

It's Canada's time to lead in a world threatened by nuclear destruction

The Atomic Scientists' Doomsday Clock has just ratcheted up to two minutes to midnight, yet Canada seems missing in action.



Douglas Roche

Nonviolence

EDMONTON—In the year marking the 70th anniversary of the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, the founder of the nonviolence movement, Donald Trump is raising the prospect of the use of nuclear weapons, the ultimate form of violence against

humanity. Famous whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg has gone on the CBC and warned “a catastrophe is waiting to happen,” and the Atomic Scientists’ Doomsday Clock has been set at two minutes to midnight, as close to Armageddon as it has ever been.

And the Canadian government has said—nothing.

The prospect of a United States pre-emptive strike on North Korea grows by the day, the Iran deal is clinging to life, the modernization of nuclear arsenals by the nuclear powers charges full steam ahead, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty is being pushed to irrelevancy, and the new Treaty to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons can barely get off the ground.

And the Canadian government says—nothing.

What is happening to Canada—the government and the public? Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has just finished a series of town hall meetings across the country and, as far as I can tell, the subject of nuclear weapons and what Canada is doing at this perilous moment in history did not arise. I watch Question Period in the House of Commons most days, but the opposition is more

interested in nailing the prime minister over the ethics of his vacation than the ethics of human survival. The government is focused on NAFTA. Please don’t talk about anything else.

In the midst of all this, in an effort to keep my balance, if not my sanity, I think about the principles of nonviolence that Gandhi set in motion: healing, humility, harmony, dialogue, openness, reconciliation, patience, service, witnessing. These attributes of a culture of peace seem lost in Trumpworld. But are they?

We are now in the Season for Nonviolence. Every year between Jan. 30 and April 4, community groups in 900 cities in 67 countries observe the Season for Nonviolence, a grassroots campaign promoting nonviolent action for peace. It is bookended by the anniversaries of the assassinations of Gandhi and Martin Luther King, whose lives were the embodiment of opposing social injustice without the use of force.

Those who relegate nonviolence to the pleasantries of life should consider what it has actually achieved. Gandhi led India to freedom by his nonviolent resistance to British rule. King gained voting rights for Black people in

the U.S. Nelson Mandela defeated apartheid in South Africa. The dissolution of the Soviet Union took place nonviolently.

I also think about what Mikhail Gorbachev, in his perestroika days, tried to achieve in launching a foreign policy that decried the use of force. When he introduced that policy at the United Nations in 1988, the delegates cheered for 10 minutes. But this, too, now seems lost in the age of terrorism, rebellion, fear, and loss of belief that governments have an instrumental role in building the conditions for peace.

The lack of protest at Trump blatantly increasing nuclear stocks and threatening more violence tells us that the ethical norms in the world are lowering. And in Canada, too, we are becoming inured to violence as a way of life, despite the valiant efforts of those who see the wisdom and the practicalities of nonviolence.

Far from being passive, nonviolence calls for peaceful, active behaviour in the midst of conflict. It is both a philosophy and a strategy for social change that rejects the gratuitous use of physical violence.

Why can’t Canada stand up and clearly tell President Trump: we

are not going along with nuclear modernization and we want to stop the policy of threatened violence against humanity? Why can’t Prime Minister Trudeau utter such words? Why can’t the mainline media do their duty and warn Canadians of the calamity ahead posed by the new nuclear arms race?

Canada has four opportunities to show leadership in the months ahead. Preparations will be made in April for the 2020 50th anniversary review of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, which obliges states to negotiate “in good faith” nuclear disarmament. A special UN High-Level International Conference on Nuclear Disarmament will be held in May, providing new opportunities to raise world public opinion against nuclear weapons. In June, Canada will host and chair the next meeting of the G7 at which security issues will predominate. And in July, a NATO summit will be held, providing an opening to press for a review of NATO’s obsolete policies that nuclear weapons are the “supreme guarantee” of security.

Canada could shine at these four international meetings, leading a new chorus calling for action to reduce the dangers of nuclear violence. Or we can sit on the sidelines, wavering and afraid of offending the major powers.

Sick of Trump? Try Gandhi. Douglas Roche, a former Independent Senator and former Canadian ambassador for disarmament, is the author of *Hope Not Fear: Building Peace in a Fractured World*.

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