

Global



It's not easy for Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to challenge the military-industrial complex, which drives U.S. policy, which in turn, drives NATO. He deserves credit, writes Douglas Roche. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Trudeau is right to resist defence lobby's call for more military spending

NATO doesn't do holistic peace. Always demanding more money for arms, it intimidates its own members.

Douglas Roche

Opinion



EDMONTON—Credit Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who is a politician, with telling the truth. A leaked Pentagon document, bearing the seal of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, said Trudeau told NATO officials privately that Canada will never reach the military spending target of two per cent of GDP agreed to by members of the alliance. Asked about this, Trudeau pointedly did not deny saying it.

The prime minister did say: "I continue to say, and will always

say, that Canada is a reliable partner to NATO, [a] reliable partner around the world."

Canada currently spends 1.29 per cent of its GDP on NATO, which this year, translated to \$29-billion. This makes Canada the 13th largest military spender in the world, and the sixth largest in NATO. The government plans to spend \$553-billion over the next 20 years to buy new weapons systems like fighter jets, armed drones, and warships.

To move to a full two per cent would require the government to starve already under-funded health and housing needs. The public would never stand for it.

The two-per cent target is one of the greatest frauds ever perpetrated on a gullible public by the military-industrial complex, which drives American policy, which, in turn, drives NATO. Trudeau deserves credit for challenging it.

It's not easy for Trudeau to do this, for he is surrounded by military hawks for whom no amount of military spending is ever enough. The Conference of Defence Associations Institute released an open letter, signed by dozens of political and military luminaries, calling on Ottawa

to stop backsliding on national defence.

The institute wants "a major reassessment of our defence posture" and more money for NATO. This is the defence lobby speaking, and they have big voices (Richard Fadden, Andrew Leslie, and Rick Hillier are among the signatories). They drown out another set of equally distinguished Canadians (including Margaret MacMillan, John Polanyi, and Veronica Tennant) who have pleaded with the government to understand that peace doesn't come from the barrel of a gun.

Thanks to the Ukraine war, the militarists today are beating a very loud drum. Russia's ruthless invasion of Ukraine has unleashed a demand for more arms, and world military expenditures this year will climb well over \$2-trillion. Public attention in the West is fixated on defeating Russia at all costs. So it is easy for the war planners (who command the headlines) to proclaim that the government must "make significant additional funding available to address the long-standing deficiencies in military capabilities and readiness."

NATO is driving the new clamour in Canada for more military

spending. NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg doesn't hide his displeasure with us for not meeting the two per cent target. What Stoltenberg doesn't say out loud is that NATO policy is driven by the United States, which undertakes excessive military spending beyond belief. America's planned \$842-billion military budget for 2024 is greater than the next 10 greatest military spenders combined.

All this is commanded by the military-industrial complex, led by five powerful defence contractors in the U.S., who virtually control the proceedings of the armed services committees in Congress. The military-industrial complex (warnings about it go back as far as the Eisenhower administration) operates on the assumption that future "strategic competition" with Russia and China is inevitable. There's no cap for research on artificial intelligence weaponry.

Canada is caught up in this headlong dash for rearmament. NATO is now an express train roaring through a dark tunnel. No one knows what's on the other side of the tunnel, but the fear-mongers tell us it must be bad. Once again, fear overcomes

good judgment. Thankfully, Trudeau has—at last—issued a red flag to NATO.

Pierre Trudeau, the father of the present prime minister, told me in 1984, when I was named Canada's ambassador for disarmament, that NATO's obsolete policies were one of the biggest thorns he had had to endure as prime minister. George Kennan, the famous U.S. diplomat who first proposed the policy of containment of the Soviet Union, called NATO expansion "the most fateful error of American policy in the entire post-Cold War era." Still, the expansion goes on (Finland has just been taken in) and the false belief that bigger and better weaponry will bring peace continues to bamboozle the public.

The fallout from Justin Trudeau's reluctance to keep paying obeisance to NATO is just getting started. The peace movement in Canada, hitherto cowed by the spurious charges that calls for negotiations to end the Ukraine war amount to appeasement of Russia is awakening. The Canadian Pugwash Group is now mobilizing its members to advocate for international leaders to bring Russia and Ukraine to the negotiating table.

Trudeau has opened up the issue of just how much money is required for adequate Canadian defence. Just look at the faces of his cabinet as they surround him in Question Period: a group split group between those who've been swayed by the NATO machine; the others fearful that NATO will lead them into perpetual militarism. Public opinion on NATO's efficacy will be an important factor in how Trudeau responds to the brow-beating he is now taking from his military alliance "allies."

The issue of peace in the world is far larger than the Russia-Ukraine disputes. Peace is a global issue. Thus, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is now preparing "A New Agenda for Peace," which will address a myriad of challenges the international community faces today. Guterres says that in order to protect and manage the global public good of peace, we need a peace continuum based on a better understanding of the underlying drivers of conflict, a renewed effort to agree on more effective collective security responses, and a meaningful set of steps to manage emerging risks. This is a holistic approach to peace.

NATO doesn't do holistic peace. Always demanding more money for arms, it intimidates its own members. How else can you explain Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland's cut, in the recent budget, of \$1.3-billion from Canada's already meagre international assistance program? NATO bloats; the poor suffer.

Douglas Roche is a former Canadian senator and author. His new book, *Keep Hope Alive: Essays for a War-free World*, will be published in the fall.

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