

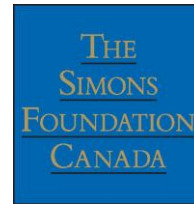


THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

School of Public Policy and Global Affairs



SCHOOL FOR  
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES



## **Advancing Disarmament in a New Age of Insecurity**

SFU's Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue, Room 420

580 West Hastings Street, Vancouver

11-12 April 2025

### **WORKSHOP FRAMEWORK STATEMENT**

#### **Closer Than Ever: The Escalating Threat of Nuclear Catastrophe as the Rationale for the Workshop**

The 2024 statement from the Science and Security Board of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists began with a stark warning: “Ominous trends continue to point the world toward global catastrophe.” In January of this year, the Doomsday Clock was further advanced and now stands at 89 seconds to midnight—the closest it has ever been. Even at the height of the Cold War, the clock never approached this level of danger.

This perilous state reflects the growing risk of nuclear weapons use, which many argue is greater now than ever. While concerns during the early post-Cold War period focused on accidental launches or new nuclear states like North Korea, today's dominant fear is the deliberate use of nuclear weapons.

Recent events have underscored this alarming trend. Russian officials, including Dmitry Medvedev, have threatened nuclear strikes in Ukraine, and Israeli officials, like Amihai Eliyahu, have suggested using such weapons against Gaza. Even earlier, former U.S. President Donald Trump openly threatened to “totally destroy” North Korea. These statements come from leaders who have already shown a willingness to inflict mass civilian casualties through conventional means.

#### **Escalating Perils: Dynamics Driving the Risk of Nuclear War**

Several dynamics amplify the risk of nuclear war today:

**The Collapse of Arms Control:** The New START treaty, the last remaining limit on nuclear weapon deployments by the United States and Russia, will expire in 2026, with no renewal or replacement in sight. All nuclear-armed states are pouring trillions into “modernizing” their arsenals instead of pursuing disarmament.

**Technological Threats:** Advances in artificial intelligence (AI) and cyberwarfare are undermining traditional command-and-control systems for nuclear weapons. For example, Israel has used AI programs like Lavender, Where's Daddy, and Habsora in Gaza to guide missile targeting decisions. The U.S. Department of Defense is heavily investing in AI for warfare applications, introducing new vulnerabilities and accelerating militarization.

**Great Power Competition:** A renewed arms race among the United States, Russia, and China has shifted focus to advanced non-nuclear weapons, including precision-guided missiles, drones, hypersonic missiles, missile defense systems, and autonomous "killer robots." These advancements are prompting nations to also reinforce their reliance on nuclear weapons as a countermeasure, fueling a dangerous cycle of escalation. In this climate, political leaders are not only exhibiting diminished interest in disarmament but are actively expanding their military capabilities.

Nuclear weapon states increasingly use the proliferation of conventional weapons and military buildup to justify retaining—and potentially using—their nuclear arsenals. For instance, in November 2024, President Putin issued a decree emphasizing nuclear deterrence as a central state priority after the U.S. approved Ukraine's use of long-range missiles.

### **Aim of the Workshop**

This workshop addresses the growing dangers of nuclear escalation and makes the case for active disarmament as a response—not through increased militarization, but by building arguments and strategies for peace. It focuses on the role of higher education institutions in advancing disarmament education and exploring effective ways to advocate for change.

Key objectives include:

- Identifying successful arguments and approaches for disarmament advocacy particularly nuclear disarmament and abolition of nuclear weapons
- Reviewing existing courses and materials focused on nuclear disarmament and assessing their impact.
- Learning from past initiatives to establish programs and curricula.
- Building international partnerships and coalitions to further disarmament education particularly nuclear disarmament