



January 15, 2020

Dear Ministers,

Greetings from Canadian Friends Service Committee, the peace and social justice agency of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Canada.

Our hearts are heavy as the prospect of another war looms before us, this time with Iran. Let us examine some common misconceptions.

Opposition to war is not advocating doing nothing, it is advocating actively investing in and pursuing the many viable and effective alternatives, rather than imagining that alternatives must be impossible although they haven't yet been fully tried.

Opposition to war is not condoning human rights abuses, it is being realistic and clear-sighted by refusing to believe that those abuses can be solved through killing.

Opposition to war is opposition to the destruction of human life and of the earth. Militaries are among the most harmful polluters, contributors to climate change, and destroyers of infrastructure needed by people and of habitats depended on by wildlife.

We the human family are overwhelmingly fed up with wars. They are a false solution to misunderstood problems.

Canada's recent involvement in wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Syria has made it clear that they have each been tremendously costly disasters.

We recognize the delicate situations that key decision makers are in, facing many competing pressures and having to make far-reaching choices with limited and imperfect information. We encourage slow and careful reflection and learning from history. We call for the courage to refuse a war with Iran.

The Washington Post recently uncovered details about an \$11 million dollar US government report on "lessons learned" from the decades of war with Afghanistan. The lengthy report contained interviews with senior sources including ambassadors, generals, and White House officials who often spoke candidly about the catastrophic blunders and ignorance behind the war. For instance, General Douglas Lute, who was the White House's "Afghan war czar" for years, noted that "we were devoid of a fundamental understanding of Afghanistan—we didn't know what we were doing." The report also documented "sustained efforts by the U.S. government to deliberately mislead the public" in an attempt to bolster





support for the war.¹ The world we live in is extremely complex. Yet wars continue to be driven by factors like narrow thinking, dehumanization, and a fear of looking weak.

The situation is dire, but it may not be too late. As UN Secretary-General António Guterres said on January 3, “this is a moment in which leaders must exercise maximum restraint.”² We call on the government of Canada to prioritize diplomacy and all peaceful means of engagement with Iran, and to encourage the US and other countries to do so as well.

Now is precisely the time for Canada to send culturally aware diplomatic personnel to Iran and to call on other countries to do the same. Experienced negotiator Joshua Weiss of Harvard University explains:

*During times of crisis and conflict, more communication is needed, not less.... When negotiation is absent it is important to remember that communication does not stop, but that messages are sent with actions open to multiple interpretations. During tense large-scale conflicts between nations, when mistrust is high, most actions taken are assumed to be belligerent.*³

Something as catastrophic as a war might be averted with fulsome communication rather than assumptions that Iran is simply belligerent and unreachable.

When countries go to war, the costs to society, particularly to the poorest and most vulnerable, are immense. Wars do, however, benefit a few. A war can't be fought without weapons. This means that every person killed, every home destroyed, every jet pumping toxic emissions into our atmosphere, is good for certain companies, paid through tax dollars. Also, since the government of Canada has planned a massive increase in our military budget to buy new fighter planes and warships,⁴ there will always be those who advocate for using this hardware to prove that it is needed.

Other industries like private military contractors and intelligence companies profit as well. There are others like local crime syndicates and militias who too can benefit from the lawlessness and economic breakdown that happens in countries like Afghanistan, Iraq,

¹ Craig Whitlock, “At War With the Truth,” *The Washington Post*, December 9, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/investigations/afghanistan-papers/afghanistan-war-confidential-documents/>

² Quoted in UN News, “UN Chief Calls for De-escalation across Gulf Region After killing of Top Iranian General in US Airstrike,” January 3, 2020, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/01/1054701>

³ Joshua Weiss, “Why Has Negotiation Gotten a Bad Name?” *Mediate*, February, 2003, <https://www.mediate.com/articles/weissj.cfm>

⁴ Canadian Friends Service Committee, “Our Questions about Canada’s Defence Budget,” September 5, 2017, <https://quakerservice.ca/news/our-questions-about-canadas-defence-budget>





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Syria and Libya due to wars. We recognize the pressures that all of those who benefit from wars can place on key decision makers, and we call for a rejection of their agendas.

Let us be clear that no one side is fully responsible for the current tensions, and any claims to that effect, whether coming from the media or politicians, are unwarranted.

The US withdrew from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (the nuclear deal) “despite repeated certifications that Iran was sticking to its end of the bargain” and reintroduced sanctions on Iran with brutal consequences for everyday Iranians.⁵ The US has engaged in many other provocative actions prior to assassinating Iranian general Qassem Soleimani, Abu Mahdi al-Mauhandis, and at least six others.

Iran has engaged in provocative actions of its own, including shooting down a US drone, apparently mobilizing protesters to break into the US embassy in Baghdad, and orchestrating an attack on a US military base outside of Kirkuk, Iraq, that resulted in one US citizen being killed and several others being wounded.

We recognize the pressures Canada faces to side with our NATO ally the US as if it is an innocent victim of Iranian aggression. We call for you to have the courage to resist this, and to be impartial and tireless in the pursuit of diplomacy.

There does not need to be a war in Iran. Other paths are possible.

With hope and in Friendship,

Lana Robinson,
CFSC Clerk

⁵ Tamara Qiblawi, Frederik Pleitgen and Claudia Otto, “Iranians are Paying for US Sanctions with Their Health,” *CNN*, February 22, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/02/22/middleeast/iran-medical-shortages-intl/index.html>

