

Progress on international nuclear security has stalled. Over the last decade, arms control agreements have been dissolved, nonproliferation initiatives scuttled, and nuclear arsenals modernized. Thinly veiled nuclear threats have accompanied Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine. Even the rare bright spots—the entry into force of the Nuclear Ban Treaty, for example, or the 2021 extension of an arms control treaty between the United States and Russia—face steep odds for achieving their long-term nuclear security goals.

Our project aims to better understand these current challenges by exploring the politics and history of nuclear security. Relying on an interdisciplinary approach that blends political science, history, and cultural studies, we will closely examine regional policies, movements, and initiatives aimed at nuclear nonproliferation, arms control, and disarmament.

Our project contributes to scholarship and policy in two important ways. First, it moves beyond the study of the most powerful nuclear states—the United States, Russia, and China—focusing instead on regional initiatives by non-nuclear weapons countries. There is a rich history of these efforts. Non-weapons countries have actively proposed nuclear weapons free zones (nine such zones are currently in existence), nuclear verification regimes, and confidence-building initiatives, often in direct opposition to the agendas of nuclear weapons states. A close look at these overlooked states and their political strategies will enable us to assess the role and significance of smaller players in working toward nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament, and offer a blueprint for non-weapons states to advance new international security initiatives. For example, the 1996 agreement making Africa a nuclear weapons free zone offers a promising model for legal restrictions on targeting nuclear facilities in wartime,<sup>1</sup> and non-weapons states seem best positioned to advance politically fraught confidence building measures in the Baltics and the South China Sea.

<sup>1</sup> Second, the project does not just examine high-level politics; it also casts a spotlight on social and cultural movements on the ground. To explore how citizens, activists, and cultural producers help generate or

undermine nonproliferation movements at the international level, we will study the psychology and dynamics of civil society, especially by scrutinizing popular movements, cultural texts, and public opinion. Looking at political and cultural dynamics from the ground up will deepen our understanding of the state's relationship to society and the significance of grassroots movements to the global community.

Understanding the full social, cultural, and diplomatic history of these efforts is essential to learning the right lessons from past regional initiatives and applying those lessons to future challenges. By taking an in-depth approach to regional dynamics, from both the "top down" and the "bottom up," we aim to better inform both policymakers and the broader public on the perils and promises of living in a "nuclear world."