

Airshows Sell War and Militarism

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The growing [campaign](#) to oppose spending tens of billions of dollars on 88 new fighter jets faces an important, if unconventional, obstacle: the warplanes themselves. Fighter jets are an important tool of militarist propaganda.

In recent weeks Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) planes have done numerous flyovers and participated in airshows across the country. As part of “Operation Inspiration” CF-18s [flew](#) over the Prince George Exhibition and [lower](#) Vancouver Island. The RCAF does flyovers at dozens of special events every year. In 2019 they flew by the opening game of the NBA finals and the Toronto Raptors’ massive victory celebration.

Fighter jets also participate in numerous airshows every year. In recent weeks CF-18s were part of the Camrose Drive-In Airshow, Cold Lake Aqua Days and Abbotsford International Airshow. To create popular support for the Air Force the RCAF has promoted airshows and flying for a century. In “[The Public](#) Face of the Royal Canadian Air Force: The Importance of Air Shows and Demonstration Teams to the R.C.A.F” Timothy Balzer writes: “For almost as long as Canada has had an air force, it has had demonstration flyers displaying the skill and daring required to be a pilot. From the first formation flight in 1919 on, demonstration teams have played an important role in keeping the Royal Canadian Air Force engaged and interacting with the Canadian public.”

This weekend warplanes will participate in the country’s largest airshow. With a federal government decision on selecting a new fighter jets looming, the controversial F-35 Stealth Fighter will be on display at the upcoming [Canadian International](#) Air Show. When the jets participated in the 2019 Ottawa Air show CBC noted “[The high](#)-speed hard sell: why the F-35 is coming to a Canadian air show”

The CF-18 Demonstration Team and Snowbirds will also fly over Lake Ontario, including Toronto’s waterfront. The CF 18 Demonstration Team participates in more than a [dozen airshows](#) a year. According to the Department of National Defence, they are “[inspiring](#) and connecting with Canadians” and “building interest amongst audiences in Canada’s Air Force”.

With millions of Canadians watching Snowbird airshows every year, DND calls them an “important public relations and recruiting tool.” Each year the famed Snowbirds participate in some [60](#) air shows across North America. Over 50 years they’ve flown in more than [2,500](#) shows and cultural events such as Canada Day celebrations. Millions [watch](#) Snowbird planes fly annually.

Snowbirds and the CF-18 Demonstration Team have been [celebrated](#) in books and on Canada Post stamps. Fighter jets have also been celebrated by one of Canada’s top sports teams. Unveiled in 2011, the Winnipeg Jets logo was designed in [collaboration](#) with the RCAF. A blue circle with a metallic grey silhouette of a CF-18 Hornet Fighter above a red maple leaf, the logo was revealed at an air force [base](#).

These Winnipeg Jets jerseys and many other initiatives promote killing machines. Over the past three decades CF-18s have bombed Iraq, Serbia, Libya and Iraq/Syria. Many were killed directly or due to the destruction of infrastructure.

One way to decrease the likelihood of RCAF violence is to lessen their ability to inflict it. While seven Canadian fighter jets participated in the 2011 bombing, alliance member Latvia didn’t send warplanes partly because it doesn’t have top notch jets.

Currently, the RCAF is about the 15-20th most lethal air force in the world and yet Canada is the [39th](#) most populous nation in the world. If the RCAF stuck with its current stock of CF-18s the RCAF’s global ranking would likely decline over time. But, for years, probably decades, it would remain stronger than other Pacific nations with similar or larger populations such as Mexico, Colombia and Peru. If RCAF declined to 39th most lethal air force it would still be stronger than 154 other nations.

In a bid to weaken the RCAF’s capacity to carry out violence the no fighter jet campaign is pressing the government to scrap its planned \$19 billion (\$77 billion over their full lifecycle) purchase of 88 new cutting-edge fighter jets. The campaign received a boost recently with a [public letter](#) signed by Canadian musicians Neil Young, Tegan and Sara and Sarah Harmer, as well as authors Yann Martel, Gabor Maté and Michael Ondaatje. The statement opposed to “spending tens of billions of dollars on unnecessary, dangerous, climate destroying fighter jets” was also endorsed by environmentalists Naomi Klein and David Suzuki, as well as three sitting MPs, four former MPs and prominent international figures such as Roger Waters, Daryl Hannah and Noam Chomsky.

Scrapping the entire 88 fighter jet purchase is an uphill battle.

The no fighter jets campaign is challenging an arms industry addicted to public money, a military seeking fancy toys and a Canadian establishment tied to the US empire. These militarists use air shows, “sexy” jets and other means of propaganda to push their views. People who believe in peace and oppose militarism need to understand what we’re up against.

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Yves Engler is author of [Stand on Guard For Whom?](#) — A People’s History of the Canadian Military.

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