

The 2000 Review of the Non-Proliferation Treaty concluded with a consensus accepted by the five Nuclear Weapon States for an “unequivocal undertaking to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals”. The NPT has 187 signatories, making it the world’s most comprehensive disarmament treaty.

The International Court of Justice ruled that nuclear weapons are implicitly illegal, and that negotiations to eliminate them must be concluded. The overwhelming majority of nations at the UN have voted for their elimination in recent General Assembly resolutions. Can these high-level actions be dismissed as mere naïveté?

Senior military figures in both the United States and Russia state that nuclear weapons cannot be used to fight wars and are too dangerous to maintain. A statement signed by 131 international civilian leaders from 49 countries, including 52 past or present presidents and prime ministers, called for the achievement and enforcement of elimination.

When asked whether the Canadian people want to see their government lead negotiations for a Nuclear Weapons Convention, 92 percent of Canadians responded favorably. When asked the same question, 87 percent of respondents in both the United States and Britain agreed.

Fourth, clearly the world wants nuclear weapons eliminated, but they are bound to proliferate with the deployment of a missile defence system in the United States. There are those, like the Alliance, who maintain that because the U.S. is Canada’s most important ally, we must support its military initiatives such as ballistic missile defence (BMD).

This logic is fundamentally flawed. The potential consequences of BMD deployment are enormous and must be seen beyond Canada-U.S. relations.

Remaining true to multilateralism

Should Canada support exclusive pursuit of military superiority over rules-based arms control? Because the U.S. is Canada’s most important ally, it is Canada’s obligation to ensure that the U.S. does not threaten to undo the whole structure of arms control agreements built up over decades by substituting for them a doctrine of unilateral defence.

Rather than supporting BMD, Canada needs to emphasize that the response to the ballistic missile threat -- as much as there is one -- needs to be part of a broader concern for the international community. That's the point made by several NATO allies, particularly France. Canada must not only resist participating in the development of BMD but, as a key ally of the United States, it must insist that the United States remain true to its multilateral commitments.

Snide references to “soft power” and “human security” show just how out of step these reactionary political policies are with the modern world. All the characteristics of globalization