POLI 369C: Issues in International Security
Risks of the Nuclear Age

Course Syllabus

Instructor: M. V. Ramana
Email: m.v.ramana@ubc.ca
Office: 313 Liu Institute (6476 NW Marine Drive)
Office Hours: 11-12 AM, Thursday
Class Time: Tuesday & Thursday, 5-6.30 PM
Class Room: SWNG-121

Course Overview

In January 2018, the Science and Security Board of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists moved the famous Doomsday Clock to “two minutes to midnight”, as close as it was in 1953, at the height of the Cold War. The accompanying statement offering reasons for this assessment stated that the “greatest risks last year arose in the nuclear realm”. The danger is growing; as former U.S. Secretary of Defense William Perry has opined, the risk of nuclear catastrophe is greater today than during the cold war.

The consequences of nuclear war and the use of nuclear weapons are, of course, disastrous, but they are not the only risks associated with the nuclear age. This proposed course will offer a systematic exploration of the different kinds of risk that are intrinsic to the nuclear age from many different perspectives.

After an introduction to the subject, students will examine the first, and only, use of atomic weapons in war: Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The course will focus on the harrowing dangers of nuclear bomb use, including the multiple physical mechanisms that are responsible for the massive losses of human life and the long-term health impacts of radiation exposure. Students will then study the potential consequences of large scale nuclear war.

The risk of the proliferation of nuclear weapons technology remains one of the most important challenges to international stability. This course will look at why countries acquire nuclear weapons, the risks of nuclear war as a result of such acquisition, and one case study about the pathways to such acquisition and the risks from some measures that have been adopted to counter this process.

Although nuclear weapons have not been used in war since 1945, there is still an enduring risk of nuclear weapons, either during periods of heightened international tension, as in the case of the Cuban Missile Crisis, or the possibility of accidental launch of nuclear weapons. Nuclear weapons have also been “used” political leaders, not by exploding them, but by threatening to
use nuclear weapons. The threat to use nuclear weapons lies at the core of another area of concern, namely nuclear terrorism.

The nuclear age also poses a risk to the natural world. Study will explore some of the the environmental impacts of producing and testing nuclear weapons and the environmental consequences of nuclear war. Nuclear weapons are also closely related to the technology to produce nuclear energy and the class will look at both the linkages between the two as well as the debate over whether and how nuclear energy could help with mitigating climate change. Nuclear energy also comes with two risks: that of catastrophic accidents and the production of radioactive wastes that remain hazardous to human health for millenia.

Nuclear weapons also pose risk that is not often recognized: the threat to democracy. Students will examine some of the ways in which the acquisition of nuclear weapons affects people’s control over their governments. The class will conclude by examining efforts to counter these risks. All of these topics should help inform student engagement in the current nuclear debate.
Requirements

Students are required to carefully go through the readings assigned for each class and be prepared to discuss it in class. There will also be a number of quizzes in class based on the readings as well as the lectures. Students are required to participate in a few online discussions on prompts provided. After responding to the prompt, students can read and respond to postings by other students. During the first half of the term, students will have to watch a film (feature or documentary) from the list below and write an analytical review. The review is due February 17 at 9 PM (or earlier).

Students will also be divided into groups to work on a group presentation on a topic to be chosen from the list below (or other topics, after discussing with instructor about its suitability). These presentations will be during the second half of the term (dates chosen randomly, and to be assigned later in the course) and receive a group grade. In addition, each student will submit one paragraph on her or his contribution to the group presentation. The last requirement is an op-ed (1000 words + references) that will build on the topic of the group presentation. The op-ed will be due on April 20 at 11.59 PM (or earlier).

Paper Format

Any submissions must be word-processed and follow these rules.
- Save the file with a name that includes your first name, last name (or preferred name) and student ID and the specific assignment
- Use Times New Roman 12 or its close equivalent.
- Set your margins at 1”.
- Proofread your writing for typographical, grammatical, and punctuation errors. If you consistently make these kinds of errors, your grade will drop.
- Use a standard citation format and maintain it consistently.

Grading

Quizzes and Discussions: 40 percent
Film review: 15 percent
Group presentation: 15 percent
Individual paragraph: 5 percent
Final op-ed (1000 words + references): 25 percent

Late assignments (individual paragraph, film review, final op-ed) will be penalized. An assignment that is late by 1-7 days will have a grade that is 10 percent lower than it would have received if it had been submitted on time. Likewise, if it is 8-14 days late, the grade will be lowered by 20 percent. Anything later than 14 days will not be graded. Students with extenuating circumstances should notify the instructor as soon as possible.

Academic Integrity

The academic enterprise is founded on honesty, civility, and integrity. As members of this enterprise, all students are expected to know, understand, and follow the codes of conduct.
regarding academic integrity. At the most basic level, this means submitting only original work done by you and acknowledging all sources of information or ideas and attributing them to others as required. This also means you should not cheat, copy, or mislead others about what is your work. Violations of academic integrity (i.e., misconduct) lead to the breakdown of the academic enterprise, and therefore serious consequences arise and harsh sanctions are imposed. For example, incidences of plagiarism or cheating may result in a mark of zero on the assignment or exam and more serious consequences may apply if the matter is referred to the President’s Advisory Committee on Student Discipline. Careful records are kept in order to monitor and prevent recurrences.

A more detailed description of academic integrity, including the University’s policies and procedures, may be found in the Academic Calendar at http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,54,111,0.

Access & Diversity
Access & Diversity works with the university to create an inclusive living and learning environment in which all students can thrive. The university accommodates students with disabilities who have registered with the Access & Diversity unit: [http://www.students.ubc.ca/access/drc.cfm]. Students must register with the Disability Resource Centre to be granted special accommodations for any on-going conditions.

Religious Accommodation
The university accommodates students whose religious obligations conflict with attendance, submitting assignments, or completing scheduled tests and examinations. Students should let their instructor know in advance, preferably in the first week of class, if they will require any accommodation on these grounds. Students who plan to be absent for varsity athletics, family obligations, or other similar commitments, cannot assume they will be accommodated, and should discuss their commitments with the instructor before the course drop date. UBC policy on Religious Holidays: http://www.universitycounsel.ubc.ca/policies/policy65.pdf

UBC Statement on Respectful Environment for Students, Faculty and Staff

The University of British Columbia envisions a climate in which students, faculty and staff are provided with the best possible conditions for learning, researching and working, including an environment that is dedicated to excellence, equity and mutual respect. The University of British Columbia strives to realize this vision by establishing employment and educational practices that respect the dignity of individuals and make it possible for everyone to live, work, and study in a positive and supportive environment, free from harmful behaviours such as bullying and harassment.
Schedule of Topics and Readings

Many of the readings are available online (some through the UBC library website). Please download them. PDFs of many of these will also be available through the Library Online Course Reserves through Canvas.

**Topic 1)  Introduction**

**7 January:**

**Topic 2)  Risks from Use of Nuclear Weapons**

**9 January:**

**14 January:**

**16 January:**

**21 January:**


23 January:


Topic 3)  
Risk of Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

28 January:

30 January:


4 February:


Topic 4)  
Risks of Accidental Nuclear Weapons Use

6 February:
• Reif, Kingston. “13 days—and what was learned.” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, June 22, 2012. [https://thebulletin.org/2012/06/13-days-and-what-was-learned/](https://thebulletin.org/2012/06/13-days-and-what-was-learned/)

**Deadline for submission of suggestions for group presentation topics (with names of 5 students per suggestion)**

**11 February:**

Guest lecture by Lauren Borja

**13 February:**

**Film Review due February 17**

**25 February:**

**Topic 5) Environmental Risks**
27 February:

**Topic 6) Gender**

3 March:

**Topic 7) Risks from Nuclear Energy**

5 March:

10 March:

12 March:

17 March:

Topic 8) Risks to Democracy

19 March:

Topic 9) Confronting and Reducing Risk – Disarmament and Abolition

24 March:

26 March:

Group Presentations

31 March:

2 April:

Group Presentations
Films for watching and reviewing

Choose one from either the first or second lists (check availability on Netflix in advance)

Through UBC Library

- Dr. Strangelove
- The Day after
- Into Eternity
- Countdown to Zero
- Jang aur Aman (War and Peace)
- The China Syndrome
- Silkwood
- On the Beach
- White light, Black rain

Through the Internet/Netflix

- Buddha weeps in Jadugoda: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XAb9UjzdixQ
- Episode 3 of Oliver Stone’s Untold History of the United States:
  - The Bomb
- Command and Control
- Threads (https://archive.org/details/threads_201712)
- Wargames (https://www.amazon.com/WarGames-Matthew-Broderick/dp/B0011EQBOS)
  - not sure if this is available in Canada