

*Simons Panel on Prospects for  
Nuclear Disarmament*

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the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs**

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

Good Afternoon,

I would like to add my welcome to Martina Schubert's, the Deputy Director of Vienna School of International Studies and Karen Halberg's, the new Secretary-General of International Pugwash. I am most appreciative of the opportunity to say a few words about the current situation with which we are faced.

We are in a time of utmost critical danger of a nuclear incident. The international world order is under threat - as the UN Secretary-General says, new nuclear risks have "reached heights not seen since the Cold War" . Much can be attributed to Russia's aggressive foreign policy, culminating in 2022 in the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. This has had immense consequences. President Putin's invasion is responsible for the enlargement and strengthening of NATO and is – in part - to be blamed for a potential new nuclear arms race.

The Russian President had not calculated the dimension and extent of Ukraine's support as the Western allies overcame their reservations and are providing high impact military aid and financial security assistance.

Mutual reductions in nuclear arms between Russia and the U.S. are stalled; and China is expanding its nuclear arsenal in order to reach parity with them. North Korea is advancing its nuclear programs and supplying Russia with weapons to attack Ukraine. Iran too, is providing ballistic missiles to Russia for its war on Ukraine. Moreover, because of US withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, Iran is increasing enrichment to weapon production level. And with Israel's war in Gaza between nuclear-armed Israel and Iran proxies, the situation could explode into a nuclear war.

The international realm is further destabilized because the United States now "has the capacity with non-nuclear forces to pre-empt Russia and Chinese nuclear forces" - U.S. **conventional weapons** which are far superior in development to those of Russia and China, are capable of destroying all of China's and Russian **nuclear** missile silos <sup>1</sup> - a threat which could trigger a nuclear response.

To compound all of this, Ukraine invaded Russia - Ukraine called President Putin's bluff engendering an even more precarious nuclear security environment.

Since its original nuclear deterrence blackmail, Russia has continued to raise the specter of escalating its war on Ukraine to nuclear use. By invading Russia, Ukraine demonstrated that Russia "cannot be allowed to dictate the terms of conflict by issuing nuclear threats"<sup>2</sup>. This has placed more pressure on the Kremlin, raised the risk calculus and created uncertainty with regard to Russia's bluff. To date, this has appeared to be empty rhetoric with no open evidence of practical follow-through.

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<sup>1</sup>[www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/sep/05/us-arms-advantage-over-russia-and-china-threatens-stability-experts-warn](https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/sep/05/us-arms-advantage-over-russia-and-china-threatens-stability-experts-warn) -Dan Plesch and Manuel Galileo Report

<sup>2</sup> <https://misedefenseadvocacy.org/alert/calling-putins-bluff/>

But we can't count on this - Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov's and former president Dimitri Medvedev's threats may become the reality. As Pavel Baev warns us "the task of deciphering Putin's risk calculus can never be accomplished with certainty"<sup>3</sup>

We desperately need diplomatic initiatives – not more nuclear or other weapons. Intensive diplomacy is needed to eliminate the risk of inadvertent war through deliberate use by Russia, by miscalculation or by accident.

Which now provides me with the opportunity to introduce Ambassador Alexander Kmentt, our Keynote Speaker tonight – a man who, actually, needs no introduction because of his – globally acknowledged - outstanding leadership, and invaluable contribution to a nuclear weapon free future.

As one of the architects of the Humanitarian Initiative, he dramatically reshaped diplomatic discussion on nuclear disarmament and the subsequent Treaty prohibiting nuclear weapons, and was President of the First Meeting of the States Parties to the TPNW.

Ambassador Kmentt is the Director of the Disarmament, Arms Control and Non-Proliferation Department of the Austrian Foreign Ministry, and on behalf of the government, spearheads Austria's leadership and actions in multilateralism with its focus on non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and humanitarian disarmament initiatives.

There is no better person to provide insight into essential furtherance of nuclear disarmament initiatives. And I invite you, Alexander, to take the chair.

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<sup>3</sup> [www.brookings.edu/articles/nuclear-brinkmanship--in-putins-war-upping-the-ante/?b=1](http://www.brookings.edu/articles/nuclear-brinkmanship--in-putins-war-upping-the-ante/?b=1)