

Why Does Humanity Still Tolerate the Tragedy of Wars in the 21st Century? The Big Picture

By [Prof Rodrigue Tremblay](#)

Global Research, March 11, 2023

Theme: [History](#)

All Global Research articles can be read in 51 languages by activating the Translate Website button below the author's name.

To receive Global Research's Daily Newsletter (selected articles), [click here](#).

Follow us on [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#) and subscribe to our [Telegram Channel](#). Feel free to repost and share widely Global Research articles.

First published on January 12, 2023

Thursday, January 26, 2023.

Professor Tremblay's Important Statement

Under these circumstances, with the escalation of the war in Ukraine, it would be useful and desirable for the Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr. António Guterres, to convene the United Nations General Assembly, in order to discuss the question of peace in the world, considering the great risk that the deterioration of the war in Ukraine currently poses to humanity.

Since the end of the [Second World War](#) (1939-1945), there have been many civil wars and several important regional [military conflicts](#) between two or more countries, but none has evolved into a general world war involving all the most heavily armed countries. The most serious regional wars were the [Korean War](#) (1950-1953), the [Vietnam War](#) (1955-1975), the [Iraq War](#) (2003-2011), the [Syria War](#) (2011-), and the [Ukraine War](#) (2022-).

Indeed, with no sign yet of peace in [Ukraine](#), nine years after the overthrow of the elected Ukrainian government, in February 2014, and nearly one year after the Russian [military invasion](#), last February 24—and with a real danger that such a prolonged proxy conflict between great powers could escalate into a nuclear world war—it may be appropriate to search for reasons why, in this 21st Century, the world is still threatened with murderous and destructive wars.

There are basic tendencies in human nature, structural institutional failures and geopolitical factors for why this is the case.

Let us identify the most important causes, which can explain why wars of aggression and

proxy wars are still taking place today.

- Human nature: Warlike instincts as the basis for wars

Basic human instincts of control, conquest, domination, and exploitation have often been the very background to conflicts and wars between states.

That may be because some countries are, over time, ruled by men who are bent on using violence to gain and expand their power: they may be kings, emperors, dictators, autocrats or hardliners, even in so-called advanced societies.

If war belongs to the very nature of man, in order to escape this atavism, civilization would need to be more commonly based on humanistic principles, and democratic rules and laws, in order to curb the tendency of autocratic governments or oligarchies to dominate other peoples.

- Attempts to prevent wars, with ethical principles or through international cooperation

The Just War Theory

Ever since the philosophical works of Augustine of Hippo (354-430) and Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), the most well known religious thinkers about the [Just war theory](#) (*jus ad bellum*), there have been several attempts to introduce some morality and some fairness, if not more justice, into the practice of organized military violence between nations.

According to thinkers of the '*just war theory*', a war must not be pre-emptive but be defensive. It must rest on self-defense. Its purpose must be to defend a nation's peace against serious injury, and be a lesser evil than the alternatives, after all diplomatic options have been exhausted. For that, a war must meet some criteria, such as being based on a just cause (ex: protect innocent life), seeking a just long-term peace, being under the control of a legitimate authority, being proportional in the means used and being waged as a last resort.

Needless to say, with no practical means to prevent wars of aggression, the *Just war theory* has not prevented wars of aggression, or wars of conquest, from taking place since its inception.

Indeed, when unscrupulous and arrogant leaders subscribe only to the law of the jungle in international relations, it leads to the application of the dictatorial rule that "might makes right".

The League of Nations (1920-1946)

Supporters of a League of Nations

COUNTRIES

ALBANIA, ARGENTINA, AUSTRALIA, AUSTRIA, BELGIUM, BRAZIL, CANADA, CZECHOSLOVAKIA, DENMARK, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, ECUADOR, ESTONIA, FINLAND, FRANCE, GERMANY, GREECE, HUNGARY, ICELAND, ITALY, JAPAN, LATVIA, LITHUANIA, LUXEMBOURG, MEXICO, MONTENEGRO, NETHERLANDS, NEW ZEALAND, NORWAY, PANAMA, PARAGUAY, PERU, POLAND, PORTUGAL, ROMANIA, RUSSIA, SERBIA, SLOVAKIA, SPAIN, SWEDEN, SWITZERLAND, SYRIA, TAIWAN, THAILAND, TURKEY, UGANDA, UNITED STATES, URUGUAY, VENEZUELA, YUGOSLAVIA.



Victory Democracy Peace
Make them secure by a

LEAGUE OF NATIONS



Christmas this year dawns on a world groping from war toward peace. The world hopes and prays that peace may be established on justice and safeguarded against future wars. ¶ The army of occupation that sleeps till the Judgement Day in the graves of France will have fought and died in vain unless such a **PEACE** is framed. ¶ Our Soldiers and Sailors, returning from **VICTORY**, will have fought and suffered in vain if that **VICTORY** is not made secure. ¶ All the peoples of the free nations will have given in vain billions of their wealth and millions of their own flesh and blood if **DEMOCRACY** is not established forever.

The only Practical Way

These things which the whole world longs for can be gained only by the creation, right at the Peace Table, of a **LEAGUE OF NATIONS**. President Wilson has declared for such a League and is in France for the express purpose of guiding its formation. Ex-President Taft believes in it, heart and soul, and is urging his countrymen that a League must be established and that the United States must join.

A **LEAGUE OF NATIONS** is necessary to do the things no one nation can accomplish alone. Victory and Peace have brought a multitude of new problems—

The New Nations:

We propose to carve out of the Old World a dozen or more Republics based upon the principle of self-determination. Can we make the world safe for Democracy if we create these new nations and then leave them to shift for themselves? A **LEAGUE OF NATIONS** will be needed to guide and protect them.

German Colonies:

Germany has proved her unfitness for colonial rule. To return her colonies is unthinkable. They must become the wards of all the free peoples, banded together in a **LEAGUE OF NATIONS**.

Economic Questions:

Access to the sea and access to raw materials are two of the international questions that can be handled only by a **LEAGUE OF NATIONS**. It will be possible for the Peace Congress to establish only broad, general rules for the regulation of these problems. No one nation can make safe and effective use of Economic Pressure to prevent war. The right to supply this weapon must reside, as President Wilson has pointed out, with a **LEAGUE OF NATIONS**.

Interpretation of the Peace Treaty:

Without a Supreme Court to interpret its provisions and a national police power to enforce them, the Constitution of the United States would long ago have

become a dead letter. Yet the framers of the world Peace treaty at Paris face difficulties a hundred-fold greater than those which confronted the fathers of our Republic.

It will be impossible to apply the provisions of the Peace treaty without an international court to interpret them. How shall this court be appointed? How shall its decision be enforced? There is but one answer—by a **LEAGUE OF NATIONS**.

Your Responsibility:

This is a movement in which every man and woman in the United States can share. You believe in the principles here set forth. You want to make the world safe against the menace of future wars. You think that the progress of civilization depends upon the co-operation of all the peoples of the world. You believe that the Peace Treaty which won the war should be continued and utilized for the world's future prosperity. The League to Enforce Peace offers you an opportunity to DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT.

League to Enforce Peace

Headquarters: 130 W. 42nd Street, New York
WILLIAM H. TAFT, President
A. LAWRENCE LOWELL, Chairman Executive Committee
W. H. LLOYD, Secretary

Your Christmas Enrollment

You have just accepted the Red Cross Christmas Seal. Will you not also accept the League to Enforce Peace Christmas Seal? This advertisement appears in thousands of the largest papers in the country. Save them, keep them, and send them to the League to Enforce Peace. It is just for a few cents, but it will mean a great deal to the League. We want this money to reach every man and woman in America. This advertisement campaign will be continued and pushed as far and as long as funds are available. Will you do it this Christmas and send it with your contribution? Don't wait! Do it at once! Send it to the League to Enforce Peace, 130 W. 42nd Street, New York.

LETTERS TO SUPPORT THE LEAGUE

Send to the League to Enforce Peace, 130 W. 42nd Street, New York

NAME _____ ADDRESS _____

Make checks payable to William H. Taft, President

History Program

Adopted, November 11, 1918, at the Official Platform of the League to Enforce Peace.

"**THE** war now happily brought to a close has been above all a war to end war, but in order to ensure the fruits of victory and to prevent the recurrence of such a catastrophe, as universal as possible, based upon treaty and judged that the security of each year shall rest upon the strength of the whole. The same for members of the membership of the League should be the nations associated as belligerents in winning the war. The League should aim at promoting the liberty, progress and the economic opportunity of all nations, and the orderly development of the world. It should ensure peace by eliminating causes of dissension, by deciding controversies by peaceful means, and by utilizing the potential force of the League as a standing deterrent against any nation that seeks to upset the peace of the world. The advantages of membership in the League, both economically and from the point of view of security, should be so clear that all nations will desire to be members of it. For the purpose it is necessary to maintain, the League should be organized on a basis of the decision of the members, as they are, and not on a basis of the number of members. It will be possible for the Peace Congress to establish only broad, general rules for the regulation of these problems. No one nation can make safe and effective use of Economic Pressure to prevent war. The right to supply this weapon must reside, as President Wilson has pointed out, with a **LEAGUE OF NATIONS**. Interpretation of the Peace Treaty: Without a Supreme Court to interpret its provisions and a national police power to enforce them, the Constitution of the United States would long ago have become a dead letter. Yet the framers of the world Peace treaty at Paris face difficulties a hundred-fold greater than those which confronted the fathers of our Republic. It will be impossible to apply the provisions of the Peace treaty without an international court to interpret them. How shall this court be appointed? How shall its decision be enforced? There is but one answer—by a **LEAGUE OF NATIONS**.

Present this platform for discussion and endorsement by your Church, Club, Lodge, and any other organization. It has been approved by thousands of leading Americans

The [League to Enforce Peace](#) published this full-page promotion in *The New York Times* on Christmas Day 1918. It resolved that the League "should ensure peace by eliminating causes of dissension, by deciding controversies by peaceable means, and by uniting the potential force of all the members as a standing menace against any nation that seeks to upset the peace of the world". (Licensed under the Public Domain)

The [League of Nations](#) was created in the first part of the 20th Century, in Geneva, Switzerland, on January 10, 1920, by 41 member states, representing 70 percent of the world population. It was a multilateral attempt to prevent a repetition of [World War I](#) (1914-1918) and to "achieve international peace and security".

Before WWI, the international system for keeping peace and stability was very primitive. It was based on a few [military alliances](#) regrouping several countries. They were supposedly designed to protect smaller states, and their objective was to be a deterrent to war through a so-called "Balance of Power".

Nevertheless, the alliance system was very unstable, because any serious localized military incident could easily escalate and trigger a wider war. Indeed, member nations of any given military alliance were expected to join in the mêlée, when a single country declared a war.

Before World War I, there were two rival military alliances: the Central Powers, which included Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy, joined later by Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire; and the Allies, which included France, the United Kingdom and Russia, joined later by Japan and the United States.

The spark that ignited WWI happened in Bosnia, in the city of Sarajevo, on June 28, 1914, when [Archduke Franz Ferdinand](#)—heir to the Austro-Hungarian Empire—was shot to death along with his wife, Sophie, by the Serbian nationalist Gavrilo Princip. With that, military alliances came into play.

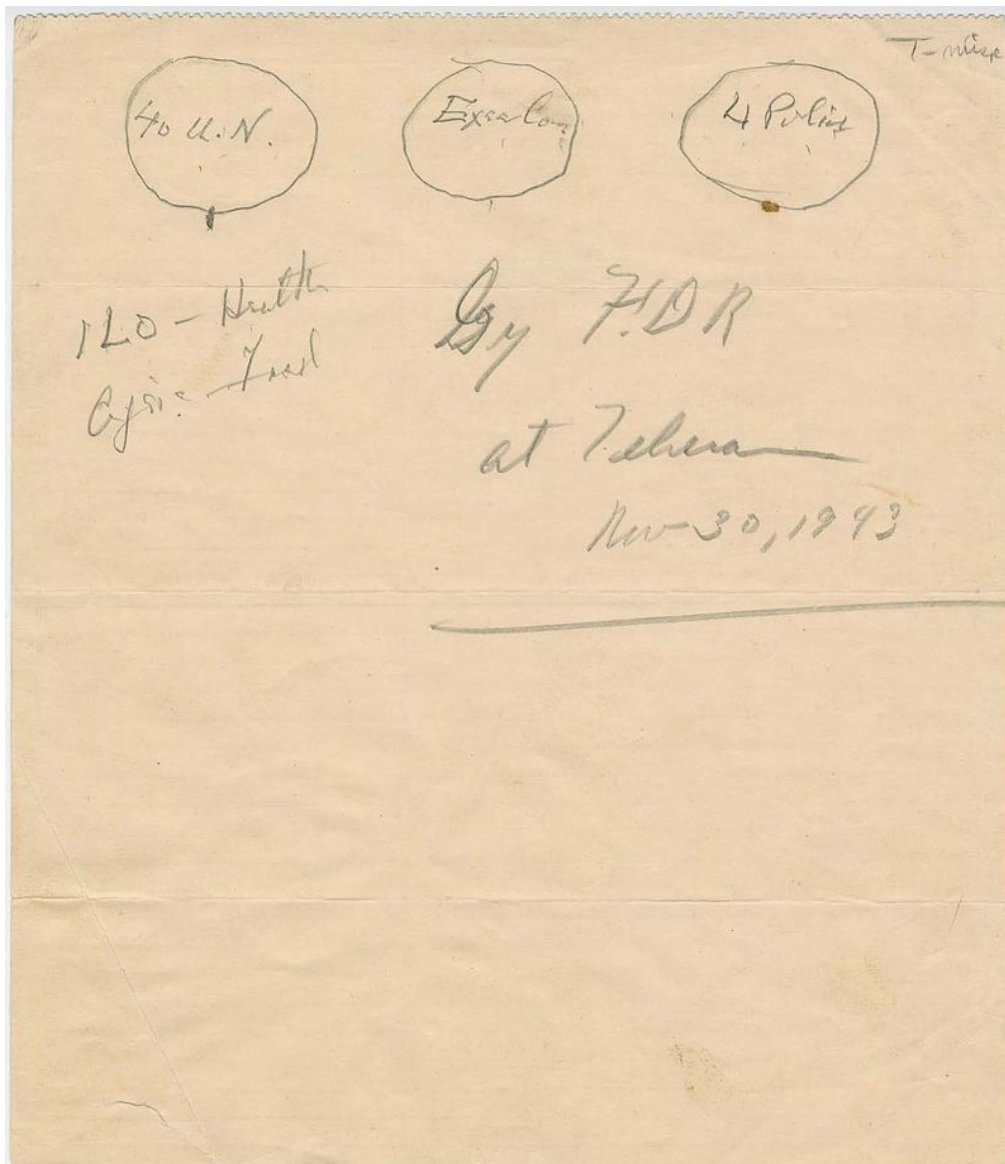
Without the military alliances, the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand would have only caused a regional war between Serbia and Austria-Hungary. However, because of alliances, Russia came to assist Serbia, which in turn led Germany to declare war on Russia.

A question needs to be asked: Are military alliances powder kegs for creating large wars?

Even though, after WWI, the League of Nations was designed to prevent wars, it was too weak to prevent arms races between countries and to enforce disarmament agreements. It was also too weak to impose solutions to conflicts through negotiation or arbitration in cases of international conflicts.

The United Nations (1945)

The [Second World War](#) (1939-1946) is considered to have been a legacy of WWI. And, just like WWI, it involved two opposing [military alliances](#). On one side was the Axis Powers (Germany, Italy, and Japan) and on the other, the Allied Powers (France, Britain, Canada, the U.S., the Soviet Union and China).



1943 sketch by Franklin Roosevelt of the UN original three branches: The [Four Policemen](#), an executive branch, and an international assembly of forty UN member states (Licensed under the Public Domain)

The immediate cause of WWI was the German military invasion of neighboring Poland, on September 1, 1939. Britain and France then both declared war against Germany, on September 3, 1939, in accordance with the defense treaties that they had signed with Poland.

However, historians have placed a lot of the blame for WWI on the failure of the League of Nations to prevent regional wars. They single out the [Treaty of Versailles](#) of June 1919, which imposed the payment of severe war reparations on Germany (the Weimar Republic) and on its economy, besides depriving Germany of several territories along with other exactions. Such a severe humiliation of an entire nation, in turn, promoted the rise of the Nazi movement and of militarism in Germany, but also in Italy and in Japan.

The creation of the United Nations on June 26, 1945, in San Francisco, represents an attempt to ban wars of aggression, after the failure of the League of Nations. Indeed, the United Nations [Charter](#) states that its main purpose is to “*save succeeding generations from the scourge of war*”.

Even though the U.N. Charter makes wars of aggression illegal, powerful states nevertheless

continue to engage in wars of aggression against other less powerful nations, under different pretexts, claiming that their violent aggression is 'necessary', while resorting to an abusive interpretation of the [Self-defense article 51](#).

That is why it can be said that the post-Second World War era has not left the world in a better position today for avoiding wars of aggression, than during the pre-World War I period. *"The more things change, the more they stay the same."*

- Geopolitical factors and the danger of military alliances

The Cold War I (1945-1991)

During WWII, the United States and the Soviet Union were allies. However, once the war ended, they engaged in building two powerful opposing 'defensive' military alliances.

On the one hand, in 1949, the U.S. government was instrumental in creating [The North Atlantic Treaty Organization](#) (NATO), a 'defensive' military alliance initially regrouping 12 countries (the United States and Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, and the United Kingdom). Presently, it has 30 members, with a number of countries waiting to join (Sweden, Finland and Ukraine).

Its official objective was to provide a counterweight to Soviet armies stationed in central and Eastern Europe after World War II.

NATO's Article 5 stipulates that:

"an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or [North America](#) shall be considered an attack against them all; and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or [collective](#) self-defense recognized by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of [armed force](#), to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area."

On the other hand, the Soviet Union formed the Warsaw Pact military alliance in 1955, in order to counterbalance the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). It had 8 Eastern European member states: the Soviet Union (USSR), Albania, Poland, Romania, Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria.

The founding treaty of the 'defensive' [Warsaw Pact](#) called on the member states to come to the defense of any member attacked by an outside force, and it set up a unified military command.

During more than three decades, these two opposing 'defensive' military alliances, a Western bloc and an Eastern bloc, served as counterweight to one another through the establishment of a balance of power in Europe.

However, the East European Warsaw Pact was officially disbanded in 1991, when the Soviet Union went through a severe political crisis and disintegrated, on December 25, 1991, being replaced by the Russian federation and 15 new states. That ended the thirty-six year Cold War.

Such an event left the Western bloc alliance, NATO, without a potential enemy to counterbalance.

The U.S. government, under President George H.W. Bush (1924-2018), as the promoter of NATO, then had two choices: either to dismantle the Western military alliance or to reorient its purpose and develop new missions.

The choice was made not to dismantle NATO, in order to maintain American influence in Europe.

Such a decision was not exempt from raising many misgivings on the part of the Russian government, which feared to be placed in the position of facing a potentially belligerent NATO. In order to allay such fears, the U.S. administration of George H.W. Bush gave assurances, through the Secretary of State [James Baker](#) (and representatives of other Western governments did the same) that NATO “*would not expand into Eastern Europe*” and therefore, would not pose a military threat to Russia.

As a counterpart, the Russian government was expected to go along with the reunification of East Germany (the German Democratic Republic) and West Germany (the German Federal Republic) into a single sovereign state, within the NATO alliance.

However, things changed in 1994 and even more so in 1999.

Cold War II (1999-)

Indeed, during the 1994-1996 period, under pressure from the Republican Party, but also influenced by [neoconservatives](#) in favor of a unilateral neo-imperialist foreign policy, President Bill Clinton made [speeches](#) indicating that his administration would not respect anymore the assurances given to Russia by the H.W. Bush administration, i.e. that NATO would not expand “*one inch Eastward*”.

His administration had been convinced by neoconservative advisors that the U.S. government should [take advantage](#) of the extreme economic weakness of Russia to encircle the latter militarily.

In October 1996, President Clinton made it official that NATO enlargement was part of his foreign policy when he openly [called](#) for former Warsaw Pact countries and post-Soviet republics to join NATO. This was implemented, beginning in March 1999, when three East European countries (Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic) officially joined NATO.

In March 1999, the Clinton administration went one step further. It sidestepped the United Nations Charter, which forbids acts of aggression, and instead relied on the cover of [NATO](#) to initiate an aerial bombing campaign in Yugoslavia, against Serbian military targets. On that date, the U.S. government rendered the United Nations *de facto* impotent to prevent or stop wars of aggression. Since then, the U.S. government has relied on the NATO substitute to justify its military interventions abroad.

- Pretexts, provocations, lies and other deceptive tactics are commonly used to initiate war

There are panoply of indirect possibilities and treacherous strategies to initiate interstate

warfare, besides directly bombing a country or sending armies to invade a foreign country.

For instance, a nation with warlike intentions can use [provocations](#) and threats as a prelude to war, or to incite an enemy to retaliate; an aggressor may also try to disrupt and destabilize a country by simulating a military attack through war games and [covert operations](#). The recourse to a [false flag](#) operation (when a country commits an act of war and blames another country for it) has often been employed.

Another trick to hurt an unfriendly country is to resort to a [proxy war](#) (i.e. a war waged by a client-state against a targeted enemy, but being financed and armed by a major third party instigator). A mixture of a proxy war and a false flag operation can then be part of a plan to enlarge a conflict into an open war.

A war plan on the part of an aggressor can go as far as [sabotaging](#) the installations of a foreign country for military or political motives, through covert operations. An aggressor can also impose a [siege](#) on a victimized nation without any formal declaration of war.

One tactic commonly used to start a war is to denigrate and [demonize](#) an adversary, through lies and deceptive propaganda about that country's armaments or real intention.

Another way to push a targeted country to war is to impose trade [embargoes](#) of some essential commodity that it must import, such as oil. Indeed, the unilateral imposition of economic and financial [sanctions](#) against a country, in order to hurt its economy, is another hostile act that could result in a war.

That is why it is so arduous to prevent a war only through legal and diplomatic means, or through mediation, when a powerful nation is bent on going to war against another country.

Neither the *League of Nations* nor the *United Nations* made it illegal for a warlike nation to provoke a war through indirect means.

This is an indication of how complex and difficult it remains to make the curse of wars of aggression a truly obsolete event. Nevertheless, wars of aggression, now with the destructive capabilities of [nuclear weapons](#), must be prevented, if humanity is to survive on this planet.

Finally, a not too cheery fact: A recent [study](#) has concluded that democracies are more likely to start wars than autocratic regimes.

Conclusion

Currently, the international political and legal framework to prevent or to end war is in shambles. The United Nations has been sidelined and its authority as an arbiter of military conflicts, as stipulated in the U.N. Charter, has been undermined and replaced with a comeback of more or less arbitrary raw power politics.

Like in a not so glorious past, military alliances have been reconstituted and the reliance on a new "Balance of Power" is again the only bulwark against a worldwide military conflagration.

A more civilized world would free itself of the trap of atavistic military alliances, a proven historical recipe for permanent wars, high public indebtedness and persistent inflation. Wars

of aggression and proxy wars should be eliminated as a barbarous human institution, once and for all.

*

Note to readers: Please click the share buttons above. Follow us on Instagram and Twitter and subscribe to our Telegram Channel. Feel free to repost and share widely Global Research articles.

This article was originally published on the author's blog site, [Dr. Rodrigue Tremblay](#).

International economist Dr. Rodrigue Tremblay is the author of the book about morals "[The code for Global Ethics, Ten Humanist Principles](#)" of the book about geopolitics "[The New American Empire](#)", and the recent book, in French, "[La régression tranquille du Québec, 1980-2018](#)". He holds a Ph.D. in international finance from Stanford University.

He is a Research Associate of the Centre for Research on Globalization (CRG).

Featured image: A U.S. Navy Lockheed SP-2H Neptune (BuNo 140986) of patrol squadron VP-18 Flying Phantoms flying over a Soviet freighter. The freighter is most probably the Okhotsk, which left the port at Nuevita carrying 12 IL-28 airplanes on 5 December 1962 (Licensed under the Public Domain)

The original source of this article is Global Research
Copyright © [Prof Rodrigue Tremblay](#), Global Research, 2023

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Prof Rodrigue Tremblay](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca
www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca