



**ASIA-PACIFIC LEADERSHIP NETWORK**

FOR NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION AND DISARMAMENT

## The Korea Times

### NUCLEAR WEAPONS: KILL THIS LOVE

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*We must kill this love*

*Yeah, it's sad but true*

*Gotta kill this love*

*Before it kills you, too ...*

-- BLACKPINK, "Kill This Love"

It seems that the Asia-Pacific loves all things nuclear. Nuclear power is expanding in the region, with China, the ROK, India, and Pakistan leading the way, while Japan reopens reactors shut down after Fukushima. Bangladesh will join the nuclear energy club this year, and Indonesia and Australia are expressing renewed interest. Nuclear medicine is booming, along with other nuclear applications in agriculture, industry, and even space. However, the curse of nuclear weapons remains. The six nuclear-armed states in our region – and those relying on the arguably illusory protection of nuclear alliances – appear fatally attracted to these weapons of mass destruction.

### The vision

The Asia-Pacific Leadership Network (APLN) brings together prominent public figures dedicated to eliminating nuclear threats in the Asia-Pacific. Founded by former Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans, APLN leveraged the trailblazing International Commission on Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament (ICNND), co-chaired by Evans and former Japanese Foreign Minister Yoriko Kawaguchi.

APLN's inaugural communiqué in 2011 drew inspiration from President Obama's Prague speech, which pledged America's "commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons." It also acknowledged significant cuts to US and Russian nuclear arsenals and the "modest success" of the 2010 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) review. However, it also warned that the positive momentum for nuclear controls was in danger of stalling.

## **Marching backwards**

The last decade-plus has been an unmitigated period of lost opportunity, nuclear control vandalism, and increased nuclear threats.

Obama's promise of a world without nuclear weapons soon gave way to renewed distrust between Cold War adversaries, compounded by rising tensions between Washington and Beijing. The various nuclear control regimes that once regulated US-Russia competition have been scrapped or are on life support.

With the DPRK demonstrating its nuclear and missile capabilities, the already fraught interactions among several nuclear-armed adversaries in the region have become even more complex. Yet, in the absence of an existential wake-up call like the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Asia-Pacific has failed to create political and security structures capable of reducing nuclear risks.

Reflecting the malaise between the nuclear powers, the NPT – while still almost universally supported – remains ineffectual. The UN has also failed to agree on any of the "building blocks" of nuclear disarmament envisioned by the ICNND. The Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty has yet to enter into force – worse, nuclear-armed states are threatening to resume banned testing. And instead of reducing the strategic relevance of nuclear weapons, the threat of nuclear use has once again become a feature of international life.

Dismayed by the lack of progress in nuclear disarmament, the United Nations mandated negotiations for a treaty to ban them – the 2016 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. The treaty now has 73 members, but not one nuclear-armed state – so is powerless to reduce nuclear threats.

Three other factors have changed the context and character of the debate on nuclear weapons.

First, the emergence of climate change as a long-term existential threat, with immediately evident impacts, demands a global response. While nuclear war promises a quicker route to annihilation, eighty years of avoiding that calamity have led to complacency.

Second, the inevitable spread of new technologies is impacting the stability of nuclear deterrence arrangements. Consider the growing regional nuclear arsenals and improved delivery systems, the deployment of THAAD anti-missile systems, Australia's plans to acquire long-range nuclear-powered submarines, and South Korea's bunker-busting Hyunmoo-5 ballistic missile.

Third, changes in public opinion. South Korean opinion is increasingly open to the nuclear weapons option, and Australia is embracing the benefits of nuclear power for submarines and revisiting its nuclear power options. And in Japan, there is diminishing resistance to a growing defence budget.

### **Time for Asia-Pacific to kill this love**

As anticipated in the APLN 2011 Communiqué, the world's economic and security centre of gravity has shifted inexorably to our region. The Asia-Pacific is now the global epicentre of nuclear threats. The response to date has been defence but not diplomacy. Both are needed.

In 2011, APLN urged that, with its newfound global status, the Asia-Pacific needed to step up and take responsibility by contributing ideas and policy proposals to engage nuclear weapon powers on serious confidence-building measures and multilateral arms reduction negotiations.

The Prague speech was ahead of its time, but it was set in the wrong hemisphere. Where might we find the leader to deliver a vision for a nuclear-free security path for the Asia-Pacific? Is it too much to hope that the new administration in Washington might seek to reimagine security in the region? Could the new leadership in Jakarta leverage ASEAN's leadership potential and advance a middle way? Or can the legacy of Hiroshima inspire Japan to champion a new regional security architecture that finally ends the love of nuclear weapons?

Gareth Evans once referred to the absence of action on nuclear disarmament as sleepwalking into oblivion. We have yet to wake the sleepwalkers of the Asia-Pacific. Time to get cracking.

*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.*

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## ABOUT APLN

The **Asia-Pacific Leadership Network for Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament (APLN)** is a Seoul-based organisation 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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