

Opinion



Foreign Affairs
Mélanie Joly
speaks with
reporters in
the West
Block on
May 9,
2023. *The
Hill Times*
photograph
by Andrew
Meade

Canada's salute to militarism is sad

Mélanie Joly is heir to some great Canadians initiatives for peace: Lester Pearson on peacekeeping in the Suez Canal, Jean Chrétien in keeping Canada out of the Iraq war, Lloyd Axworthy in building the Landmines Treaty, Brian Mulroney in ending apartheid in South Africa, Joe Clark in bringing Vietnamese Boat People to Canada.

Douglas Roche

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EDMONTON—Let us lament the decline of Canadian

foreign policy now subsumed into Canada's defence policy. The ambitious diplomatic outreach of Lester Pearson, Jean Chrétien, Lloyd Axworthy, Brian Mulroney, and Joe Clark—all of whom took important foreign policy initiatives—contributed directly to Canada helping build a peaceful world. But Mélanie Joly, the present foreign affairs minister, presents only mush as she defends the \$73-billion increase in this country's defence expenditures over the next 20 years.

The new defence policy statement, announced April 8, makes it clear that a burst in spending on the armaments of war now dominates the political thinking in Ottawa. "Further investments in our military are essential to safeguarding our interests," Joly says. She joins the chorus in Ottawa that says defence spending—which will reach 1.76 per cent of GDP in five years—is but a way-stop on the way to the full two per cent demanded by the NATO leadership.

While defence spending soars, Joly meekly accepts a nearly 20 per cent decline in the spending of Global Affairs Canada from its \$9.2-billion budget in 2022-23. The details of the slash in Global Affairs' spending, as outlined in Neil Moss' article in *The Hill Times* on March 13, reveal that Canada is succumbing to the world-wide loss of confidence in diplomacy as the main driver of peace.

In the new quicksand of militarism as the answer to the world's problems, Canada risks being mired in what the historian Barbara Tuchman called the "wooden-headedness" of governments. This wooden-headedness consists in assessing a situation in terms of preconceived fixed notions while ignoring or rejecting any contrary signs. No experience in the failure of war to bring peace can shake NATO's belief in military dominance as the path to security.

It cannot be said that elements of this country's new defence policy are without value. The investment of \$1.4-billion over 20 years to acquire specialized maritime sensors to conduct ocean surveillance will strengthen Canada's protection of our share of the Arctic. More money to protect our year-round presence and infrastructure in the North will benefit the territories, Indigenous Peoples, and Northern communities.

But it is folly to think that military means alone can ensure that the great sweep of the Arctic—already heavily militarized by the presence of 69 military sites in the five states with Arctic Ocean coastlines—can bring security to the peoples there. No Arctic-centred conflicts are amenable to military solutions, the distinguished Arctic analyst Ernie Regehr writes in an essay, *Military Footprints in the Arctic*, recently published by the Simons Foun-

ation. Noting that the Arctic is warming at four times the global rate, Regehr says the Arctic "is a region that above all requires advances in human security and creative responses to the crises of climate change, economic and social dislocation, and strategic instability, not accelerated military competition and the further accumulations of the destructive technology and paraphernalia of military combat."

Nonetheless, the political thinking that more military hardware in the Arctic will protect Canada's "sovereignty" is but another reflection of wooden-headedness. A fever of militarism has broken out in the world because governments have lost faith in their own abilities to resolve political disputes without violence.

A moment of great hope occurred when the Cold War ended more than three decades ago. The leaders of the UN Security Council met for the first time to chart a course of co-operation that, if not happily harmonious, would at least be dedicated to a rules-based order. The secretary-general at the time, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, issued an Agenda for Peace, which called for a \$50-million peacekeeping reserve fund, a \$50-million humanitarian revolving fund for emergency assistance, and a \$1-billion peace endowment fund. The governments wouldn't listen, and fell into warring factions; the rise of an expanding

and powerful NATO surrounded a re-arming Russia; and the military-industrial complex drove U.S. military spending to new heights.

Throughout the years of turmoil, the UN's authority was steadily weakened. Now the present Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is trying again to steer the world away from reliance on arms for peace. A few months ago, he published *A New Agenda for Peace*, setting out a comprehensive approach to prevention, linking peace, sustainable development, climate action, and food security. He laid out 12 recommendations for action, starting with the elimination of nuclear weapons, boosting preventive diplomacy, and developing national prevention strategies to address the drivers of violence and conflict.

One would think Guterres' practical proposals would command the attention of the Government of Canada, and at least be a factor in the new defence policy. But there is not a single reference to the *New Agenda for Peace* in the defence document. The reticence of Joly—who seems content to play second fiddle to Defence Minister Bill Blair in the presentation of the government's policies—is particularly disappointing.

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From Mélanie Joly: a salute to militarism. It is sad. Utterly sad.

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

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