

11-4-2016

How to melt a cold war: With nuclear war raising its ugly head again, Canada must act for disarmament

Erika Simpson

University of Western Ontario (Western University), simpson@uwo.ca

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/politicalsciencepub>



Part of the [International Relations Commons](#)

Citation of this paper:

Simpson, Erika, "How to melt a cold war: With nuclear war raising its ugly head again, Canada must act for disarmament" (2016). *Political Science Publications*. 249.

<https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/politicalsciencepub/249>

With nuclear war raising its ugly head again, Canada must act for disarmament

Author of the article:

The London Free Press

Published Nov 04, 2016 • 4 minute read



Article content

The stormy relationship between Russia and the West raises questions about whether we are heading into a renewed Cold War.

Russia deployed nuclear-capable missiles to its Kaliningrad enclave on the Baltic Sea last month, and NATO officials are seeking commitments to send 4,000 new troops to the Baltic states and eastern Poland in early 2017.

Angry about Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, NATO plans to station four battle groups in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. Recently Canada, Germany, the U.K. and the U.S.

committed to lead, and NATO is asking for more support from its 28 allies along with assistance to defend against cyber attacks in Ukraine.

At the same time, worries are that NATO's nuclear weapons deployed in Turkey's Black Sea region are threatened by the terrorist organization ISIL as well as Russia's military presence. Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey are expected to shore up air and naval patrols while the newer NATO allies, like Poland, are demanding NATO allies honour their Article 5 commitment, outlined in the 1949 Washington Treaty, promising that an attack against one NATO member is an attack against all.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has recently suspended the Global Partnership Program, which was designed to ensure the safety of Russia's weapons-grade uranium and plutonium. Canada and the United States were paying billions to inspect Russian facilities and pay Russian scientists stipends so they would not sell their knowledge on the black market to terrorists.

ISIL is now the world's wealthiest terrorist organization, and about US\$10 million of its stolen cache might purchase a grapefruit-sized amount of nuclear materials laden with conventional explosives. An explosive like that could be set off in New York City or Washington, causing millions of Americans, fearing more so-called dirty bombs, to panic and flee the inner cities into the countryside.

Meanwhile the U.S. plans to spend \$1 trillion over the next 30 years to modernize its air, land and sea triad of nuclear weapons, including 160 to 200 short-range B-61 warheads deployed in Europe.

And Putin vows to develop new arms systems to neutralize the U.S.'s ballistic missile defence project, which the Russians and the Chinese see as a breach of the now-defunct Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty.

In the face of nuclear threats and renewed spending on nuclear arms, 50 nations from Austria to Brazil to Ireland — not including Canada — proposed a UN resolution calling for a global conference in 2017 to establish a legally binding process to ban the manufacture, possession, stockpiling and use of these weapons. The draft resolution, known as L41, was put forward on Oct. 28 and won an overwhelming majority of 123 votes in the 193-member General Assembly, paving the way for historic negotiations to begin.

But nuclear-armed states exerted intense diplomatic pressure on their allies to vote against it. The U.S. voted no and is refusing to participate in negotiations. Among its NATO allies, the Netherlands was the only one to abstain, while Canada voted no.

Among the eight other nuclear-armed states, North Korea voted in favour and India and Pakistan abstained.

Canada's vote against L41 puts us on the wrong side of history. Peggy Mason, former Canadian ambassador for disarmament to the UN, says, "Canada was one of only a handful of countries to vote no. In so doing, we joined with most other NATO member states, in blatant contradiction of

our legal obligation under the NPT (Non-Proliferation Treaty) Article VI to enter into good faith negotiations for nuclear disarmament.”

The diplomatic negotiations during the NPT’s review conferences in 2010 and 2015 ended last spring in debacle and deadlock. Parallel negotiations in the UN’s Conference on Disarmament are stalled. In fact, they have not been able to agree on even an agenda for discussion over the last 20 years, so diplomats from all over the world wine and dine themselves at the public’s expense in Geneva, New York and Vienna, while negotiations go nowhere.

But the plucky disarmament movement drew public attention to the humanitarian impact of use of nuclear weapons. Scientific predictions say even a limited nuclear exchange between India and Pakistan using about 100 Hiroshima-sized weapons would lead to a drop in the world’s temperature of 1.25 Celsius degrees; a war fought with U.S. and Russian high-alert nuclear weapons would lead to a drop of four Celsius degrees and the detonation of 4,400 strategic nuclear weapons out of the world’s remaining stockpile of 15,500 would lead to a drop of eight Celsius degrees. Such a nuclear winter would endure for decades, effectively decimating the globe’s economic production and killing billions of people.

Growing worries about whose finger could be on the nuclear trigger after Tuesday’s U.S. election also incited renewed calls for the nuclear-armed states to step down from their first-use nuclear postures.

Canada must somehow join the UN negotiations beginning in 2017 in order to prevent a disaster of unimaginable and unprecedented proportions.

Nestling under the United States’ nuclear umbrella should still allow the Trudeau government to spearhead a review of NATO’s reliance on nuclear deterrence during the runup to NATO’s 70th anniversary celebrations in 2019.

Lloyd Axworthy, a former Canadian minister of foreign affairs, wisely called for questioning the untested assumptions of nuclear deterrence by threatening first-use. Similarly the new Liberal government should question American policy that advocates first-use of nuclear weapons against conventional, biological or chemical threats.

Despite opposing the UN resolution, Canada could still participate in the talks. There is no UN dictum preventing abstainers and nay-sayers from participating in negotiations that will assuredly go ahead.

Erika Simpson is an associate professor of international relations at Western University and was a speaker at the Building Momentum for Nuclear Disarmament conference in Ottawa on Oct. 24