

Canada's Participation in the Global Arms Race

Illusion of choice: Shared commitment to armament by all federal political parties

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Throughout Prime Minister Stephen Harper's term, Canada's current account balance has fallen from over +\$18 billion in 2006, +\$12 billion in 2007, and +\$8 billion in 2008, to -\$38 billion in 2009 and -\$40 billion in 2010. With these figures, Canada slipped from being ranked 13th globally, to ranked 185th.

Considering the nation's financial position, budget cuts will obviously be required to get Canada back in the black, and to finance ongoing stimulus measures intended to promote long term growth and profitability. Few federal political candidates, unfortunately, are directly addressing how they intend to balance the budget. None are addressing rising military spending that is a growing drain on public finances.

Under Stephen Harper, Canada's military (National Defence) budget increased from \$15 billion in 2005-2006 to \$18 billion in 2008-2009. Another 9.7% increase is predicted for 2010-2011. The current 2010 Conservative budget projects continued annual growth in military spending beyond 2018. Increases in defence spending, however, began over a decade ago in 1999, and prior to 9/11 2001 that has been often used to justify increases. At least capping, if not actively decreasing military spending, is an absolute requirement for Canada to balance its international account. Doing so will provide billions of dollars year-on-year to reduce the national debt-load and to improve Canada's productivity and competitiveness.

The Conservative Party's commitment to increased military spending is clearly visible in the 2010 budget and its projected year-on-year increases. Ironically, the left-leaning NDP platform plans to "maintain the current planned levels of Defence spending commitments", while proposing specifically to review the controversial purchase of F-35 fighter jets. The Liberal platform promises to cancel the F-35 purchase (proposed to cost Canadian taxpayers anywhere from \$9 billion to upwards of \$30 billion), but does not promise to reduce spending levels overall. All three Canadian left-wing parties, the Liberals, NDP, and *Bloc Québécois*, plan to honour the 2011 withdrawal from Afghanistan. Only the Liberals openly support the 2011-2014 Afghanistan training mission. No real political contender has proposed disengaging from current NATO operations in Libya, nor has any proposed voicing resistance to opening further theatres.

In reality, Canadians know that both what political leaders are capable of delivering upon election, and what they plan to deliver, are inevitably different from the initiatives written into official platforms. Canadians should be very sceptical, however, of the lack of consideration paid by leaders to growing military spending commitments. Many left-wing

voters would undoubtedly be surprised to learn that their favoured NDP actually promote increasing yearly levels of military spending. The international Green Party is the only platform conservative enough to promote military budget cuts (reduced to 2005 levels). The Green Party does not, however, appear to be a legitimate federal contender, leaving Canadians who are opposed to escalating military armament with no legitimate option in the upcoming federal election. While the NDP and Liberals both propose to revise Canada's military procurements systems, neither directly addresses the issue of Canadian arms trade with nations currently engaged in active warfare.

Military escalation and armament from both NATO and other countries is a significant concern to voters. While public spending is used to finance destructive wars, fewer and fewer resources are available to construct a productive and sustainable future for Canada's youth, or to finance the retirement of ageing populations. Canada has an opportunity to become a global leader in disarmament, and to challenge the military-industrial complex driving the ongoing global arms race. From reviewing parties' platforms, however, it is quite clear that none of the potential Prime Ministers has any intention of seizing this opportunity for Canadians. After May 2nd, left-wing voters in Canada will most likely learn, like their Democratic counterparts in the US have learned, that party choice makes no real difference in military policy and budgeting.

With the current platform options, Canadians cannot effectively voice opposition to a military policy of armament through elections. Canada's participation in the global arms race does not carry the official, or implied, approval of a majority of the Canadian public. Parties' promises to return to peace-keeping operations are hypocritical and meaningless in the face of growing military expenditures and complicit support of NATO offensives, the stance taken by all real political contenders. Decreasing military spending is both a practical economic and symbolic commitment to peace in a time of armament and escalation. The alternative is to continue marching towards a new world war, and unfortunately, doing so is the only option available to Canadian voters.

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