

**ASIA-PACIFIC LEADERSHIP NETWORK**

FOR NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION AND DISARMAMENT

CAN THE 2024 PREPARATORY COMMITTEE MEETING SAVE THE NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION TREATY?

Marianne Hanson, Honorary Associate Professor at the University of Queensland

23 July 2024

The second Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) for the 2026 Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference is being held in Geneva from 22 July to 2 August. PrepCom sessions were mandated by NPT states in 2000 as a way of strengthening the review process of the Treaty, specifically by addressing the principles, objectives, and means for promoting its full implementation. The PrepCom will also consider the 1995 Resolution on the Middle East, which aims to create a zone free of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction (WMD), as well as the outcomes of previous Review Conferences.

Given that recent NPT Review Conferences have ended in acrimony and that the antagonism felt by many non-nuclear weapon states (NNWS) towards the five NPT nuclear weapon states (NWS—the United States, Russia, Britain, France and China) is growing, it will be challenging for this current PrepCom to provide new insights or compromises for a successful outcome in 2026.

Since 2000, when NPT states agreed to a substantive final document listing practical steps for systematic and progressive efforts to implement Article VI of the Treaty on nuclear disarmament, only one meeting—the 2010 Review Conference—has been able to provide meaningful conclusions and recommendations for follow-up actions towards any of the Treaty's chief pillars: nuclear disarmament, nuclear non-proliferation, and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. There has also been very little progress on the Resolution on the Middle East.

In short, the NPT is under severe duress. Non-nuclear weapon states see no progress on disarmament by the NWS; neither have the NWS taken serious moves to implement the risk-reduction measures designed to avert nuclear use by accident or design. These included steps such as offering No-First-Use promises (only China has done so), taking nuclear weapons off high-alert status, and bringing into force the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).

Instead, in recent years, we have seen the nuclear weapon states reify their nuclear weapons more than ever before, with some, particularly Russia, making veiled threats to use them. The [Declaration](#) at the recent anniversary of NATO in Washington, DC

proclaimed the ongoing importance of nuclear weapons and NATO's intention to keep modernising its nuclear capabilities. This is contrary to the obligation for nuclear weapon states to lower the salience of nuclear weapons in military doctrines, another one of the risk-reduction measures that have been all but ignored by the NWS.

We have also [seen](#) increased signs of activity at nuclear weapons testing sites in the US, Russia, and China. Testing might not be imminent, but increased talk of testing only exacerbates tensions and [rivalries](#), and shows a blatant disregard for the CTBT.

Additionally, prospects for a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction have only worsened since Israel's bombing campaign in Gaza (since October last year) and the perception that many Western states, especially the US and Britain, are doing little to curb this by ending their weapons exports to Israel. That two Israeli politicians have considered using [nuclear](#) or 'doomsday' weapons on Gaza points to the urgency of eliminating all WMDs in the region, but this is highly unlikely to gain traction at the PrepCom. The call to establish such a zone was one of the conditions stipulated by non-nuclear states in 1995 when they agreed to extend the NPT indefinitely. It hardly needs to be said that this failure will only increase the sense of grievance felt by non-nuclear states, especially those within the Non-Aligned Movement.

The P5 process, designed to assist these states in fulfilling their NPT obligations, has remained largely moribund due to the hostility between the US, Russia, and China. Its only notable contribution was the statement issued in early 2022, which [reiterated](#) that a nuclear war can never be won and must never be fought. Since then, geostrategic competition has grown, and practices such as summit meetings, dialogue, and confidence building attempts have all but disappeared.

As other [studies](#) have shown, it is vital that we protect the NPT, the base of the nuclear non-proliferation regime, and tone down dangerous nuclear rhetoric. The PrepCom Briefing Book published by Reaching Critical Will has [observed](#):

We're in a moment where one nuclear-armed state is committing genocide, another has invaded and is at war with its neighbour, and many NPT states parties are funding, arming, or otherwise supporting them. The potential for global holocaust is as high as ever and for the past twenty-three years NPT states parties have squandered every opportunity to walk this whole mess back from the brink.

Unfortunately, it will take a miracle in Geneva for this PrepCom to achieve any success. The current dynamics among member-states are dire and suggest that there might be little life left in the NPT. That would be a loss to international security.

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.

This commentary is also published on the [APLN website](#).

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.



@APLNofficial



@APLNofficial



apln.network