



**ASIA-PACIFIC LEADERSHIP NETWORK**

FOR NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION AND DISARMAMENT

**LENDING A HELPING HAND TO THE FIRST NPT PREPCOM FOR THE ELEVENTH REVIEW CYCLE**

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In preparation for the eleventh Review Conference (RevCon) of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) in 2026, the first session of the NPT's Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) is scheduled for the end of July. The preparatory meeting process allows multiple opportunities for the NPT member states to engage and express their views on how to promote the full implementation of the treaty.

This year, the process for the eleventh NPT RevCon commences amidst stressed major power equations. In fact, international relations have not improved since the conclusion of the tenth NPT RevCon in August 2022, which was not only delayed by two years due to the pandemic but also eventually took place in the shadow of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. It was unable to reach a consensus final document owing to Russian objections to paragraphs referring to Russian control of the Zaporizhka nuclear power plant and stressing its return to Ukraine. A comprehensive Chair's summary, however, captured the discussions and will serve as a basis for the upcoming meeting of the PrepCom.

The international situation in which this meeting will be held is deeply challenging. Belying all expectations, the Russian 'special military operations' have now exceeded 500 days. The period has witnessed a substantive deterioration of US/NATO-Russian relations. Threat perceptions in Europe have heightened considerably. Additionally, Russia and China have drawn closer together, while the US and China are passing through a phase of tensions over many issues. Meanwhile, there are clear differences between the Nuclear Weapon States (NWS) and Non-Nuclear Weapon States (NNWS) on the imbalance between nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament in the NPT. The NNWS have long expressed their concerns about bearing disproportionate responsibilities for non-proliferation even as the NWS do not make sufficient efforts towards disarmament.

To address this complaint, the five NWS tried to show unity by issuing a joint statement in early 2022, echoing the Reagan-Gorbachev formulation that a nuclear war cannot be won and should not be fought. This was the first time that the five jointly made such a

declaration. But the import of the statement and the possibility that it might facilitate more meaningful actions was lost soon thereafter as Russia launched military operations against Ukraine, and the US came to support the latter. The resultant breaking of the ranks within the NWS has now made it difficult for concerns over nuclear disarmament to be addressed. Rather, there appears to be a hardening of positions on the centrality of nuclear deterrence for nuclear weapon possessing states.

Another rift in positions that will impact the NPT review meetings will be between the NPT and the Treaty on Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). Nuclear weapon possessors had never accepted the latter treaty. However, some NATO nations, such as Belgium, Germany, Norway and the Netherlands, had adopted a relatively softer position towards the TPNW and even attended its first meeting of States Parties held in June 2022 as observers. That mood seems to have dissipated if one goes by the recent NATO Communique issued at Vilnius. It describes the TPNW as “inconsistent and incompatible with the Alliance’s nuclear deterrence policy... at odds with the existing non-proliferation and disarmament architecture, risks undermining the NPT.” Such a statement will create more discord within the NPT between the supporters and detractors of the TPNW. Meanwhile, the expansion of nuclear arsenals and the modernisation of capabilities are apparent amongst all nuclear armed states. Nuclear disarmament is hardly on the mind of many states.

Indeed, the conduct of the opening meeting of the new review cycle of the NPT will need delicate handling at this juncture. The stresses in the political relations cannot but seep into the discussions. Will these exacerbate the already extant challenges to the NPT? Will the rifts among the NWS widen, as well as those between the NWS and NNWS? Will this make it more difficult to handle long-standing issues related to the nuclear programs of Iran and the DPRK? Will it be possible to find shared interests that are common to the NWS, NNWS, and even non-NPT parties?

Holding the NPT together amid difficult developments will be the urgent task before the first PrepCom. Many well-wishing NGOs and nations have issued reports and messages to help the PrepCom to identify and order its priorities and provide ideas to address the challenges.

One such notable effort has been made by the [International Group of Eminent Persons for a World without Nuclear Weapons \(IGEP\)](#), which was set up by the Prime Minister of Japan in December 2022. Fumio Kishida, who hails from Hiroshima, became the first prime minister to personally address the RevCon in August 2022, where he expressed his intention to set up such a group. He fulfilled the promise by appointing 15 experts from nuclear and non-nuclear states, five of whom are members of the Asia-Pacific Leadership Network (APLN), to explore possibilities of nuclear disarmament and to provide ideas and guidance to the NPT. The IGEP has since held two meetings in December 2022 and February 2023. At the second meeting, the IGEP members decided to prepare a message for providing inputs to the first session of NPT Preparatory Committee.

## IGEP's recommendations

Three main action points have been recommended by the IGEP. The first relates to the need for **reinforcing and expanding norms**. Given the differences between major powers, it appears difficult to build consensus for negotiation and conclusion of treaties or binding agreements on relevant issues. It is therefore necessary to hold on to and strengthen existing norms while building new ones, till such time as treaties become possible. Amongst the important norms that the message identifies are respect for international laws and principles, in particular those of non-aggression and resolution of international disputes through peaceful means; not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons; upholding and expanding negative security assurances (NSAs); not to conduct nuclear tests; not produce fissile material for nuclear weapons; and increase awareness of the horrendous consequences of nuclear weapon use, drawing upon the experiences of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The Preparatory Committee must build consensus around these norms, which in fact should be easier since they already enjoy widespread support. This action could turn the mood in a positive direction because instead of starting by consideration of issues that are divisive, it might be better to start with issues which are likely to bring nations together.

The second recommendation of the IGEP is to take **concrete measures on nuclear risk reduction**. A remarkable achievement of the final document concluded (though not consensually released) at the last RevCon of the NPT was to recognise the value of nuclear risk reduction, since nuclear risks – of deliberate use of nuclear weapons, of inadvertent use due to miscalculation or misperception, of non-state actor use, etc. – had grown considerably in a tense global environment. The IGEP, therefore, calls upon the NWS to take measures to address these concerns by providing information regarding their nuclear weapons arsenals, nuclear postures and doctrines, and to improve reporting on measures taken towards implementation of their past commitment to the NPT. It also encourages them to initiate dialogues for arms control measures, practice strategic restraint in their behaviour, and not to engage in activities that threaten to undermine international stability and the NPT regime, including by not expanding their nuclear arsenals, with the ultimate goal of a world without nuclear weapons consistent with Article VI of the NPT.

The third focus of the IGEP message is on **revitalizing the treaty review process** itself. Given the perception that the review process does not demand much accountability, the 2022 RevCon had decided to establish a working group on looking at ways to further strengthen the process. It had then been decided that this working group would meet around the beginning of the first meeting of the PrepCom to discuss and make recommendations to the Preparatory Committee on measures to improve the effectiveness, efficiency, transparency, accountability, coordination, and continuity of the treaty review process. The group will be holding its meetings from July 24 to 28, 2023, just before the PrepCom convenes on July 31. The IGEP also recommends establishing a process of

regularly discussing national reports submitted by NPT States Parties, especially by the five NWS, amongst themselves and with others, to clarify nuclear modernization programs and potential changes in nuclear doctrines. It also encourages dialogue with other non-NPT states (including through observer participation) and with TPNW signatories and non-signatories through briefings to the NPT member states to foster better understanding between the two. The message also recognizes the value of engaging diverse stakeholders, from civil society and governments to political leaders and defense officials tasked with nuclear decision making.

Given the array of grave and unprecedented nuclear challenges facing the world today, the IGEP message calls it a moral imperative and a shared responsibility of all states to collaborate to transform the current crisis into an opportunity to strengthen the nuclear non-proliferation regime, in particular by upholding and strengthening the NPT. Any action that goes contrary to this goal cannot be in the interest of the international community. The NPT stands as the most universal treaty, with only four holdouts. Such an impressive membership is the result of efforts by many nations. Building another such treaty in today's divisive environment would be near impossible. Therefore, preserving what has been painstakingly built over five decades and thoughtfully adjusting it to respond to long-standing imbalances and contemporary realities appears to be the prudent thing to do.

*The opinions articulated above represent the views of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Asia-Pacific Leadership Network or any of its members.*

## ABOUT APLN

The **Asia-Pacific Leadership Network for Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament (APLN)** is a Seoul-based organization and network of political, military, diplomatic leaders, and experts from across the Asia-Pacific region, working to address global security challenges, with a particular focus on reducing and eliminating nuclear weapons risks. The mission of APLN is to inform and stimulate debate, influence action, and propose policy recommendations designed to address regional security threats, with an emphasis on nuclear and other WMD (weapon of mass destruction) threats, and to do everything possible to achieve a world in which nuclear weapons and other WMDs are contained, diminished, and eventually eliminated.



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