

Volume 19 Number 1 (2025): 1-33

<https://openjournals.utoledo.edu/index.php/infactispax>

ISSN 2578-6857

## **Forging Global Peace: Canada and South Korea's Global Leadership and Middle Power Momentum**

Erika Simpson and Juneseo Hwang

Erika Simpson is Associate Professor of International Relations and President of the Canadian Peace Research Association, Department of Political Science, Room 7233, Social Science Centre, Western University, London, Canada. [simpson@uwo.ca](mailto:simpson@uwo.ca)

Dr. Juneseo Hwang is a research associate at the DFG Humanities Centre for Advanced Studies "Futures of Sustainability" established within the University of Hamburg, Germany. E-mail: [juneseo.hwang@uni-hamburg.de](mailto:juneseo.hwang@uni-hamburg.de).

### **Abstract**

This article offers a fresh and compelling look at how Canada and South Korea—two influential middle powers—can reshape the global approach to peace and security. It traces South Korea's robust journey from military rule to democratic resilience and its ongoing efforts to engage North Korea in peace and denuclearization talks. In parallel, Canada's experience with a nuclear-armed neighbor underscores the shared challenges both nations face. Rather than relying on outdated military alliances and Cold War mindsets, the article calls for bold new coalitions and innovative security alliances that champion diplomacy, peacebuilding, and multilateral cooperation. It argues that Canada and South Korea are uniquely positioned to lead a global shift away from militarization—toward dialogue, conflict prevention, and peace education. With the rise of emerging technologies like drones and AI-driven warfare, the need for forward-thinking

diplomatic strategies is more urgent than ever. The article ends with a powerful vision: a reimagined global security order led by middle powers that dare to challenge the status quo and light the path toward a more peaceful, nuclear-free world.

### **Keywords**

South Korea, democracy, nuclear proliferation, Canada, peacebuilding

### **Introduction: Forging Peace in a Time of Turbulence and Distrust**

In December 2024, the majority of Korean lawmakers defied expectations, voting against the declaration of martial law and issuing South Korea's president an ultimatum: resign or face impeachment. Amid this constitutional crisis, fears of a descent into military dictatorship gripped the global community, including Canada, home to a significant Korean diaspora concentrated in cities such as Vancouver and Toronto.

These concerns escalated as a million union members of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions, representing one of the nation's most formidable labor coalitions, pledged to strike, and ordinary citizens took to the streets, blocking an eight-lane roadway in defiance of authoritarianism. Parliamentarians, too, stood firm, refusing to legitimize the martial law declaration. In a dramatic turn of events, democracy triumphed: the embattled President Yoon Suk-Yeol was finally removed from office on 4 April 2025, 111 days after the National Assembly vowed to impeach him and deliver justice concerning his unlawful coup, preserving South Korea's status as one of Asia's leading democracies alongside India. Canadians, anxiously observing from afar, breathed a collective sigh of relief as South Koreans reaffirmed their commitment to democratic governance, offering a powerful testament to the resilience of their institutions and the courage of their people.

The Korean President stated that the sudden cessation of democratic rule was deemed necessary due to the proliferation of 'pro-North Korean groups' that were trying to paralyze the state by organizing mass protests against him. His rationale was not even accepted by his own party, causing one-fifth of the National Assembly representatives to vote against martial law. Unfortunately, however, such 'red tagging' of political rivalries and civil social organizations has long been normalized in South Korea, even after its democratization in 1987.

As a result of its internal dissension over time, the Korean peace process with North Korea, officially the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), has also fluctuated, indicating an imminent breakdown between the two Koreas, as

demonstrated by the diminishing effectiveness of agreements such as the Panmunjom Declaration and the 9/19 Comprehensive Military Agreement (CMA). The trend suggests that South Korea is encountering challenges in leading dialogue-based diplomatic initiatives toward North Korea's denuclearization; indeed, it is in danger of excessively suppressing civil social organizations that are campaigning for inter-Korean reconciliation in order to ostensibly 'restore public security'. Complicating matters, there is a growing advocacy within South Korea itself to in favour of wielding its own nuclear weapons capability, subtly questioning the effectiveness of the United States (U.S.) nuclear umbrella (Sukin, 2020; von Hippel, 2023).

**Canada and South Korea: Shared Challenges and Opportunities.** Canada and South Korea share unique strategic positions, as both are located adjacent to unpredictable and potentially irrational nuclear-armed states. For Canada, the United States' unpredictability poses risks of entanglement in conflicts, while South Korea faces direct threats from North Korea, which could drag the country into the renewal of war. Both nations, despite their nuclear energy capabilities, have remained non-nuclear-armed, adhering strictly to their commitments under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).

South Korea learned important lessons following the North Korea-U.S. Summit in 2019 as North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Yong Ho expressed North Korea's frustration over the devaluation of its 'offers' by the U.S. government (Nishino, 2019). North Korea's offers included the shutdown of its Yongbyon nuclear facilities and a moratorium on ICBMs and nuclear weapons testing in exchange for the lifting of UN sanctions imposed against North Korea. For Washington, however, only 'complete' denuclearization was a satisfactory term for future negotiations, which would have meant from North Korea's perspective, a de facto 'surrender' for North Korea.

Both Canada and South Korea maintain a commitment to peaceful international relations. However, their geopolitical circumstances differ. South Korea's proximity to numerous neighbors, including North Korea and China, intensifies the complexity of its regional dynamics and the ripple effect of the Russia-Ukraine War on Korean denuclearization has been thus far profound (Hwang & Hwang, 2024). In contrast, Canada's geography provides greater insulation, but its role as one of the 32 North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies—indeed, a founding member of the alliance—positions it as a key actor in maintaining transatlantic peace and security (Simpson, 2024a).

Despite these differences, both countries share aspirations as middle powers. They actively contribute to United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations and advocate for a nuclear weapons-free world. As intermediaries, negotiators and ‘go-betweens’ in the international system, they prioritize the construction of multilateral institutions and collaborative frameworks to address global security challenges. Civil society actors in South Korea, including humanitarian aid suppliers and reunification movement organizations, are actively engaged in building relationships with North Korea to advance the inter-Korean peace process, despite ongoing political conflicts and tensions at the state level. Some civil society actors within the two Korean governments have played crucial roles as facilitators of inter-Korean dialogues and as public diplomats operating in a neutral capacity. However, it is important to note that civil society in the Korean Peninsula operates differently from the Western liberal model, with all social institutions in North Korea tightly controlled by the Workers’ Party of Korea. Similarly, South Korean organizations involved with North Korea face strict regulations and government controls due to security concerns. Certain members of Korean reunification campaign groups, such as the Pan-Korean Alliance for Reunification, have encountered legal repercussions, including prosecution and imprisonment, for actions that violate South Korea’s National Security Act. This law, which has its roots in the anti-communist policies of the Japanese Empire and the U.S. military administration of Korea, has been criticized by international and domestic human rights institutions and campaign groups for its perceived unlawfulness (D. Kim, 2010).

### **Objectives of Study: Rethinking Security and Alliances**

To avoid the escalation of conflicts into total war, Canada and South Korea must explore innovative strategies. One proposal involves the formation of new coalitions to intervene in conflicts when ‘bad actors’ invade, bypassing the UN General Assembly and the UN Security Council when vetoes render it ineffective. These coalitions would consist of ‘like-minded states’ that prioritize peace and reject pre-emptive warfare. This approach could complement traditional alliances like NATO, while mitigating their potential to stoke tensions.

Moreover, the excessive focus of traditional alliances like NATO, the North American Air Defense Agreement (NORAD) and the U.S.-Japan-Korea Trilateral Pact against nuclear threats has diverted resources from addressing root causes of conflict, such as ideological, religious, and socio-ecological divides among marginalized groups. Efforts should shift toward addressing the grievances of these groups—often led by tribal leaders in remote regions, like Afghanistan, Indonesia or Yemen—without entangling great and middle powers in proxy wars.

**Toward a Shared Vision for Peace.** By leveraging their positions as middle powers, Canada and South Korea can spearhead efforts to reimagine and forge newer international security frameworks. These efforts should aim to prevent conflict, alleviate root causes of instability, and foster a global order that prioritizes peace over militarization. Through renewed partnerships and contemporary alliances, both nations can contribute to a more stable and cooperative international system, advancing the goal of a nuclear weapon-free world. To break the security dilemma, for example, South Korea could reduce the role of the U.S. military on its territory in order to induce North Korea to lower its threshold for counter-deterrence against the U.S.-South Korea military alliance. Such peaceful measures might include the suspension of U.S.-South Korea joint military exercises; reduced deployment of U.S. strategic assets to the Korean Peninsula; and an offer of unconditional dialogue between the two Koreas. So far, South Korean and American militaries have annually expanded their joint military exercise, called Eulji Freedom Shield in the West Sea of the Korean Peninsula, making it one of the largest joint military training exercises in the world. This has led North Korea to escalate its security measures in preparation for imminent war. More pro-active peaceful actions, rather than excessive reliance on pre-emptive military measures, by South Korea would increase the credibility of ‘reassurance’, placing stepping stones on the road to greater mutual confidence in each other’s long-term and peaceful intentions.

Canada might also support the de-escalation of geopolitical insecurity and military tensions in East Asia through the U.S.-led Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. In turn, North Korea could eventually consider analogous risk reduction measures, for example, the cessation of nuclear tests and ballistic missile launches. For all the parties in the Indo-Pacific, it is worth considering the restoration of the inter-Korean hotline to avert accidental clashes from miscalculation and miscommunication.

**Canada, South Korea, and the Evolving Threat of Great Power Competition.** Canada and South Korea share historical legacies deeply influenced by their participation in major 20th-century wars. Canada’s involvement in both World Wars and the Korean War shaped its national identity and international role. Similarly, South Korea, as the primary theater of the Korean War (1950–1953), experienced profound devastation that continues to shape its security policies. These shared histories have influenced their contributions to global security, with Canada’s substantial losses in the world wars propelling its emergence during the Cold War as a prominent UN peacekeeping contributor.

In the post-Cold War era, however, Canada and South Korea's involvement in UN peacekeeping has waned over time. Nonetheless, the demilitarized zone (DMZ) between North and South Korea remains one of the UN's longest-standing peacekeeping missions, highlighting ongoing tensions in the region. The DMZ is a paradoxical space, symbolizing both conflict and hope. While it has become a sanctuary for wildlife, its legacy as one of the most heavily contaminated areas, filled with landmines and unexploded ordnance, underscores the enduring scars of war. Efforts to remove these hazards focus on the periphery of the DMZ to mitigate potential threats from North Korea, leaving much of the zone inaccessible and dangerous.

In addition to land tensions, the contested sea borders in the Indo-Pacific, exacerbated by frequent incursions by Chinese fishing vessels, further complicate inter-Korean relations. Middle-power diplomats, potentially convening within the DMZ itself, could advocate for transforming the area into a Sustainable Zone of Peace. Such a vision could foster sustainable peace for both humans and wildlife, addressing broader regional tensions and promoting environmental and diplomatic cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.

**Shifting Perceptions of Strategic Threats.** While Canada historically viewed the threat of war with China as a remote possibility, its focus has increasingly turned toward safeguarding Arctic sovereignty amid perceived Chinese expansionism. During the Cold War, Canada's primary security concerns centered on the potential for a Soviet attack across the North Pole, with missile trajectories and radioactive fallout threatening Canadian territory (Simpson, 2001). The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989–1991 momentarily diffused these anxieties, yet the resurgence of Russian aggression in 2014, marked by the annexation of Crimea, reignited concerns about territorial violations and geopolitical instability.

The annexation of Crimea, although brazen, did not escalate into a broader European land war. Western powers, including NATO, adopted a cautious posture, eschewing direct military confrontation in favor of economic sanctions and diplomatic condemnation. However, this restrained response may have emboldened Moscow, leading to its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. This miscalculation underscores the absence of proactive diplomacy and the failure of middle powers, including Canada and South Korea, to leverage their intermediary status to preempt escalation through coalition-building and mediation.

**The Role of Middle Powers in an Era of Technological Warfare.** The Ukraine conflict illustrates the transformative impact of technological advancements, such as drone warfare, in redefining the nature of combat. Coupled with the influence of

the U.S. military-industrial complex, these technologies have enabled Ukraine to reinvent its military strategy against Russia. Despite this innovation, the conflict reveals the limitations of traditional alliances, such as NATO, in averting protracted wars. Canada and South Korea, alongside other middle powers—Australia, Austria, Egypt, Germany, Ireland, Israel, France, Kazakhstan, New Zealand, Saudi Arabia, and the United Kingdom—could have exerted greater diplomatic pressure to prevent escalation. By advocating for early negotiations and challenging the reliance on nuclear deterrence, these nations might have played a pivotal role in circumventing the current quagmire.

**The Escalating Costs of a New Cold War.** As the war in Ukraine rages, the United States has increasingly shifted its strategic focus toward China, identifying Beijing as a potential adversary on a parallel front. This dual-focus strategy has precipitated an alarming expansion of U.S. military expenditures, with an annual budget exceeding \$760 billion. This figure dwarfs the combined military spending of Russia, China, and NATO allies, highlighting the United States' unparalleled dominance in global defense capabilities. However, this arms race, fueled by bipartisan consensus in the U.S. Congress, risks entrenching a New Cold War dynamic that diverts resources from pressing global challenges such as climate change, poverty alleviation, and ecocide. The United States and Russia together currently possess nearly 90 percent of the world's nuclear warheads (Federation of American Scientists, 2023) but their examples are teaching other states to channel resources toward arms races instead.

**Toward a New Paradigm of Security.** The Ukraine conflict and rising U.S.-China tensions underscore the need for a reimagined global security architecture. Rather than perpetuating the militarization of international relations, middle powers like Canada and South Korea must champion alternative frameworks that prioritize diplomacy, multilateralism, and conflict prevention. By forging innovative coalitions outside traditional alliances and addressing root causes of instability, these nations can lead the charge toward a more peaceful and equitable global order. Only by stepping away from the precipice of perpetual militarization can the international community avert the catastrophic consequences of a new era of great-power rivalry.

**The Escalating Conflict in Ukraine.** The Ukraine war has reached a critical juncture, with billions of dollars in military aid from the United States, Canada, NATO allies, and middle powers fueling the prolonged conflict. Russia's engagement of North Korean troops and its reliance on advanced weaponry from China, Iran, and North Korea have exacerbated the situation, while drone strikes on

Ukrainian infrastructure have left civilians and non-human inhabitants in cold, dark, and freezing environments enduring extreme challenges. Casualty estimates among humans suggest 400,000 to 800,000 deaths on each side, though neither Russia nor Ukraine has disclosed reliable figures. In the current landscape, it is extremely difficult to comprehend, let alone measure, the profound impact of war on non-human species and ecosystems. Yet, as the destruction of the Kakhovka Dam in 2023 shows, huge explosions causing extensive flooding and dwindling food supplies along the lower Dnieper river in Kherson Oblast war have destroyed the foundations of life for all species, even for the ‘victors’, whoever they may be. The increasing intensity of the war between Russia and Ukraine is inciting global fears of an eventual NATO intervention, potentially escalating the war into a global conflagration.

### **The Role of Middle Powers in Peacebuilding and Peace Education**

Amid these developments, middle powers such as South Korea and Canada have a critical role to play in pressing the great powers toward diplomatic solutions. While any negotiated peace will undoubtedly be complex, the moral and practical necessity of halting further bloodshed and the ecocide of all species is clear. Middle powers must leverage their unique positions to facilitate dialogue, reduce the risk of escalation and foster peace education. Peace education in both Canada and South Korea has been shaped by their unique histories and societal challenges. While both countries emphasize global citizenship and human rights, their approaches reflect distinct national experiences—Canada grapples with its colonial past and the ongoing process of Indigenous reconciliation, whereas South Korea confronts the enduring division of the Korean Peninsula and the legacy of Japanese colonialism, the Korean war, and the 30-year military dictatorship.

**Peace Education.** In Canada, peace education is closely tied to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and its Calls to Action, which urge educational institutions to teach the history and lasting impact of residential schools while promoting understanding of Indigenous rights and sovereignty. According to the Chief Commissioner of the TRC, “A reconciliation framework is one in which Canada’s political and legal systems, educational and religious institutions, the corporate sector and civil society function in ways that are consistent with the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, which Canada has endorsed.” (Sinclair, M., Sinclair, S., & Sinclair, N. J., 2024, p. 463). Although many Canadian schools and universities now incorporate Indigenous perspectives, treaty education, and land-based learning to foster respect for Indigenous knowledge systems and environmental stewardship, the TRC Commissioner



emphasizes the pressing need for more substantive restorative justice initiatives that promote peaceful conflict resolution, public truth sharing, apology, and commemoration that acknowledges and redresses past harms (Sinclair, M., Sinclair, S., & Sinclair, N. J., 2024, pp. 1–465).

Environmental peace and sustainability are additional themes within Canadian peace education, reflecting growing awareness of climate change, resource conflicts and nuclear accidents. Canadian organizations like the Canadian Pugwash Group, the Canadian Coalition to Prevent Nuclear War, and Project Ploughshares provide further educational resources on peace, disarmament, and global justice, connecting local reconciliation efforts to broader international issues such as Afghanistan and Ukraine (Project Ploughshares, 2025; Simpson, 2023, pp. 347–365).

In contrast, South Korean peace education is shaped by the country's experience of colonization, war, and national division. Much of the state-led peace education curricula focuses on understanding the causes and consequences of the Korean War, the ongoing separation of North and South Korea, and the importance of peaceful reunification. School textbooks, Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) peace tours, and unification education programs expose students to the realities of the Korean peninsula's division and encourage empathy toward North Koreans (H.J. Kim, 2023). Programs such as the Jeju 4.3 Peace Education Program and the memorialization of the 5.18 Gwangju Uprising also highlight human rights and historical memory (Jeju 4.3 Peace Foundation, 2023; H.J. Kim, 2023).

### **Parallel Crises in the Middle East, The Nuclear Genie and Great Power Competition**

The Ukraine war is not unfolding in isolation. In the Middle East, rising tensions between Israel and actors such as Iran, Hamas, Hezbollah, and potentially Egypt and Saudi Arabia threaten to ignite a regional conflict. The threat of nuclear weapon use looms large, particularly considering Iran's potential clandestine advancements following the collapse of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). This volatile situation highlights the interconnected nature of global security challenges and the urgent need for coordinated peacebuilding efforts.

The concept of the "Nuclear Genie" encapsulates the dangers of unrestrained nuclear modernization by great powers. The competitive strategies of states like the United States, China, and Russia as well as those of emerging middle powers, like Iran, Israel, and Saudi Arabia risk precipitating unintended conflicts with catastrophic consequences. Washington must prioritize engaging Beijing to

discuss the shared dangers of nuclear arms races, which now extend to the militarization of space, as well as the importance of mutual restraint. However, the Trump administration's adversarial stance toward China, framing it as the enemy within an us-versus-them paradigm, suggests little hope for meaningful progress on arms control before 2030 or beyond.

**The Challenges of Tailored Deterrence in Modern Conflicts.** Deterrence strategies must evolve to address the multifaceted risks of modern conflicts, from conventional warfare to nuclear proliferation. Historical precedents provide valuable lessons for crafting approaches that constrain great power ambitions and prevent wider wars. Middle powers must not remain passive observers; instead, they should lead efforts to debate the efficacy of deterrence and advocate instead for durable peace agreements. Only through proactive and collective action can the international community prevent further escalation and secure a more stable future.

The failure of tailored deterrence was evident in the October 7 terrorist attacks on Israel, which provoked a devastating Israeli assault on Gaza. Israel's deterrence strategies were unable to prevent the escalation of violence into a broader regional conflict involving Egypt, Iran, Lebanon, and Syria. Despite U.S. President Joseph Biden's visit to reaffirm unwavering support for Israeli President Benjamin Netanyahu, the conflict continued to worsen. Old-fashioned war tactics, including hostage-taking and the use of conventional weapons such as guns and tanks, have created a cycle of violence reminiscent of earlier Middle Eastern conflicts in 1947 and 1956. These patterns suggest that conventional approaches to deterrence are insufficient, necessitating a fundamental reassessment of strategic planning. Preparing for peace requires shaping deterrence strategies to prioritize dialogue and reconciliation over continuous preparations for war.

**Deterrence and the Taiwan Strait: Avoiding Security Dilemmas.** A critical case study in tailored deterrence lies in the Taiwan Strait, where escalating tensions between China and the United States risk spiraling into conflict. Instead of adopting militarized strategies, such as deploying advanced U.S. aircraft carriers, middle powers should facilitate dialogues exploring alternatives to military confrontation. Proposals for enforcing a stable maritime boundary, whether centered around the Spratly Islands, fishing zones, or environmental protection areas—similar to Canada's Arctic Waters Pollution Act—could pave the way for cooperation. While compromises are inevitable, the sacrifices of peace are far preferable to the devastation of war. Middle powers could convene forums to develop innovative

frameworks for regional stability, underscoring that diplomatic engagement offers a viable path to de-escalation.

**The Risks of Nuclear Escalation in Asia.** The prospect of a conventional war over Taiwan is fraught with additional risks posed by Artificial Intelligence (AI), cyberwarfare, and space-based capabilities. A conflict post-2025 could see denial capabilities in space immobilizing both sides, preventing a decisive outcome. Meanwhile, the nuclear dimension of regional competition remains a looming threat. Unlike the Cuban Missile Crisis, where only two nuclear powers were involved, today's Indo-Pacific region involves six nuclear-armed states—China, India, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia, the United States (and potentially Japan and South Korea, which are non-nuclear states under the U.S. nuclear umbrella). The complexity of this nuclear environment heightens the risks of miscommunication and accidental escalation, emphasizing the urgency of nuclear restraint and dialogue. Adding to those risks, there are still an alarming 12,500 nuclear weapons operational across the globe (Federation of American Scientists, 2023), heightening the risks not just in the Middle East and Asia but among other middle powers in South America and Africa.

### **Lessons from Canada: Extended Deterrence and Nuclear Disarmament**

Canada's decision not to host nuclear weapons during the Cold War serves as a powerful example for other nations. By choosing nuclear disarmament over direct nuclear armament, Canada avoided the burdens of maintaining a nuclear arsenal, although Canada chose to acquire nuclear weapons in the 1950s before the Cuban missile crisis (Simpson, 2001). Canada's gradual approach of disarming itself of nuclear weapons resonated with Canada's domestic population advocating for nuclear-free policies and demonstrated that security can be achieved without direct reliance on nuclear weapons. The decision also highlights the potential for middle powers to lead by example in advocating for nuclear disarmament and arms control.

**Preparing for Emerging Threats: Technology and Autonomous Systems.** While Canada has historically played a key role in conflict management, from counterterrorism to NATO operations, it, like other middle powers such as South Korea, must now focus on preparing for emerging threats posed by autonomous technologies. The success of Ukraine's use of drones in its defense strategy seems to be teaching nations the growing importance of integrating advanced technologies into national defense systems. As Canada and other nations invest in drones and other autonomous systems, the lessons from Ukraine will inform their efforts to enhance surveillance, border security, and territorial defense (Simpson, 2024b, p.

104–123). However, by prioritizing innovation and collaboration in cooperative security, middle powers could instead promote the principles of peacebuilding and conflict prevention.

The evolving nature of global conflict highlights the limitations of traditional deterrence strategies. Whether addressing regional wars, nuclear risks, or the integration of advanced technologies, a proactive approach rooted in preparation for peace is essential. Middle powers, drawing on historical examples and contemporary innovations, have a unique opportunity to lead in fostering dialogue, developing cooperative frameworks, and averting the catastrophic consequences of war. Through concerted efforts, they can shape a more stable and secure international order.

**The Urgency of Addressing Emerging Security Challenges.** The international community cannot afford inaction amidst Trumpism, extremism, and ongoing diplomatic confusion (Simpson, 2025, 1–12). New military technologies are advancing at an unprecedented pace, with countries like Afghanistan, Israel, and Iran, as well as others in the Middle East, rapidly developing and acquiring sophisticated air and missile defense systems. Simultaneously, adversaries are employing unconventional tactics, such as drive-by shootings via motorcycles or drones, and engaging in piracy off Somalia’s coasts (Simpson, 2024b). The potential for cross-border biological attacks, releasing spores to contaminate large areas, further amplifies the urgency of these threats. Middle powers must act decisively by directing resources toward fostering dialogue and forging paths to peace.

While great powers focus on dominance in sea-to-ground and air-to-ground warfare, the implications of asymmetrical warfare—where smaller powers successfully challenge larger ones—demand attention. Ukraine’s destruction of Russian ships in the Black Sea can only remind us of the enduring strategic significance of critical waterways. Without cooperative agreements, conflicts over access to and control of water resources will persist. The collaboration between Canada and the United States, exemplified by their management of the Great Lakes, serves as a model for international cooperation. With the world's largest source of freshwater and longest shared shorelines, Canada together with the U.S. has demonstrated how joint frameworks can promote sustainable water-sharing and regional stability.

The growing security risks to global trade routes, such as the Red Sea’s closure to commercial shipping due to Houthi attacks, highlight the inadequacy of military solutions alone. Even the U.S. Navy has struggled to ensure safe passage

in these waters. If armed conflict were to disrupt Indo-Pacific trade routes, the resulting economic devastation would dwarf the costs of post-9/11 conflicts, threatening ports like Vancouver in Canada and Pusan in South Korea, causing widespread hardship. To mitigate these risks, stakeholders, including corporations and civil society, must collaborate to fund research and develop peaceful countermeasures that protect trade and ensure freedom of navigation.

Technological advancements in warfare, such as precision-guided missiles, will inevitably lead to countermeasures like electronic jamming, perpetuating a cycle of escalation. As peacemakers, the focus should shift to creating Zones of Peace that expand into larger sanctuaries, fostering buffer zones that are demilitarized and cooperative areas (Pearson & Simpson 2022; Simpson & Naimpoor, 2021). Initiatives such as the Antarctic Treaty provide valuable precedents for establishing Nuclear Weapon Free Zones (NWFZs) in fragile regions like the Arctic. By building on the success of existing NWFZs and ‘freezing out the nukes’ in the Arctic (Dallaire & Simpson, 2014), the international community can promote stability in other critical areas, including oceans and outer space.

### **The Role of International Agreements in Transforming Humanitarian Conflict**

Through strategic foresight and collaborative action, middle powers can play a pivotal role in shaping a more secure and cooperative global order. Investing in dialogue, cooperative frameworks, and innovative conflict prevention measures offers a pathway to sustainable peace and prosperity. The diplomatic efforts of middle powers should focus on strengthening the fraying NPT regime, revitalizing the UN's Conference on Disarmament, completing negotiations for a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT), and supporting a potential Nuclear Weapons Convention (NWC). Unfortunately, revitalizing stalled diplomatic negotiations and adequately preparing for the upcoming NPT Review Conference in 2026 and beyond have not been the primary focus of Korean officials and Canadian governments.

Under the current Republican administration led by U.S. President Donald J. Trump, it remains highly unlikely that a “No-First Use” (NFU) doctrine on nuclear weapons will be adopted, with a pre-emptive “first-use” posture likely to be retained. The United States’ tendencies will likely hinder the adoption of global norms related to nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament. The nuclear-weapon possessor states—including China, France, India, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia, the United Kingdom, the United States and likely Israel—are making so little progress on arms control and disarmament that some argue middle powers should

take more decisive steps toward “minimum credible deterrence,” where states possess only the nuclear weapons necessary to deter an adversary from attacking (Blair et al. 2018).

**The Role of Canada in Transforming Humanitarian Conflict and International Treaties.** Canada has a proud history of spearheading international agreements to reduce the humanitarian impact of nuclear and conventional war. It has long been proposed that NATO consider a comprehensive review of the alliance's adherence to the principle that, so long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO will maintain its status as a nuclear alliance. Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr. Lloyd Axworthy spearheaded such a review in 1999, an initiative that is well-documented in Canada's diplomatic history (Simpson, 2000, pp. 16–18).

Another landmark example is the Land Mines Treaty, born out of Canada's invitation to nations to discuss banning anti-personnel landmines. While the great powers refused to sign, the treaty marked significant progress. Yet, the current shipment of landmines from the United States to Ukraine undermines these efforts, raising concerns about the indiscriminate maiming of future generations of Russians and Ukrainians and sending negative signals that the commitment to the ban on anti-personnel landmines can be easily broken. Despite setbacks, Canada's leadership also contributed to the Cluster Mine Treaty, which banned bombs designed to scatter deadly payloads indiscriminately. These successes demonstrate Canada's capacity to lead on banning further inhumane weaponry.

**The Escalating Costs of Warfare with Small Arms in the Middle East.** The ongoing conflict in Gaza underscores the devastating costs of war involving small arms wielded by both state and non-state actors. Groups like Hamas and Hezbollah access advanced military technologies, prompting state responses that perpetuate cycles of violence. The use of improvised devices by Israel, such as handheld explosives disguised as pagers and radios, exemplifies the brutal impact of modern warfare on both soldiers and civilians, including children. These tactics highlight the urgent need for a global commitment to new avenues for peaceful engagement. Canada and South Korea must champion initiatives that prioritize dialogue and cooperative security over violent confrontation.

**The Dangers of Mercenaries and Forced Combatants.** The proliferation of mercenaries, such as those from the Wagner Group, and coerced combatants, including North Korean soldiers fighting for Russia in Ukraine, signals a troubling trend in modern conflicts. These practices degrade the ethical standards of warfare and have far-reaching implications for professional military forces worldwide. Canada's small professional military force has historically upheld principles of

decency, avoiding the use of forced or mercenary soldiers. In contrast, the use of prisoners and coerced soldiers by authoritarian regimes reflects a dangerous erosion of humanity in warfare. Canada, South Korea, and their allies must denounce these practices and advocate for international norms that protect the dignity of combatants and civilians alike, while addressing the root causes of violence and conflict that feed the mushrooming of private security companies and mercenaries.

**Learning from Failed Efforts to Support Democracy.** Canada's investments in training Afghan and Iraqi militaries highlight the risks of supporting corrupt regimes under the guise of promoting democracy. Despite billions spent, these efforts failed to establish stable, democratic governments, offering a cautionary tale about the limits of military intervention. Canada and South Korea, as middle powers, must redirect resources toward strengthening democratic institutions in the context of sustainable development globally. By teaching peace rather than war, they can lay the foundation for more sustainable and ethical approaches to international relations.

**Toward a Peace-Oriented Strategy in Ukraine.** The ongoing conflict in Ukraine calls for innovative approaches that prioritize long-term stability over military escalation. Rather than funneling military donations through the Ukraine Defense Contact Group, middle powers should focus on training Ukraine's forces to prepare for a negotiated stalemate. Such an approach would acknowledge the enduring hatred and devastation caused by the war while aiming to limit further loss of life. By promoting diplomacy and preparing for peaceful coexistence, Canada and South Korea can lead the way in fostering a future built on dialogue rather than destruction. For South Korea, the restoration of inter-Korean dialogues and engagement is a cornerstone for these efforts.

Canada's leadership in humanitarian disarmament, its ethical military practices, and its lessons from past interventions position it uniquely to advocate for a global shift toward peace. By partnering with other middle powers, Canada can champion international agreements, oppose inhumane practices, and invest in democratic resilience. In doing so, Canada and its allies can help shape a world where security is built on cooperation and mutual respect, rather than conflict and coercion.

### **The Challenge of Fragile States and the Need for Peace-Oriented Training**

Global arms races and fragile states will continue to pose a threat to global security but providing military forces, training and armaments only perpetuates cycles of violence on our already fragile planet. To break the cycles, there must be

a surge in peace-oriented training. Peacemakers need to be equipped with the technical and strategic tools necessary to deliver peace, not war. One promising avenue for advancing peace is through the use of emerging technologies, such as AI, which can facilitate communication and understanding between adversaries. AI's growing ability to translate languages quickly could help foster clearer dialogue, enabling leaders to communicate directly and citizens to exchange views across cultural and linguistic barriers. As migration patterns shift and populations move across borders, focusing on the positive aspects of these changes, rather than the negative, can help break down cultural and ethnic barriers, fostering greater cooperation.

**Harnessing AI for Global Peacebuilding.** AI's capabilities to translate languages with speed and accuracy are rapidly advancing. Currently, AI can translate languages like Chinese, English, and Korean, and soon, its ability to translate Russian will surpass current expectations. This technological leap will render traditional translation methods, once essential for even basic communication, obsolete. With AI's support, leaders will be able to engage in clear, understandable dialogue, while civilians can also connect with one another, sharing their perspectives and experiences online. This shift could be instrumental in facilitating understanding among adversarial groups, reducing the reliance on physical borders and cultural divides.

**The Possibility of Rapid Deployment Peacemakers.** The swift support provided to Israel by the West in response to the recent conflict raises a critical question: why cannot similar capabilities be mobilized for peacebuilding? Canada's proposal for a United Nations Rapid Deployment Capability was stymied by the United States, yet the potential for Rapid Deployment Peacemakers remains. The readiness and credibility of middle powers might be questioned, but they have an opportunity to initiate political exercises—beyond theoretical debates—that focus on peacebuilding. Rather than spending excessive time debating the specifics of when, where, and under what conditions a United Nations Emergency Peace Service (UNEPS) might emerge, middle powers could use their financial influence and diplomatic efforts to foster immediate, constructive actions among war-torn rivals. This approach could help create conditions for peace in the short term while the UN reconfigures itself, potentially eliminating the veto power that impedes progress.



## **The Urgency of Addressing the Stakes of the Defense Industry in Global Conflict**

The stakes for resolving conflict and building peace are at their highest in the post-9/11 era. The world is facing unprecedented challenges that demand immediate action. Middle powers, by focusing on peace-oriented initiatives rather than military escalation, could play a pivotal role in shaping the future of global security. Through rapid deployment capabilities, financial support for peacebuilding, and the promotion of dialogue facilitated by technologies like AI, the international community can create new pathways for cooperation, understanding, and ultimately, peace. Yet despite all that, the role of domestic defense industries in shaping the contours of war is becoming increasingly evident across the globe. In many countries, including Canada and South Korea, domestic defense sectors are striving to meet the escalating demands of warfare. In Canada, defense industry hubs are located in cities like London, Ontario, which is also the author's hometown, while in South Korea, medium-sized cities and rural areas play a central role in hosting environmentally-polluting arms industries and defending Seoul, the co-author's home city. The influence of defense industries also permeates smaller locales like Hamburg, where Dr. Hwang, the co-author completed his postdoctoral work, and Ottawa, Simpson's postdoctoral base. This pervasive influence reflects the deepening integration of defense industry interests in shaping national security agendas.

Meanwhile, Russia's own defense industrial base is struggling to keep pace with the demands of protracted warfare. As a result, Moscow has turned to external sources, purchasing weapons, including lethal drones, from China, Iran, and Syria. The growing partnership between Russia and these nations, with Beijing providing critical military technologies and Tehran and Pyongyang supplying munitions, signals a troubling trend. If unchecked, such defense industry interests and alliances will continue to bolster the military capacities of adversaries indefinitely unless strong countermeasures are taken.

**The Importance of Honoring the Arms Trade Treaty.** The global community has committed to the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), with both Canada and South Korea being signatories. The landmark ATT, regulating the international trade in conventional arms—from small arms to battle tanks, combat aircraft and warships—entered into force on 24 December 2014. This treaty must be respected and upheld by defense corporations to prevent the proliferation of arms and the perpetuation of violent conflict across the globe, including in regions such as the Indo-Pacific. In order to prevent the continuation of state-on-state warfare

combined with insurgencies, there must be renewed and intensified efforts to strengthen international treaties. The failure to do so will enable further cycles of violence.

Although some countries may view the Arms Trade Treaty as ineffective, South Korea was among its original signatories, and Canada's 2019 accession has gradually shifted its leaders away from the notion of profiting from arms sales, including the controversial \$15 billion deal with Saudi Arabia for Light Armoured Vehicles. This contract, signed by General Dynamics in the author's hometown of London, Ontario, continues to be honoured despite the ethical concerns it raises. Initially lauded by Canadian lawmakers, this deal has since become a point of shame for those who championed it, as they now recognize the dangerous implications of arming a military power like Saudi Arabia.

### **The Legacy of War and the Call for Peacemakers**

The true legacy of war is not written by those who profit from it but by those who strive for peace. History honors the efforts of peacemakers, not the architects of war. During the Cold War, it was figures like Vaclav Havel and Lech Walesa, both known for their commitment to peace, who shaped the historical narrative. Likewise, while Ronald Reagan's presidency is often remembered in the context of his engagements with Mikhail Gorbachev, it is their agreement on the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty in 1988 that remains a defining moment.

In contrast, the actions of bureaucrats and politicians who contribute to the culture of war are often forgotten, as the true legacy of history is reserved for those who lead with a vision of peace. As such, those in positions of power should recognize that the path to being remembered in the annals of history is through the promotion of peace, not the perpetuation of conflict.

**The Path to Peace and the Role of Small States in Global Security.** The path to peace in the current geopolitical climate may seem daunting, yet it is essential to recognize how small nations like Taiwan have outsize relevance for regional security and stability. Taiwan, a small island that could comfortably fit into Ontario, one of Canada's 10 provinces and 2 large territories, wields significant influence primarily due to its strategic positioning in the Asia-Pacific region and its relationship with global powers, notably China and the United States. While geographically minor, Taiwan's role in the balance of power in East Asia remains profound, with China's assertive policies and the United States' continued support for Taiwan's democratic values amplifying its importance on the global stage.

Similarly, the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, despite their small size, exert considerable influence on NATO's defense posture. Their geopolitical positioning and security concerns have made them pivotal in shaping NATO's approach to regional threats, especially concerning the alliance's stance on nuclear weapons (*i.e.* NATO's 'Strategic Concept'). The inclusion of Finland and Sweden as NATO members further amplifies this influence. Though these countries long opted for non-nuclear stances, their integration into NATO introduces new dynamics regarding the alliance's stance on nuclear policy, particularly as these nations align with NATO's values on nuclear weapons without having nuclear capabilities themselves (Simpson, 2021, 1–28; Erika Simpson, Interviews on NATO's Nuclear Weapons, Deterrence and UN Arms Control and Disarmament, Western NMREB Research Project 2020-113754-36016, 2000–2025).

**Nuclear Deterrence and the Challenges of Escalation.** For a significant period, European NATO allies were reluctant to publicly discuss the alliance's dependence on nuclear weapons for defense. Fast-forward to NATO Summits in 2022 and 2023 in Madrid and Vilnius, where the military alliance unveiled the newest iteration of its Strategic Concept (NATO, 2022). This concept's central focus is on addressing the potential threats posed by Russia's intention to employ weapons of mass destruction, as well as the pressing need to deter chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and cyber-attacks. Once again, NATO reiterated its commitment to being a nuclear alliance, emphasizing the necessity of maintaining an appropriate mix of nuclear, conventional, missile defense, space, and cyber capabilities within its deterrence and defense posture (NATO, 2022, pp. 6–8, paras. 20–34).

However, recent geopolitical developments, especially Russian threats to escalate to nuclear conflict, have called into question the traditional doctrine of nuclear deterrence. Some analysts refer to Russia's nuclear strategy as a form of “escalate to de-escalate,” wherein the threat of nuclear escalation is seen as a means to achieve strategic objectives without full-scale war. This doctrine has introduced new challenges to the principles of deterrence, compelling a reassessment of the effectiveness of Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) and strategies of flexible response in managing nuclear escalation.

The traditional game-theoretical frameworks that have shaped nuclear policy—such as the prisoner's dilemma and chicken games—are increasingly seen as inadequate in addressing the realities of modern nuclear threats. What once seemed like theoretical exercises in strategy now directly relate to life-and-death scenarios of global conflict, civilian casualties, and the potential for widespread devastation. The theoretical models that once captivated armchair theorists are now

confronted by the grim reality of total annihilation, as illustrated by the catastrophic consequences of nuclear warfare (Simpson, 2018, pp. 38-58). This shift has prompted growing concerns among scientists and global thinkers, with the Doomsday Clock as of December 2024 reading just 90 seconds to midnight, symbolizing the near-total extinction of humanity, species, and ecosystems (Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, 2024).

**The Irrelevance of Traditional Deterrence Approaches.** President Vladimir Putin's decision to suspend the New START Treaty and his ominous statement about resuming nuclear testing are contributing to unease about nuclear build-ups (Kimball, 2023). The Treaty, the last remaining bilateral nuclear arms control agreement between the United States and Russia, represents yet another threatened element of global nuclear security. The current state of global affairs underscores a stark truth: traditional approaches to deterrence, once central to nuclear policy, are now increasingly irrelevant in addressing contemporary security challenges. The rapid advancement of nuclear capabilities, combined with evolving strategies of escalation, highlights the inadequacy of old frameworks that have long dominated strategic thinking. These developments signal a need for rethinking and innovating new methods of conflict resolution and deterrence in the face of an increasingly unpredictable global environment. The path to peace demands not only a re-evaluation of existing strategies but a collective effort to adapt to the complexities of modern security threats.

**Deterrence by Denial and Its Limitations.** Deterrence by denial was designed to make it difficult for an adversary to achieve its intended objectives through aggressive actions. However, recent events in Ukraine and the Middle East have shown that this strategy often fails to prevent acts of aggression. A prime example is Israel's inability to stop Iran's conventional attack on Israeli territory in 2024, despite threats of widespread punishment. Instead of deterring the Iranian missiles and drones, Israel was compelled to rely heavily on its air and missile defense systems. While Israel's defensive capabilities were bolstered using relatively inferior Iranian bombing technology, future attacks are likely to see a much stronger Iranian missile force, potentially backed by technology from North Korea, Russia, and possibly rogue scientists. This highlights the growing difficulty of relying solely on deterrence by denial, particularly as adversaries adapt and develop more advanced technologies.

**Lessons from Canada's Global Partnership Program.** Canada's participation in the Global Partnership Program—now the G7-led Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction—involves significant

investments in nuclear security and offers valuable lessons for other nations. Over the course of two decades, Canada donated billions of dollars and worked to secure nuclear materials and facilities, particularly in Russia. This initiative was praised as a success by multiple Canadian governments, both conservative and progressive. However, the program's potential was significantly undermined when Russia withdrew, citing concerns over espionage and territorial sovereignty related to its Cold War-era facilities. Despite the setbacks, the core features of the program could be replicated in other nuclear states such as India, North Korea, and potentially the United States. The international community can learn from Canada's approach to nuclear security, especially in terms of funding nuclear scientists and converting weapon-grade nuclear materials for peaceful purposes.

**The Costs of Air Defense Systems.** Air defense systems, while crucial for national security, are inherently more costly than offensive measures. Israel's response to Iran's missile and drone attack in 2024 likely cost significantly more than Iran's initial launch. Similarly, the Taliban's use of inexpensive, small-scale tools to attack NATO forces resulted in the loss of 168 Canadian soldiers and countless injuries, despite Canada's substantial financial investment in the war in Afghanistan. The cost of Canada's involvement in Afghanistan was staggering, depleting the Canadian Armed Forces without sufficiently diminishing the threat posed by the Taliban. The resources spent on military operations could have been better used to address domestic issues, such as improving Indigenous access to clean water and providing educational opportunities focused on peacebuilding. These experiences illustrate the inherent imbalance in the costs of defense versus offense, as well as the long-term financial burdens of protracted military engagements.

**Deterrence by Punishment and Its Failures.** The strategy of deterrence by punishment—threatening severe consequences if an adversary takes certain actions—has proven to be ineffective in many cases. North Korea's provocations under Kim Jong Un did not lead to peace but rather heightened tensions, particularly during U.S. President Donald Trump's first term. Trump famously threatened that his nuclear 'button' was bigger than Kim's, signaling a willingness to use nuclear weapons against North Korea. However, his subsequent diplomatic overtures, which involved warnings of nuclear retaliation alongside friendly gestures, confused international observers. South Koreans remember this period as one of unpredictable diplomatic moves, with Trump and Kim meeting at the border, despite the sabre-rattling rhetoric. This combination of threats and diplomacy created confusion and undermined the credibility of nuclear deterrence strategies. China and India publicly condemned the role of nuclear weapons on the Korean Peninsula, further complicating the situation. In this context, engaging with a new

U.S. president requires a baseline understanding of how threats are perceived, and signals are sent, across the U.S. government. Active feedback loops among middle powers are essential to ensuring that diplomatic engagement prevails, rather than escalating to total war.

The limitations of deterrence strategies, both by denial and punishment, underscore the need for a rethinking of how the international community addresses military aggression and security threats. While deterrence remains a core component of defense policy, recent experiences suggest that more comprehensive and innovative approaches are needed to address the evolving challenges of modern warfare. The lessons from past conflicts, coupled with the need for more sustainable and peaceful solutions, will be critical in shaping future strategies for conflict resolution and international security.

### **Signalling Peaceful Intentions to Prevent Escalation**

The ability to signal peaceful intentions is essential for preventing the escalation of conflicts. In moments of heightened tension, a combination of threats, military deployments, and the rapid spread of unclear or contradictory messages—often amplified by social media—can inadvertently contribute to large-scale regional conflicts. One illustrative example is the ongoing conflict between Hamas and Israel since October 7, which has seen escalating violence and a complex web of political, military, and social forces at play.

**The Case of Hamas and Israel.** The situation in Gaza is shaped by Israel's actions, which Hamas perceives as ethnic cleansing and acts of aggression. The assassination of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran and Israel's threats to destroy Iran—Hamas's primary military backer—have further intensified the conflict. On the ground in Gaza and Lebanon, many people wish for Hamas to leave their territory and hope for a ceasefire, yet the conflicting messages from Israel's leadership complicate the situation. Internal divisions within Israel's government, as well as vengeful rhetoric, further fuel the confusion. The atmosphere of hatred, exacerbated by Iran's involvement and the inflammatory presence of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, increases the potential for wider conflict.

**The Role of U.S. Military Engagement.** In response to these tensions, U.S. military leaders, such as Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, deployed two aircraft carriers and additional aircraft to the Middle East in an attempt to deter Iran from escalating the conflict further. However, the effectiveness of these military deployments remains uncertain. Despite this show of strength, efforts to deter Iran diplomatically have failed, as evidenced by U.S. Secretary of State Antony

Blinken's inability to prevent Iran's response, including through diplomatic channels involving leaders in Qatar and Jordan. Iran's large-scale attack on Israel in April 2024 demonstrated the limitations of deterrence, both in conventional warfare and, more ominously, in the potential nuclear theater.

### **The Limitations of Military Force in Deterrence Necessitates a Shift in Mindset Towards Peacebuilding**

The recent failures of deterrence underscore the urgency of rethinking conflict management strategies. Partnerships with nations across the Middle East and Europe are essential, particularly in addressing the limitations of U.S. military capabilities and their effectiveness in curbing escalation. While military force may provide temporary security, an overreliance on it carries significant drawbacks. A more enduring and effective approach lies in fostering cooperation and actively engaging in peacebuilding efforts. As the proverb goes, "a gentle hand can lead where force cannot," emphasizing that collaboration rather than coercion is key to achieving lasting peace.

To prevent further escalation, it is crucial to foster a mindset focused on peace rather than war. Engaging in dialogue about peace should not be seen as futile or a sign of weakness. There are no sunk costs in pursuing peace; instead, it offers an opportunity to build a future of stability and cooperation. The failure to engage in peace talks often results in continued conflict, which has far-reaching consequences for all involved. Moving forward, the focus must shift from a fear of war to the constructive pursuit of peace through dialogue and cooperation.

**The Role of Middle Powers in Global Peace and Security.** As the United States, China, and Russia contend with multiple global threats, including their long-term competition, middle powers must redirect their focus toward fostering genuine peace and security. While great powers confront each other on the battlefields of Europe and the Middle East, with the potential emergence of a third front in the Indo-Pacific, middle powers are positioned to reframe the U.S.-China-Russia rivalry. Instead of merely reacting to the dynamics of these global powers, they have the opportunity to introduce an alternative form of peace: "peace by resilience." This concept emphasizes the ability to endure, recover, and adapt to disruptions, marking a shift from traditional military postures to a broader, more sustainable approach to conflict management.

**Reimagining U.S.-China-Russia Rivalry: Peace by Resilience.** The "peace by resilience" framework would fundamentally challenge the approach outlined in the 2022 U.S. National Defense Strategy. Rather than disperse military assets across

various regions, this strategy would propose a peace-building approach grounded in the understanding that the costs of war far exceed the benefits of peace. The certainty provided by peace planning—characterized by clarity and simplicity—contrasts sharply with the complexities and uncertainties inherent in military conflict. In this view, peace becomes the more effective and desirable option, offering stability and predictability that military engagement cannot guarantee.

Middle powers such as South Korea and Canada are uniquely situated to foster connections among countries within the Indo-Pacific region. These efforts could lead to historic, middle-power-brokered progress, akin to the positive examples of relationships such as Japan and South Korea; Canada and Cuba; and Australia and the United Kingdom. By focusing on less formal but meaningful collaborations, middle powers can create a new framework for peace. One such initiative could be the formation of a group known as “Pacific Team Peace,” consisting of Australia, Canada, Japan, the Philippines, South Korea, and Taiwan. The peace ministers of these countries could meet periodically to discuss strategies, while initiating joint actions such as Peace Convoys in the South China Sea.

**World Peace 2030: A Collaborative, Middle-Power-Led Peace Exercise.** In the long-term, the concept of a World Peace 2030 exercise, led by middle powers, could involve over 30 countries across Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and the Western Hemisphere. This initiative would serve as a platform for fostering cooperation among diverse nations, promoting the idea that peacebuilding can be a collaborative and expansive effort. The exercise could be held in the Indo-Pacific and would represent a collective effort to foster understanding, build trust, and prevent the escalation of tensions.

As we collectively march towards crucial milestones, notably embodied in the United Nations 2030 agenda encapsulated within the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, it is imperative that we undertake a multifaceted approach. Within the UN and NATO and newer collaborative frameworks proposed in this article, we must work to delegitimize and stigmatize not only nuclear weapons, but any threats to use any Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) including atomic, biological and chemical weapons. Key facets of the UN’s approach include strengthening the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) and the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), and subsequently minimizing the role of WMD within military doctrines. Violence within societies, including gun violence, militarized policing, femicide, and ecocide, should be addressed through peaceful means, as they contribute to the internalization of us-versus-the enemy logic.



**The Value of Expanded Partnerships.** These campaigns, though requiring substantial effort and decades of collaboration, would demonstrate the power of a cooperative, middle-power-led approach to global security. Expanded partnerships would create political and military buffer zones and act as proactive measures, offering ‘insurance policies’ against the cost of conflict. By cultivating tighter relationships built on trust and conciliation, middle powers can create a more resilient security environment. Such collaborations make it significantly harder for those who seek to disrupt global stability, creating a more secure world for all nations and species.

A key responsibility is for middle powers to draw greater attention to the specter of a war fought with atomic weapons, whether in the hands of the great powers, like the United States and Russia, or between middle powers like Iran or Israel, as atomic warfare carries dire consequences, potentially triggering catastrophic scenarios akin to nuclear winter (United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs 2023; Tannenwald, 2022, pp. 74–81). Well-researched scientific forecasts cast a stark light on the repercussions of even a limited nuclear exchange among two middle powers, like India and Pakistan. An exchange involving approximately 100 tactical-sized nuclear weapons between India and Pakistan would result in colossal fires, ejecting millions of tons of soot into the atmosphere. This soot would precipitate a worldwide temperature drop of at least 1.25 Celsius degrees. The human toll would be staggering, with an estimated 20 million lives lost within a week and approximately two billion individuals at risk of perishing due to famine over the ensuing decade, largely attributed to a severe reduction in grain production (Robock & Toon, 2009, pp. 1–8).

### **The Urgency of Peace Education in the Face of Global Conflict**

The pursuit of peace demands a sense of urgency to prevent the escalation of war into a global conflagration. As the great powers invest in advanced and specialized military capabilities, such as robotic drones, super-sonic underwater missiles, and space-based forces like the U.S. Space Force, the importance of older and newer peacemaking strategies remains ever relevant. While conflict zones continue to expand, the need for collaboration among peace proponents and peace educators grows more critical. The emphasis on military deterrence and winning conflicts by the great powers contrasts sharply with the necessity for middle powers to bolster cooperative security efforts and peace education, which will be pivotal for achieving long-term peace.

In recent years, Canada and South Korea have expanded peace education to include global citizenship and environmental sustainability, aligning with the

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations, 2015; Simpson, 2016). Institutions like the Asia-Pacific Centre of Education for International Understanding (APCEIU), based in Seoul, as well as civil society organizations play a key role in promoting peace, human rights, and cultural understanding across the region (APCEIU, 2024; D. Kim, 2017). Grassroots pacifist movements in South Korea have manifested in various forms alongside traditional advocacy groups for reunification, expanding and nurturing the notion of peace. These movements promise to interlink their causes with political activism to address broader societal challenges, including systematic environmental destruction (such as 'ecocide'), the arms race, and global injustices (Hwang, 2025).

While Canada and South Korea differ in historical contexts, both nations use peace education to address past injustices and envision more inclusive futures. In Canada, this means it is imperative to acknowledge and repair relationships with Indigenous peoples while in Korea, this involves fostering dialogue and empathy across a divided peninsula. Both models share a commitment to empowering young people as active participants in building peaceful societies. Ultimately, peace education in both countries highlights the importance of confronting historical wrongs, promoting human rights, and cultivating global citizenship. These efforts reflect broader societal commitments to justice, reconciliation, and sustainable peace—lessons that resonate well beyond their borders.

**Middle Powers and the Shift Towards Cooperative Security.** In regions like Taiwan, the United States prioritizes military assistance and training to prepare for potential conflict with China, thereby paradoxically increasing the possibility of military confrontation and accelerating regional arms races. In return, China blames the U.S. to justify its weapon programs and expansionism. However, a more 'realistic' approach would involve preparing for scenarios that focus on avoiding violence altogether, instead fostering alliances, partnerships and peace education based on serious and sustained attention to peaceful outcomes. India's diplomatic approach to China provides yet another model, suggesting that cooperation rather than heightened competition may be the key to managing tensions effectively in the current global security environment.

**Learning from Peaceful Efforts: The Better Path.** In conclusion, learning from the peace efforts waged by others is often difficult, but it is ultimately more beneficial than experiencing the devastating consequences of war firsthand. The ongoing devastation and loss of life across all species in Ukraine and the Middle East highlight the urgent need for more proactive peacebuilding efforts. To avoid the same fate, it is essential to foster peace and prepare for scenarios that prevent

the kinds of wars that have devastated these regions. The adage that "the best way to prepare for peace is to prepare for war" is fundamentally flawed. In truth, lasting peace is not built through threats or arms races but through diplomacy, mutual understanding, and proactive conflict resolution. **To prevent war, prepare for peace—build trust, mend rifts, and calm the storm before it brews.**

### Notes on Contributors

Erika Simpson is a prominent scholar in the field of international relations and peace research, serving as an Associate Professor at Western University, Canada. She is also the President of the Canadian Peace Research Association (CPRA). Erika is the author of *NATO and the Bomb* and has contributed to several prestigious publications, including the *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, *International Journal*, *In Victus Pax*, *Peace Magazine*, *Peace Research*, *Peace Review*, and *Policy Options*. A well-regarded voice in Canadian media, she regularly contributes to Canada's *Hill Times* and provides expert analysis for outlets such as the Postmedia Network, CTV Television, and CBC Radio. Her involvement in peace initiatives extends to her leadership roles in the Canadian Pugwash Group, and she also serves as a reviewer for the CIMVH and SSHRC. Dr. Simpson's outstanding contributions to peace research have earned her a number of fellowships, including the Alton Jones Fellowship, Barton Fellowship, Liu Institute Fellowship, and NATO Fellowship. In 2015, she received the lifetime achievement award from the Voice of Women in Canada in recognition of her extensive work in peace writing.

Juneseo Hwang is a research associate at the DFG Humanities Centre for Advanced Studies, *Futures of Sustainability*, at the University of Hamburg in Germany. He is also a policy consultant specializing in peace and security issues in East Asia. His current research emphasizes fostering sustainable peace through the criminalization of ecocide, moving beyond the traditional framework of victors' justice. Dr. Hwang's notable expertise encompasses peacebuilding, environmental justice, human rights, green criminology, and disarmament. His work has already been published in the *Journal of Contemporary Asia* and *Peace Review*, with contributions forthcoming in the *Handbook of Research on Sustainability and Governance* and *May Books*. His doctoral dissertation, *The Road Not Taken: 'Triple Transformation' towards Sustainable Peace in Northern Ireland*, received the United Kingdom Political Science Association's 2022-2023 Elizabeth Wiskemann Prize for the best thesis on inequality and social justice.

## References

- Asia-Pacific Centre of Education for International Understanding (APCEIU). (2024). Innovative Approaches to Global Citizenship Education in the Asia-Pacific: Dialogue between Theory and Practice. <https://www.unescoapceiu.org/post/5193>
- Blair, B. G., Sleight, S., & Foley, E. C. (2018). The end of nuclear warfighting: Moving to a deterrence-only posture. Program on Science and Global Security, Princeton University, and Global Zero. <https://sgs.princeton.edu/sites/default/files/2021-02/Blair-et-al-2018.pdf>
- Bulletin of Atomic Scientists. (2024, January 23). A moment of historic danger: It is still 90 seconds to midnight. <https://thebulletin.org/doomsday-clock/current-time/>
- Dallaire, R., & Simpson, E. (2014, May 3). Freezing out the Nukes: With the Arctic expected to become an area of increasing friction, experts see an opportunity to bar nuclear weapons from the region around the pole. *Sun Media*. <https://lfpres.com/2014/05/01/simpson-with-the-arctic-expected-to-become-an-area-of-increasing-friction-experts-see-an-opportunity-to-bar-nuclear-weapons-from-the-region-around-the-pole>
- Federation of American Scientists. (2023). Status of World Nuclear Forces. <https://fas.org/initiative/status-world-nuclear-forces/>.
- Government of Canada. (2015). Truth and Reconciliation Commission Reports. <https://nctr.ca/records/reports/>
- Hwang, J. (2025). *Justice now! A story of the ecocide resistance moments that change the world*. (In Korean, published by May Books). <https://product.kyobobook.co.kr/detail/S000215691428> and <https://www.zukuenfte-nachhaltigkeit.uni-hamburg.de/kolleg/newsroom/2025-02-25-book-presentation-juneseo-hwang.html>
- Hwang, Y., & Hwang, J. (2024). Out of Fire into the Frying Pan? The Ripple Effect of the Russia–Ukraine War on Korean Denuclearization. *Peace Review*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10402659.2024.2414031>

- Jeju 4.3 Peace Foundation. (2023). Jeju 4.3 Peace Education Program.  
<https://jeju43peace.or.kr>
- Kim, D. (2017) Building Relationships Across the Boundaries: The Peacebuilding Role of Civil Society in the Korean Peninsula. *International Peacekeeping*, 24(4), 515-537. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13533312.2017.1314762>
- Kim, D. (2010). The Long Road Toward Truth and Reconciliation. *Critical Asian Studies*, 42(4), 525–552. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14672715.2010.515387>
- Kim, H. J. (2023). Tracing the Development of Peace and Conflict Studies in South Korea. *Asian Journal of Peacebuilding*, 11(1), 33-57.  
<https://doi.org/10.18588/202305.00a337>
- Kimball, D. G. (2023). Why We Must Reject Calls for a U.S. Nuclear Buildup. *Arms Control Association*. <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2023-11/focus/why-we-must-reject-calls-us-nuclear-buildup>
- Nishino, J. (2019). Assessment of the Second U.S.-North Korea Summit and the Future Course of North Korea’s Denuclearization. *Asia-Pacific Review*, 26(1), 146–161. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13439006.2019.1652433>
- NATO. (2023, July 11). Vilnius Summit Communiqué.  
[https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_217320.htm?selectedLocale=en](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_217320.htm?selectedLocale=en)
- Pearson, F. S., & Simpson, E. (2022). How to de-Escalate Dangerous Nuclear Weapons and Force Deployments in Europe. *International Journal: Canada’s Journal of Global Policy Analysis*, 77(1), 125–136.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/00207020221100712>
- Project Ploughshares. (2025). The Ploughshares Monitor, a quarterly magazine.  
<https://www.ploughshares.ca/pages/ploughshares-monitor>
- Robock, A., & Toon, O. (2009). Local Nuclear War. *Scientific American*, 302(1), 74–81.  
<https://climate.envsci.rutgers.edu/pdf/RobockToonSciAmJan2010.pdf>
- Simpson, E. (2025). Unmasking Cults: Examining the Parallels Between Trumpism and Chinmoyism to Understand Extremism and Offer Peacemakers’ Support. *Peace Review*, 1–12.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10402659.2025.2473410>

- Simpson, E. (2024a). NATO's Nuclear Strategy Post Russia's Ukraine Attack: Shaping Global Nonproliferation Talks. *Peace Review*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10402659.2024.2414941>
- Simpson E. (2024b). Cutting-Edge Dynamics of Drone Technologies: Military Strategies and Peaceful Innovations. *In Factis Pax*, 18(1), 104–123. <https://openjournals.utoledo.edu/index.php/infactispax>
- Simpson, E. (2023). Addressing Challenges Facing NATO and the United States Using Lessons Learned from Afghanistan and Ukraine. *Peace Review*, 35(2), 347–365. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10402659.2023.2204850>
- Simpson, E. (2021). Addressing Challenges Facing NATO Using Lessons Learned from Canada. *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, 27(1), 1–28. <https://bjwa.brown.edu/27-1/addressing-challenges-facing-nato-using-lessons-learned-from-canada/>
- Simpson, E., & Naimpoor, S. (2021, August 12). Why buffer zones could combat the ongoing war in Afghanistan. *Hill Times*. <https://www.hilltimes.com/story/2021/08/12/why-buffer-zones-could-combat-the-ongoing-war-in-afghanistan/269388/>
- Simpson, E. (2018). Game Theory and Peace Research: Professor Anatol Rapoport's Contributions. *In Victus Pax: Journal of Peace Education and Social Justice*. 12(1): 38–58. <https://openjournals.utoledo.edu/index.php/infactispax/article/view/1015/619>
- Simpson, E. (2016). Sustainable development goals worth sharing. *OIDA International Journal of Sustainable Development*, 9(3), 1. <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/politicalsciencepub/130/>
- Simpson, E. (2001). *NATO and the Bomb: Canadian Defenders Confront Critics*. McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Sinclair, M., Sinclair, S., & Sinclair, N. J. (2024). *Who we are: Four questions for a life and a nation*. McClelland & Stewart.
- Sukin, L. (2020). Credible Nuclear Security Commitments Can Backfire: Explaining Domestic Support for Nuclear Weapons Acquisition in South Korea. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 64(6), 1011–1042. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002719888689>

- Tannenwald, N. (2022, March 10). 'Limited' Tactical Nuclear Weapons Would Be Catastrophic. *Scientific American Newsletter*, 74–81.  
<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/limited-tactical-nuclear-weapons-would-be-catastrophic/>
- Toon, O. B., Robock, A., Turco, R. P., Bardeen, C., Oman, L., & Stenchikov, G. L. (2007). Consequences of Regional-Scale Nuclear Conflicts. *Science*, 315, 1224–1225.  
<https://www.science.org/doi/full/10.1126/science.1137747>
- von Hippel, D. (2023). Implications of the 2022–2023 Situation in Ukraine for Possible Nuclear Weapons Use in Northeast Asia. *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament*, 6(1), 87–100.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/25751654.2023.2201367>
- United Nations. (2015). The 17 Goals. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>
- United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. (2023, November 30). Report of the Scientific Advisory Group on the status and developments regarding nuclear weapons, nuclear weapon risks, the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons, nuclear disarmament and related issues. TPNW/MSP/2023/8. <https://disarmament.unoda.org/report-of-the-scientific-advisory-group-on-the-status-and-developments-regarding-nuclear-weapons-nuclear-weapon-risks-the-humanitarian-consequences-of-nuclear-weapons-nuclear-disarmament-and-relate/>