

In Canada We Must Say: Give Peace a Chance

By [Robin Breon](#)

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Even during the height of the Vietnam War, as the bombs fell daily and heavily upon the Vietnamese people, there were peace talks occurring in Paris that brought both sides of the conflict to the negotiating table.

In Canada today, the war hawks are circling overhead in swiftly scudding skies while on the ground, the drum majors of militarism are leading the call for an arms race with the tenacity of a snare drummer performing "The Downfall of Paris."

With the war in Ukraine as the impetus, a recent editorial in the *Globe and Mail* encouraged the Liberal government of Justin Trudeau to raise its commitment to NATO by spending fully 2 per cent of GDP on defence by enlarging the armed forces. Although the editorial admits "That's a large number," it concludes by stating, with great disappointment, that the "The government simply isn't prepared to sacrifice other priorities over spending on defence." (4/25/23, *Globe* editorial: "Canada needs to honour its pledge to NATO")

Other priorities? Is the *Globe and Mail* referring to areas such as improved health care and pandemic responses, access to higher education, daycare, infrastructure maintenance and renewal, job training and other pursuits within the public sphere of interest? Are those the priorities the *Globe and Mail* is suggesting should be sacrificed?

Not to be outdone, *Globe and Mail* columnist, Andrew Coyne, reminded his readers that Canada is a founding member of NATO and that other members including the U.S., Germany and Turkey are "fed up with our chronic malingering." ("The world is growing tired of Canada's freeloading on defence: Our refusal to pay our way is leading to us being increasingly shunned by our allies" *G&M* 4/29/23).

Coyne continues to speak on behalf of "the world" in a most remarkable display of hubris by going on to assert: "But the world has grown all too familiar, not only with Canada's record as an international freeloader, but with our habit of renegeing on such commitments as we do make." Who all in the world is disappointed with Canada you might ask? Without naming

any more names, Coyne states flatly: “It is everyone.”

Presently, the silence from mainstream media outlets in Canada with regard to the need to implement a timetable toward conflict resolution and the need to aggressively pursue a cease fire is very disturbing for many people who fully embrace the resistance of the Ukrainians against Russian aggression. Why this “malingering” when it comes to pursuing the peace?

Even during the height of the Vietnam War, perhaps the defining military conflict of my own generation, as the bombs fell daily and heavily upon the Vietnamese people, peace talks were occurring in Paris that brought both sides of the conflict to the negotiating table.

The Vietnam War never had a formal beginning and it never had a formal conclusion that marked the cessation of hostilities. The U.S. never declared war against the Vietnamese nor did it sign a peace treaty at the end of the war. But the war ended, that is the important thing. During this period, Canada sent a clear signal to the U.S. that draft resisters and deserters opposed to the war were welcome and would not face extradition back to the U.S.

The war against the people of Iraq was never declared because the U.S. was never attacked by Iraq. Surely one of the greatest misadventures in the history of modern warfare, the Iraq War still stands as a clear demarcation between the foreign policy aims of the United States and Canada. Many believe it was Canada’s finest hour when Prime Minister Jean Chretien declared thumbs down to George Bush’s invitation to join the fight. Had it been Stephen Harper leading a Conservative government at the time, Canada would certainly have committed substantial blood and treasure to this disastrous encounter.

It is clearly time for Canada to return to the world stage as an honest broker for peace. In an article for the *Financial Post*, editor Kevin Carmichael called Canada’s participation in the G7 economic bloc “an anachronistic club in which Canada’s main purpose is to help Washington argue with Germany, France, the United Kingdom and Italy (Japan is the other member).” (“The Great Rethink: Why Canada Needs to Return to its ‘honest broker’ role in world affairs. 10/23/20 *Financial Post*).

Why not also throw in NATO for good measure? Is there no role for Canadian diplomacy to play other than as a subaltern to U.S. foreign policy and NATO’s military interests abroad?

There is a reason that we do not have the daily responsibility to monitor and maintain hyper-sonic nuclear warheads, chemical or biological weapons buried in missile silos throughout the country. It is because Canada refused pressures from the United States to install these weapons systems during the governments of John Diefenbaker and Lester Pearson (Conservative and Liberal, respectively) in the late 1950s and early 60s even as they were under pressure to do so by both presidents Dwight D. Eisenhower and John Kennedy (Republican and Democrat, respectively).

But make no mistake about it, at the time, Canadian governments of the day were divided on the question of nuclear weapons and—in the absence of a strong peace movement—any government today could easily begin to backslide on these issues.

How might Canada begin to advocate for peace in Ukraine? First of all, by taking a firm political stance against those who would be pushing us into an arms race that is unwinnable. With each new wave of advanced military and information technology there is simply no

zero-sum game at play. There is only zero-sum loss for millions in the event of nuclear war.

Developing a strategy for peace may not be as difficult as it sounds. Canada has a long and honourable tradition in advocating for peace in the world. Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson (winner of the Nobel Peace Prize 1957); the scientist, Joseph Rotblat, and the Pugwash movement (who shared the Nobel Peace Prize in 1995); and the scientist, peace activist and feminist Ursula Franklin (awarded the Pearson Medal of Peace in 2001) are names that spring immediately to mind who have much to say about the role of peace movements, peace negotiations and compromise that can lead us away from armed conflict and toward the peace.

Where there is political will, there is a way. The readiness is all.

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Robin Breon is an independent journalist based in Toronto.

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