

# THE HARMS AND RISKS OF FIGHTER JETS: WHY CANADA MUST NOT BUY A NEW FLEET

The Canadian government plans to buy 88 new fighter jets for \$19-billion to replace the current fleet of CF-18s. It is the second most expensive procurement in Canadian history. The government is considering the two bids: Lockheed Martin's F-35 Joint Strike stealth fighter and SAAB's Gripen multirole fighter. It plans to choose the winning bid and award the contract sometime in 2022. Most likely, the government will choose the American F-35 over the Swedish Gripen to appease the U.S. and meet NORAD and NATO interoperability requirements.

**However, the Canadian government has not transparently and comprehensively considered the many, serious risks and harms posed by new warplanes.**

There has *not* been any government or Parliamentary report on the threat of fighter jets to people and the natural environment. The federal government and the Department of National Defence have failed to conduct and publicize an environmental assessment, a gender-based analysis and a full life-cycle costing of a new fleet of fighter jets. There has not been a government study on the opportunity costs of investing in carbon-intensive combat aircraft over other domestic priorities and the possibilities for disarmament. The opposition parties in the House of Commons and the Senate have also been reluctant to or have failed to ask critical questions about the risks of new combat aircraft and to consider alternatives.

WILPF Canada has released an in-depth report entitled *Soaring: The Harms and Risks of Fighter Jets and Why Canada Must Not Buy a New Fleet* to address the government's failure to fully inform the public. This fact sheet provides an overview of some of our key concerns. **Read** the report on our web site: [wilpfcanada.ca](http://wilpfcanada.ca)

## **FIGHTER JETS ARE FOR FIGHTING: THEY HARM PEOPLE**

Fighter jets are not for defence; they are for fighting. The 2017 Liberal defence policy, Strong Secure Engaged, confirmed that new fighter jets are necessary for "air attack" and "high-end warfighting." If Canada buys new combat aircraft, they will be used in aggressive military interventions and wars as they were in the past.

### **Canada's deployment of its CF-18 fighter jets since the end of the Cold War, 1991-2021**

**1991:** CF-18 fighter jets bomb Iraq in First Gulf War destroying infrastructure and killing people

**1999:** CF-18 fighter jets bomb Serbia in an illegal NATO operation injuring and killing civilians

**2011:** CF-18 fighter jets bomb Libya that causing a massive humanitarian and refugee crisis and a civil war

**2014-2016:** CF-18 fighter jets bomb Syria and Iraq harming and displacing thousands of people

**2014-2021:** CF-18 fighter jets conduct illegal, provocative NATO "Air Policing" operations along Russia's border

## **FINANCIAL RISK OF FIGHTER JETS**

Buying new fighter jets will enrich weapons companies not help Canadians. The U.S. Government Accountability Office warned that the operating costs of the F-35 are escalating and unaffordable. The cost per flying hour of an F-35 is \$38,000 USD (= \$48,000 CAD). Two hours of flying a fighter jet is the annual salary of a nurse, teacher or paramedic. Studies from the Political Economy Research Institute at the University of Massachusetts shows that more jobs are created from \$1 billion in government investment in clean energy, health care and education than in the military.

Instead of spending \$19 billion on 88 foreign fighter jets, the federal government could create more jobs building things Canadians need across the country:

- 422 recreation and athletic centres
- 15 state-of-the-art healthcare complexes
- 760 Indigenous wellness centres
- 240 high schools
- 575 elementary schools
- 130 kilometres of light rail transit
- 380,000 solar panel systems for large businesses and farms
- 87,842 green affordable housing units

## **PIPELINES IN THE SKY: FIGHTER JETS HARM THE CLIMATE**

Fighter jets are notoriously energy inefficient and emit excessive greenhouse gases and air pollutants. Fighter jets cannot fly long distances without fossil-fuel powered refuellers flying alongside them. A fighter jet releases more carbon emissions in one long-range flight than a typical automobile emits in a year. A new fleet of carbon-intensive combat aircraft will exacerbate the climate crisis and prevent Canada from decarbonizing. The federal government has not released any public plan to offset the emissions to achieve net-zero.

## **DISTURB THE PEACE: NOISE POLLUTION AND CRASH RISK OF FIGHTER JETS**

Fighter jets are extremely loud and negatively affect hearing and well-being. In Burlington, Vermont, homes in the direct flight path of the F-35s were bought by the government and demolished because they were in a noise zone that was deemed “unlivable.” Communities in Canada around air force bases will be exposed to extreme noise and crash risk from the new fleet of fighter jets especially from the F-35, which has 800+ technical flaws.

## **NUCLEAR WEAPONS RISK OF THE F-35**

The F-35 is intended as a first-strike fighter jet and is a delivery system for nuclear weapons. Since its inception, the stealth fighter was designed to carry a nuclear weapon, the B61-12, which is a 700-pound thermonuclear gravity bomb. If Canada buys the F-35, we will likely be in violation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and these warplanes will risk a nuclear accident or conflict.

## **SOCIOCULTURAL HARMS OF FIGHTER JETS: WOUNDING THE LAND, WOUNDING INDIGENOUS PEOPLE**

There is a long, terrible history of the Canadian government expropriating land without consent or fair compensation from Indigenous people to establish air force bases and air weapons testing ranges, such as in CFB Cold Lake and CFB Goose Bay. Losing access to their sacred land caused severe sociocultural harm. Read Innu land defender and elder Tshaukuesh Elizabeth Penashue’s memoir *Nitinikiau Innusi: I Keep the Land Alive* about the impact of low-level fighter jet testing on the Innu people in Labrador. Read our report about the adverse impact of the Cold Lake Air Weapons Range on the Dene and Cree people in Alberta and Saskatchewan. Canada should demilitarize and return the land.

## **WE DON’T NEED FIGHTER JET TO PROTECT OUR SECURITY OR SOVEREIGNTY**

Former Deputy Minister of National Defence, Charles Nixon, argued that Canada does not need any fighter jets because we don’t face a credible threat and they are not necessary to defend the country or protect our sovereignty. In 2020, retired Canadian fighter jet pilot and former squadron commander, Sidney Popham of Comox, British Columbia, also claimed that the country does not need any new combat aircraft calling them a “colossal waste.” Canada’s plans to buy new warplanes should be grounded. **Tell your Member of Parliament to cancel the fighter jet procurement.**

### **About**

**The Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) Canada** is a membership-led organization committed to a feminist peace, social justice, and gender equality. WILPF Canada is a national section of WILPF International. WILPF Canada is active in the Canada-Wide Peace and Justice Network, the Women, Peace and Security Network-Canada and the No New Fighter Jets Coalition. Get involved in the campaign to stop the federal government from buying new fighter jets: [nofighterjets.ca](https://nofighterjets.ca)



**Women’s International League for  
Peace and Freedom (WILPF) Canada**

**Email:** [wilpf.canada@gmail.com](mailto:wilpf.canada@gmail.com)  
**Web site:** [wilpfcanada.ca](https://wilpfcanada.ca)



**#WILPF #NoNewFighterJets**

  [@wilpfcanada](https://www.instagram.com/wilpfcanada)

February 2022