

Ontario's hard-right Tory government unveils plans to massively boost military production to support Canadian imperialism's war machine

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Ontario's hard-right Tory premier, Doug Ford, is seeking to place the province at the centre of Canada's military-industrial buildup, unveiling a 10-year strategy aimed at rapidly transforming the country's most populous and industrialized province into a critical hub within North American and European military-supply chains.

The plan was announced in late May at the CANSEC defence trade show in Ottawa. Ontario's new defence Industrial Strategy (ODIS) boasts of what government officials describe as a "once-in-a-generation" increase in military spending by Canada and other NATO states. In a press release, Ford stated, "Our provincial defence strategy will position Ontario to take advantage of these record investments, contributing to global security, supporting Ontario companies and bringing tens of thousands of good-paying defence jobs to our province."

The ODIS places these initiatives within the context of the "illegal" Russian invasion of Ukraine, China's "growing use of economic coercion," ongoing conflicts in the Middle East, and shifting transatlantic security dynamics. The lies about Russian aggression in Ukraine, a conflict provoked by over three decades of US and NATO expansion following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and the portrayal of China, rather than the US and European imperialist powers, as the driving force towards war, express the predatory interests of Canadian imperialism. Ottawa requires a war machine to enable the bourgeoisie, as Prime Minister Mark Carney put it in his Davos speech, to be at "the table" rather than "on the menu" in the imperialist redivision of the world.

Ontario's plans to become a major player in the international arms industry align with the Mark Carney-led federal Liberal government's Defence Industrial Strategy (DIS) released in February. The strategy is based on Carney's pledge to increase Canada's war budget to 5 percent of the GDP by 2035 in line with new NATO targets, a gigantic sum that would amount to over \$150 billion being spent on the military and related infrastructure every single year. The DIS outlined a strategy to ensure that a substantial portion of these funds flow to Canadian arms suppliers and developers to create a military-industrial sector under Ottawa's control that is less dependent on the United States.

The ODIS outlines a provincial "defence ecosystem" spanning some 300 firms in aerospace, advanced manufacturing, critical minerals, nuclear technology, and research and development. A crucial element highlighted is the development of mining and processing in northern Ontario's Ring of Fire region, which can supply many of the critical minerals necessary for the production of hi-tech weaponry and military gear.

The province projects the expansion will add \$6 billion to Ontario's GDP and triple the "defence" workforce from 13,000 to 43,000 by 2035, promising "good-paying" jobs at 60 percent above the average for private

manufacturing. That premium is measured against a wage baseline the ruling class has systematically slashed—through the 2009 restructuring of the auto industry, the proliferation of two-tier contracts, and the renegotiated North American trade deal, which locked in a \$16-per-hour poverty wage floor for autoworkers. The ruling class, having engineered a crippling cost-of-living crisis and an accelerating AI-driven jobs bloodbath, now presents militarism as the only escape for workers—economic conscription sold as the only opportunity for a decent standard of living.

Ontario's 2026 austerity budget, the latest in a decades-long all-party assault on public services, dovetails with the Ford government's determination to make a major contribution to the construction of Canadian imperialism's war machine. It promises a boon for the province's private developers and defence contractors, and deprivation for the working class. The projected deficit of \$13.8 billion—significantly higher than previous forecasts—will be used to justify further austerity for public services and public sector workers. Critical social services, like healthcare, education, and housing, are already chronically underfunded due to cost-cutting budgets enforced by Ford's Tories since taking power in 2018. Prior to that, governments led by the Liberals, Tories, and NDP imposed strict fiscal discipline for public spending since the 1990s, while slashing taxes for big business and the rich, producing an explosion in poverty and the growth of a super-rich elite.

K-12 education funding drops 3.6 per cent this year, continuing a trend that has seen per-student funding decline by roughly \$1,500 in real dollars since Ford took office. The government has seized direct control of eight school boards, installing Tory-connected supervisors to force through school closures and cuts to special education. Funding for Ontario colleges and universities will decline in real terms by almost 2 percent this year. These institutions already receive among the lowest levels of per-student public funding in Canada.

Much of the Ford government's much-ballyhooed "historic investment" in post-secondary education will be financed through regressive changes to the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) whose impact will fall disproportionately on working-class students. The government has slashed the grant portion of student aid from 85 to 25 per cent, thereby dramatically increasing students' reliance on loans. The student aid cuts have triggered protests across the province, as students confront rising debt-loads and the soaring cost of higher education.

Having cut government funding for colleges and universities to the bone, the government proposes in the ODIS closer integration between post-secondary institutions and the defence sector through workforce planning mechanisms embedded in the education system. It calls for a

“robust pipeline of new talent” and proposes convening the Ontario Military Defence Representative (OMDR)—a Canadian Armed Forces liaison officer stationed within the provincial government—alongside administrators and industry executives to “identify defence-related training gaps.” In other words, to secure funding, institutions of higher learning will be compelled to subordinate their activities to the needs of arms suppliers and the Canadian military.

This aspect of Ford’s plan interlocks with the Carney government’s Defence Industrial Strategy, which, as the WSWs reported, explicitly designates post-secondary institutions as engines of military R&D, proposing to “establish mechanisms to better connect universities and colleges to defence priorities” and earmarking \$1.6 billion to “attract and equip world-class researchers” for the rearmament drive. The ODIS’s own proposed \$1.7 billion expansion of STEM and skilled trades makes clear that the ruling class is using the gutting of student grants and the cost-of-living crisis to force young people to tie their careers to the unprecedented military-industrial expansion.

The federal government’s sweeping military buildup takes place amid a historic breakdown in US-Canada relations, which finds expression in the trade war initiated by the fascist Trump and fuelled by the Canadian ruling class’ nationalist reaction, and the US president’s threat to annex Canada. Working in line with the Carney government, Ford recently traveled to Washington to champion “Fortress North America” and push for the retention of the US, Mexico, Canada Agreement (USMCA, the successor to NAFTA), which is due to expire in July. Canadian imperialism hopes to remain part of a US-led protectionist trade bloc directed against Washington’s global economic rivals—above all China.

However, the unprecedented crisis in Canada-US relations has also accelerated Canadian imperialism’s pursuit of military ties with its European NATO allies. The ODIS targets the EU’s Readiness 2030 rearmament plan, which mobilizes €800 billion for war spending, to be paid for by an onslaught on the working class across the continent. Ford’s plan also aims to take advantage of the SAFE funding mechanism, which opens \$244 billion in EU defence procurement loans to Canadian firms. For corporations such as Bombardier Defense, CAE, Calian, and Thales Canada, both paths expand access to a global arms market projected in the trillions.

Workers cannot oppose the militarization of society through the trade unions, which have emerged ever more openly as champions of exploding military budgets and wars of aggression. Unifor President Lana Payne has hailed the Bombardier Global 6500 military aircraft as a “Canadian success story” and now sits on Carney’s Canada-US advisory council alongside CEOs and retired Tory politicians. Her union has discussed with General Motors converting the idled CAMI auto plant in Ingersoll, Ontario, to military vehicle production and has long campaigned for Canada to adopt national aerospace and defence strategies based on government-directed contracts for arms producers and military contractors.

At the provincial level, Ontario Federation of Labour president Laura Walton—who rose to her top position in the bureaucracy by helping sell out the 2022 strike of 55,000 education workers against poverty wages and a government-imposed strike ban—proposed a “Labour-Business-Community Anti-Tariff Task Force” with Ford’s government to promote a Canadian nationalist response to Trump’s trade war in January 2025. When Ford ignored her, she groveled publicly, declaring, “His office has my cell number, and we’re ready to roll up our sleeves and get to work.”

The political alignment of the union bureaucracy and its “partners” in the Carney Liberal government with Doug Ford’s provincial government is highly revealing. Ford swept to power in 2018 as an unabashed Trump imitator—rolling back the minimum wage, imposing a public sector hiring freeze, slashing \$6 billion from welfare and healthcare, and illegally capping public sector wages for over a million workers at one percent per

year for three years. He invoked the “notwithstanding clause” to trample on democratic rights, prematurely ended all COVID-19 public health measures at the cost of thousands of lives, and initially allied himself with the far-right “Freedom Convoy” that occupied downtown Ottawa in early 2022. He has played a major role in backing Israel’s genocide in Gaza, banning the *keffiyeh* from the Ontario legislature and pressing for police action against anti-genocide, Palestine solidarity protesters.

If Ford no longer publicly touts his admiration for Trump, this is only because Canadian and American imperialism have seen their decades-long military-strategic partnership break down over the intervening years. But Ford, like the Canadian ruling class as a whole, is fully on board with large swathes of Trump’s far-right agenda, because the gutting of public spending, banning of strikes, rearmament and war, and attacks on democratic rights serve the interests of the financial oligarchy.

It is in the interest of this parasitic social force that Ford and Carney have systematically deepened their cooperation. Ahead of three April federal by-elections, Ford publicly stated that he hoped the Liberals would secure a parliamentary majority. “I always believe that you get more things done when you have a majority government,” Ford told the *Globe and Mail*. “At the end of the day, I think people want certainty. And it will give them certainty.”

Ford’s Tories and the Carney Liberal government are committed to waging global war in the interests of Canadian imperialism and making workers pay for it. The unions, the New Democrats, and their pseudo-left appendages dress up these political forces as partners in “Team Canada.” But there is no “Team”: the bosses’ wars—commercial and military—are being waged at the expense of workers’ jobs, wages, and public services.

The fight for decent jobs and social services is a fight against war and the capitalist system that gives rise to it. What is required is the independent industrial and political mobilization of the working class on the basis of a socialist and internationalist program to fight for a workers’ government that will reorganize the economy to place social needs before profit, and abolish Canada’s war machine.



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