



## South Asia and China: Evolving Issues and new Ideas

### Report of the APLN Regional Meeting, New Delhi 2017

#### Summary

APLN members from South Asia and China met in New Delhi 20-21 January 2017 to review global nuclear threats and the regional challenge posed by the nuclear deterrence triad between China, India and Pakistan. Hosted by our local partner, the Observer Research Foundation, the meeting was held back-to-back with the ORF's Raisina Dialogue, India's flagship conference engaging with geopolitics and geo-economics.

The meeting focused on three issues. First, the global nuclear disarmament outlook in the context of the forthcoming start to the United Nations mandated negotiation of a "legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading towards their total elimination".

Second, in the search for practical measures to relieve regional nuclear tensions, the meeting examined the potential applicability to Asia-Pacific of the arrangements under the Treaty on Open Skies, which established a regime of unarmed observation flights over the territories of participating countries in Europe and North America.

Third, recognising that regional nuclear threats and their elimination are inextricably linked to the broader geo-strategic context, how can we reduce the trust deficit in managing and containing nuclear tensions between China, India and Pakistan?

Aspects of that analysis included:

- Current nuclear risk flash points.
- The adequacy of current regional security structures.
- Precursors for reducing nuclear tensions and increasing trust.
- And the potential for confidence building measures.

Chaired by Co-Convenor Ramesh Thakur, APLN participants came from China (Fan Jishe and Shen Dingli), India (our host Rakesh Sood, Rajamurti Rajaraman, Shashi Tyagi, and Siddharth Varadarajan); Pakistan (Pervez Hoodbhoy); Sri Lanka (Jayantha Dhanapala and HMGS Palihakkara); plus, Hyung T Hong representing Co-Convenor Chung-in Moon, and APLN Research Director John Tilemann. The meeting also benefited from the participation of an expert from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Robin Mossinkoff whose contributions were particularly valuable to our exchanges on the relevance of North Atlantic

experience in confidence building measures (CBMs) to the circumstances of Asia-Pacific. Unfortunately, several additional members were late withdrawals, in part due to the regional security situation, in part due to practical scheduling problems.

The meeting was conducted in conformity with the Chatham House rule.

*We report below on those discussions and some key conclusions.*

## Content

### The Raisina Dialogue: “The New Normal: Multilateralism with Multipolarity”



The APLN Regional Meeting was scheduled back-to-back with the premier Indian Davos-styled Raisina Dialogue hosted by the Observer Research Forum, a think-tank with links to APLN through ORF Distinguished Fellow Ambassador Rakesh Sood. Our members were generously invited by ORF to participate in all aspects of the Dialogue. And APLN members were prominent participants: former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd was a prominent guest speaker; Shen Dingli and Rakesh Sood were guest panelists in the panel “New Strategic Order: Nuclear Conundrum”; while Shen Dingli also participated in the panel “The New Normal: Multipolarity with Multilateralism”. The Dialogue was an excellent example of high level exchange on a broad range of regional and global strategic issues – all against the back-drop of the uncertainties occasioned by the then impending transition in Washington to the Presidency of Donald Trump. Program details of the Raisina Dialogue can be found at <http://www.orfonline.org/raisina-dialogue/>.

## The APLN Regional Meeting



### 1. Regional perspectives on and priorities for the 2017 conferences on a Nuclear Weapons Ban Treaty

The first round of United Nations mandated negotiations on a treaty to ban nuclear weapons will take place in Geneva in 27-31 March 2017, and the second, 15 June-7 July 2017. Such a negotiation is consistent with the objectives of the APLN and accordingly our members were keen to support a constructive negotiation and to minimise any negative fallout it might entail. To this end the meeting examined the normative impact and practical utility of a ban treaty, and how such a treaty might interact with the cornerstone of the nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament architecture, the NPT, which is scheduled to hold in Vienna in May the first preparatory committee meeting for the 2020 NPT Review Conference.

The meeting considered the context of the upcoming negotiations:

- The outlook for nuclear disarmament is bleak; the enthusiasm engendered by President Obama's Prague speech is dissipated; UN resolutions are not helping; disarmament has become an unfashionable issue; but nuclear threats remain highly dangerous.
- Reductions of US and Russian arsenals have stalled, modernisation and suggestions of new growth in numbers; unilateral actions to suspend/end cooperation on the disposal of surplus plutonium stocks; the side-lining of missile (INF) and anti-missile controls (ABM); and norms relating to the management of deterrence have eroded.
- The absence of any brakes on the nuclear and conventional weapon spirals in Asia; no significant CBMs in sight; and fresh outbreaks of border tensions along the India-Pakistan Line of Control.
- The blurring of the lines between strategic nuclear and conventional capabilities.
- The challenges to non-proliferation: the failed 2015 Review Conference; the absence of progress on disarmament weakens commitment to non-proliferation.
- Further proliferation, and advances in weapon design have become technically easier, no longer requiring top level physics, rather engineering skills readily available.
- The dilemma of having five nuclear powers bound by NPT Article VI and four outside, not so bound.
- A decline in public interest in nuclear disarmament which only a crisis looks likely to reverse - but efforts must be made to raise awareness and new approaches like professional advocacy groups might help.
- The crisis in the nuclear power industry following the tragic destruction of the Fukushima power plant.

While it was generally agreed that the ban treaty initiative needed to be strongly supported, there were challenges and risks. Some of the points made:

- The ban treaty negotiation was the most significant development for many years in the multilateral nuclear arms control arena.
- It needed to be fully acknowledged that a treaty which did not attract the support of states with nuclear weapons would not by itself eliminate nuclear weapons.
- However a ban treaty prohibiting nuclear weapons would further delegitimise them, and add to the moral pressure for disarmament (as the CTBT has added moral pressure against weapons testing).
- Hitherto the P-5 sought to act in unison on nuclear disarmament issues: however, unlike the others, China had not opposed the negotiation.
- China, India and Pakistan had abstained: might they participate in the negotiations?
- Most 'umbrella' states (the Netherlands the exception) had opposed the negotiation: might some of these in Asia-Pacific, Australia, Japan and ROK, nevertheless participate?

- Need to consider how to avoid the process being deemed a failure: the nuclear weapons ban is agreed, but the weapons remain: need to have a follow up process in place to maintain the momentum of delegitimisation.
- The negotiation will probably aggravate relations between NWS and NNWS; and has opened a new gap between advocates of the ban treaty and umbrella states such as Australia and Japan, which have traditionally been advocates of non-proliferation and disarmament.

The meeting acknowledged that while the ban treaty negotiations were important, it was also vital that other initiatives directed at reducing nuclear risks should not be neglected, as had been predicted by the opponents of the negotiations. On practical measures, it was suggested that India and Pakistan should jointly promote in the currently moribund Conference of Disarmament an initiative on the verification systems that will be required for an eventual elimination of nuclear weapons, modelled on the work of the Group of Scientific Experts which had prepared the way for the negotiation of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty.

The concerns of nuclear-armed states were weighed. On the one hand, most were committed in principle to the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons (either through their NPT membership, or otherwise) but also considered that until all weapons were eliminated, their stocks played a vital security/deterrence role. Accordingly, they shared varying degrees of reluctance to see nuclear weapons further delegitimised. Further, states with smaller arsenals might fear they would be further disadvantaged if pressed to make cuts.

It was noted that preparations for the 2020 NPT Review Conference formally get underway in May in Vienna with the convening of the first Preparatory Committee meeting under the chairmanship of Ambassador van der Kwast of the Netherlands. In the lead-up to that meeting the Netherlands has been sponsoring regional consultations and has invited APLN contributions in the form of ideas about sources of expertise and themes of special interest to Asia-Pacific.

Concern was expressed that the NPT was in peril and could not afford a repeat of the situation in 2015 when that Review Conference failed to adopt a substantive agreed consensus outcome. A positive: it was noted that historically no two successive NPT Review Conferences had failed to reach an agreement. A new deal between Russia and the Trump administration on further warhead cuts would have an immediate dividend. It was unclear how the nuclear ban treaty negotiations would interact with the NPT review process. The negotiations would be in parallel with the NPT review but it was unclear how long they would continue: to maintain momentum the advocates would probably be looking for a quick conclusion.

## **2. Options for Confidence Building: A regional 'Open Skies' agreement/treaty?**

The Asia-Pacific has only little experience with confidence building measures, lacks

the machinery which might support such measures, and suffers from a lack of official and non-official, so called 'track-2', processes to act as idea generators. APLN is committed to stimulating ideas which might one day help to reduce and eliminate nuclear threats. To this end at the suggestion of an APLN member from the region, our agenda sought to explore the possible relevance to Asia-Pacific of a now well established mechanism developed for Europe and North America – the Treaty on Open Skies of March 1992 regulating a regime of unarmed observation flights over the territories of the State Parties.

Our OCSE expert guest, Robin Mossinkoff, outlined the long history of the general idea of an open skies agreement, which evolved from a proposal for a bilateral instrument between the Soviet Union and the US into a multilateral arrangement which was negotiated in 1992, and which finally entered into force in 2002. The treaty was from the outset a successful symbol of political engagement, without specific stated goals as to what the overflights were to achieve. Overflights are closely monitored in terms of numbers, conditions and timing of flights, and the technical capabilities of the surveillance equipment. Despite current heightened tensions amongst the parties, the treaty continues to operate. While the practical intelligence benefits, if any, of the treaty have never been articulated, overflights continue including of sensitive regions of conflict, for example in and around Ukraine.

The Treaty on Open Skies articulates the ambition to 'improve openness and transparency, to facilitate the monitoring of compliance with existing or future arms control agreements and to strengthen the capacity for conflict prevention and crisis management ...' The question was whether the experience of the Treaty in the Atlantic had any lessons for Asia-Pacific.

The meeting considered the India-Pakistan border as one scenario where aerial surveillance under an 'open skies' arrangement could help reduce the risk of unintended conflict. Could aerial observation of the border from the Line of Control to the Arabian Sea help secure the fence and prevent infiltration? For Pakistan, early detection of a security incursion could raise the threshold for a Pakistan nuclear response. In discussion, it was recognised that in any such arrangement the needs of each party would differ, and would be part of the negotiation.

The meeting considered the situation in Pakistan. The civil conflicts of the last decade had resulted in 60,000 people dead in essentially a civil war. Security forces and their families had become targets of attack. The understanding of terrorism had changed. As a result, there was now a search for a new narrative which recognised that not all problems had their origin abroad. Whereas India has asserted commitment to no first nuclear use, Pakistan's concerns were dictated by the threat posed by the 'Cold Start' doctrine.

Against this background, the following points emerged:

- India and Pakistan do have some if limited CBMs in place: on placement of forces away from the border; restrictions on use of helicopters near the border; but no restrictions on UAVs (which neither side questions).
- While politics remained at the core of a solution, growing nuclear arsenals including tactical weapons demanded action: India and Pakistan needed to look at all options including technological solutions and other possible CBMs; and an open skies agreement could be a great confidence builder.
- In the case of India and China, some CBMs are in place and there could be scope for additional ad hoc arrangements.
- Technical arrangements for reducing security risks had proved beneficial in Europe, but is the necessary shared political will to be found in Asia-Pacific.
- CBM proposals need to establish how they can contribute beyond what can be achieved by 'national technical means'.
- Issues to be addressed for a successful CBM: (i) Political will (ii) defining countries to be involved (iii) meeting domestic requirements – both military and diplomatic considerations.
- While CBMs are attractive, perhaps APLN should focus on core issues: NFU; reduced arsenals; and helping further reducing the salience of nuclear weapons in regional strategic considerations?

This examination of the potential benefits of the Open Skies Treaty led to three key questions deserving further analysis:

- The arrangements developed in Europe during the Cold War and later were unique in that they evolved between two blocs – rather than the nuclear triad and multi-centred environment of Asia; how can we translate the lessons of the one to that of the other?
- Will / should Asia-Pacific focus on bilateral or regional approaches (or both simultaneously)?
  - o The meeting noted that multilateral approaches can offer frameworks where bilateral differences might be managed, even diffused.
- Whether the Asia-Pacific had the necessary regional security infrastructures to create and manage regional CBMs?
  - o While regional structures were often depicted as 'talk shops', they performed an essential role in encouraging the habit of information sharing and problem solving, especially when the political atmosphere is favourable.

### **3. Reducing the trust deficit in managing and containing nuclear tensions: China, India and Pakistan**

This agenda item focused on the nuclear risk flash points, the adequacy of current regional security structures, the precursors to reducing nuclear tensions, and the pathways for increasing trust including the potential for trilateral CBMs.

On the current state of regional relations:

- India's relations with Pakistan are a low point with no movement in 2016 due to terrorist activity designed to prevent normalisation.
- The new element of India's recent 'surgical strikes' is that they have been made public; Pakistan's denial of the strikes enabled it to deflect the issue of a response (noting the problem of finding a comparable target for a response).
- While at the last elections Pakistan had voted for better relations with India, public opinion had since swung the other way.
- On the other hand India's relations with China had been marked by a steady improvement of the level of trust, despite dips: the boundary review has stalled but taken on additional border control issues which sustains the dialogue.
- However, India was irritated by the China Pakistan Economic Corridor, a major pilot project of China's One Belt and One Road Initiative; and by China's continued resistance to India's joining the Nuclear Suppliers Group (it was argued that India's non-proliferation record was superior to that of Pakistan), particularly after the issue was raised at head of government level.

While the states with nuclear weapons are at centre stage when it comes to managing and eliminating nuclear threats, the meeting considered the impacts of these tensions on the non-nuclear neighbours and the potential for those neighbours to help contain and eliminate nuclear threats including through more empowering regional organisations. It was concluded that the current regional structures are not up to the job. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), an economic and political organization of eight countries in Southern Asia, was not able to address sensitive security issues. For the broader region, the only security dialogue mechanism available was the ASEAN Regional Forum. Whereas ASEAN itself has matured into a valuable regional arrangement, the ARF has yet to progress beyond the most basic elements of a regional security dialogue.

For this reason, track-2 mechanisms and academic exchanges could play a role though their value was not universally appreciated in Asia-Pacific. While there is a military hotline between India and Pakistan, and arrangements for exchanges between border commanders, there is no high level mechanism for military dialogue between the two countries. Against this background, the track-2 exchanges between former military chiefs do have some usefulness. And in the past, track-2 exchanges between young technical experts from Pakistan and India had had a lasting impact, aided by commonality of language. But track-2 arrangements have not always been encouraged: for example, conservative elements in India have been sceptical of such dialogues, and visa requirements are a barrier.

In North Asia, track-1.5/2 and academic exchanges have demonstrated their utility fostering better understanding of policies and processes. One example: track-2 has

been used to developing common understandings of strategic concepts and terms, thereby helping avoid misunderstandings between regional officials. Further, track-2 dialogues have helped launch regional exchanges on new security issues, for example on cyber and space. In the ASEAN context, the ARF has been supported over decades by the Council for Security Cooperation Asia Pacific (CSCSAP), particularly by its study group on nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament.

Stark differences were observed in the state of regional people to people relations. India-China relations have been dominantly government to government; whereas India and Pakistan share close historical people to people links – though it was noted that generational change might weaken those links, and there is dwindling interest amongst students in cross-border academic studies. Cross border cultural relations could be enriched by initiatives such as the recently opened Partition Museum in Amritsar. Over decades of close cooperation, Pakistan and China appear to have developed a people to people resonance. It was suggested that people to people links should be cultivated as ballast to regional stability. More broadly it was noted that many countries on the region have developed deep links of strategic significance outside the region, by design or otherwise, through migration and through travel for education abroad.

Economic interactions are important for forging shared interests. The lack of business opportunities in Pakistan was cited as a significant deficit in the relationship. Media also deserved monitoring for their capacity to reduce governments' freedom of movement, and for their ability to fan national antipathies. Traditionally in South Asia, governments lead the media on security matters: indeed in some cases internal agencies were using media (including social media) to shape opinion; but the reverse is now also to be observed.

In summing up:

- Clearly the region suffers from trust deficits in key relations.
- Whereas in the cold war the US and the Soviet Union developed channels for dialogue and CBMs out of an interest in survival, these models have yet to find fertile ground in Asia-Pacific.
- It is vital to develop channels for cooperation (Asia-Pacific has one successful model in ASEAN).
- And we should encourage all other means available: track-2 and academic exchanges; people to people links; commercial interactions; and cultural activities.

### **APLN Next steps ...**

The discussion was substantive and frank: but the goodwill could not disguise the fact that the regional nuclear threats outlook is not encouraging. Uncertainty over the directions that will be taken by the new US Presidency, the continued failure of the international disarmament machinery, and the challenges of the Iran deal and even

more problematic the DPRK's defiance of the will of the region (and the broader international community) make the APLN mission as important and urgent as ever.

Accordingly APLN would continue to have an important role. The Network would continue to grow through recruitment of further committed opinion leaders. Members were invited to keep up the high level of activism which is being recorded on the APLN website. Members were also invited to suggest priority issues for the expanding range of topical Policy Briefs, and to foster interaction with regional partners including co-publishing arrangements where this is permitted, such as enjoyed with '*Global Asia*', the journal of the East Asia Foundation in Seoul.

The tempo of APLN meetings should be maintained:

- The Annual APLN meeting would again be convened in May in Jeju (ROK) in association with the East Asia Foundation and the Jeju Forum for Peace and Prosperity.
- A North Asia regional meeting scheduled for Ulan Bator in June.
- A further 'Triad Dialogue' involving China, India, Pakistan and other South Asian countries might be convened later this year (possibly October or November) – themes might include maritime issues and the strategic challenges posed by tactical nuclear weapons.
- A sequel to the December 2016 South East Asia meeting is in planning.
- Additionally, this year in March in Kuala Lumpur, the APLN will host a meeting of new members of the Network to promote avenues of engagement and awareness raising.

In closing the meeting, the APLN recorded its gratitude to the Observer Research Foundation for its hospitality and support.

*Report prepared by APLN Director of Research, John Tilemann*

## Appendix I: Program

Welcome remarks by:

APLN Co-convenor Ramesh Thakur and

Hyung Taek Hong representing Co-convenor Chung-in Moon

Rakesh Sood, Distinguished Fellow, ORF, host

- Outline of administrative and organisational matters
- Outline of the agenda and program

### **Session 1 Regional perspectives on and priorities for the 2017 conferences on a nuclear weapons ban treaty**

- normative impact
- practical utility
- relationship to the NPT

Chair: Ramesh Thakur

Introductory remarks

- Shen Dingli
- Jayantha Dhanapala
- R. Rajaraman

### **Session 2 A regional Open Skies agreement/treaty**

- description of existing treaty
- technical requirements
- management issues

Chair: Ramesh Thakur

Introductory Remarks

- Robin Mossinkoff
- Shashi Tyagi
- Pervez Hoodbhoy
- Fan Jishe

### **Session 3 Reducing the trust deficit in managing and containing nuclear tensions: China, India and Pakistan**

- current nuclear risk flash points
- the adequacy of current regional security structures
- precursors to reducing nuclear tensions and increasing trust
- potential for trilateral CBMs

Chair: Ramesh Thakur

Introductory Remarks

- HMGS Palihakkara
- Siddharth Varadarajan
- Fan Jishe

### **Session 4 Conclusions and recommendations**

Chair: Ramesh Thakur

- suggested follow up action

- priorities for next sub-regional meeting: dates; themes; partner/venue

## **Appendix II: Participants**

### **Invited guests**

Robin Mossinkoff (Head FSC Support Section, Conflict Prevention Centre/FSC Support Section, OSCE)

Hyung Taek Hong (Head of APLN Secretariat, R.O.K.)

### **APLN members**

#### **Australia**

Ramesh Thakur (Co-Convenor)

John Tilemann (Director of Research, APLN)

#### **China**

Shen Dingli (Associate Dean, Institute of International Studies, Fudan University)

Fan Jishe (Deputy Director, Center for Arms Control and Non-proliferation Studies, CASS)

#### **India**

Rakesh Sood (former Ambassador to Conference on Disarmament)

R. Rajaraman (Emeritus Professor of Physics at Jawaharlal Nehru University)

Siddharth Varadarajan (Founding Editor, The Wire)

Shashi Tyagi (former Chief of the Indian Air Force)

#### **Pakistan**

Pervez Hoodbhoy (Professor of Nuclear and High-Energy Physics, Quaid-e-Azam University)

#### **Sri Lanka**

Jayantha Dhanapala (President, Pugwash Conference on Science and World Affairs)

HMGS Palihakkara (former Foreign Secretary and former Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the UN in Geneva and subsequently New York)

## APLN and ORF

The **Asia Pacific Leadership Network (APLN)** comprises around eighty former senior political, diplomatic, military and other opinion leaders from fifteen countries around the region, including nuclear-weapons possessing states China, India and Pakistan. The objective of the group, founded by former Australian Foreign Minister and President Emeritus of the International Crisis Group Gareth Evans, is to inform and energize public opinion, and especially high level policy-makers, to take seriously the very real threats posed by nuclear weapons, and do everything possible to achieve a world in which they are contained, diminished and ultimately eliminated. The co-Convenors are Professors Chung-in Moon and Ramesh Thakur. The Secretariat is located at the East Asia Foundation in Seoul, Republic of Korea. See further [www.a-pln.org](http://www.a-pln.org).

Set up in 1990, the **Observer Research Foundation** seeks to lead and aid policy thinking towards building a strong and prosperous India in a fair and equitable world. It helps discover and inform India's

choices, and carries Indian voices and ideas to forums shaping global debates. ORF provides non-partisan, independent analyses and inputs on matters of security, strategy, economy, development, energy, resources and global governance to diverse decision-makers (governments, business communities, academia, civil society). ORF's mandate is to conduct in-depth research, provide inclusive platforms and invest in tomorrow's thought leaders today. See further <http://www.orfonline.org/>

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