

Ray Acheson: Canada must get on right side of history in helping to ban nuclear weapons



RAY ACHESON



Ray Acheson is a steering-group member with the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, and was thus part of the Nobel Peace Prize-winning effort to get a nuclear-weapons ban treaty passed at the UN. Acheson is pictured in Vancouver on Feb. 2. Jason Payne / PNG

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When a nuclear war could be initiated over reckless comments on Twitter, nine countries possessing nuclear weapons are pouring billions of dollars into building up their arsenals. We know all too well the horrific consequences that the use of even a single nuclear weapon would have on human bodies, our cities, the climate and economies. As in any other age of the atomic era, “banning the bomb” is the most realistic, rational and responsible move the world could make.

Yet, those nine countries, including some that are Canada’s allies, like the U.S., are moving in the opposite direction. In fact, the U.S. is talking about making their nuclear weapons “more usable.”

The dominant narrative says these weapons prevent war and keep us safe. They’re meant not to be used, but to deter conflict. There’s not much realism in this narrative. Many of the risks we fear — war on the Korean Peninsula, missiles inbound to Guam or Hawaii, proliferation of nukes to new countries — aren’t mitigated by nuclear weapons, but rather are caused by them.

The same was, and remains, true of the Earth-destroying arsenals of the U.S. and Russia. They haven’t created a safer world but caused

generations to live in fear under threat of global extinction and done nothing to stop proliferation.

With the release of the new Trump Nuclear Doctrine — one that explicitly aims to make nuclear war more likely — a line has been drawn in the sand and Canada must decide if it's on Trump's side or humanity's.

Only a policy anchored in the abolition of nuclear weapons will move Canada and the rest of the world in the right direction.

Something extraordinary happened at the UN in July. The vast majority of countries in the world — 122 nations — negotiated and adopted a treaty outlawing nuclear weapons. The world is moving in the right direction, but the Trudeau government is leading Canada the wrong way.

Our prime minister called the treaty “sort of useless” before the ink was even dry. The Liberal government claims that while the nuclear ban is well-intentioned, it won't have any impact on the policies or practices of nuclear-armed countries. The New Democrats and the Greens disagree, both encouraging the government to join the treaty.

Long before President Donald Trump had his finger on the nuclear button, the [majority of Canadians](#) supported the elimination of nuclear weapons. The ban treaty gives us a path to that reality.

As I've travelled across Canada, I've met students shocked that a government that prides itself on progress has such regressive nuclear policy. I've met proud Canadians who worked so Canada could be a global leader in banning landmines under a previous Liberal government — over the objections of the U.S. I've met former diplomats and government officials who stood their ground against U.S. demands that we join in the invasion and occupation of Iraq. But under this Trudeau government, Canada is betraying its history and values.

The PM is choosing to side with a policy that is a relic of the Cold War, even as the U.S. tries to wind the Doomsday Clock in the wrong direction by lowering the threshold for the use of nuclear weapons and making more of those weapons.

Canada should be a leader in the process to ban nuclear weapons. Even though we don't possess nuclear weapons ourselves, we claim protection from the U.S. nuclear arsenal. This kind of hubris and hypocrisy is out of step with what most Canadians want our country to be.

Canada has a history of being a leader in peacekeeping and in humanitarianism. Building on this, Trudeau has said he wants to develop a feminist foreign policy for our country. Joining the nuclear ban would be consistent with this goal. A feminist foreign policy is about justice, equality and empowerment. So is prohibiting nuclear weapons.

A ban would create a world in which we can all live without being intimidated and manipulated by a handful of countries threatening



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massive nuclear violence. It's about standing up to patriarchal power that asserts the right to dominate and dictate the terms of international relations. With the nuclear ban we have the chance to be on the right side of history. We must seize this opportunity before it's too late.

Ray Acheson is director of the disarmament program of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and international steering group member of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, last year's Nobel Peace Prize winner.

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