Editorial

To future generations, the persistence of thousands of nuclear warheads, coupled with the erosion of arms control agreements, may appear not only reckless but profoundly unjust. Every generation that inherits nuclear arsenals inherits the risks of accident, escalation, and annihilation. And it is not only human life which would be impacted by nuclear use: nuclear testing alone already harms the environment to a massive degree. A nuclear war would fundamentally change the world as we know it, leading to environmental destruction, nuclear winter, and radioactive contamination.

Yet, despite this knowledge, the global frameworks for nuclear arms control are fraying. Once central pillars of international security, agreements such as the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, and the Non-Proliferation Treaty now appear fragile. At the same time, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which embodies the ambition of many states to move towards abolition, is often dismissed by nuclear-armed powers as unrealistic. Together, these developments highlight a world in which nationalism, sovereignty, and strategic rivalry increasingly overshadow collective security.

Most people would agree that the presence of nuclear weapons in the world indicates non-ideal circumstances. Even those who argue for the centrality of nuclear deterrence in preventing conflict may well agree that ideally, these weapons of mass destruction would not be necessary. Today, however, we do live in a world with nuclear weapons. As such, it may be productive to imagine what kind of world we would like to live in – or indeed, we would like our children to live in – comparing several degrees of non-ideal circumstances. One such thought experiment might be: *Which world is preferable: A world in which two states each possess 5,000 nuclear warheads, or a world in which eight states possess 1,000 each?* Secondly, we might ask ourselves: *Would we rather live in a world in which nuclear powers are all democracies, or one in which both democracies and autocracies wield the bomb?* These scenarios are simplifications, but they illustrate a deeper truth about how best to achieve nuclear containment and non-proliferation, as intermediate steps towards long-term peace. The ideal circumstances should always be in the back of our head: friendly cooperation between states, the spread of democracy, and justice.

In the realm of power relationships, the existence of nuclear arsenals entrenches a two-tiered global order, privileging nuclear states with strategic status while constraining non-nuclear states to rely on international norms they cannot fully enforce. Within nuclear states themselves, the democratic legitimacy and public consent of maintaining such weapons is also open to question. In the United Kingdom, for example, the Trident system stationed at HM Naval Base Clyde in Scotland is central to the nation's defence strategy and standing in NATO. Yet its presence in Scotland remains deeply contested. Independence advocates argue that an autonomous Scotland should not host nuclear weapons, viewing them as an imposition of Westminster that not only undermines Scottish political agency but also makes Scotland a potential target in the event of nuclear conflict.

So how can we maintain long-term peace? In this context, a few key questions emerge that are considered by the authors of this journal: Is the presence of nuclear weapons a regrettable necessity, with deterrence ensuring stability and peace? Or does their presence instead hinder diplomacy, generate mistrust, and make the outbreak of nuclear war more likely? What role should public opinion play in shaping the legitimacy of nuclear deterrence, and why is it that nuclear risks no longer feature in the minds of younger generations in the same way that they did thirty years ago? Why, in contrast, is climate change now widely recognised as the defining existential risk of our time, whilst nuclear risk is largely forgotten?

The first article in this issue focuses on the possibility of nuclear strikes in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. In this article, Ayesha Zafar explores the history of Russia's nationalistic and geopolitical ambitions to illuminate how Moscow uses nuclear posturing as a tool of battlefield coercion and political signalling. She argues for the centrality of both nuclear deterrence and international diplomacy to prevent the conflict from going nuclear.

Tom Sauer continues the discussion of nuclear proliferation and peacekeeping in the second article of this issue, which focuses on sustainable nuclear non-proliferation with Iran as a key case study. In contrast to Zafar, Sauer argues that the presence of nuclear weapons makes further nuclear proliferation and conflict more likely, calling into question the effectiveness of deterrence. Sauer discusses the events which lead to the ratification and the breakdown of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, otherwise known as the 'Iran Deal', before offering two possible future scenarios.

Finally, in the third article of this issue, Rhys Crilley explains how public perceptions of nuclear weapons in the UK are shaped by contested narratives of deterrence, disarmament, and identity. In the 'Third Nuclear Age' – defined by global tensions, emerging technologies, and weakened arms control – the media play a crucial role in framing nuclear debates. Crilley shows how these representations influence emotions, legitimacy, and the futures Britain imagines for its nuclear policy. He then explores how the British public holds simultaneously contradictory opinions about nuclear weapons, supporting both nuclear deterrence and Britain's status as a nuclear-armed state.

This issue concludes with two book reviews. Firstly, Theresa Eisenmann reviews Marianne Takle's *Showing social solidarity with future generations* (2024), which proposes 'solidarity' as a more suitable concept than 'justice' for considering our obligations towards future generations. Following this, Grace Clover reviews an anthology of essays edited by Axel Gosseries and Greg Bognar titled *Ageing without ageism? Conceptual puzzles and policy proposals* (2023), which apply philosophical theories of age-group justice in novel policy proposals.

Jörg Tremmel, Permanent Editor
Grace Clover, Co-Editor