

## Opinion

# Putin has shown, in a demented and terrifying way, why the possession of nuclear weapons must be outlawed now

The Government of Canada is sending more arms to Ukraine. That is an attempt to tell the brave people of Ukraine that we are with them in their fight against tyranny. Our concern for Ukraine would go to a higher level if Canada implemented a plan to remove the nuclear cloud from over their heads—a cloud that is swirling around everyone in the world today.

Douglas Roche

Opinion



EDMONTON—It's no longer postponable. Russian President Vladimir Putin has shown, in a demented and terrifying way, why the possession of nuclear weapons must be outlawed now.

Far from closing down the little that remains of nuclear disarmament agreements because of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, this seminal moment in the history of the 21st century must be seized.

The contradictions in Canada's nuclear disarmament policies have got to be fixed. Sand castles won't stop a tsunami. We and our NATO partners can no longer go on professing a desire for an end to nuclear weapons while supporting the military doctrine of nuclear deterrence, which leads to even more than the present 13,000 nuclear weapons.

Putin jolted the world when he warned the West of "consequences greater than you have faced in history" for any interference in his invasion, and then



Russian President Vladimir Putin, pictured Jan. 10, 2022. Far from closing down the little that remains of nuclear disarmament agreements because of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, this seminal moment in the history of the 21st century must be seized, writes Doug Roche. Photograph courtesy of Commons Wikimedia

ordered Russian nuclear forces to be placed on high alert. Suddenly a light went on in people's minds: "You mean, those things could actually be used?"

Throughout the post-Cold War years, people—and governments—have become lackadaisical that these horrendous instruments of warfare that once

destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki could ever actually be used again. Putin raised this spectre anew.

Fortunately, U.S. President Joe Biden didn't rise to the bait and return the threat, but you can be sure all the security systems around the world were tightened after Putin's outburst. The arms industry is moving into high gear.

One would have to be in real denial not to recognize that the world has now moved closer to a nuclear catastrophe. It is not enough to condemn Putin's invasion and threat of Armageddon. It does not suffice to have an immediate ceasefire and retraction of Russian forces from Ukraine.

The Nobel Peace Prize-winning International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons made the right call when it urged all nuclear

armed states to stand down their nuclear forces and refrain from threatening to use weapons of mass destruction. "Any use of nuclear weapons would cause catastrophic humanitarian suffering and the fallout—radioactive, economic, political—will be harming people for generations," the organization said.

But such voices are shouted over by those who see belligerence as the only way to stop tyrants. Diplomacy and dialogue have failed, they claim. So now defence budgets everywhere will shoot up (Germany was an early example). Some want the remaining U.S.-Russia nuclear arms agreement, the START, to be abandoned.

At the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva and again at the UN Human Rights Commission, Western delegates walked out last week when Russia took the floor (I regret immensely that Canada's Foreign Affairs Minister Mélanie Joly was among the walk-outs) to protest Russia's actions.

touch it because it actually bans the possession of nuclear weapons. Should we quit trying diplomacy just because we are at a stalemate in nuclear disarmament and the international system is in disarray? No, we should try even harder now that we realize how close we are to an unspeakable tragedy for all humanity.

Foreign Minister Joly went to the Conference on Disarmament and recited again the tired themes of the unenforceable Test Ban Treaty and the proposed Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty, neither of which are doing anything to stop the modernization of nuclear weapons. She never mentioned the Prohibition Treaty, which has now entered into force for the 59 states that have ratified it.

How is it rational to refuse to even discuss a fully activated treaty in international law? How will the new treaty become effective if NATO, which vigorously opposes it, keeps its head in the sand?

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Senator Marilou McPhedran, pictured April 29, 2019, on the Hill wants Canada to send a parliamentary delegation to Vienna for the first meeting of state parties to the Prohibition Treaty 'with instructions to listen and report back publicly.' The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade

What good does such juvenile thinking accomplish? How will we solve the world problems of common security if all the politicians and diplomats run to their own corners? Some think effective engagement can only be done on the battlefield. They are wrong.

Nuclear weapons must be negotiated away because that is the only way we can avoid being blown up in some frenzied strike by an adversary. The Non-Proliferation Treaty was set up to effect such negotiations. But it has so far failed. That is why a group of like-minded countries and civil society leaders wrote the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. But the nuclear powers won't

mentary delegation to Vienna for the first meeting of state parties to the Prohibition Treaty "with instructions to listen and report back publicly."

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Former Senator Douglas Roche was Canada's ambassador for disarmament 1984-89.

The Hill Times



Foreign Affairs Minister Mélanie Joly, pictured Feb. 24, on the Hill, went to the Conference on Disarmament and recited again the tired themes of the unenforceable Test Ban Treaty and the proposed Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty, neither of which are doing anything to stop the modernization of nuclear weapons. She never mentioned the Prohibition Treaty, which has now entered into force for the 59 states that have ratified it. The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade