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On International Affairs / Sur les affaires internationales

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Why Canada must end arms exports to Saudi Arabia now.

My name is Peggy Mason and I am the President of the Rideau Institute, a small independent foreign policy think tank in Ottawa.

I want to comment on some of the arguments being raised by pundits, analysts and the government itself against Canada doing the right thing and ending arms exports to Saudi Arabia.

1) Acting alone will have no impact.

We would not be acting alone. We would be joining Germany, Sweden, Norway, Belgium and Finland, all of whom have suspended arms exports to Saudi Arabia. And, in any event, that Canada cannot act alone is an argument that Canada can only be a follower on the international stage, never a leader. We beg to differ.

But back to the point about having no impact if we act now. Nothing could be further from the truth. Even acting alone, which we would not be doing, Canada would still have a tremendous practical, as well as normative, impact. We have been selling armoured vehicles – LAVs - to Saudi Arabia for a very long time and they depend on these vehicles for a range of internal security uses as well as for the conduct of the ground war in Yemen.

Ending any further military exports to Saudi Arabia not only stops the delivery of new vehicles but also means no more parts and components or technical assistance in the servicing of the LAVs. This would have an immediate negative impact on Saudi Arabian military capacity – a very good outcome in light of egregious behaviour by that country.

Conversely, Canada would be providing a powerful, tangible, positive demonstration of support for human rights and the rule of law, at a time when they are under global attack.

2) What about the negative impact on Canadian jobs?

We are told that two to three thousand jobs could be lost if our arms exports to Saudi Arabia were stopped. If this is true, Canada has the means to mitigate, possibly even totally offset, that negative jobs impact. A central plank in the 2017 Defence Policy is the revitalization of the Canadian reserve – by providing them with the training and equipment necessary to become a

truly integral part of the Canadian military. Well, equipping them with state-of-the-art Canadian-made armoured vehicles should be part of that revitalization plan.

But the jobs issue raises a broader point, beyond the scope of today's press conference, but well-worth emphasizing. Sooner rather than later, we need a serious discussion in this country about progressively lessening, not increasing, our economic dependency on arms exports.

3) Ending arms exports would cost Canada billions in penalties.

This is the hardest argument to assess because of the secrecy surrounding the contractual terms. What is indisputable is that the GOC has the clear legal authority to suspend all further exports in light of grievous human rights violations by Saudi Arabia. What is much less clear is whether a Canadian court would enforce a penalty against our government for acting in full accordance with Canadian law and the dictates of public conscience. That's a legal case I am sure many human rights lawyers would enthusiastically embrace. Would Saudi Arabia be as keen to fight such a public, and reputationally damaging, legal battle?

But what if the penalties do have to be paid? What price Canada's soul?

This is a defining leadership moment for our Prime Minister.

We call on the Government of Canada to end all further arms exports to Saudi Arabia.

We also call on the Government to ensure that our country will never, ever be in this situation again. The means to accomplish this aim is through further amendments to Bill C-47, now in second reading in the Senate to:

- 1) include all of Canada's military exports including those to the USA;
- 2) apply to all of the government Ministers, departments and agencies involved in negotiating and overseeing Canada's military exports; and
- 3) establish an effective system of end use monitoring of Canadian military exports.

Thank you.

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