomacy; yet his quick declaration of support for the war on Iran showed his continued tolerance of the hard power of military action.

When Carney told this year's Davos World Economic Forum that a fundamental principle to guide efforts

toward an improved world order would have to be “prohibition of the use of force, except when consistent with the [United Nations] Charter,” applied equally “to allies and rivals,” it was shocking to see such a quick retreat from it.

It is perhaps harsh, as some have done, to charge the prime minister with “abandoning” international law in supporting the U.S. strikes. Rather, we would say he is weakening this country’s diplomatic work for peace by over-reliance on—and certainly over-funding—Canada’s defence spending.

This is because he has given a too-ready acceptance of British Prime Minister Keir Starmer’s recent description at the Munich Security Conference of “hard power” as the “currency of the age.” The Iran war is a tragic demonstration of this.

Many Canadians are left to gasp—some of us with more than a little foreboding—at the speed and apparent ease with which our country has adopted hard-power currency through quadrupled defence spending, while other federal departments brace for across-the-board cuts. What most clearly confirms this rush to join the hard-power currency bloc are the accompanying cuts to soft power, notably diplomacy, just when the prime minister’s welcome talk

of Canadian middle-power leadership calls for dramatically increased demand for skilled, experienced diplomats.

If, as the defence establishment likes to argue, effective diplomacy depends on the support of persuasive military capacity, why is Canada not preparing to take advantage of that growing military heft to pursue seriously expanded diplomacy?

In his comments opening the Security Council meeting on Iran, Secretary-General António Guterres regretted that promising diplomacy had been “squandered” by the attacks, adding that “lasting peace can only be achieved through peaceful means.” That is the message Carney should have conveyed at home and abroad.

Those means have always included arms control and disarmament diplomacy. Through NORAD, Canada has joined the hunt for more effective defences against hypersonic and cruise missiles. That hunt should include exploring possibilities for multilateral restraints on these rapidly proliferating systems. Without some real controls, hypersonic and cruise missile offence will continue to race well ahead of the defenders.

And why is Canada, a prominent middle power with G7 credentials, not acting on Carney’s challenge to middle

powers by leading a collective war prevention and nuclear restraint push, now that our expanding hard power will be lending our diplomacy added gravitas.

For example, the 191 states adhering to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) will hold their next critically important review conference in April/May. The last two reviews, in 2015 and 2022, failed to reach consensus and another failure must be averted. Thus, Canadian experts in NPT affairs are calling on this country to gather like-minded middle powers together to co-ordinate their disarmament actions at the conference and beyond – and in the process make arms control and disarmament a key plank of Canadian security policy.

Similarly, NATO's expanding military hard power, if not accompanied by direct talks across the deepened east-west divide, will contribute to dramatically escalated tensions and increased risks of war, leaving both sides less secure.

The Americans and Soviets learned this the hard way in the Cold War, watching their competition spin out of control and putting the planet in escalating nuclear peril. Jolted by the Cuban missile crisis, they finally realized that talking and dialogue across the Iron Curtain was the only path to restraint and greater stability.

Talks continued, even in the face of the Soviet Union's illegal and blatant aggression on Afghanistan, and a remarkable series of arms control agreements and the innovative Helsinki Process ensued. Instead of learning from that experience, Europe and Canada have chosen to elevate a refusal to talk substantively with Russia into a moral virtue. But as distasteful as it is to dialogue with perpetrators of illegal wars and war crimes, engagement with declared enemies is essential and inevitable and, as Ukraine is demonstrating, can be done with honour.

Just as diplomacy was essential to easing Cold War competition, the widening destruction of the Iran conflict will ultimately yield to a semblance of stability only through a return to engagement, dialogue, and negotiation—in other words, the soft power of diplomacy.

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