

Pugwash, feisty at 50

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Give them credit. They never give up. The Pugwash Movement of Ban the Bombers is celebrating its 50th anniversary this week by lobbying Prime Minister Stephen Harper to try to persuade the United States and other nuclear powers to scrap their vast arsenals.

The tireless gadflies' timing couldn't be better. The Cold War "peace dividend" has evaporated. The world is back to spending \$1.2 trillion (U.S.) on weapons. Twice as many countries today have nuclear weapons than at the time of the first Pugwash conference in 1957, including unstable states. The nuclear club now includes the U.S., Russia, Britain, France, China, India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea. Today, about half the people on Earth live in a nuclear-armed state.

The nuclear powers are ever readier to use their 27,000 warheads, even against adversaries who don't have them. They are modernizing them. And as nukes proliferate, they are prized targets for terrorists.

This is madness, to Canadian participants Senator Roméo Dallaire and former senator Douglas Roche told the gathering yesterday.

The Canadian Pugwash Group is urging the Harper government to reaffirm Canada's support for the 1970 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, and to push the U.S. and other major powers harder to disarm. The NPT is a cornerstone of arms control. Under the treaty, the U.S., Britain, France, Russia and China pledged to negotiate in good faith toward "general and complete disarmament." In turn, non-nuclear states promised not to develop their own weapons but only to acquire nuclear technology for civilian use. Today, nearly four decades later, the Big Five are nowhere close to disarming. That invites others to snub the NPT and get the bomb.

Pugwash also points out that Canada, as a North Atlantic Treaty Organization member, is caught in a contradiction. NATO's strategic doctrine of 1999 affirms that nuclear weapons play an "essential role." That runs counter to the spirit of the NPT treaty to scrap them.

Yesterday Pugwash urged the Harper Conservatives to use Canada's leverage as a nuclear-capable country that has foregone such weapons, to lead a push for NATO denuclearization.

That may be dreaming in colour, but the Pugwash Movement has always dared to dream. The group is named after the Nova Scotia village where Canadian philanthropist Cyrus Eaton hosted Joseph Rotblat and a score of other scientists at a summer think-tank in 1957. Since then, the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs have been a place where scholars, diplomats, scientists, politicians and others can spin ideas to make the world a better, safer place. That spirit earned Pugwash and Rotblat the Nobel Peace Prize in 1995.

While we may no longer face a Cold War nuclear holocaust, the risk of nuclear war is real, and growing. Yet the drive to contain these weapons, so strong in the 1960s, '70s and '80s, has abated. Pugwash, still feisty at 50, is sounding an alarm the world disregards at its peril.

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