

“Common Security and Nuclear Deterrence”

**Common Security and Nuclear Deterrence:
How to replace the current reliance on nuclear weapons
with sustainable security for all**

United Nations, Vienna
August 4, 2023

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

Good afternoon!

Thank you for inviting me to speak today on *Common Security and Nuclear Deterrence*, the follow-on event to the proposal to the NPT PrepCom Plenary session for the establishment of “a subsidiary body to undertake a situation-specific evaluation of the roles of nuclear weapons in conflicts and the common security/conventional alternatives to nuclear weapons in each of these situations,” which I fully support.

We are all acting on the assumption that Russia will not attack Ukraine with nuclear weapons, and implicit in the Common Security and Nuclear Deterrence proposal is the question on the necessity for nuclear weapons in the future when the war in Ukraine has shown that they cannot be used.

The reality is that nuclear weapons *enabled* this war. The actual detonation of nuclear weapons in the battlefield was not necessary. The threat of use of nuclear weapons controlled the battlefield. President Putin achieved his objective without resort to use. The threat was enough, and it is likely that President Putin never intended to employ these weapons - especially because coercion worked.

Russia’s malevolent use of deterrence policy to deter its nuclear-armed rivals and allow it to invade a non-nuclear weapon state has placed the world in a frightening situation affecting the security of all peoples.

Nuclear weapons were the most dominant factor – the crucial element which allowed an unhampered invasion by Russia and is responsible for its longevity. The threat of nuclear weapons use, and the fear of escalation to a global nuclear war, constrained and curtailed military response to aid Ukraine in its desperate fight for survival.

The slow and cautious response from NATO and allies, fearful of providing the types and quantities of weaponry desperately needed by Ukraine to swiftly end the war, has prolonged the killing of civilians and military personnel; the devastation, demolition its culture, destruction of its buildings, and its infrastructure.

This successful abuse of the deterrence security paradigm has resulted in – as of June 29th – three hundred and fifty-four thousand casualties – 10,000 of them civilian deaths, and twelve million refugees. [*August 18 update: nearly 500,000 military deaths and injuries*]. The current cost of destruction is 113.5 billion dollars with a 750 billion price tag to rebuild Ukraine when the war ends.

In a nuclear-free world destruction on such a devastating scale would not have occurred. Friends and allies of Ukraine *would not have been hamstrung by the threat of nuclear war*. They would have intervened *immediately* and *directly* with enough military strength and enough hardware to defend Ukraine – to end the Russian invasion within a brief timeframe.

The G7 Leader’s Statement from Hiroshima criticizes Russia’s irresponsible nuclear rhetoric, accuses Russia of undermining the arms control regimes, and states that Russia’s intent to deploy nuclear weapons in Belarus as dangerous and unacceptable.

However, **what actually was undermined was the accepted paradigm of security through nuclear deterrence.**

“Our security policies – to quote from the G7 text - are based on the understanding that nuclear weapons, for as long as they exist, should serve defensive purposes, deter aggression and prevent war and coercion.”

Russia’s perversion of this theory further undermines the already fallacious policy that deterrence policy brings security and thus elevates the risk of nuclear use to a critical danger – **gambling with the fate of humankind.**

Currently, the outcome of Russia’s invasion, has resulted in increasing acceptance of nuclear weapons for global security and expansion of nuclear-sharing arrangements and has elevated the risk of nuclear use and of nuclear war.

At the end of the war, the question will not be about the necessity for nuclear weapons in the future, but rather about which of the two roads will be taken, given Russia’s effective use of a nuclear threat as a strategic tool to power, for coercion and control.

On the one hand, though Russia may lose the war, its abuse of the accepted concept of deterrence theory could lead to acceptance of it as **a winning strategy.** Already fears have been expressed that China may invade Taiwan, control the South China Sea, colonize the Pacific Islands etc., and that Russia and China may attempt to colonize the Arctic North.

The U.S. could apply the same strategy of nuclear deterrence to invade Cuba because of China’s Intelligence listening post in Cuba. And because China and Cuba are engaged in negotiations to establish a joint military training facility on the island that could lead to the stationing of Chinese troops just 100 miles off Florida's coast.¹

On the other hand - and a hoped-for outcome - is a wake-up call for the nuclear weapons states:

- the recognition that Russia has made a mockery of deterrence policy:
- that nuclear deterrence policy can be ***used against them*** in order for a rogue nuclear weapons state to achieve its goals
- that deterrence policy does not provide security but rather it elevates the risk.

It is essential that positive action be taken. Russia’s coercive action could result in the destruction of the NPT. There are 9 nuclear weapons states (though India, Pakistan and Israel are outside the NPT and North Korea has withdrawn); there are 37 states protected under the “nuclear umbrella”.

This leaves 144 NPT non-nuclear NPT member states. The Ukraine experience confirms and bolsters their legitimate security concerns of these states, who are recognizing that they may need

¹ "the US would have deep concerns about PRC intelligence or military activities in Cuba". Reuter’s June 20, 2023

nuclear weapons to protect themselves. The Non-Proliferation component of the NPT, therefore, is under threat.

The value of the proposed subsidiary body is:

- An exploration of the nuclear deterrence security paradox
- discussion of the new dangers to the P-5
- For the P5 to consider security without nuclear weapons
- For their adherence to Article VI - the third pillar of the NPT
- The nuclear weapons states acceptance and, further, their signature and ratification, of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons – the treaty complementary component of Article VI of the NPT.

The fact is that there is no way to reduce the risk of nuclear weapons use. The only effective way to reduce the risk is to remove the risk – complete elimination of nuclear weapons. The detonation of one nuclear weapon can result in catastrophic consequences for humanity.

Thank you!

August 4th, 2023

Jennifer Allen Simons, Ph.D., LL.D,

Founder and President

The Simons Foundation Canada