

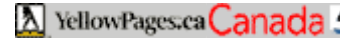


HEADLINE SCAN | E-MAIL UPDATE | NP MOBILE | SUBSCRIPTIONS | SITE MAP | ADVERTISE | CONFERENCES & EVENTS | USER HELP

Sunday » No

14-DAY SEARCH:

National Post



» NEW & UPDATED:

:: NP Business Magazine

:: [Subscribe to the Post](#)

:: [Paul Martin](#)

- NATIONAL POST HOME
- NATIONAL NEWS
- WORLD NEWS
- FINANCIAL POST
- FP INVESTING
- COMMENTARY
- COLUMNISTS
- SCIENCE & TECH
- ARTS & LIFE
- SPORTS
- DIVERSIONS

WEEKLY FEATURES

- REVIEW
- TRAVEL
- DRIVER'S EDGE
- POST HOMES
- WEDDINGS

SPECIALS

- APPOINTMENTS
- SPECIAL REPORTS
- INSIDE ENTERTAINMENT
- NP BUSINESS MAGAZINE
- FORUMS
- CONTESTS



canada.com

- TECHNOLOGY
- HEALTH
- CLASSIFIEDS
- AUTOS
- SHOPPING
- PERSONALS

Utilities

| SEARCH RESULTS - STORY

Land mine treaty highlights the flaws of arms control

Pact made Liberals feel proud, but nobody else

Mark F. Proudman

National Post

Saturday, November 30, 2002

ADVERTISEMENT

Dec. 4 will mark an anniversary of sorts in the history of the Ottawa Anti-Personnel Mine Treaty, which purports to outlaw the use of land mines. Five years ago, the treaty was signed in Ottawa by 121 nations, which also pledged US\$500-million to implement it. The treaty was celebrated as a great Canadian success and will no doubt be remembered as such. It has undeniably been a political triumph for the Liberal government and for its author, Lloyd Axworthy, the former Foreign Affairs minister.

Before the land mine treaty, Canadian diplomacy had appeared to consist mostly of Jean Chrétien's tawdry Team Canada sales missions. After the land mine treaty, Canadian foreign policymakers could pose as benefactors to mankind. A certain type of Ottawa-centred Canadian enjoys few things more than moral pride -- and doubly so, if it can be moral pride at the expense of those narrow-minded, warmongering Americans.

Though Ottawa has found the land mine treaty politically rewarding, the treaty has done no good on the ground. It did not stop Slobodan Milosevic from using land mines as a weapon of depopulation in Kosovo; it did not stop the Taliban from using land mines in Afghanistan; it has no effect on Islamic extremists; and it receives little attention in the Congo, where a bloody multi-sided civil war continues. As usual throughout history, arms control treaties have little effect on dictators and warlords.

Supporters of the treaty can pull statistics out of the air, arguing that millions of land mines have been lifted in Cambodia, Afghanistan, Kosovo, Bosnia and Angola. But in reality, it was the end of the wars in these countries that allowed de-mining to go ahead, and not an arms control treaty. The Canadian de-mining effort in Kosovo was a fiasco, notwithstanding our much-ballyhooed treaty. The Americans, on the other hand, have not signed the treaty, but are still leading the world in their de-mining efforts. The fact is that mines are lifted by soldiers and other volunteers, not by scraps of paper.



- Proc
- Con

\$

WEATHER

Select

[Stock Qu

- TSE -
- Dow -
- S&P
- 500
- Nasdaq
- C\$ -
- (in U\$) -



POST VOTE

POST ~~X~~ VOTE

Due to technical difficulties, Post Vote is temporarily not in service. National Post Online regrets any inconvenience.

The land mine treaty made great TV: No one can look coldly at pictures of children maimed by mines. The story had a Princess Diana angle, too -- though she was not well-versed in foreign policy, her involvement was as telegenic as it was constitutionally dubious.

UN-style internationalism and the associated practices of arms control have long been an established religion in Ottawa, associated with the name of Lester B. Pearson, one of the household gods of the Liberal party. They have assumed a key role in our national ideology, guiding the large class of officials, academics and journalists who create the ideas available to politicians.

- - -

History is littered with the wrecks of failed and injurious arms control treaties.

The Washington Naval Treaty of 1922 tried to avoid the kind of naval arms race that many thought had caused the First World War. It laid down restrictions on battleship size and armament, restrictions that Britain respected scrupulously, cutting down the size and armament of new battleships. But in the 1930s, the Germans and Japanese paid the treaty no heed, building such powerful ships as the Bismarck and the Yamato. In the Second World War, brave men died because of an arms control treaty concocted by well-meaning diplomats. The 1935 Anglo-German naval accord -- which the Germans were planning to violate even as they signed it for propaganda reasons -- was equally futile.

The Strategic Arms Limitation Treaties of the Cold War era were not much more successful: We now know the Soviets lied consistently. The Pentagon used to release an annual booklet titled Soviet Military Power, which true believers of arms control regularly dismissed as budget-season paranoia. We now also know the Pentagon underestimated Soviet warhead counts and Soviet military strength generally. We also know the Soviets violated international agreements on chemical and biological weapons: One artillery shell in three in the Soviet arsenal was chemical, and the USSR had an active anthrax program.

The ABM Treaty of 1972, which the United States last year abrogated (as under its terms the U.S. had every right to do), is a textbook illustration of the dangers of arms control. The Soviets were in repeated and persistent violation of the treaty before 1989. But now that conditions have changed, it is the United States that is said to have broken the treaty. In Axworthy's words, the United States is "throwing the whole global structure of arms control as we know it into disarray" -- though the Americans have obeyed the ABM treaty scrupulously.

Arms control treaties control the arms of democracies, but rarely of dictators.

Not all such treaties have been failures: In the Rush-Bagot agreement of 1817, Britain and the United States agreed not to keep navies on the Great Lakes, which led to the long 19th-century Anglo-American rapprochement. One can conclude that arms control treaties can work between culturally related, law-abiding nations.

The Intermediate Nuclear Force treaty of 1987 provided for an entire class of weapons to be withdrawn from Europe by both superpowers. But in order to secure this treaty, Ronald Reagan had to run and win an arms race with the USSR -- over the vociferous protests of those who believe in arms control, including Axworthy. This example leads to the conclusion that arms control treaties can under some circumstances be an effective means of managing victory.

The land mine treaty is different from those two examples in one important way: In this case, there was no adversarial negotiating procedure, no head-to-head "I will give up weapon X if you forgo weapon Y" negotiation. The states that decided to give up land mines did so without any quid pro quo -- without imposing any conditions on the actions of others. They depended on moral blackmail to get signatures -- and, of course, on the fact that Third World countries know whence their foreign aid euros come. In this, the land mine ban is like the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928, a treaty that purported to outlaw war.

Many countries signed the Kellogg-Briand Pact because not signing might have looked bad. Who could be in favour of war? The "Ottawa process" by which the land mine bandwagon was created had much the same effect.

- - -

Countries with serious militaries, and those with serious military problems, have avoided the land mine treaty. Just as the United States did not sign, neither did Russia, China, India, Israel or most of the Arab world. The land mine treaty was signed almost exclusively by minor countries that face no serious threats or are protected by the United States.

The land mine treaty has failed to ban land mines. That has not prevented some side effects: It has played into an environment suffused with anti-Americanism. Though many other powers have not signed the treaty, the United States alone is accused of being a bad international citizen -- though the Americans' very respect for international undertakings stopped them from signing a treaty with which they disagreed.

This treaty lets states that make little or no contribution to allied defences preach to the one state that provides the safe environment for Euro-Canadian multilateralism.

The specific American objection to the treaty is the need for land mines in the Korean Demilitarized Zone. If North Koreans infiltrate the DMZ, then American soldiers will die; Axworthy and his successors in the Lester B. Pearson Building will continue to make speeches about peace. The land mine treaty was irresponsible in that it was an act of grandstanding by those who have no responsibility for real decisions in the real world of real conflict.

The primary practical effect of the land mine ban has been to exacerbate inter-allied divisions, at a time when active unity is increasingly required. Axworthy himself is now arguing that Canada cannot co-operate with the U.S. Northern Command because of the land mine treaty, among other reasons. Since the author of the treaty agrees that it is an obstacle to allied unity, the time has come to junk it.

We Canadians might help to undo the damage that we have done were we to repudiate this short-sighted treaty -- and to drop our sanctimonious moral pretenses.

© Copyright 2002 National Post

[Return to search results](#)



Copyright © 2002 CanWest Interactive, a division of [CanWest Global Communications Corp.](#)
All rights reserved. [Copyright terms & conditions.](#) | [Corrections](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)
Optimized for browser versions 4.0 and higher.

