

Public Pressure to Rescind Canada's 15 Billion Dollar Light Armored Vehicles (LAV) Sale to Saudi Arabia, Lobbyists Will Likely Rule

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Will they cancel the contract or won't they? In order to understand Ottawa's decision making process regarding General Dynamics' massive arms deal with Saudi Arabia one must look closely at industry lobbyists.

While the Trudeau government is under substantial public pressure to rescind the \$15 billion Light Armoured Vehicle sale, to do so would challenge the company and the broader corporate lobby.

Last week a senior analyst with the GD-financed Canadian Global Affairs Institute boldly defended the LAV sale.

*"[There has](#) been no behaviour by the Saudis to warrant cancelling this contract", said **David Perry** to the London Free Press.*

Perry must have missed the Kingdom's violence in Yemen, repression in eastern Saudi Arabia and consulate murder in Istanbul.

Two weeks ago Perry told another interviewer that any move to reverse the LAV sale would have dire consequences.

"[There would](#) be geopolitical implications. There would be a huge number of economic implications, both immediately and in the wider economy... cancelling this, I think, would be a big step because as far as I understand the way that we look at arms exports, it would effectively mean that we've changed the rules of the game."

Amidst an earlier wave of criticism towards GD's LAV sale, the Canadian Global Affairs Institute published a paper titled "Canada and Saudi Arabia: A Deeply Flawed but Necessary Partnership" that defended the \$15-billion deal. At the time of its 2016 publication at least four of the institute's "fellows" wrote columns justifying the sale, including an opinion piece by Perry published in the *Globe and Mail Report on Business* that was headlined "Without foreign sales, Canada's defence industry would not survive."

Probably Canada's most prominent foreign policy think tank, Canadian Global Affairs Institute is a recipient of GD's "generous" donations. Both GD Land Systems and GD Mission

Systems are listed among its “supporters” in recent [annual reports](#), but the exact sum they’ve given the institute isn’t public.

The Conference of Defence Associations Institute also openly supports GD’s LAV sale. Representatives of the Ottawa-based lobby/think tank have written [commentaries](#) justifying the LAV sale and a 2016 analysis concluded that “[our own](#) Canadian national interests, economic and strategic, dictate that maintaining profitable political and trade relations with ‘friendly’ countries like Saudi Arabia, including arms sales, is the most rational option in a world of unpleasant choices.” Of course, the Conference of Defence Associations Institute also received [GD money](#) and its [advisory board](#) includes GD Canada’s senior director of strategy and government relations Kelly Williams.

Representing 150 top CEOs, the Business Council of Canada (formerly Canadian Council of Chief Executives) promoted a similar position. In a 2016 *iPolitics* column titled “We can’t always sell weapons to people we like” the corporate lobby group’s head, John Manley, wrote that LAVs are not “[used in torture](#) or persecution of women. We are selling military vehicles — basically fancy trucks.”

Another corporate lobby group applauded GD’s Saudi sale. In 2014 Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters president **Jayson Myers** labeled the LAV sale “[an Olympic](#) win for Canada and for Canadian manufacturers ... All Canadians should be proud of this record achievement.”

The armament industry’s primary lobby group also backed GD’s sale to the Saudis. In 2014 Canadian Association of Defence and Security Industries president Tim Page celebrated the LAV sale as a “[good day](#) for Canada” and two years later its new president, Christyn Cianfarani, defended the deal from criticism, telling the press “[we certainly](#) don’t take positions on the judicial practices of other nations.” GD is a member of CADSI and GD Land Systems Vice President, **Danny Deep**, [chairs its board](#). With an office near Parliament, CADSI lobbyists have likely spoken to government officials about reversing the Saudi LAV sale.

For its part, GD has been lobbying decision makers aggressively. According to an October 24 *iPolitics* article “[General Dynamics](#) Land Systems-Canada has filed almost a dozen communications requests with government officials in the last week.” Like other military companies, the London, Ontario, armoured vehicle maker maintains an Ottawa office to access government officials.

GD has contracted former military officials to lobby on its behalf and offered retired Canadian Forces leaders senior positions. Before becoming Defence Minister, **Gordon O’Connor**, a former Brigadier-General, [represented GD](#) as a lobbyist while GD Canada hired former Navy commodore [Kelly Williams](#) as senior director of strategy and government relations in 2012.

GD also advertises at events and in areas of the nation’s capital frequented by government officials. Similarly, it promotes its brand in publications read by Ottawa insiders.

If the government does not cancel the Saudi LAV sale it will be further proof of the corporate lobby’s political influence.

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