

New stealth fighter doesn't sway F-35 critics

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OTTAWA -- Does the stealth fighter China unveiled last week change the debate here about Canada's purchase of 65 F-35s?

The Russians, too, are developing their own stealth jet, the T-50, which made its maiden test flight a year ago.

But critics of the F-35 aren't swayed by the competition.

"I don't think it changes the debate at all," said NDP defence critic Jack Harris. "We're not engaged in an arms race with the Chinese or the Russians. They both have nuclear weapons and no one's suggesting we need to have nuclear weapons, too."

Despite the Russians and the Chinese -- both of whom have laid claim to Arctic Ocean resources--going stealth, Liberal Leader Michael Ignatieff vowed again Thursday a Liberal government would still cancel the F-35 purchase, opting instead to replace Canada's ageing CF-18s with a competitive bidding process and investing the savings from buying cheaper planes into education and skills development research.

But retired Lt.-Gen. George MacDonald, once the No. 2 man in the Canadian Forces and a top boss with NORAD, said it is always prudent to keep up with the Joneses, just in case.

MacDonald now works for the defence lobbying firm CFN Consultants and is working with Lockheed Martin on the F-35.