QUAKERS
Canadian Friends Service Committee

A new national security plan misidentifies security as being for the State and the economy rather than for people.



Security for whom?

Analysis of *The Plan for a Stronger Canada: National Security for Canadians*

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How can Canada control its own destiny in a dangerous world?

Our answer is that a nation's strength lies first in the wellbeing of its people.

Introduction

In October 2026 the Government of Canada released The Plan for a Stronger Canada: National Security for Canadians (hereafter referred to as 'the Plan'), its first national security policy in more than twenty years.[1] It arrives at a time of tangibly felt insecurity: a ruptured trading relationship with the United States, wars in Europe and the Middle East, and a climate crisis already reshaping Canadian life. Canadian Friends Service Committee (CFSC), the peace and social justice agency of Quakers in Canada, shares the government's sense that this is a hinge moment. We differ however, on what the moment asks of us.

The Plan's central thesis is that sovereignty is secured through strategic capability—industrial capacity, critical minerals, intelligence, and above all a rearmed and vastly more expensive Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), which it calls "the bedrock of Canadian security and an engine of this Plan."[2] This critique argues that this thesis is too narrow. Drawing on the policy asks made by the Canadian Peacebuilders Partners Network (CPPN, of which CFSC is a co-chair), the collective positions and history of Canadian Quakers, and the work of aligned Canadian research organizations including Project Ploughshares, the Rideau Institute, and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA), we contend that the Plan:

1. Misidentifies security as being for the State and the economy rather than for people.
2. Commits Canada to an unprecedented military build-up without a public account of its costs or trade-offs.

3. Leaves the CAF as Canada's default emergency responder.
4. Is nearly silent on conflict prevention, diplomacy, and peacebuilding.
5. Names climate change as a threat but does not resource addressing it.
6. Seeks to secure the Arctic through military presence rather than recognizing Inuit Peoples' sovereignty and rights and working in partnership with Inuit Peoples.
7. Expands security and intelligence powers without matching attention to oversight, civil liberties, and conscience.

We offer this critique in a spirit of engagement. The Plan contains openings we welcome, and its four-year renewal cycle invites the kind of public discernment democracy requires.[3]

The context

Quakers have refused to take part in war since the earliest days of the Religious Society of Friends. In 1660 Friends declared that they utterly denied "all outward wars, and strife, and fightings with outward weapons, for any end, or under any pretence whatsoever."[4] For Friends in Canada this testimony has never been only a refusal. It is a commitment to build the conditions in which war becomes unthinkable: relationships of trust, just economic arrangements, thriving communities, and institutions that allow conflict to be transformed without violence. CFSC has held that civilian-based defence and other forms of active nonviolence are viable ways for a nation to defend itself.[5]

In 2006 Canadian Yearly Meeting approved the statement "Toward a Culture of Peace," which affirmed that "as a Society, we have refused to condone or participate in war," lamented a shift in Canada's moral compass toward a culture of war, and called on government and citizens to redirect their creativity and resources toward an ecologically sustainable world.[6] Twenty years on, those words read less as a warning than as a description.

Our critique also rests on a practical conviction: that security and sovereignty depend first on the resilience and wellbeing of the people who make up a country. Holding that there is that of God/good in every person, we measure a security policy by whether it protects the dignity of all people, including those beyond our borders who bear the costs of a militarized world.

Where we find hope

The Plan names climate change and pandemics alongside great-power rivalry as threats Canada must withstand.[7] It counts food security and essential medicines among Canada's strategic capabilities, commits to a national preparedness program and "stronger civilian response capabilities," and promises transparency, deeper collaboration with Indigenous governments, and a review of the national security enterprise and its oversight bodies.[8] Our concern is not that the Plan ignores human security. It is that the Plan gestures toward human security while concentrating resources, institutional attention, and political language elsewhere.

A State-centred security

The Plan places "Canadian sovereignty, first, and above all."[9] Its eight strategic capabilities are nearly all industrial sectors: emerging technologies, critical minerals, defence, energy, transportation, pharmaceuticals and biotech, food security, and payments, settlement, and investment.[10] Individual Canadians appear only as "workers, firms, and innovators" to be shielded from foreign interference and economic predation.[11]

The Plan begins with a simple-seeming statement: "True sovereignty allows Canadians to live our lives as we choose."[12] But true choice requires options. A plan that prioritizes the security of Canadians will give them opportunities. It's hard to see how these can come about when such a significant amount of resources are being redirected away from healthcare, affordable housing, addressing the climate crisis, and other essential social programs toward ballooning military and intelligence spending.

Missing from this plan are the conditions that decide whether Canadians can withstand a shock (be it financial, environmental, or armed). In 2024, 11% of Canadians—about 4.5 million people—lived below the official poverty line.[13] In 2025, 24% of people in Canada, including 2.4 million children, lived in food-insecure households.[14] Nearly half of Canadians report concern about housing affordability.[15] Communities with less material slack are less able to absorb floods, fires,

and economic shocks, and need more emergency intervention of every kind, including from the military. Housing, income security, and health system capacity appear nowhere among the Plan's strategic capabilities.

CFSC asks the government to adopt an expanded, human-security definition of security in both policy and implementation. On October 26, 2026, twenty-nine Christian denominations and faith-based organizations, CFSC among them, urged the Prime Minister to adopt a comprehensive understanding of security that includes health, affordability, food security, and climate impacts.[16]

The weight of re-armament

The Plan pledges to "rebuild, rearm, and reinvest" in the CAF, puts Canada on a path to NATO's arbitrarily set target of 5% of GDP by 2035, and commits the government to "prepare for all contingencies up to and including war."[17] Yet it contains no costing, no account of what this spending will displace, and no explanation of why a military-led posture best answers the threats it names. It's important to point out here that no NATO country current spends 5% of its GDP on defence, and the US is itself only spending a little over 3% with no commitment or plans to reach its own suggested 5% target for other countries.[18] Canada, at 2% of its GDP, is already the 6th largest contributor out of the 32 member countries.[19]

The Parliamentary Budget Officer estimates that raising core defence spending to 3.5% of GDP will require roughly $33.5 billion a year in additional spending over the next decade, adding $63.0 billion to the deficit in 2035–36, and notes that the government has not published the projections behind its claim to be on track.[20]

Even analysts sympathetic to the Plan's aims note this gap. Defence scholar Philippe Lagassé observes that the Plan announces no money at all, and intelligence historian Wesley Wark notes that, unlike its 2004 predecessor, it offers no assessment of the threats it is meant to answer.[21] A strategy that commits Canada to a historic increase in military spending without naming the threats, the costs, or the trade-offs asks for trust it has not yet earned.

The trade-offs are already visible. Environment and Climate Change Canada is losing some 840 positions, including scientists who support weather forecasting and warnings.[22] The Plan would "reorient" international assistance to advance national interests.[23] The CCPA calculates that official development assistance will fall from $9.9 billion in 2024–25 to $6.1 billion in 2028–29, or 0.17% of gross national income—the lowest level since 1964—with the cuts redirected to defence roughly dollar for dollar.[24] Canadians are being asked to accept a historic transfer of public resources toward the instruments of war at the very moment the instruments of prevention are being cut.



Above: *Spending on education creates roughly twice as many jobs compared to military spending.*

Military spending is also an inefficient engine of the prosperity the Plan promises. Project Ploughshares cites research finding that each US$1 billion of defence spending creates about 8,555 jobs, against 12,883 in healthcare, 17,687 in education, and 19,795 in public transit.[25] And, as the Rideau Institute warns, build-ups invite matching build-ups by rivals, a security dilemma no one wins.[26]

There is an alternative within NATO's own framework. The pledge divides into at least 3.5% for core defence and up to 1.5% to protect critical infrastructure, defence networks, and ensuring civil preparedness and resilience, and its trajectory and balance will be reviewed in 2029.[27]

CFSC proposes that Canada lead in redefining defence by directing more than that 1.5% toward domestic vulnerability and conflict prevention. New NATO-related spending should go to nonviolent capabilities that reduce escalation risks, civilian harm, and vulnerability. The Plan makes no use of this flexibility.

Continued domestic military deployment

The Plan gives the Canadian Armed Forces "one clear, central mission: the defence of Canada and Canadian interests."[28] In practice, our military has become Canada's default disaster-response agency. National Defence told Parliament that Operation LENTUS deployments have "broadly doubled every five years since 2010," and the then-Chief of the Defence Staff, General Wayne Eyre, warned that "what is missing is capacity" at the provincial and municipal levels and that domestic demand is eroding military readiness for its primary tasks.[29]

The Plan's commitment to stronger civilian response capabilities is welcome, but it is one clause with no institutional home, mandate, or budget.[30] Canada already has building blocks. The federal evaluation of the Humanitarian Workforce Program, concluded that "there is a need for the HWF program, or a comparable civilian response initiative."[31] Germany's Federal Agency for Technical Relief, with some 88,000 volunteers, shows what a standing civilian force can do.[32] CFSC proposes a civil climate protection force to respond to disasters, support evacuation and recovery, and work with communities on prevention. It would reduce the domestic deployment of armed military personnel and it falls squarely within NATO's resilience spending category.

Prevention, diplomacy, and peacebuilding

Across its five foundations and eight strategic capabilities the Plan does not even once use the words "peacebuilding," "conflict prevention," or "disarmament," and it (quite notably) does not mention the United Nations. It defines the primary goal of foreign policy as building relations "to advance trade, attract investment, and strengthen economic security," and proposes to retool diplomacy to help companies expand abroad.[33]

This omission is strategic as well as moral. The 2025 Global Peace Index recorded 59 active state-based conflicts, the most since the Second World War, and put the economic impact of violence at US$19.97 trillion in 2024. Over the same period, peacekeeping spending fell to 0.52% of military spending, its lowest share in more than two decades.[34] Prevention is far more cost-effective than crisis response, and reactive emergency funding drains Canada's budget.

Canada's retreat from UN-centred peace work is already far advanced. In mid-2025, 29 Canadians were serving in UN peace operations, placing Canada 74th among contributors, against some 3,300 military personnel at the 1993 peak and roughly 1,900 troops now deployed with NATO in Latvia.[35]

CFSC supports Canadian contributions only to unarmed UN peace operations, so this is not a call for more troops; it is evidence of how far Canada's investment in multilateral peace has eroded. The Rideau Institute argues that, with the UN under sustained attack, Canada's core task is to work with others to defend it and the international law it upholds.[36] A foreign policy reduced to trade promotion and sanctions offers others few reasons to see Canada as an honest broker.



Above: *Light armoured vehicles (LAVs) like these are made by General Dynamics Land Systems in London, Ontario. The United Nations named Canada as one of the countries that has fuelled war in Yemen by selling LAVs and other weapons systems to Saudi Arabia. Photo: Jimderkaisser - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=13051400*

The Plan highlights Canada's "commitment to resolving disputes through diplomacy, fair economic cooperation, and respect for sovereignty and international law."[37] These need to be demonstrated in practice to be more than empty words. We urge the government to restore conflict prevention as an explicit pillar of national security: to protect Canada's civilian peacebuilding and diplomatic capacity; to

commit multi-year funding to integrated humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding programming; and to apply a peace lens to policy-making, analogous to Gender-Based Analysis Plus.[38]

Arms, industry, and accountability

The Plan commits to "build a robust domestic industrial base" for defence and to make Canada "a defence partner of choice."[39] Project Ploughshares reports that Canada's arms exports to countries other than the United States reached $2.5 billion in 2024, the third-highest on record, with $1.29 billion going to Saudi Arabia, whose Canadian-built armoured vehicles were used in a brutal war in Yemen. Exports to Israel totalled $18.9 million despite a January 2024 pause on new permits, and largely unreported transfers to the United States add an estimated $1 billion or more a year.[40]

The February 2026 Defence Industrial Strategy targets a 50% increase in arms exports, even though about 70% of CAF equipment comes from US suppliers and half of Canada's ten largest defence firms are US subsidiaries—facts that sit uneasily with the Plan's promise of strategic autonomy.[41] Canada should immediately suspend arms transfers where there is a substantial risk they could be used to commit or facilitate serious violations of international humanitarian law. Export control decisions should also be strengthened and made transparent to meet Canada's obligations under the Arms Trade Treaty.

No resources for addressing climate change

The Plan lists climate change among the challenges Canada must withstand, but climate appears nowhere among its strategic capabilities or foundations, and none of its measures are directed at adaptation or monitoring.[42] This is a striking gap in a country warming at roughly twice the global average and where the 2023 wildfire season burned some 15 million hectares, more than double the previous record.[43]

NATO itself treats climate change as a threat multiplier, and Canada hosts NATO's Climate Change and Security Centre of Excellence.[44] Germany's National Security Strategy states plainly that "global climate, environmental, food and resource policy is security policy."[45]

Project Ploughshares' systems analysis of climate change and Canadian defence finds that a military-first response is proving inadequate and calls for a National Climate-Security Task Force bringing together National Defence, Public Safety, Environment and Climate Change Canada, Indigenous leaders, and local governments.[46] Canada should invest in early warning and climate monitoring rather than cutting it.



Above: *Wild fires are one of multiple threats to Canada exacerbated by climate change.*

The Arctic

The Plan pledges "a robust, permanent presence in our Arctic" and calls the protection of Canada's geography, including the Arctic, "the defining task" of the CAF.[47] It follows a March 2026 commitment of $35 billion to defend and secure the North, directed largely to military infrastructure, intelligence, and the faster deployment of personnel.[48]
Militarizing the North offers the illusion of security while feeding the arms race it claims to answer, and military training itself compacts soil, erodes vegetation, and contaminates fragile northern environments.[49] The Arctic is warming about four times faster than the global average, and Inuit and other Northern Indigenous Peoples bear the sharpest consequences.[50] Sovereignty in the North is most credibly expressed through thriving communities and

through Inuit leadership.

The Plan names Indigenous Peoples and Northern communities as partners, yet it does not mention the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, free, prior and informed consent, or self-determination.[51] Arctic security should be developed with Inuit and other Indigenous governments in keeping with the Declaration. CFSC proposes resourcing an unarmed, Indigenous-led civilian stewardship program, building on the Canadian Rangers and on Australia's Indigenous Rangers Program. Project Ploughshares likewise urges Canada to lead in multilateral Arctic governance to prevent undue military escalation, and argues that elevating Indigenous leadership is a matter of security, not only of equity.[52]

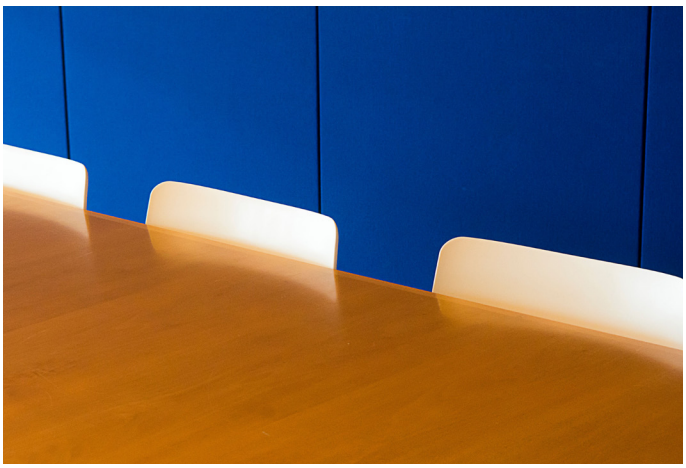
Safety and civil liberties

The Plan affirms an "unwavering commitment" to freedom of conscience and religion, of expression, and of peaceful assembly.[53] Quakers, whose conscientious objection has long depended on these freedoms, welcome that affirmation. Yet the Plan's security measures move in one direction only: new border officers and technology, expanded digital capabilities for law enforcement and the Communications Security Establishment, AI-assisted intelligence collection, "modernize[d]" intelligence authorities, and "more frequent updates" to national security law.[54]

The International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group (ICLMG), a coalition CFSC helped found in 2002, has shown where such measures lead. The Lawful Access Act (Bill C-22) would let the Minister of Public Safety secretly order digital service providers to build surveillance capabilities into their systems and keep up to a year of metadata, with approval from the Intelligence Commissioner rather than a judge. ICLMG calls it "one of the greatest threats to privacy in Canada of the past two decades."[55] Fourteen organizations and fifteen privacy scholars have asked Parliament to withdraw it, warning that backdoors built for the state "significantly weaken everyone's digital safety."[56] The bill revives powers from the Strong Borders Act (Bill C-2), whose withdrawal some 300 organizations sought.[57]

These powers do not fall evenly. In 2025 the National Security and Intelligence Review Agency (NSIRA) found that from 2009 to 2022, 67% of charities audited by the Canada Revenue Agency's counter-terrorism division were discernibly Islamic and another 19% Sikh, often without credible evidence of terrorist abuse.[58] The Plan's pledge to counter "new and evolving forms of radicalization" warrants similar caution: ICLMG warns that the proposed Combating Hate Act (Bill C-9) would give police broad discretion over protest symbols and motives, chilling dissent, particularly in solidarity with Palestinians.[59] Such risks fall hardest on Muslim, racialized, and Indigenous communities, and on people engaged in peaceful protest on issues of conscience.[60]

Meanwhile, oversight is shrinking as the agencies it watches grow. NSIRA, the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians, and the Intelligence Commissioner have been asked to propose cuts of 15% over three years; NSIRA's budget is under $18 million a year, against more than $700 million for the Canadian Security Intelligence Service.[61] We welcome the Plan's commitment to review the national security enterprise and its oversight bodies, and urge that this review be independent, public, and completed before new authorities are granted.[62]



Room at the 'table'

The Plan commits to engagement with provinces, territories, Indigenous governments, industry, labour, and academia.[63] Civil society, faith communities, and peacebuilding organizations are not named, although the Canadian Peacebuilders Partners Network was first convened by Global Affairs Canada for its expertise in peace and security. These voices belong in implementation, and CFSC calls for Parliament to study conflict prevention as a component of national security and for this work to be further supported by the newly announced Peace Caucus.[64]

Recommendations

We call on the government of Canada to:

1. Adopt a human-security definition of national security, adding housing, income security, health system capacity, and climate resilience to Canada's strategic capabilities.

2. Publish a full costing of the path to 5% of GDP, including what it will displace, report annually to Parliament, and use NATO's 2029 review to reassess the target.

3. Direct a defined share of new defence-related spending—beginning with, but not limited to, NATO's 1.5% resilience category—to conflict prevention, diplomacy, climate monitoring, and civil preparedness.

4. Establish a standing civil climate protection force (such as the Youth Climate Corps), coordinated through a national climate-security task force, so the Canadian Armed Forces is no longer Canada's default emergency responder.

5. Restore conflict prevention and peacebuilding as an explicit pillar of national security, with multi-year funding and a peace lens applied across government.

6. Reverse cuts to climate science and international development assistance, and decline to subordinate assistance to trade interests.

7. Ground Arctic security in Inuit leadership, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, community wellbeing, and diplomacy.

8. Drop the target of a 50 per cent increase in arms exports, report transfers to the United States, and comply fully with the Arms Trade Treaty.

9. Strengthen independent oversight and explicit protection for peaceful protest and conscience.

10. Include civil society and peacebuilding organizations in implementation, and invite a parliamentary study of conflict prevention.



11. Measure security by community wellbeing, through a resilience index built on existing indicators of housing, food security, income, and health access.

Conclusion

The Plan asks a fair question: how can Canada control its own destiny in a dangerous world? Our answer is that a nation's strength lies first in the wellbeing of its people and the quality of its relationships, at home and abroad. No amount of military presence will prevent the climate disasters, inequality, and fragile infrastructure that most threaten Canadians, and weapons cannot build the trust on which lasting security depends. As Friends, we hold that the way to security runs through care for our neighbours, near and far. We hope this critique helps open pathway toward a National Security plan that measures Canada's security not by its weapons but by the flourishing of its people.

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