

# **Building Resilience: Canada's Engagement with the Indo-Pacific on Non-Traditional Security Threats**

**Location:** Thompson Rivers University, Kamloops, British Columbia

**Date:** October 10-11, 2025

**Venue:** Terrace Hall

**October 10, 2025**

## **12:00 – 1:30pm: Keynote Speaker and Lunch**

### Introduction Remarks

Saira Bano, Assistant Professor, Thompson Rivers University

### Moderator

Rob Hanlon, Associate Professor, Thompson Rivers University

### Keynote Speaker

Paul Evans, Professor Emeritus, UBC Institute of Asian Research,  
University of British Columbia

## **2:00 – 3:30pm: People First: Human Security Across Borders**

### Moderator

Paul Clark, Assistant Professor, Thompson Rivers University

Sorpong Peou, Professor, Toronto Metropolitan University

**Title:** Rethinking Human Security: Limits of the ASEAN Approach

**Abstract:** This presentation argues that the ASEAN approach to security does not explicitly incorporate the concept of human security into its policy framework. However, scholars argue that it contains elements of human security, using terms like ‘people-centredness’. That said, this presentation argues that the ASEAN approach is more aligned with the concept of comprehensive security, which places greater emphasis on national and regime security than on human security, particularly in the protection dimension of the term. Therefore, human security as a public good remains underprovided.

Neilesh Bose, Professor, University of Victoria

**Title:** Boundaries of Belonging: Expulsions & Border-Making in the Indian Ocean

**Abstract:** Recent studies of the Indian Ocean emphasize the fluidity and porousness of boundaries, focusing on longer-term connections in the region on lines of religion, regional culture, and trade as opposed to national, bounded histories and politics. While appreciative of the dynamic nature of Indian Ocean spaces, this paper offers a perspective on the Indian Ocean which emphasizes violent changes in the era of decolonization and nation-state construction, from the mid-twentieth century through the present. These changes often render older ties and connections vulnerable to restructuring and reshaping in the era of postcolonial nationalism.

Given the vast diversity of the Indian Ocean space, I will focus on two sites of connection and conflict – the history and role of Indian migrants in East Africa, with a focus both on the postcolonial expulsion as well as contemporary repatriation, and the ongoing displacement of the Rohingya from Myanmar, into various spaces in the Indian Ocean. These cases are offered to consider the broad contours of nationalism and citizenship in the Indian Ocean world.

Rosalind Warner, Professor, Okanagan College &

Andy Knight, Professor, University of Alberta

**Title:** Operationalizing Human Security in Global Health Governance

**Abstract:** The concept of human security asks students of global politics to consider non-military threats and risks to people from environmental, economic, and social sources. In this talk, we will examine how human security principles can be operationalized in global health governance to address systemic risks and improve health outcomes worldwide.

Ajith Balasooriya, Research Fellow, Thompson Rivers University

**Title:** Invisible Later, Radical Care: Women's Food Stories as Decolonial Testimony

**Abstract:** Sri Lanka experienced its worst economic crisis in 2022 since independence, with food inflation exceeding 90% and widespread shortages of essential items. This crisis devastatingly impacted women and children, who bore the brunt of household food insecurity and malnutrition. While macro-level analyses document the crisis's economic dimensions, women's lived experiences of feeding families under extreme constraint—and their emergence as political actors—remain largely invisible in scholarly literature. This paper centers on women's oral food stories as both testimony and theory, revealing how cooking during crisis constituted decolonial praxis and catalyzed unprecedented political mobilization. Drawing on oral history interviews with 40 women across western province Sri Lanka—spanning ethnic, caste, class, and geographic locations—this research documents the creative survival strategies, emotional labor, and collective care practices women employed to navigate food insecurity. Women's narratives reveal how they stretched limited resources, revived traditional food knowledge, created informal food sharing networks, and transformed cooking from private domestic labor into radical political acts. Significantly, the emotional anguish and material deprivation of being unable to feed their children propelled women from private domestic spaces into public political spheres. Both rural and urban women collectively mobilized their communities, pooling scarce resources to cook and feed neighbors at grassroots levels. Most dramatically, women organized spontaneous nighttime protests, bringing pots and pans into streets and creating cacophonous soundscapes by banging cookware—visceral performances of empty cupboards and hungry children. Though lacking formal organizational structure, these protests resonated powerfully through social media, galvanizing national and international attention. This organic, women-led movement-maintained pressure until the ruling government collapsed and key political leaders resigned. Theoretically, this paper positions women's food stories as epistemological disruption—challenging dominant crisis narratives centered on state policy, market dynamics, and masculine political struggles. Women's testimonios expose the gendered violence of hunger, colonial continuity embedded in food systems, and women's transformation from caregivers to political agents. Through feminist and decolonial methodologies, this paper demonstrates how women's everyday practices of feeding constituted simultaneous critique of extractive systems and prefiguration of alternative economies based on nourishment, reciprocity, and collective survival. Women's food stories are not

supplementary to understanding crisis—they are central to theorizing gendered resistance, reimagining food sovereignty, and envisioning decolonial liberation in crisis-affected societies like Sri Lanka.

Scott N. Romaniuk, Research Fellow, Corvinus University of Budapest &  
Laszlo Csicsmann, Professor, Corvinus University of Budapest (*Attending Virtually*)

### **3:30 – 4 pm: Tea Break**

### **4:00 – 5:30 pm: Heat, Risk, Resilience: Climate Security in the Indo-Pacific**

#### Moderator

Humayun Kabir, Assistant Professor, Thompson Rivers University

Sun Ryung Park, Research Fellow, University of British Columbia &  
Senior Research Scholar, Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada

**Title:** Energy Security in the Indo-Pacific: Strategic Lessons for Canada

**Abstract:** The Indo-Pacific is rapidly becoming the frontline where climate change, state-driven industrial policy, and energy security intersect. Governments such as Japan, South Korea, and China are using strong state activism to accelerate clean energy transitions, secure supply chains, and mitigate exposure to global energy volatility. This presentation highlights the strategic implications for Canada: the need to complement its Indo-Pacific Strategy with energy-transition diplomacy, co-investment in critical minerals and clean technology, and partnerships on grid modernization and hydrogen development. Doing so would allow Canada to position itself as a trusted partner in advancing both climate and energy security in a geopolitically complex region.

M. V. Ramana, Professor, University of British Columbia

**Title:** Drivers of China's Expansion of Nuclear Energy

**Abstract:** China's civil nuclear expansion persists even as wind and solar scale faster and cheaper. The chapter explains this paradox by tracing how political-economic incentives—fragmented authoritarian governance, the influence and capital-absorption needs of SOEs (CNNC, CGN), and bargaining between central and local authorities—combine with ideological drivers such as techno-nationalism, modernity, and the civil–military nexus to sustain the program despite unmet capacity targets and weak export prospects. It documents post-Fukushima public opposition that at times halted or relocated projects, and details state responses: popular-science campaigns, targeted messaging, censorship, and selective coercion to rebuild social license. The authors conclude that continued nuclear growth carries high and uncertain financial costs (including unresolved waste), shifts environmental burdens onto marginalized regions (e.g., uranium mining), and narrows meaningful public participation—reinforcing an authoritarian environmentalist model of governance even as renewables outpace nuclear in China's power system.

Philippe Le Billon, Professor, University of British Columbia

**Title:** Maritime security and fisheries in the Indo-Pacific

**Abstract:** The Indo-Pacific has emerged as the epicentre of a complex convergence between fisheries governance, maritime security, and geopolitical rivalry. Across this vast and contested maritime space, the intensification of fishing activities, gray-zone operations, and economic coercion have transformed fisheries from food and livelihood resources into strategic instruments of state power. Drawing on recent interdisciplinary research spanning international law, security studies, and political ecology, this paper examines how conflicts over fish, fishing rights, and anti-illegal fishing in the region, especially the South and East China Seas, increasingly blur the boundaries between civilian, economic, and military domains. The analysis situates fisheries disputes within the broader context of China's maritime strategy, domestic initiatives to curb illegal fishing, and the Indo-Pacific's evolving security architecture, emphasizing the interplay between coercive state practices, ecological pressures, and efforts at regional cooperation.

Athena Madan, Assistant Professor, University of Victoria

**Title:** Heat, Conflict, and Health Security in the Indo-Pacific

**Abstract:** The Indo-Pacific is at the frontline of intensifying heat stress, but its health implications are too often reduced to biomedical categories such as heatstroke, dehydration, and vector-borne disease. Such framings obscure how vulnerability is produced through structural violence, conflict, and forced displacement. Drawing on my work in humanitarian medicine and health system reconstruction, this talk situates heat stress as a symptom of global economic and political conditions that shape health and social systems. I argue that response requires not only technical fixes but structural ones: strengthening health infrastructures and reforming the social and political systems that generate inequality. I highlight three structural domains that remain underexamined: 1/ climate stress as a driver and accelerator of conflict, fuelling resource competition and governance instability; 2/ forced displacement as both a cause and consequence of fragility, with displaced populations facing compounded health risks; and 3/ the erosion of accountability and solidarity in global health governance, as geopolitical retreat undermines protections for refugees and weakens humanitarian response. In an era of intensifying climate insecurity, Canada's Indo-Pacific engagement must be re-imagined to address health not as a secondary outcome, but as a frontline of resilience, and recognise that heat stress acts not only as a medical hazard, but as an amplifier of inequality and instability.

Jack Patrick Hayes, Kwantlen Polytechnic University

**Title:** Flood, Fire and Storm in Chinese Policy Making: Policy toolkits and NTSIs in the PRC (2005-2025)

**Abstract:** Non-traditional security issues, like policy toolkits and solutions, continue to evolve even as natural disasters, economic development, infrastructure and geo-political situations do. This paper analyzes in short a handful of key natural disasters and policy responses and outcomes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century PRC. How Party, local and regional administrations leadership have handled and reacted to major floods, storms and fires since 2005 have produced a spate of different policy solutions to mitigate future events. Ranging from increasing recentralization of disaster management in provincial and state ministries (in wake of 2008 snowstorms, 2013 ice storms) to development of large scale, centralized policy programs (Greater Yangtze River

Protection Program, Green Shield Campaign), and appointment of key national-level officials to cut across provincial and national ministries disaster or environmental system (water/river and forest chiefs), the past twenty years of ecological securitization has gone far to recentralize policy toolkits in a variety of ways. Certain elements of the toolkits have proven very effective in specific circumstances, leading to a process of wider rollout, but have also set the stage for more challenging times ahead (in particular with fire management and water quality issues).

## **7:00 – 9:00 pm Keynote Speaker and Dinner**

### Introduction Remarks

Rob Hanlon, Associate Professor, Thompson Rivers University

### Moderator

Paul Evans, Professor Emeritus, UBC Institute of Asian Research,  
University of British Columbia

### Keynote Speaker

Harjit Sajjan, Former Minister, National Defence of Canada

**October 11, 2025**

## **8:30 – 9:00 am: Breakfast**

## **9:00 – 10:30 am: Borderless Threats: Illicit Networks and Security**

### Moderator

Zubair Raja, Assistant Professor, Thompson Rivers University

Kai Ostwald, Director Institute of Asian Research, HSBC Chair &  
Associate Professor, School of Public Policy and Global Affairs, University of British Columbia.

**Title:** Governing the Ungoverned: Transnational Crime in Southeast Asia's Stateless Borderlands

**Abstract:** Emerging hubs of transnational crime in mainland Southeast Asia—especially large-scale scam centres, illicit drug production, and associated money laundering—are increasingly located in territories where the central state is weak or absent. Drawing on fieldwork along the Thailand–Myanmar border, this paper argues that these activities cluster in areas controlled by ethnic resistance organizations (EROs), where the Myanmar junta has lost effective authority. The resulting governance gap exposes a structural flaw in the international response: regional and global mechanisms are designed to engage recognized national governments, while engagement with subnational armed authorities is stigmatized as interference. Neighbouring states therefore face an operational paradox: existing diplomatic and law-enforcement channels run through national actors that lack capacity or access to the contested zones, yet there are no sanctioned pathways to coordinate with the authorities who actually control them. The paper maps the political economy of these enclaves, traces cross-border criminal linkages, and evaluates why conventional toolkits (extradition requests, joint task forces, border policing) underperform in this context. It concludes with pragmatic options: risk-based, time-bound

modalities for indirect or conditional engagement with EROs; targeted financial disruption and victim-centred rescue for scam compounds; and multilateral frameworks that permit flexible, subnational coordination without conferring political recognition.

Bridget Welsh, Honorary Research Associate, University of Nottingham, Malaysia. (Virtual)

**Title:** The Global Scam Epicenter: Transnational Crime Trends in Southeast Asia

**Abstract:** Transnational crime is a global security problem, with Southeast Asia at its core. The largest wealth transfer in modern history is taking place. With weak governance, law enforcement gaps and capture, long-standing criminal syndicates, and criminal ecosystems that support human trafficking and fraud, Southeast Asia has become a center for scam compounds and scams. Myanmar (Burma), Cambodia and Laos have become ridden with compounds, but criminals are using all of the region's countries to recruit victims and carry out their operations. Many of the criminal syndicates are from China, although not all as copycat criminality is occurring. The victims of the scams are global, and increasing citizens in the West. Law enforcement is on the back foot as criminal syndicates are harnessing cutting-edge technology, including artificial intelligence, and using fintech to elude authorities. This paper will look at the underlying conditions driving this phenomenon in Southeast Asia and lay out key trends for policymakers.

Alvin Camba, Critical Materials Specialist, Associated Universities Incorporated

**Title:** Beyond Washington and Beijing: Regional Action on Transnational Crime

**Abstract:** I argue that scam compounds operating across Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America, particularly concentrated in Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar, represent one of the most urgent non-traditional security threats. These hubs, where human trafficking, cyber fraud, and organized crime converge, are among the Indo Pacific's most pressing challenges. Victims are recruited across Asia, while illicit proceeds corrode governance and destabilize financial systems. United States and Chinese responses are increasingly fragmented and ineffective, and neither government at the moment demonstrates serious commitment to dismantling these networks at scale. Regional actors must therefore take the initiative: ASEAN as anchor, with East Asian partners such as Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, middle powers including Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, and external partners like the European Union and the United Kingdom. Coordinated enforcement, financial intelligence, and victim protection can blunt criminal economies and demonstrate that effective multilateralism is possible despite great power rivalry.

David Drake, Former Director General, Counter-Terrorism, Crime and Intelligence Bureau, Global Affairs Canada's

**Title:** Transnational Organised Crime in the Indo-Pacific Region and Implications for Canada

**Abstract:** After briefly outlining the wider context of globalization of crime and key aspects of transnational organized crime in the Indo-Pacific region, I focus on the Pacific as a microcosm of interconnected issues found throughout the region, notably cybercrime/scamming, money laundering, drug trafficking, and trafficking in persons. Due to their geographic isolation and comparatively small size, the nations and territories of the Pacific are particularly vulnerable to the corrosive effects of transnational organized crime, which risk severely undermining their national/territorial governance and sovereignty. I also review how states working in partnership with organized crime networks for a variety of reasons, including by projecting state power across national borders and conducting cyber-espionage in various forms, constitute an

important, but often overlooked factor in the Indo-Pacific region. Finally, I review the implications for Canada of transnational organized crime in the Indo-Pacific region, as well as Canada's response, with an emphasis on recent policy announcements, such as Canada's 2023 Indo-Pacific Strategy, and the series of legislative measures, regulatory changes and funding allocations for border security announced in 2025, which should significantly enhance Canada's capacity to counter transnational organized crime emanating from the Indo-Pacific region.

Qamar Cheema, Executive Director at Sanobar Institute, Pakistan (*Attending Virtually*)

**Title:** How Geo Economics can help in managing Nontraditional Security Threats?

**Abstract:** South Asia is the least connected region in the world and it needs economic connectivity both within the region and with emerging geopolitical blocs such as the Indo-Pacific. At a time when the world is shaped by interdependence, South Asian nations remain fragmented, leaving them vulnerable to borderless threats that no state can tackle alone. Illicit networks, transnational crime, human trafficking, terrorism financing, pandemics, and cyber insecurities are among the pressing nontraditional challenges that flow across porous borders and exploit weak regional coordination.

Geoeconomics offers a pathway to deal with these challenges by promoting cooperation through shared economic interests. Improved trade routes, transport corridors, energy grids, and digital linkages can provide a foundation for collective resilience. Stronger connectivity would disrupt illicit flows by creating regulated and monitored networks, while also enabling joint responses to food shortages, climate pressures, and health emergencies. Economic integration reduces the space for criminal economies to thrive and enhances the capacity of states to act in unison.

The Indo-Pacific has already developed cooperative frameworks that emphasize connectivity, infrastructure development, and collective responses to nontraditional security threats. Applying similar models to South Asia can generate stability and prosperity, while also linking the region to wider markets and security architectures. A connected South Asia would not only address its own vulnerabilities but also contribute to broader Indo-Pacific security and economic growth. Geoeconomic strategies, therefore, are central to transforming borderless threats into opportunities for regional collaboration and long-term stability.

## **10:45 – 12:15 pm: From Relief to Resilience: Humanitarian Action in the Indo-Pacific**

### Moderator

Manu Sharma, Associate Professor, Thompson Rivers University

David Matijasevich, Instructor, Department of Political Science, Capilano University

**Title:** Canadian Internationalism at the End of the Liberal International Order

**Abstract:** Canada has historically prided itself on its global commitments and contributions to human rights and human security. Humanitarian assistance, involvement with local development projects, and support for civil society and NGOs have historically been core liberal internationalist features of Canada's foreign policy. With the liberal international order in steep decline, it is necessary to take stock of the challenges and opportunities that Canada now faces with these aspects of its foreign policy. This reflection is all the more important with regard to Canada's engagement with the Indo-Pacific, a region that is both central to this global re-

ordering and that has been, in some quarters, ambivalent towards liberal internationalist approaches to global politics.

Bala Nikku, Associate Professor, Thompson Rivers University

**Title:** Building Disaster Resilient Communities in South Asia: How and What needs to be done?

**Abstract:** South Asian Countries (India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka) have developed national disaster management legislations and policies to address risks and vulnerabilities that come with disasters (e.g., India's Disaster Management Act of 2005; Pakistan's NDMA Act). Over the time these legal frameworks prioritize Institutionalization of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR). As a result, there is a change in the focus to risk reduction (proactive) over the rescue and relief operations (reactive), a shift toward community resilience-building. In addition, we also observe the implementation of early warning systems & technology integration to facilitate community's early decision making to evacuate and choose safer places in the events of disasters. For example, Bangladesh's cyclone warning systems and community shelters are known, and India has invested in satellite-based early warning systems. However, we argue that there are gaps in the policy translation and lack of political will that hinder community resilience building. The top-down approach to policies implementation often relying on centralized control, sidelining local leadership and Indigenous knowledge. We also argue that the DRR policies often tend to prioritize infrastructure protection in cities, ignoring rural, indigenous, disabled, and coastal communities in the event of cyclones and earthquakes in the region. In summary Disaster policies in South Asia are progressively evolving, yet still incomplete in their support for building community resilience. They succeed in institutionalizing DRR and reducing mortality, but falter when it comes to equity, inclusivity, and empowering local communities. To understand and further analyze the complexities, in this presentation, I will discuss the case of Nepalese earthquakes of 2015 and Indian Cyclones and how coastal fishing communities have responded to these disasters? We will reflect on the uneven recovery and widening vulnerability gaps and how community science centred research could advocate disaster resilient policies and co-produce resilience knowledge that facilitate building resilient communities in the SA region.

Sean Burke, Chief Operating Officer, HOPE International Development Agency

**Title:** Building Resilience from the Ground Up: Lessons from the Philippines, Cambodia, and Myanmar

**Abstract:** This presentation examines resilience-building in Southeast Asia through the lens of case studies in the Philippines, Cambodia, and Myanmar. It highlights three interlinked areas: land tenure and security for Indigenous communities, community bridging and social enterprise, and peace-stabilization in contexts where parallel institutions operate alongside fragile states. Drawing on field-based insights, the talk explores how these experiences provide lessons for strengthening resilience at the community level and considers the broader policy implications for regional and international actors engaged in development and peacebuilding.



Hasnat Johnson, Deputy Director, Transnational Conflict Analysis and Support (ICA), Global Affairs Canada (*Attending Virtually*)

**Title:** Anticipate, Localize, Align: Field Lessons for an Indo-Pacific Built for Shocks

**Abstract:** Based on deployments in Nepal, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, this talk shows how anticipatory action, social protection and localization can work across the Indo-Pacific.

Lauryn Oates, Executive Director, Right to Learn Afghanistan.

**Title:** Education in Emergencies: The Case of Afghanistan

**Abstract:** Afghanistan is the only country in the world to formally ban education for women and girls past primary school. While presenting a uniquely challenging situation for equitable access to education, the crisis has also prompted innovation, resilience and adaptation. It has also led to the creation of a new community of education actors, who have stepped in to fill the void, delivering alternative educational pathways for Afghan women and girls, working alongside established NGOs and agencies. This community works largely invisible to the development sector, but holds potential as an emerging responsive model for restrictive and resource constrained contexts.

## **12:15 – 1:00 pm: Lunch**

## **1:00 – 2:30 pm: Indo-Pacific Non-Traditional Security Research**

### Moderator

Ji Young Lee-An, Assistant Professor, Thompson Rivers University

Lynette H. Ong, Distinguished Professor of Chinese Politics,  
University of Toronto (*Attending Virtually*)

**Title:** Outsourcing Surveillance: Online Opinion Management in China and Lessons for Canada

**Abstract:** I want to share some findings from a forthcoming book manuscript, entitled “Outsourcing Surveillance: Online Opinion Management in China”. Together with my co-authors, we analyze how the Chinese state tries to shape and influence public opinions expressed on Chinese social media. It is different from FIMI – in that it is not a foreign actor trying to influence public opinion, but like FIMI, it similarly involves manipulation of information to achieve its objectives. When the manipulation of information is conducted within domestic online sphere, it is essentially a form of online surveillance – and we find that surveillance in China is largely outsourced to third-party for-profit corporations. I will explore some potential lessons for Canada.

James Boutilier, Maritime Forces Pacific, Department of Defense, Government of Canada

**Title:** Rising Seas, Shrinking States: The Climate Challenge for Oceania’s Microstates

**Abstract:** The microstates of Oceania are included within the scope of Canada's Indo Pacific Strategy (2022). Tuvalu is part of that insular community; a state consisting of islets and atolls that rise only a meter or so above the surface of the sea. As such, it is acutely vulnerable to sea level rise brought on by climate change. This presentation examines the social, economic, legal and societal challenges facing the leadership of this "iconic" nation and reviews the international response to the existential threats facing Tuvalu.

Terry Kading, Associate Professor, Thompson Rivers University

**Title:** Nationalism, Trade Wars and Implications for Environmental Protection – North America and the Indo-Pacific

**Abstract:** This article examines the implications of the “America First” development model and emerging policies and practices in relation to environmental protection in the Indo-Pacific and North America. It is argued that “America First” creates significant challenges for the existing regulatory context in North America and for efforts in the Indo-Pacific to address serious environmental challenges (notably for ASEAN members). While the Trump administration, and the MAGA movement with the Republican Party, have often been seen as advancing a rather inchoate and contradictory response to the negative effects of globalization e.g. loss of manufacturing prowess to China and other competitors, there has been a core vision that has become increasingly evident under the second Trump administration. Whether changes in policies / policy enforcement, or the use of tariffs and executive orders, the unravelling of the intent of decades of environmental protection statutes has generated a context where Canada, Mexico and the Indo-Pacific are left at a disadvantage with existing and proposed measures to address environmental challenges. This suggests the potential for a considerable roll-back in measures and proposals to address air and water pollution, toxic and consumer waste, plastics, deforestation and the loss of biodiversity, and in the adoption of more sustainable practices for both continents. Perhaps the irony of this potential context is that globalization was often feared as the force that would create a “race to the bottom” regarding environmental protections, whereas the new nationalistic competition may be even more detrimental.

Rick McCutcheon, Associate Professor, Thompson Rivers University

**Title:** Human Security through Civilian-Based Defence: Asia-Pacific Lessons for Canada

**Abstract:** As Canadians confront an uncertain future—where authoritarian currents in the United States could spill across the border—the question of how to defend democracy demands more than military preparedness. Civilian-based defence (CBD) provides an alternative framework, one that shifts the emphasis from weapons and armies to the organized power of people and institutions. Conceived by Gene Sharp, CBD envisions a society trained and resourced to resist coups, occupation, and authoritarian overreach through mass noncooperation and institutional resilience. It is not simply moral idealism: it is a strategic approach to human security, grounded in human dignity and collective capacity.

The Asia-Pacific region offers vivid lessons. In 1986, the Philippines demonstrated how disciplined civilian mobilization, backed by religious and civic institutions, could disarm dictatorship and restore constitutional government. In the 1990s, East Timor’s clandestine networks and international solidarity showed how civilian persistence could constrain and ultimately undo foreign occupation. Thailand’s Black May protests in 1992 revealed how broad coalitions of students, professionals, and symbolic cultural authority forced a military regime to step back. Each case underscores that ordinary people, when organized and supported, can constitute a credible line of national defence.

For Canada, the implications are profound. If civilian-based defence is to move from theory to practice, it must be reflected not only in academic debate but in policy and budgets at the national level. This would mean re-imagining defence expenditures: funding for civic education, civil society organizations, independent media, and decentralized communication

infrastructure should be viewed as investments in security rather than as discretionary social spending. It would mean supporting communities and institutions that can resist authoritarian encroachment with the same seriousness as we fund military hardware. In short, to strengthen Canadian democracy against future pressures—whether foreign or domestic—CBD must be treated as a legitimate and necessary pillar of national security. The lessons from Manila, Dili, and Bangkok show that societies which equip their citizens to defend democracy are more resilient than those that rely on armies alone. Canada should not wait for a crisis to begin this work.

### **2:30 – 3:00 pm: Tea Break**

### **3:00 – 4:30 pm: Indo-Pacific NTS: Emerging Graduate Voices**

#### Moderator

Momo Begum, Lecturer, Thompson Rivers University

Gershon Adela, PhD Candidate, University of Calgary

**Title:** Rethinking Middle Power Alignments in a Changing Security Landscape

**Abstract:** The relationship between the world's great powers—the United States (U.S.), China, and Russia—is deteriorating significantly. This shift is occurring within a rapidly evolving international system, where the behavior and foreign policies of middle-power states are undergoing major transformations. Traditionally, middle powers have been associated with multilateralism, niche diplomacy, and responsible “international citizenship.” However, they are now demonstrating substantial changes in their behavior. Their relationships with great powers are increasingly asymmetric, characterized by strategic hedging and multi-alignment driven by national interests rather than broader common goals. These variations in middle-power states’ foreign policy cannot be fully explained solely through great-power competition or traditional, hard-security concerns. Drawing on a cross-temporal analysis of the foreign policies and diplomatic approaches of Australia, Canada, Türkiye, the Philippines, and Indonesia, my research examines how middle-power alignments are shaped not only by traditional security concerns but, more importantly, by non-traditional security challenges as well.

Gurinder S. Purewal, Master's Graduate, Human Rights & Social Justice Program, Thompson Rivers University.

**Title:** The Reemergence of the Khalistan Movement in Canada-India Geopolitics

**Abstract:** This study focuses on the modern resurgence of narratives around the Khalistan movement to examine how Canada-India geopolitics seeks to frame the movement, its impact on the Sikh diaspora and understandings of why past sentiments of the Khalistan movement are now re-emerging in Canada. Therefore, a triangulation of a single-case study method of the Khalistan movement, a historical review of Sikhs, and a critical discourse analysis involving an injustice frame are applied to 227 newspaper articles identified from media sources based in Canada and India. The research findings expose the dominant discourses that emerge from identified texts on the topic of the Khalistan movement and discuss how both Canada and India frame these narratives, as well as affect the Sikh diaspora in Canada.

Jannat Bhullar, Master's Student, Human Rights & Social Justice Program,  
Thompson Rivers University.

**Title:** Safeguarding Democratic Discourse in Taiwan: Information Warfare and Media Integrity.

**Abstract:** Information warfare strategically presents a number of challenges for Taiwan fueled by evolving disinformation tactics, including narrative manipulation and exploitation of digital platforms that have turned central to China's strategy. The thesis aims to explore how China's evolving information warfare strategy impacts democratic processes and media integrity in Taiwan. The guiding research question asks what are the key strategies and impacts of China's information warfare on Taiwan's democratic processes and media environment? The proposal hypothesizes that China's disinformation campaigns contribute to the undermining of Taiwan's democratic process and the erosion of public trust in institutional structures.

To test the hypothesis, the research adopts a qualitative analysis through digital archival research to trace the evolution of information warfare and analyze English media sources from China and Taiwan. In doing so, it asks how the struggle for narrative dominance influences international perceptions surrounding Taiwan's status as a 'de facto' state and the strained relationship between Beijing and Taipei. The thesis draws on Cognitive Theory and considers the Network Propaganda Model as a framework to dissect the dynamics of information warfare, providing insight into Taiwan's democratic discourse and media ecosystem. Lastly, it hopes to provide novel policy recommendations through a nuanced understanding of the underlying motivators and evaluates countermeasures that encompass information warfare.

Himadrija Chakraborty, Visva-Bharati University, West Bengal, India.

**Title:** Informal sector in India: collaboration as a way to economic stability

**Abstract:** In achieving stable and inclusive development, human security, particularly micro-level economic security, is of critical importance. In India, where agriculture is increasingly unviable and large-scale capital has limited capacity to absorb surplus labor, the non-agricultural informal sector has become the shelter for millions (135 million in 2022). Far from shrinking, the informal sector has continued to proliferate alongside economic growth in India (Bhattacharya and Kesar 2018). While a small segment of firms has been able to gain from India's economic growth, the vast majority of firms based on self-employment—about 85 percent of the informal sector—have faced increasing precarity, further entrenching informality. From our field observations, we have seen that inter-firm collaboration plays a crucial role in these firms and acts as a form of resilience during shocks or crises (like COVID-19). Strengthening such collaborative practices is crucial for improving human security and translating economic growth into broader social stability.

Radhika Tabrez, Master's Student, Human Rights and Social Justice Program,  
Thompson Rivers University.

**Title:** Shifting Demographic Trends in the Indo-Pacific - An opportunity or a threat

**Abstract:** The Indo-Pacific is often framed through the lens of geopolitics; great-power rivalry, maritime disputes, and trade corridors. Yet beneath these headlines lies a quieter but equally consequential story, that of demographic transformation. The region is experiencing two simultaneous and contrasting trends - youth bulges in South and Southeast Asia, and rapid aging in East Asia. Recent youth-led protests in Nepal, Indonesia and Bangladesh illustrate how wealth inequality, unemployment, and political neglect can fuel civil unrest. At the same time,

Japan, South Korea, and Sri Lanka are grappling with declining fertility, shrinking workforces, and mounting care burdens. These demographic extremes are not isolated; migration, remittances, and social tensions link them across borders. This talk argues that the Indo-Pacific's future may be shaped less by trade summits and aircraft carriers than by how these societies harness youthful energy and aging wisdom. The region's challenge, and opportunity, are to turn demographic pressure into shared resilience.

Closing Remarks

Saira Bano, Assistant Professor, Thompson Rivers University