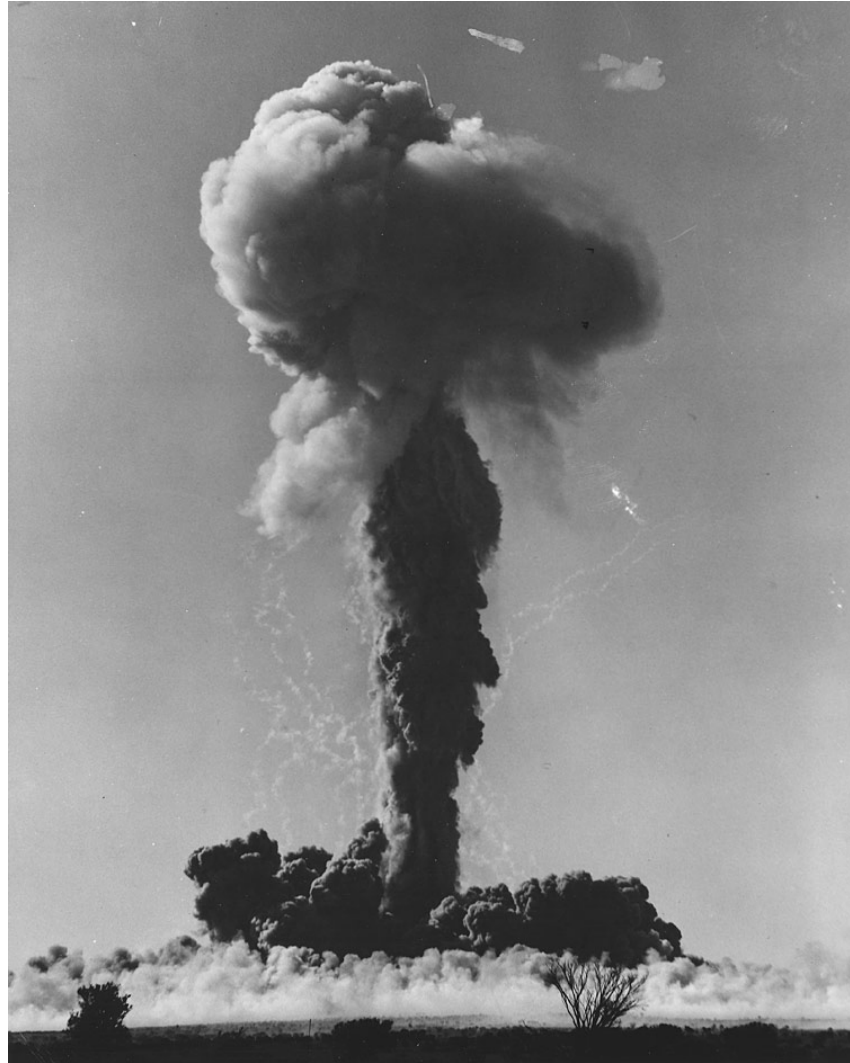


2025



Mondays
12:30–13:50

B330

[Readings](#)
[\(folder\)](#)

[Moodle](#)

NUCLEAR WEAPONS IN WORLD POLITICS

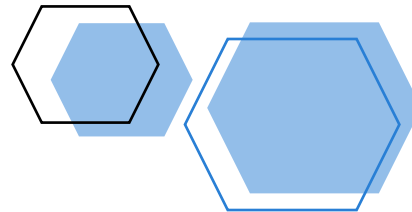
MICHAL SMETANA

- B.A. course about the role of nuclear weapons in international politics
- provides you with a basic introduction to scholarship investigating the impact of nuclear weapons on international affairs
- it is recommended for active students who enjoy interactive teaching methods, lively debates, and scholarly puzzles
- it is quite challenging and requires intensive weekly work on assignments
- an integral part is a simulation game taking place during the last three sessions of the semester



WHAT DO WE COVER IN THE COURSE?

As you are becoming experts in the field of international studies, you simply cannot avoid the issue of nuclear weapons. Whether you think that nuclear weapons represent the ultimate evil, or they are the guardians of a long great-power peace, the spread of nuclear weapons is frequently placed among the top risks humanity is facing today. In this course, we will discuss the contemporary discords in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty regime; unpack new disarmament initiatives; elaborate on the current problems with nuclear programs in Iran and North Korea; assess the risk of nuclear weapon use in the Russo-Ukrainian war; and try to solve the big puzzles that keep nuclear scholars awake at nights: why countries develop nuclear weapons in the first place, what are the consequences of nuclear proliferation, and why nuclear weapons have not been used since World War II.



WHAT HAPPENS IN THE CLASS?

Most classes in this course are lecture-seminar hybrid; while I always try to provide you with some basic overview of the current developments in the field and relevant academic concepts and theories, your own input and ideas are critically important for the joint learning process. There will be some special lectures delivered by practitioners and other guests. Attendance in classes is compulsory, with up to three abstentions allowed (for whatever reason—no prior excuse is needed).



WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE CLASS?

After each class, I will ask you to follow up on what we've learned and read a scholarly article to elaborate on our problem in more detail. There is good evidence that from a learning perspective, this approach works much better than the traditional "read first – attend the lecture second" approach. Readings for each class will be available for you in the [Dropbox folder](#).

Moreover, after each class, you will do an assignment related to the simulation game (see below). This mostly requires you to write a short policy memo or speech that you must submit by Sunday of the same week [through Moodle](#). The simulation coordinator is Karim Kamel (karim.kamel@fsv.cuni.cz); feel free to reach out to him if you have any questions about the assignments or the simulation itself. Note that in order to pass the course, you need to submit assignments for each week. Points will be deducted for any late submissions (0.5 for the first late submission, 1 for each subsequent late delivery).



SIMULATION GAME

Simulation exercises are proven to be among the most effective methods for learning. By immersing oneself in a stakeholder role, you incentivize active learning (check: [“Simulations and Experiential Learning in the International Relations Classroom”](#)). The point of this simulation exercise is to immerse yourself in the role of a country’s diplomatic mission. All students will partake in this roleplaying game, where they represent a government during negotiations. You will learn three things from this exercise. First, you will study your assigned country’s position on the topic. A useful reference for studying countries’ positions is the [Nuclear Threat Initiative country profiles](#). Your main reference, however, should be official statements and working papers produced by governments, which can be found on [Reaching Critical Will’s website](#). Second, you will need to learn about the broader context in which the negotiations are taking place. This means you will study other countries’ positions, their redlines, influential political groupings, and the history of the topic and the discourse in policy, media, and academia. Third, you will be exposed to the “art” of negotiations. Diplomacy and negotiations have been described [as an art and a science](#). Studying the Rules of Procedure (check: [Processes of International Negotiations](#)) and mastering them could help you in the deliberations. There is also literature on [negotiations](#) and negotiation tactics (check: [Never Split the Difference](#)) that could bolster your negotiation skills.

In this particular exercise, we will imagine that we are taking part in negotiations through the United Nations Open-Ended Working Group on Nuclear Disarmament (OEWG). The subject we will be negotiating is [Nuclear Risk Reduction](#), which is an orientation to treat nuclear war from a risk management angle. Nuclear risk reduction is seen as a “reconciliatory” position, with most support coming from the U.S. and the West. The concept is not novel and could be traced back to the inception of [Transparency and Confidence Building Measures](#) (TCBMs). However, it has risen to the fore in recent Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) review cycles due to the perceived heightened nuclear risk. Some analysts see that a nuclear risk reduction is a useful approach (check: [“The Nuclear Risk Reduction Approach: A Useful Path Forward for Crisis Mitigation”](#)). Others see it as a distraction from real progress on nuclear disarmament (check: [“The False Promise of Nuclear Risk Reduction”](#)). Your first assignment will be to study your assigned country’s position on nuclear risk reduction and, from there, articulate your strategy to handle negotiations on the topic.

Note that while there are weekly tasks relevant to the game, the **simulation itself will take place over the last three sessions. Attendance at these three sessions is compulsory.** If you cannot make it to one or more of these sessions, let us know and you will be assigned an alternative task to pass the course.

WEEKLY ASSIGNMENTS

Assignments dos and don'ts:

- Submit your assignment by Sunday of the same week [through Moodle](#). Points will be deducted for any late submissions (0.5 for the first late submission, 1 for each subsequent late delivery). Note that you have to submit all assignments in order to pass the course.
- Reach out to Karim Kamel (karim.kamel@fsv.cuni.cz) if you have any questions about the assignments
- Stick to the question asked. As students, you are full of exciting and innovative ideas, but there is a point where you could be going out of the scope of the question.
- Maintain precision in terminology. For instance, we will be looking for precise usage of terms like “disarmament,” “nonproliferation,” “arms control,” and “nuclear risk reduction.” Each of these means something different.
- Read the weekly assignment prompts carefully. Is it a memo or a speech?
- If it's a memo:
 - Contextualize your memos. Introduce the topic and set the scene. For example, you can start the memo with, “I am writing this memo to provide analysis on the impact of war in Ukraine on the nonproliferation regime...”
 - Tone: you're talking to someone. Think about it as if you're writing an email
- If it's a speech:
 - Read previous speeches by your country and try to follow their style and tone
 - You're trying to be engaging, and imagine this statement to be read, so watch the flow of the text.



EXAM

We will do an oral group exam where you will discuss the negotiations and their outcome in the context of ideas, concepts, and theories we discussed in the classes or that you have read about in the assigned readings. You will need to demonstrate that you can connect abstract theories with concrete empirical developments in nuclear politics. I will set dates for these oral exams in due course.

NO-ELECTRONIC-DEVICES POLICY

In all my courses, including this new one, we observe a strict no-laptop / no-tablet / no-phone policy; in other words, the students and lecturers are not allowed to use electronic devices during class. Please note that the motivation for this rule is not to discipline the students or to make it harder for you in any way—on the contrary. [Research has shown](#) that using laptops for note-taking during class has very high cognitive costs; it is a constant distraction for your brain, which makes you unable to focus on the lecture itself fully. This ‘no electronic devices’ policy has been tested at many renowned universities abroad, and the results are extremely positive. I encourage you to just listen to the lectures, pose questions whenever something is unclear or worth further elaboration, actively engage in the in-class debates, and just make a short note on paper when you feel it is something you would like to follow up on at home.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1 (Feb 17): Introduction: The Problem of Nuclear Proliferation in World Politics

Week 2 (Feb 24): Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Birth of Global Nuclear Order

Week 3 (Mar 3): Banning the Bomb: Politics of Nuclear Disarmament

Week 4 (Mar 10): Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons? Causes of Nuclear Proliferation

Week 5 (Mar 17): Nuclear Taboo or the Tradition of Non-Use?

Week 6 (Mar 24): Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Advocacy /*guest lecture by Alyn Ware*/

Week 7 (Mar 31): Curbing the Arms Race: The Practice of Nuclear Arms Control

Week 8 (Apr 7): Technology of Nuclear (Non-)Proliferation /*special field trip – a visit to a nuclear reactor; approx. 08:30–13:00*/

Week 9 (Apr 14): Special guest lecture by Professor Stephen G. Brooks, Dartmouth College

Week 10 (Apr 21): No class (Easter Monday)

Week 11 (Apr 28): Simulation Exercise I

Week 12 (May 5): Simulation Exercise II

Week 13 (May 12): Simulation Exercise III

	Simulation assignments
1	No assignment till next session when delegations are assigned
2	Write a memo (400 words) to your foreign minister explaining how the latest NPT PrepCom meeting (2024) handled the issue of “nuclear risk reduction,” and indicate whether the outcomes from the meeting served your country’s national security
3	Write a memo to your foreign minister providing an honest critique (400 words) of your country’s position during the TPNW negotiations. So first you explain your country’s position, then you provide your own assessment of this position
4	Write a memo to your foreign minister (400 words) providing your analysis on how the war in Ukraine is impacting the nuclear nonproliferation regime. For instance, does it reduce or increase the risk of nuclear war? Does it have any impact on international norms or safeguards applications?
5	Write a memo (400 words) to your foreign minister explaining whether “nuclear risk reduction” would help reduce the likelihood of more countries acquiring nuclear weapons according to the existing expert literature on the topic. You have to choose one theoretical work to base your analysis (such as Scott Sagan’s)
6	Write a speech (400 words) for your ambassador to deliver at an academic/NGO workshop on the issue of nuclear taboo
7	Write a memo (400 words) to your foreign minister explaining the relationship between arms control and “nuclear risk reduction”
8	Write a memo (400 words) to your foreign minister identifying the most alarming emerging technology that would negatively affect your country’s national security from a (non)-proliferation angle (provide an explanation)
9	Write a memo endorsing one civil society organization to be your ally during the “nuclear risk reduction” negotiations. Provide reasons for why they would make a good ally and how you plan to operationalize a potential partnership (400 words).
10	Submit your country’s position for the negotiations (400 words). In this memo, you should explain your 1) Priorities 2) Secondary objectives 3) Redlines, and 4) Diplomatic strategy (negotiation tactics)
11	Opening statements and negotiations commence
12	Negotiations on text
13	Negotiations conclusion and closing statements



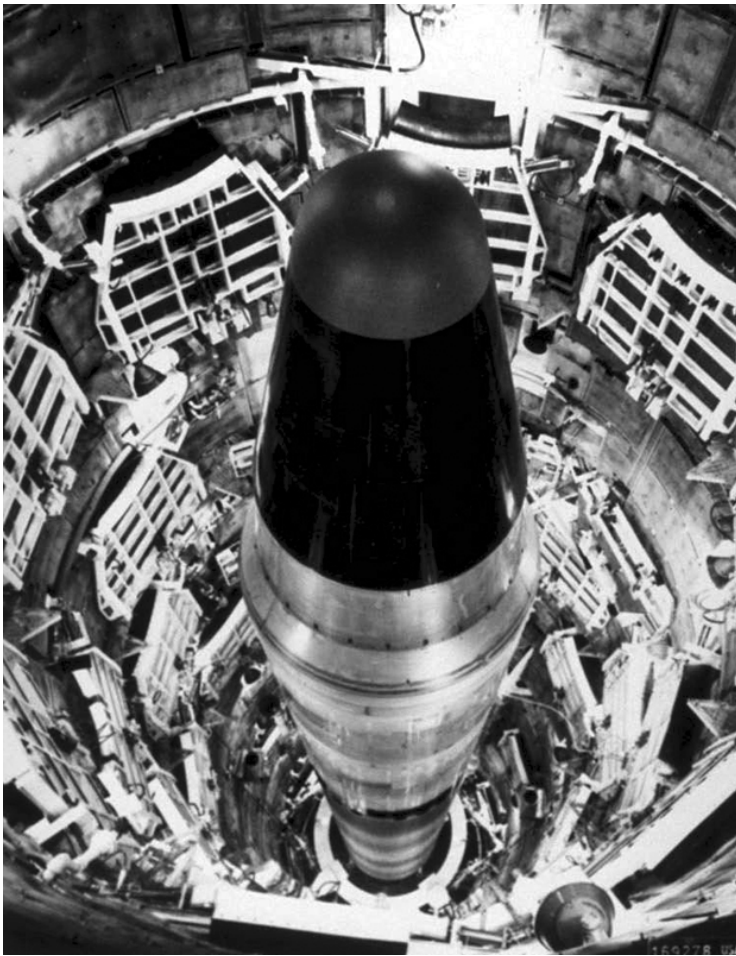
OKAY...A SUMMARY

During each class: listen, ask, discuss, challenge, think; up to three absences are allowed; we observe 'no-electronic-devices' policy

After each class: read the assigned readings, write a short policy memo, and submit it to karim.kamel@fsv.cuni.cz by Sunday of the same week; you cannot be delayed more than three times during the semester

April 28, May 5, May 12: in-class simulation game

May/June: exam sessions



EVALUATION

Policy memos:

0-27 points

Simulation performance:

0-25 points

Exam:

0-33 points

In-class activity:

0-15 points

100-91 points: A

90-81 points: B

80-71 points: C

70-61 points: D

60-51 points: E

50-0 points: F

Remember that in order to pass the course, you need to get at least 50% of points in each of the four aspects of evaluation—that is, a minimum of 7.5 points for in-class activity, 13.5 points for policy memos, 16.5 points for the exam, and 12.5 points for simulation performance. Moreover, you must submit *all* policy memos (and not be delayed more than three times) and have a maximum of three abstentions in the class.

ABOUT ME

I am an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Director of the [Peace Research Center Prague \(PRCP\)](#), and a Head Researcher at the [Experimental Lab for International Security Studies \(ELISS\)](#). My main research interests revolve around nuclear weapons in world politics, but I am also very interested in applying social/cognitive/experimental psychology in IR, studying the dynamics of international norms, theorizing deterrence models, and examining frozen conflicts in Europe and Asia. You can visit my [academic website](#) and [Twitter page](#). For consultations, you can contact me at smetana@fsv.cuni.cz