

The Post-Ukraine Nuclear Environment

**Conference of Defence Associations Institute
Metro Expert Series Webinar**

October 3, 2022

***Jennifer Allen Simons, C.M., Ph.D., LL.D.,
Founder and President,
The Simons Foundation Canada***

Good Morning from Vancouver,

Thank you for the invitation to speak on **The Post-Ukraine Nuclear Threat Environment** – a speculative enterprise because the resolution is unknown. Russia’s latest annexation of Ukrainian territory has added a dangerous, frightening dimension and brings the world closer to a global war which may become nuclear.

It is distressingly obvious from the Ukraine experience that conventional weapons are effective tools for destruction and death.

Yet, the outcome of Russia’s invasion, is increasing acceptance of nuclear weapons for global security and the heightened risk of nuclear use and of nuclear war.

Putin’s threat to use nuclear weapons, and the weaponization of nuclear power plants, revealed a previously unconsidered dimension of **nuclear deterrence policy and practice** which hamstrung Ukraine’s friends and allies. His threat of nuclear use, if interfered with, created **a safe nuclear-free space for** Russia to invade and attack and destroy Ukraine – **a non-nuclear weapon state.**

The consequence confirms and bolsters the legitimate security concerns of the non-nuclear weapons states which conclude, from the Ukraine experience, that nuclear weapons are necessary for their security; and that International Law, and treaties, including the NPT, are worthless.

Putin’s threat and Medvedev’s confirmation of nuclear weapons use if Russia is hindered in any way is a wake-up call to the nuclear weapons states:

- Authoritarian nuclear weapons states may recognize the advantage of holding the other nuclear weapons states hostage in order to impose or invade others with impunity, for example the much-quoted fear that China will invade Taiwan.
- States with nuclear break-out capability eyeing Russia’s success may see the power of possession - not just for their own security, but as well, to fulfil their own aggressive ambitions.
- A successful outcome for Russia will drive proliferation; and the consequences of dealing with more states with nuclear weapons will mean that nuclear deterrence policy and practice will be more fragile than it already is.
- On the other hand, “the risks of nuclear weapons is now becoming ever more apparent to more people.”¹ and there may be recognition that nuclear weapons and the risks associated with possession, are too dangerous and should be eliminated. But elimination, certainly, is not the case now, nor in the immediate future.

It is an extremely negative environment for nuclear disarmament.

States are placing greater reliance on nuclear weapons in their national security policies and, as well, are upgrading and adding to their arsenals of both nuclear and conventional weapons. And with new nuclear-sharing, nuclear weapons becoming ubiquitous.

¹ Alexander Kmentt letter to JAS

The consequences of expanding existing nuclear sharing arrangements are that:

- It encourages non-nuclear weapons states to seek nuclear options
- It further entrenches nuclear weapons in security policy
- It worsens relations with China which, prior to Ukraine, has responded negatively to the AUKUS Agreement.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has jeopardized the traditional zone of peace environment in the Arctic. The Russian Northern Nuclear Fleet, based in the Kola Peninsula, expanded its military presence in the Arctic in 2017. And since Russia's invasion of Ukraine has increased military activity.

The expansion of the NATO nuclear umbrella to include Arctic states, Sweden and previously neutral Finland, further nuclearizes the Arctic and creates a security threat to the region and, particularly to Canada, because Russia and the United States - its two closest neighbours – are enemies and have the largest nuclear arsenals.

Canada has historically been uneasy with NATO presence in the Arctic. Security measures have been predominantly non-military – governed under the auspices of the Arctic Council which was suspended at the time of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and annexation of Crimea. If and when, the eight-member Arctic Council resumes, Russia will be facing seven NATO states – an unlikely scenario.

Russia's invasion of the Ukraine is also affecting the Indo-Pacific region which has been developing as a coherent economic and security community in response to China's aggressive pursuit of its sphere of influence in East Asia, Taiwan, South Pacific Islands, and its repeated provocations for control of the South China Sea. The Aukus Agreement –its nuclear technology sharing arrangement - a strategy to counter China's aggressive actions, added a further nuclear dimension to the existing Indo-Pacific arena of nuclear weapons states and their allies.

The invasion of the Ukraine has potentially furthered the nuclearization of this region. South Korea is now seeking US weapons based in South Korea and considering acquisition of its own nuclear weapons. North Korea, perhaps in response to South Korea, has formally announced that it is a nuclear weapon state and will use nuclear weapons if it is threatened. Japan feeling threatened by China, and North Korea, and now, by Russia, because of Japan's support for Ukraine - is reconsidering its military policies and, as well, seeking more security assurances - including nuclear - from the U.S.

The range of the topics we have been invited to address reflects this global disarray, and the jeopardization of the prevailing international law and governance system which has guided the conduct of states for almost two hundred years.

President Putin's contempt for the Budapest Memorandum, the Helsinki Accords, for International Humanitarian Law, the Geneva Protocols, the Genocide Conventions, the NPT and the tenets of the United Nations Charter itself – undermine and weaken the multilateral architecture of global governance leaving the United Nations. hobbled and ineffective.

Failure of the 10th NPT Review Conference in August Of this year has been attributed to Russia. Yet despite Russia's pariah status the Nuclear Weapons states – the P-5 – managed to bond together to make no concessions to Article VI – confirmation that the nuclear weapons states and their allies have no intention of disarming. And among other disarmament proposals refused to allow reference to the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons which sought to address Article VI, the disarmament pillar of the NPT .

The NPT is already weak and fragile because of the P-5's dangerous trend of nuclear arsenal expansion and upgrading, and the lack of disarmament. With Russia's invasion of non-nuclear member state, Ukraine, is further substantially enfeebled by Putin's violation of the Treaty and the new nuclear-sharing arrangements. If the NPT fails – if states leave the Treaty - the most important Convention governing nuclear weapons – there will be no treaty restricting nuclear proliferation, managing and controlling peaceful uses of power and purportedly aiming for nuclear disarmament.

With commitments on disarmament ignored by the nuclear weapons states, with their new weapons, new uses and a new arms race – even if Russia does not resort to a nuclear attack - we are courting nuclear catastrophe which could culminate in nuclear war.

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons - the TPNW - is the bright light at the end of a long tunnel. At some point, it is hoped - the nuclear weapons states will recognize the full dimension of critical dangers - the unacceptable risk and how it also works **against** their own interests - of security based on nuclear deterrence policy and practice. And the Ukraine experience may well be the catalyst.

The question has been raised as to whether or not Canada should sign the **TPNW**. Of course, Canada should sign but under the Trudeau government this is far from happening. Canada, citing NATO membership, declined to participate as an Observer in the First Meeting of the States Parties to the TPNW despite the fact that other non-nuclear NATO allies, Belgium, The Netherlands, and Germany which hosts U.S. nuclear weapons, participated as Observers. Australia, a nuclear-protected ally of the United States was also an Observer.

Derek Burney and Fenn Hampson have just released their report on Canada and the Indo-Pacific and among the recommendations are that Canada, for security reasons “ boost ... its military presence in Indo-Pacific”: that Canada join the Aukus defence Agreement and also become a fifth member of the Quad “four-country defence and security alliance “ – joining India, U.S., Japan and Australia. ² This would further embed Canada in nuclear partnering and nuclear sharing arrangements and make a Canadian commitment to nuclear disarmament and signature of the TPNW a distant goal.

The threat and danger of a nuclear attack has raised awareness of the danger of nuclear weapons use, and **could** change the paradigm of military security to a paradigm of human security – of the catastrophic consequences to humanity. Russia's threat **could** provide the momentum for

² Robert Fife, *Ottawa urged to work to boost trade ties and military presence in Indo-Pacific*, G&M, September 28, 2022

furtherance of the TPNW. If Russia does resort to nuclear weapons, I imagine this would be a turning point for universal support of the Ban Treaty.

It is hard to predict how the world can come together to rebuild the trust with Russia. It is imperative to maintain dialogue. There is too much at stake with a potential nuclear apocalypse in the offing. Prior to Russia's annexation, both the U.S. and Russia indicated willingness to begin negotiations on another five-year extension of the New START Treaty. But I understand this has been paused and also that further negotiations will be complex with Russia wanting to include conventional weapons and the U.S. to include China. The resumption of these discussions may be a way forward. As would military to military discussions. The Russian positions at the diplomatic level and at the U.N. are so bizarre with Russia's projection and the truth turned upside down that I have no answers on a way forward while the Security Council, The Conference on Disarmament and the NPT require consensus-based assent.

Thank you!

**Jennifer Allen Simons, C.M., Ph.D., LL.D.,
Founder and President,
The Simons Foundation Canada**

October 3, 2022