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### OPINION

# World's only surviving multilateral nuclear weapons treaty is on the verge of collapse

Parliament is snoozing while the world shifts into a confrontational mode—driven by the military-industrial complex, which all along has been responsible for the enlargement of NATO, which was a principal factor in producing the conditions that led to Vladimir Putin's war. Putin has made Ukraine sorry it ever gave up its nuclear weapons. Canada's Parliament should speak up, writes **Doug Roche**.

BY DOUGLAS ROCHE

**E**DMONTON—Joe Biden is ineffectual. Vladimir Putin is demented. Donald Trump is

ubiquitous. Antonio Guterres is invisible. Jens Stoltenberg reigns. Political leadership in the world is broken. And so it's not hard to predict a train wreck is



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, pictured in Ottawa. Does anybody care that the world's only surviving multilateral nuclear weapons treaty—the one designed to stop the spread of nuclear weapons around the world—is on the verge of collapse, writes Douglas Roche. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

coming when the month-long Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference opens in New York on Aug. 1.

Does anybody care that the world's only surviving multilateral nuclear weapons treaty—the one designed to stop the spread of nuclear weapons around the world—is on the verge of collapse?

Russia doesn't care. Its president, Vladimir Putin, threatened to use nuclear weapons in the Ukraine war, which has already produced unspeakable human tragedies. The United States doesn't care. It plans to spend \$1.7-trillion over the next 30 years to replace all its nuclear bombs and warheads. NATO doesn't care. A few days ago, it repeated its mantra that nuclear weapons are the "supreme guarantee" of security and moved to enlarge its membership to 32, including some of the most important states in the world.

Fifty-two years ago, when an outbreak of nuclear weapons

### NEWS

Health-care advocates, premiers calling for urgent first ministers' meeting to address challenges facing system's sustainability

BY MIKE LAPOINTE

**F**ollowing a two-day summit by provincial premiers who are calling for more federal health-care transfers to address a system increasingly in crisis, health-care advocates are calling for a first ministers' conference as an urgently needed next step.

"There is an urgency need for the meeting, but an important thing that needs to be considered is the planning of this meeting," said Paul-Émile Cloutier, president and CEO of HealthCareCAN, the national voice of action for health organizations and hospitals across Canada.

"I've been advocating for a first ministers' conference way back to basically rethink the health-care system," he said in an interview with *The Hill Times* last week.

"There's a number of challenges in the health-care system at this moment, and some of these problems are immediate which

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# World's only surviving multilateral nuclear weapons treaty is on the verge of collapse

Douglas Roche

Opinion



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states was feared, the NPT came into existence. It provided mechanisms to curb nuclear proliferation, foster the peaceful use of nuclear energy, and committed states possessing nuclear weapons—the U.S., Russia, the U.K., France, and China—to engage in “good faith” comprehensive negotiations toward the elimination of nuclear weapons.

The NPT is reviewed every five years. As ambassador for disarmament at the time, I led the Canadian delegation at the 1985 review. Every review is an exercise in walking on eggshells. The nuclear weapons states feign adherence to the treaty’s obligations; the smaller states accuse the big powers of non-compliance; NATO states stand on the sidelines. It is a cynical and cyclical merry-go-round, which has had devastating consequences. The last review was a failure, and a repeat this time would be further damaging.

The smaller states became so fed up with the NPT charade that they created the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons,

which 66 states have now ratified. It bans, for those who sign it, the possession of nuclear weapons. But all the nuclear states oppose it and are trying to kill it. The Prohibition Treaty just had a successful meeting committing its members anew to “further stigmatizing and de-legitimizing nuclear weapons and steadily building a global peremptory norm against them.”

For the NPT, which has near-universal membership, to hold together, the very least that is required is for the U.S. and Russia, the two largest possessors of nuclear weapons, to work together and reaffirm the Gorbachev-Reagan dictum that a nuclear war can never be won and must never be fought. But they are currently

hurling epithets at each other, as their tangle at the recent G20 meeting in Bali showed. If the U.S. and Russia collide at the NPT, a train wreck will follow.

The Ukraine war casts into doubt whether the NPT can even survive. Does Canada care about that? And if so, what is it doing? The only thing I can see is continued adherence to the discredited NATO nuclear doctrine. NATO rests on the spurious logic that as long as nuclear weapons exist, it will remain a nuclear alliance. George Orwell couldn’t have put it any better.

The reason the government gets away with proclaiming its adherence to the NPT while also supporting NATO’s undermining of the NPT is because the public, bombarded by ceaseless crises, doesn’t know which way to turn. Deception and confusion have produced a great apathy.

Parliament snoozes while the world shifts into a confrontational mode—driven by the military-industrial complex, which all along has been responsible for the enlargement of NATO, which was a principal factor in producing the conditions that led to Putin’s war. Putin has made Ukraine sorry it ever gave up its nuclear weapons.

Thus, NATO feels justified in retaining nuclear weapons as a core component of NATO’s overall capabilities for deterrence

and defence, and Canada salutes. NATO’s latest rendition of its strategic concept, which significantly downgrades the focus on arms control as the principal tool for managing conflict in favour of risk reduction, sounds the death knell for nuclear disarmament.

I find it shocking that NATO has become such a powerful instrument—it’s certainly more powerful than the United Nations, which was established in the first place to guarantee world peace and security. The NATO secretary-general, Jens Stoltenberg, has become a kingpin in world affairs while the UN’s secretary-general Antonio Guterres is relegated to the shadows.

The Ukraine war, COVID-19, climate change, and growing inequalities are converging to produce starvation in vulnerable parts of the world. The UN is telling us the severity and magnitude of the challenges before us demand sweeping changes on a scale not yet seen in human history.

World military expenditures continue to climb and now exceed \$2.1-trillion a year. Yet for NATO, it’s not enough. More spending on nuclear weapons is a direct theft from the poor of the world. Does anyone care?

*Former Senator and author Douglas Roche chaired the UN Disarmament Committee in 1988. The Hill Times*