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Time to close the U.S. arms export loophole

Prime Minister Mark Carney talks about pragmatic principles, but Canada's weapons exports to the United States tell a different story.

If Canada is serious that our way forward must be 'principled and pragmatic,' like Prime Minister Mark Carney said, then the path is clear: subject all Canadian weapons exports to the same scrutiny, writes Alex Neve. *Photograph courtesy of the World Economic Forum/Ciaran McCrickard*

OPINION | BY ALEX NEVE | January 28, 2026

Prime Minister Mark Carney's speech at Davos last week was certainly one for these times.

With relatively unvarnished clarity, at the World Economic Forum event in Switzerland, Carney called out the world "as it is"—and he essentially trashed it.

We need that honesty. There is undeniably much that is broken and full of betrayal in that world.

Alex Neve is a professor of international human rights at the University of Ottawa and Dalhousie University. The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade

Carney was right on several fronts: we are facing a rupture in geopolitical relationships; we should call the system what it is;

a world of fortresses would be poorer, more fragile, and less sustainable; and we must apply the same standard to allies and rivals—yes, to dream of a world of consistency.

He even said the quiet part aloud, conceding that "we knew the story of the international rules-based order was partially false, … that international law applied with varying rigour depending on the identity of the accused or the victim." It shouldn't have taken disruptions in free trade relationships or threats against Greenland's sovereignty to provoke this confession, when the truth has already been obvious to the millions of Canadians who have been witnessing a live-streamed genocide, carried out with total impunity and materially supported by our government and its allies. Nonetheless, it is striking to hear a global leader finally admit what billions of people knew all along: the supposed "rules-base order" has always been brutally selective.

Carney suggests that "from the fracture, we can build something better, stronger, and more just." I hope that is true. And I welcome his insistence that "middle powers like Canada are not powerless"—that we have "the capacity to build a new order that embodies our values, like respect for human rights, sustainable development, solidarity, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of states."

This vision, however, stands in stark contrast to the role Canada is currently playing as a key enabler of American and allied military operations that routinely violate those very values.

United States military strikes in Venezuela, the shocking violence being committed by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and Israel's renewed bombardment of Gaza are all directly supported by a constant pipeline of weapons systems, components, and military technology originating in Canada. Even hypothetical threats by U.S. President Donald Trump to annex Canada would, in practice, rely on Canadian-made weapons parts embedded within an integrated North American military supply chain.

U.S. President Donald Trump, centre, at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, on Jan. 22. Even hypothetical threats to annex Canada would, in practice, rely on Canadian-made weapons parts embedded within an integrated North American military supply chain, writes Alex Neve. Photograph courtesy of the World Economic Forum/Ciaran McCrickard

Canadians rarely hear about this because, unlike military exports to the rest of the world, Ottawa conveniently—and intentionally—exempts the vast majority of arms shipped to the U.S. from any tracking, oversight, or human rights assessment. Arms manufacturers don't even have to apply for a permit. The result is what is often termed the U.S. loophole—a system deliberately designed to obfuscate where Canadian weapons sent to the U.S. ultimately end up, or how they are used.

While the Liberal government has taken the important step of suspending direct military export permits to Israel—acknowledging that such weapons could be used in serious violations of international human rights law—it has simultaneously refused to address the massive flow of Canadian-made components sent to the U.S. and subsequently transferred to Israel. This includes, for example, Canadian explosives manufactured at General Dynamics facilities in Quebec and shipped to U.S. ammunition plants producing 2,000-pound bombs, artillery shells, and tank rounds for Israeli forces.

The illegal U.S. attack on Venezuela earlier this month relied on F-35 fighter jets, each containing millions of dollars worth of Canadian-made components from landing gear to engine parts. And when the U.S. military unlawfully bombed so-called "narco-terrorist" fishing boats in the Caribbean and Pacific (on at least one occasion coming back for round two to ensure no survivors), they used advanced MX-Series sensors manufactured by L3Harris Wescam in Hamilton, Ont., according to a report by non-governmental organization Project Ploughshares. The company told the CBC "as a matter of practice, we do not comment on military missions."

Meanwhile, Brampton,

Ont.,-based weapons company Roshel has been contracted to send a rush order of armoured vehicles to ICE, which is growing more brazen by the day in its campaign of detentions, deportations, and killings. The firm did not respond to The Canadian Press' requests for comment.

In his Davos address, Carney made clear that Canada's relationship with the U.S. must be re-examined and renegotiated. But by leaving the U.S. loophole in Canada's arms exports regime wide open, his government is effectively writing Washington a blank cheque—made of tanks, explosives, and weapons systems—while outsourcing Canada's supposed commitment to human rights to a neighbour who has repeatedly demonstrated complete disregard for international law.

NDP MP Jenny Kwan's No More Loopholes Act, a private member's bill, is at second reading. The Hill Times photograph

by Andrew Meade

This sitting, Parliament will vote on the No More Loopholes Act, a private member's bill introduced by NDP MP Jenny Kwan. The legislation would tighten up our arms export processes, and finally require American-bound arms to be regulated the same way as all other Canadian military exports, subjecting them to transparency requirements and human rights risk assessments.

Carney has insisted that Canada must apply consistent standards and lead with its values. This is a true test of that claim.

If this country is serious that our way forward must and will be "principled and pragmatic" then the path we must walk is clear: close the U.S. arms export loophole. Subject all Canadian weapons exports to the same scrutiny. And stop pretending that selectivity is a form of principled foreign policy.

This is where the rubber hits the road. Will Prime Minister Carney contend with the world as it is, with principles at the fore? Or will he continue to capitulate to hegemons and arm their atrocities?

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