SUVA DIALOGUE ON SECURITY IN THE PACIFIC AND ASIA

Dialogue Report / December 2025

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APLN
ASIA-PACIFIC LEADERSHIP NETWORK

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report is produced as part of the third year of APLN's project on Nuclear Disarmament and the Anthropocene: Voices from Pacific Island Countries. The report summaries the major findings and crucial takeaways that emerged from the discussions at three virtual roundtables organized by APLN from September to October 2024 and the Track 2 'Suva Dialogue on Security in the Pacific and Asia' hosted and convened by APLN in April 2025. The project is supported by the Ploughshares Fund under the Equity Rises Initiative. The authors of this dialogue report are grateful to all the participants of the virtual roundtables and the Suva Dialogue on Security in the Pacific and Asia for their invaluable intellectual contributions to this project. The authors are grateful to Sandra Tarte and Elina Noor for their thoughtful and in-depth review of the report. The authors also thank APLN colleagues for their inputs and support during the execution of the project.

 This publication was made possible by a grant from Ploughshares Fund.

The views represented herein are the authors' own and do not necessarily reflect the views of affiliated institution(s), nor that of APLN, its staff, board, or funders.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the Pacific Islands have found themselves navigating the impacts of rising nuclear risks, past nuclear practices, and the current climate crisis amid a worsening geopolitical competition and growing militarism between the major powers. The rivalry between the United States and China poses significant challenges for the Pacific Islands, which are directly affected by their economic, foreign and defense policy decisions. Yet, even as great power competition brings renewed focus to the Pacific region, perspectives from the Pacific Island remain poorly represented within wider regional and global conversations on issues that directly and indirectly affect them.

Since July 2022, with support from Ploughshares Fund, the Asia-Pacific Leadership Network (APLN) has worked to elevate and highlight various perspectives from the Pacific Islands within regional and global security debates. Broad consultations with experts and security practitioners from the Pacific Islands region in the second year of the project revealed that there exists a dialogue gap between the Pacific Island nations and their Asian counterparts on how the different countries in the Asia-Pacific navigate pressures and challenges of contemporary geopolitics while, at the same time, balancing their national and regional priorities. This key finding was highlighted in APLN's project report 'Navigating Nuclear Legacies, Climate Change, and Geopolitics in the Pacific Islands,' published in June 2024.[1] The report further concluded that there is a critical need to deepen engagement and collaboration within the Pacific Islands while expanding dialogue across the wider Asia-Pacific region and that people-to-people exchanges and Track 2 platforms can serve as valuable mediums for coordinating like-minded actors and stakeholders across the Asia-Pacific, bypassing sometimes reluctant official government channels.

1 Tanvi Kulkarni and Elaine Natalie, "Navigating Nuclear Legacies, Climate Change, and Geopolitics in the Pacific Islands," Asia-Pacific Leadership Network (APLN), 12 June 2024, https://www.apln.network/projects/voices-from-pacific-island-countries/navigating-nuclear-legacies-climate-change-and-geopolitics-in-the-pacific-islands

To bridge this dialogue gap, in the third year of the project, APLN launched a new dialogue between experts from the Pacific and Asia to comprehensively discuss shared nuclear, climate, and other security risks as well as ways to cultivate a solutions-based approach for addressing these risks, and promoting the security of the broader Asia-Pacific region. Central to this effort is the aim of better understanding the Pacific priorities and emphasising the Pacific peoples' agency and perspectives in regional and global security conversations.

In September and October 2024, APLN hosted three virtual roundtables, with experts, policy practitioners, and civil society groups from the South Asia, Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands and Oceania. The first roundtable focused at contemporary geopolitics in the Asia-Pacific, specifically the consequences of worsening relations between the United States and China, growing military risks, and other challenges for the Pacific Islands and Asia. The discussions explored how Pacific and Asian states can align their perspectives on the challenges facing the regions and work toward a more stable Asia-Pacific regional security order. The second roundtable took a closer look at the impacts of rising nuclear risks, past and present nuclear practices, and challenges to disarmament efforts, as well as the emerging risks and humanitarian challenges for the Asia-Pacific. In the third roundtable, participants examined current and emerging climate change-related risks and impacts, with a focus on environmental security and ocean health.

Based on these preliminary discussions, APLN convened an in-person Track 2 meeting in Suva, Fiji, on 24-25 April 2025 to explore how the Pacific Islands and Asian states can collectively future-proof the region against shared security risks and challenges, including those arising from escalating geopolitical competition, increased militarisation, nuclear policies, and climate change. The dialogue brought together twenty participants from thirteen countries[2] across the broader Asia-Pacific region. The 'Suva Dialogue on Security in the Pacific and Asia' aimed to facilitate greater collaboration and build better understanding between experts, policy practitioners, and civil society groups from Asia and the Pacific, to foster trust and to advocate for concrete collective actions.

2 Experts from Australia, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Marshall Islands, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Singapore, Taiwan, Vanuatu participated in APLN's Suva Dialogue on Security in the Pacific and Asia. These broadly represent the four subregions of the Asia-Pacific – South Asia, Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands and Oceania. The authors of the report note that the three major powers in the region - China, the United States, and Russia – were intentionally excluded from dialogue discussions.

APLN Suva Dialogue Group Photo, 24 April 2025.

Participants were invited to explore six key themes:

1. Understanding the "Asia-Pacific."
2. Identifying Converging and Diverging Security Concerns.
3. Nuclear Risks in the Asia-Pacific.
4. Climate Insecurities in the Asia-Pacific.
5. Navigating the US-China Strategic Competition.
6. Broadening the Asia-Pacific Dialogue.

This report summaries the major findings and crucial takeaways that emerged from the discussions at the virtual roundtables and the Track 2 'Suva Dialogue on Security in the Pacific and Asia'[3] hosted and convened by APLN.

3 Henceforth referred to as the 'APLN Suva Dialogue' for the purpose of this report.

UNDERSTANDING THE "ASIA-PACIFIC"

The 'Asia-Pacific' is a vast and expansive geographical and geopolitical space stretching between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. Defined this way, the Asia-Pacific comprises of four major subregions – South Asia, Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific and Oceania. APLN's Suva Dialogue opened with a discussion on how the Asia-Pacific is viewed and understood through various narratives, constructs and framings that emerge from within and from outside of the region and the ways in which these constructs also shape the strategic environment of the region.

Narratives and Constructs

Narratives and constructs define and shape our understandings of the Asia-Pacific region. These include not only home-grown constructs like the 'Blue Pacific Identity' and 'ASEAN Centrality', but also constructs that are imposed extraneously, like the 'Global South' or the 'Indo-Pacific'. Western-driven geopolitical narratives have especially been prevalent in the framing of security perspectives and policies in the Asia-Pacific.

Dialogue participants noted particularly how the characterisation of "the West" (namely the United States in the broader Asia-Pacific region, as well as Australia and Aotearoa-New Zealand within the Pacific Islands and Oceania) has traditionally been that of "benign protectors" of smaller states. While this patronising and paternalistic framing has been prevalent and even normalised in Western security discourses, as applicable to the different subregions of the Asia-Pacific, it appears to be particularly pronounced in the Pacific Islands region vis-à-vis Australia and Aotearoa-New Zealand. Such normalization, in turn, can obscure the extent to which regional strategic narratives have been shaped or constrained by dominant West-centric frameworks.

Such narratives have also framed China as the 'enemy' – portrayed as an aggressive and ambitious rising power with expansive regional outreach. Within this narrative, China is accused of undermining the "protective shield" that the West is perceived to provide for other Asia-Pacific countries, particularly to the "small and vulnerable" Pacific Island nations, and often positioned as a "party crasher" in the region. Dialogue participants also noted that bilateral engagements with China tend to be viewed by Western actors as contentious, attracting disproportionate attention and contributing to polarisation – whereas similar engagements with Australia or ASEAN are rarely seen as problematic. In fact, ASEAN's efforts to defend their neutrality are frequently interpreted by their Western allies and partners as 'choosing China'. Dialogue participants acknowledged the dangers of the persistence of these polarising narratives, rooted in binary thinking, and exacerbating geostrategic tensions in the Asia-Pacific.

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Key Shifts in Subregional Perspectives and Strategies

Pacific leaders and communities have been particularly skeptical about externally-driven narratives and foreign security cooperation constructs, that lack Pacific ownership. Political groupings in the Pacific have insisted on the need to define the region from the Pacific perspective. Pacific experts point out, however, that Pacific perspectives are not uniform and differ within the subregion. For instance, the Melanesian Spearhead Group emphasises a Melanesian perspective.[4] The Pacific Island Countries have, therefore, adopted commonly agreed concepts and declarations like the "friends to all and enemies to none" posture which emphasizes flexibility over strict alignment, and allows the Pacific Island states to engage positively with external powers while prioritising their own national interests. This spirit is also reflected in other concepts like the Blue Pacific Identity spelled out in the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent developed by the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) to articulate a collective regional approach to intensifying great power rivalries in the region.[5] These narratives also reveal the concern that small island states can be highly susceptible to external influence and domination by larger states, but unity across the Pacific Islands can enhance their collective leverage and resilience to withstand some of those pressures.

For Southeast Asia, being part of the "Asia-Pacific" once signified development and prosperity. The region has, however, increasingly become a strategic arena for big power competition, as seen in the shift, in some contexts, toward the "Indo-Pacific" framing. Regional experts observed that ASEAN faces challenges in maintaining its centrality within the regional architecture, particularly amid the emergence of a large number of minilateral groupings and great power-led initiatives such as the QUAD (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue)[6] and AUKUS[7] (Australia-United Kingdom-United States). These arrangements risk sidelining ASEAN and eroding its centrality. As with the Blue Pacific Identity, this underscores the urgent need for ASEAN to strengthen its collective will, maintain its neutrality, and continue to promote peace and stability in the region through its own initiatives.

4 Melanesian Spearhead Group, https://msgsec.info/, accessed on 25 September 2025.

5 Pacific Islands Forum, "2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent," 5 August 2022, https://forumsec.org/2050

6 The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue is a diplomatic partnership of Australia, India, Japan, and the United States, committed to maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific.

7 'AUKUS,' Australian Submarine Agency, Australian Government, https://www.asa.gov.au/aukus. Accessed on 26 September 2025.

In 2019, ASEAN introduced the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP)[8] as a strategic framework to uphold ASEAN centrality and navigate an increasingly complex regional environment marked by major power rivalries and territorial disputes. The AOIP reaffirms ASEAN's role as a proactive stakeholder in shaping the region's future, guides cooperation with external partners, and promotes key principles such as openness, inclusivity, and a rules-based order. Unlike the Indo-Pacific strategies of many major powers, the AOIP is not meant to counter China. Instead, it emphasises cooperation across a wide range of areas, including maritime security, economic development, connectivity, and sustainability.

CONVERGING AND DIVERGING SECURITY CONCERNS

From traditional security threats and geostrategic competition, to non-traditional security threats and climate change, states in the Asia-Pacific are confronted individual and shared security challenges. Dialogue participants explored the different prisms through which security is viewed across the Asia-Pacific region, and noted how contemporary geopolitical pressures and great power competition often clash with the priorities and values of Pacific and Asian states.

Borrowed Language, Borrowed Security

Participants at the APLN Suva Dialogue emphasised the dangers of borrowed knowledge and language external to the region – a concern shared by both Pacific and Asian participants. When discussing the concept of traditional and non-traditional security, participants noted that states in the Asia-Pacific have internalised the "language of outsiders" to frame their own notions of security and insecurity. For instance, in Southeast Asia, broadly speaking, there has been an acceptance of Western definitions of security defined primarily through state-centric concerns such as military defence. Meanwhile, issues that directly impact the people, such as climate change and counterterrorism, are typically categorised as "non-traditional" security concerns.

Dialogue participants argued that the categorisation of traditional and non-traditional security is not only problematic but also ahistorical. Take for instance, the problem of classifying terrorism as a non-traditional security matter, even though it's been a traditional issue for decades in countries like the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia. This categorisation is problematic because it compels being reactive to external concepts rather than addressing lived realities.

8 'ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific,' ASEAN Main Portal,22 June 2019, https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/ASEAN-Outlook-on-the-Indo-Pacific_FINAL_22062019.pdf. Accessed on 26 September 2025.

And yet, among many in Southeast Asia's elite policy circles, terrorism and counterterrorism are still regarded as non-traditional security matters. Similarly, the major security concern for many Asian countries is in fact nation-building – creating a unified national identity from diverse communities, a product of colonialism. Yet, they are constantly forced to talk about external threats like China or AUKUS.

Pacific experts echoed similar concerns. Citing examples of supposedly homegrown concepts that were in fact shaped by outside – often Western – influence. For instance, the Fijian government received advice from the United Kingdom when developing the concept of the 'Ocean of Peace',[9] and Fiji's foreign policy White Paper[10] was initially drafted with significant input from Australia and included much borrowed language. Participants noted that Pacific governments often defer to external thinking – especially to the West – and that it is troubling when such ideas are adopted uncritically.

Borrowed language is connected to borrowed thinking and constrained agency. Asia-Pacific states are often forced to adopt the security language of the West in order to communicate with the outside, rather than communicating internally within the Asia and Pacific subregions. Words like "security" and "threat" do not even exist in some of the vernacular languages in the Pacific (Tokelau or Samoa), as the communal values in these communities prioritise collaboration and negotiation over fear. There is a need to reduce reliance on borrowed language, as those words shape the region's thinking and can lead to the securitisation of issues that in fact require open dialogue and discussions to be dealt with.

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The Limits of Binary Thinking

Dialogue participants also discussed the dangers of binary thinking in security, as well as potential alternatives. For example, an existential threat like climate change is often labeled as a "non-traditional" security issue. However, the attempt to draw rigid lines between different types of security is inherently problematic – particularly when these lines are based on binary thinking, such as human

9 Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade, "PM Rabuka's Ministerial Statement – The Proposal of The Ocean Of Peace," Government of The Republic of Fiji, 5 August 2024, https://www.foreignaffairs.gov.fj/oceans-of-peace/. Accessed on 30 September 2025.

10 "Fiji's Foreign Policy White Paper," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Fiji, September 2024, https://www.foreignaffairs.gov.fj/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/FFPWP.pdf. Accessed on 30 September 2025.

security versus national security, or non-traditional versus traditional security. This impulse to categorise security issues as traditional and non-traditional is rooted in a Western concept of duality – reflected in the Cartesian, mechanistic view of humans distinct from nature – contrasting sharply with more relational philosophies found in other worldviews.

Dialogue participants also discussed alternative framings of security. The concept of comprehensive security, for instance, is often referenced in the ASEAN context, and it does not rely on strict binaries but instead recognises the interconnectedness of various security concerns. Although India does not have a common national security strategy, it has tended to adopt a broad understanding of national security that often includes human security concerns. This understanding is sometimes rooted in constitutional values and historical traditions of security thinking in the region. Similarly, the concept of relational security is found in Pacific Islands discourses, where security is rooted in relationships among people, communities, and the environment, rather than being defined solely by the state's military capacity.

The Impact of Colonialism

The roots of the aforementioned concerns appear to lie in the enduring impacts of past coloniality and an ongoing colonial thinking in many parts of the Asia-Pacific. For example, Southeast Asia's push for 'progress,' in the form of big GDP (gross domestic product) and foreign investments, still follows models shaped by old power structures, meaning they have not outgrown but rather internalised that coloniality. In Fiji, colonial history has been romanticised and critical analysis is often lacking in public discourse, such that narratives like the Indo-Pacific are accepted without question. There is a crucial need to decolonize the minds of leaders and bureaucracies in such states where they continue to perpetuate systems designed against them, often due to a "romantic nostalgia" for colonial history.

Dialogue participants stressed that the long-term solution to unlearning colonial mindsets is seen as decolonization of education and reforming the curriculum to critically analyze inherited systems. Another strategy is the 'proactiveness in the silence,' or the strategic use of delayed response by smaller states in international negotiations. Participants also underscored the importance of including diverse stakeholders who challenge entrenched assumptions – individuals with different backgrounds, worldviews, and experiences that do not necessarily align with dominant molds. Participants emphasised the need to critically examine security concerns, challenge externally imposed narratives, and emphasize a homegrown, people-centered approach to security and development. This includes questioning why Fiji's foreign policy white paper borrowed its language, including the term Indo-Pacific, from Australia.

NUCLEAR RISKS IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC

The Asia-Pacific constitutes a complex and dynamic space for nuclear contestation and risks. Six of the world's nine nuclear-armed states and several nuclear alliances are present in this region. Growing deterrence competition, arms races, proliferation pressures, and the fears of deliberate or accidental use of a nuclear weapon pose a shared challenge to states in this region. The region also covers two nuclear-weapon-free zones of the world, including the Southeast Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (also known as the Treaty of Bangkok) and the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone (also known as the Treaty of Rarotonga). These are key international arrangements that prohibit the presence of nuclear weapons in these geographical zones.[11] Nuclear risks and dangers are, however, not uniform across the Asia-Pacific, and the dialogue participants noted that impacts of contemporary nuclear policies and practices are experienced differently by states in this region.[12]

APLN Infographic on Nuclear Risks in the Asia-Pacific. This infographic is based on a roundtable on Nuclear Issues and Humanitarian Crises, conducted by APLN in October 2024.

11 Unlike the Bangkok Treaty, all five Nuclear Weapons States have signed the additional protocol to the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone (with only the US not having ratified it).

12 See:" [Infographic] Nuclear Risks in the Asia-Pacific," APLN, 18 April 2025, https://www.apln.network/projects/voices-from-pacific-island-countries/infographic-nuclear-risks-in-the-asia-pacific

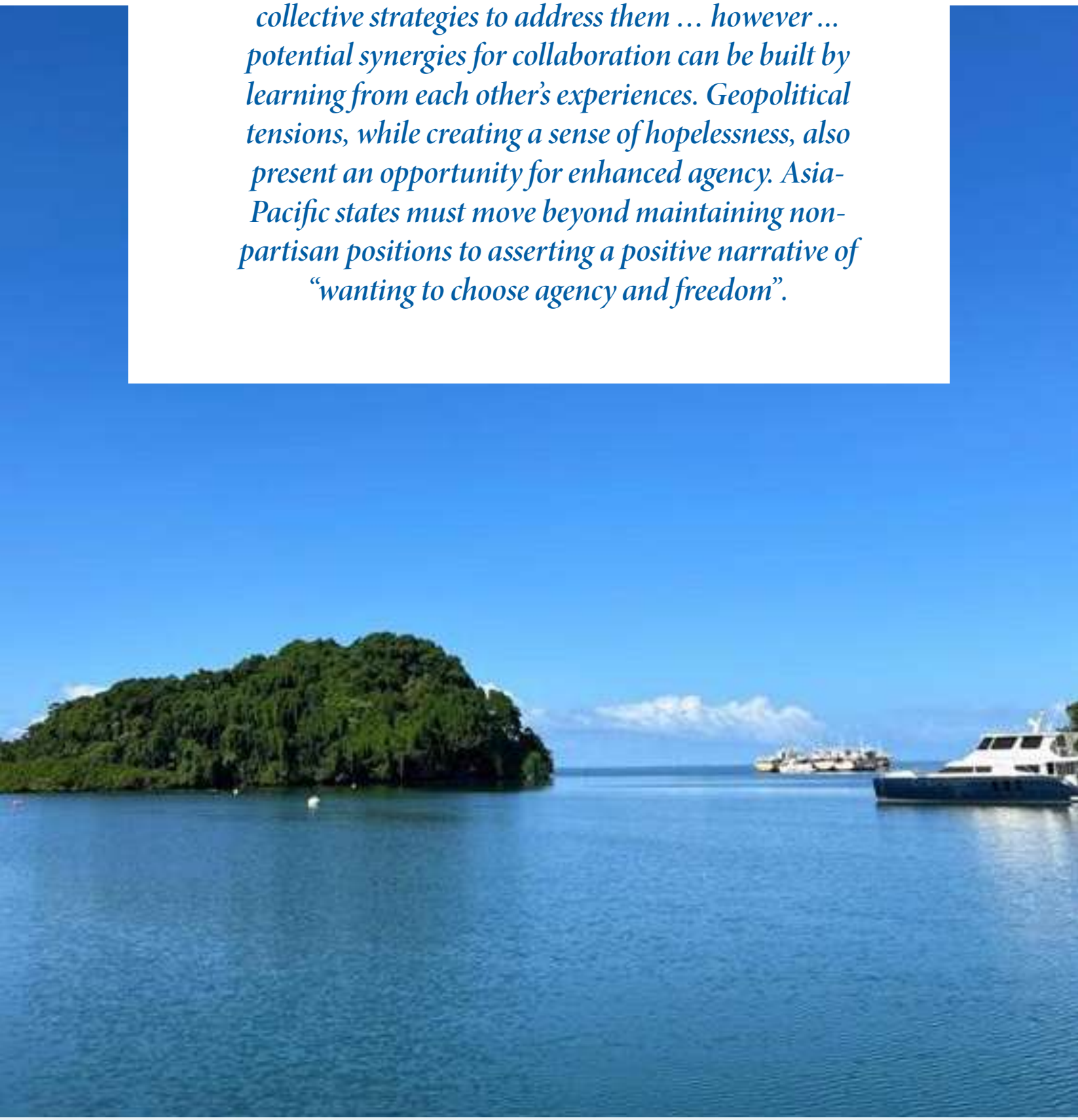
Multifarious Nuclear Risks

South Asia and Northeast Asia are comparatively high-risk zones for nuclear use in the Asia-Pacific. A combination of historic rivalries, unresolved conflicts and growing nuclear competition, amid a worsening geopolitical environment, has created space for nuclear conflict in these subregions. In South Asia, nuclear-armed neighbours, India and Pakistan have a long-standing territorial dispute and a crisis-prone relationship. The expansion of nuclear capabilities of both India and Pakistan, coupled with their asymmetric nuclear deterrence postures, have frequently stoked fears of nuclear escalation in this region. Correspondingly, in Northeast Asia, direct conflict on the Korean Peninsula or in the Taiwan Strait, involving China, North Korea and the United States carries a risk of nuclear escalation. As a ripple effect, Japan and South Korea are reviewing the necessity of nuclear weapons in their security strategies, increasing risk of nuclear proliferation. Pro-nuclear sentiments are rising in Japan and South Korea as they see a belligerent and expanding North Korean nuclear regime developing strategic proximity to China and Russia, as well as the diminishing credibility of the American nuclear umbrella. These sentiments trump their own lived experiences of devastation from the nuclear bomb.

In Southeast Asia, the immediate concerns are nuclear smuggling and nuclear terrorism. Southeast Asian states are seeking nuclear power to meet their energy requirements, which will bring associated risks of security of nuclear material during storage, transportation and disposal. Even though, the Southeast Asian Nuclear-Weapon Free Zone (SEANWFZ) has ensured that this region is untouched by the immediate nuclear threat, the proximity to nuclear armed states and growing fears of US-China confrontation in the Taiwan Strait or the South China Sea have spawned fears about the spillover effects of a nuclear conflict for Southeast Asia.

The Pacific Islands have been also been historically tied to the nuclear age as the staging grounds for the atomic bombings on Japan, and thereafter as the proving grounds for hundreds of nuclear tests by the United States, United Kingdom and France during the Cold War. The devastating effects of nuclear testing continue to reverberate in the Pacific Islands, particularly for Marshall Islands, Kiribati, and French Polynesia, engendering long-term physiological and psychological effects, loss of land and habitat, environmental degradation, and displacement for many indigenous communities from their original homelands. These legacy effects are compounded and worsened by contemporary geopolitical insecurities and the climate crisis. Driven by a profound sense of protecting the Pacific Ocean and Pacific identity, Pacific Island communities have spearheaded notable nuclear justice movements and disarmament campaigns, that yielded the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone (SPNFZ).

There exists wide variations in the strategic perceptions, security priorities, and historical experiences of states across the four subregions in the Asia-Pacific. This makes it very challenging to build a shared understanding of geopolitical risks and security threats, and to devise collective strategies to address them … however … potential synergies for collaboration can be built by learning from each other's experiences. Geopolitical tensions, while creating a sense of hopelessness, also present an opportunity for enhanced agency. Asia-Pacific states must move beyond maintaining non-partisan positions to asserting a positive narrative of "wanting to choose agency and freedom".



APLN Suva Dialogue in Fiji. April 2025, Photo by Elaine Natalie.

Pacific experts pointed out that, like Asia, the Pacific nuclear experience is diverse. The island of Guam, for instance, in the Northern Pacific Islands is a strategic outpost and territory of the United States in the Western Pacific that hosts US nuclear facilities. The Reagan Test Site[13] located on Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands is a US ballistic missile testing base. As sites of geostrategic logistics for modern nuclear warfare, these locations are frontline targets for an adversary nuclear attack.

Varied Perspectives on Contemporary Nuclear Developments

Discussions at the APLN Suva Dialogue revealed that despite a shared memory of the destructive power of nuclear weapons, nuclear existential threats are perceived differently across the Asia-Pacific. Two issues specifically elicited varied viewpoints–nuclear-powered submarines, and nuclear and radioactive waste disposal.

Pacific Island Countries and, to a limited extent, Southeast Asian states are particularly concerned about the implications of the AUKUS nuclear-powered submarines programme on their nuclear weapon free zones and on the nuclear non-proliferation regime. Experts from the Pacific Islands hold deep reservations about the strategic purpose of AUKUS, arguing that the nuclear-powered submarines, even if not nuclear-armed, are part of the US power-projection and nuclear war-fighting system, and their presence in the Pacific region is a violation of the Treaty of Rarotonga.[14] ASEAN states have expressed caution that the presence of Australian nuclear-powered submarines in Southeast Asian waters would undermine the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon Free Zone (SEANWFZ) treaty. Countries like Indonesia and Malaysia are also worried that AUKUS could ignite a nuclear arms race in the region, threatening ASEAN's non-proliferation and disarmament efforts. The AUKUS deal has, nonetheless, received tacit support from Asia-Pacific allies of the United States.

The issue of managing radioactive waste generated from nuclear power plants and nuclear-powered submarine programmes like the AUKUS also finds differing viewpoints in Asia and the Pacific. Japan's decision to release nuclear wastewater from the TEPCO Fukushima plant into the Pacific Ocean has exacerbated fears of radioactive contamination of the water and marine environment of the Pacific Ocean. AUKUS too has led to domestic debate and concerns in Australia about the management of radioactive waste from spent fuel used in the submarines. Indigenous Australians have voiced outrage at plans to locate the waste disposal sites on Aboriginal lands, which were already contaminated from the British

13 "Reagan Test Site," Lincoln Laboratory, MIT, https://www.ll.mit.edu/about/facilities/reagan-test-site. Accessed on 20 September 2025.

14 "Treaty of Rarotonga," United Nations Platform for Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones, https://www.un.org/nwfz/content/treaty-rarotonga, Accessed on 30 September 2025.

nuclear tests. Pacific experts emphasise these practices add to the historical trauma suffered by the Pacific and Aboriginal communities, including from the nuclear waste left behind in the Pacific by colonial nuclear powers.

Building Synergies and Potentialities for Alleviating Nuclear Risks in The Asia-Pacific

The responses of countries in Asia and the Pacific to the multifarious nuclear risks and dangers are informed by their strategic perceptions, security priorities, and historical experiences with nuclear weapons. These three elements vary widely across the subregions, which makes it difficult to credibly build a shared understanding of risks and devise collective strategies to counter them. Dialogue participants, nevertheless, envisaged that potential synergies could be built between states to address growing nuclear risks in the Asia-Pacific.

Participants suggested that there is scope for learning from each region's experience with nuclear weapons. States burdened by nuclear use and testing legacies especially offer valuable lessons from the lived experience of nuclear harm. A good example of collaborative partnership is that of Kiribati and Kazakhstan, both former nuclear testing sites, who are working together to establish global mechanisms that provide support to nuclear survivors.[15] This inter-governmental cooperation is backed by civil society mobilisation. There is similar potential for undertaking comparative studies of SEANWFZ and SPNFZ to find how each zone can be further strengthened.

Other projects that could potentially unite nuclear risk reduction and non-proliferation efforts in Asia and the Pacific include common education programmes about the linkages between nuclear history, colonial history, and environmental history. There is potential for humanitarian issues to transcend political boundaries. Younger generations in Asia and the Pacific are discovering the simultaneous dangers of multiple existential threats, including climate change, nuclear dangers and pandemics. Disarmament education offers meaningful scope for collaboration between Asia and the Pacific.

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) provides opportunity to build solidarity between states from Asia and the Pacific to make a critical political intervention on nuclear disarmament. For instance, in September 2023, the Assembly of French Polynesia unanimously adopted a resolution in favour of

15 "Kazakhstan and Kiribati Adopt Joint Statement at UN on Rehabilitation of Territories Affected by Nuclear Tests," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, https://www.gov.kz/memleket/entities/mfa/press/news/details/270338?lang=en. Accessed on 16 September 2025, and "Joint Statement on behalf of Kiribati and Kazakhstan 2023 NPT Preparatory Committee General Debate Delivered by H.E. Ambassador Teburoro Tito," UNODA, 31 July 2023, https://docs-library.unoda.org/Treaty_on_the_Non-Proliferation_of_Nuclear_Weapons_-Preparatory_Committee_for_the_Eleventh_Review_ConferenceFirst_session_(2023)/Kiribati_and_Kazakhstan_Joint_Statement_General_Debate.pdf. Accessed on 20 September 2025.

the TPNW, explicitly calling on France, a Nuclear Weapon State, to join the treaty.[16] Although symbolic, these steps can push to strengthen anti-nuclear norms. Even though the treaty's progress has been hindered by opposition from the nuclear-armed states and their allies in the Asia-Pacific, the TPNW is nevertheless strengthened by the support of over 25 signatory-states from the Asia and the Pacific.[17]

CLIMATE INSECURITIES IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC

The climate crisis is unfurling across the Asia-Pacific, in the form of extreme weather events (like severe heatwaves and storms, flash floods, frequent bushfires, long droughts, rapid soil erosion, disappearing glacier, and ocean acidification), the loss of biodiversity, disrupted ecological cycles and altered ecosystems. States in the Asia-Pacific are experiencing different sets of climate change impacts and vulnerabilities depending on their geographies. Vulnerable states, however, like those with low-lying and archipelagic geographies, and coastal and island communities in Asia and the Pacific are faced with direct and more immediate impacts of climate-induced threats,[18] because of their high dependence on natural and ocean resources. In 2018, Pacific Islands leaders declared climate change as the "single-greatest threat to the security" of the Pacific communities.[19]

Small Island Developing States (SIDS) have historically been among the most prominent campaigners of urgent climate action. As communities on the frontline of climate change, they have championed key international climate change negotiations. Global and multilateral efforts to address the climate crisis have, however, been hindered by rising international conflicts and geopolitical complexities. Dialogue participants discussed the climate and security interlinkages in the Asia-Pacific and explored the potential for collaborative approaches to enhance resilience in vulnerable communities.

16 "French Polynesia wants France to join the TPNW," International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), 29 September 2023, https://www.icanw.org/french_polynesia_wants_france_to_join_the_tpnw#:~:text=SHARE,as%20a%20humanitarian%20disarmament%20treaty. Accessed on 26 September 2025.

17 Indonesia and Timor Leste are recent signatories to the TPNW. For information on which Pacific Island Countries have supported the TPNW, see "[Infographic] TPNW in the Pacific," APLN, 4 October 2023, https://www.apln.network/projects/voices-from-pacific-island-countries/tpnw-in-the-pacific

18 Climate-induced threats include economic losses, infrastructure damages, water and food scarcity, poverty and displacement, and diseases.

19 "Boe Declaration on Regional Security," Pacific Islands Forum, 5 September 2018, https://forumsec.org/publications/boe-declaration-regional-security. Accessed on 15 July 2025.

Climate Securitisation

Dialogue participants noted how 'climate security'[20] has become a dominant frame for thinking about the climate crisis, not only in the West and the Global North but also among their allies and strategic partners in the Asia-Pacific.[21] This narrative is leveraged by militaries to justify their continued presence beyond their borders and often has little to do with communities that are affected by climate change. In the face of growing geopolitical contestations, bigger powers in the Asia-Pacific have resorted to this climate securitisation framing to prioritise defence and military capabilities over climate adaptation and mitigation strategies.

In the Pacific, this approach has, at times, created friction between the PIF island countries and their traditional partners, Australia and Aotearoa-New Zealand, with the latter being accused of using their humanitarian assistance and disaster response (HADR) responsibilities in the Pacific region to justify acquiring new warfighting capabilities. Regional experts have pointed out, however, that the Pacific Island Countries too have boosted their own defence and maritime surveillance capacities, through synergies with Australia and Aotearoa-New Zealand in the climate security space. Experts also indicated that the language of climate justice and indigenous rights have also sometimes been used at forums like the South Pacific Defence Minister's meeting as a means to securitise the region's multilateralism in opposition to China.

While there is concern that securitisation politicises the climate and development agendas, experts suggest that developing and small island states across the Asia-Pacific must explore opportunities to build climate coalitions[22] to push for approaches focused on local adaptation and mitigation practices.

Ecological Security and Multilateralism

States in the Asia-Pacific have traditionally participated in and trusted the global multilateral system and international laws to shape a climate governance system to prevent and mitigate dangerous climate change. Participants at the APLN Suva Dialogue, however, agreed that the current multilateral climate governance system centred on the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

20 Climate security emerges from a conflict-centric discourse, which assumes that climate change drives conflict and insecurity through resource scarcity, forced migration, displacement and impeding the ability of states to effectively defend their borders and national interests.

21 It was also noted that some Asian and Pacific Island leaders have been complicit in promoting this threat narrative, without necessarily realizing its negative consequences.

22 For instance, the Malé Declaration on the Human Dimension of Global Climate Change (2007). See: "Male Declaration on the Human Dimension of Global Climate Change," Asian Development Bank Law and Policy Reform Program, 14 November 2017, https://www.ciel.org/Publications/Male_Declaration_Nov07.pdf. Accessed on 7 October 2025.

(UNFCCC) and its core agreement, the Paris Agreement, is deeply flawed in terms of accountability and in its underlying colonial understanding of climate change. State parties have been meeting without realising tangible outcomes or concrete decisions.

Regional efforts in Asia-Pacific to address the climate crisis, too, are largely fragmented, with the exception of the PIF,[23] and to some extent these issues are discussed collectively within the ASEAN' senvironmental coordinating groups.[24] In South Asia, legal formal regional architectures[25] have established frameworks and action plans, but their implementation and effectiveness are often limited by geopolitical challenges and a lack of concrete, collective action. Some Asian countries are also big carbon-emitters[26] and therefore part of the problem.

Multilateral efforts beyond state-level cooperation, however, are trying to find solutions to some of the climate change issues. This includes transnational advocacy networks and research organisations working across the Asia-Pacific region.[27] In many indigenous cultures of Asia and the Pacific, much of the local community practices have focused on a harmonious interrelationship between humans and the Earth's ecosystems. These communities have spearheaded local adaptation and mitigation practises, in parts of Asia and the Pacific, that emphasise securing livelihoods, protecting biodiversity, and ensuring food and water security in order to pursue climate justice. This perspective, defined more contemporarily as 'ecological security', differs from a purely state-centric 'climate security' perspective toward ecological issues.

23 The Pacific Islands Forum's 2050 Strategy for Blue Pacific Continent called for "urgent, immediate and appropriate action" to address the threat. See: https://forumsec.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/PIFS-2050-Strategy-Blue-Pacific-Continent-WEB-5Aug2022-1.pdf

24 One expert explained that while ASEAN member countries share experiences related to climate change, they do not have collective and holistic climate mitigation targets or plans for the region. In terms of action, they issue a statement every year just before COP event.

25 For instance, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), or the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC).

26 This includes China, India, Japan and Indonesia among others. See: "CO2 Emissions," Global Energy Review 2025, The International Energy Agency, https://www.iea.org/reports/global-energy-review-2025/co2-emissions. Accessed on 10 November 2025.

27 See for instance the "Asia Pacific Adaptation Network (APAN)," https://www.unep.org/topics/climate-action/adaptation/asia-pacific-adaptation-network-apan, accessed on 10 November 2025 and "Asia Pacific Climate Change Forum," https://www.asiapacificadapt.net/forums/. Accessed on 10 November 2025.

Vanuatu's call for the criminalising of 'ecocide' under international law was noted by dialogue participants as a step forward in shifting the focus from humans to the environment.[28] In September 2024, Vanuatu, Fiji and Samoa made a historic bid at the UN General Assembly to include ecocide as a fifth crime under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and sought the legal opinion of the International Court of Justice on states breaching or failing to meet their obligations under the Paris Agreement.[29] The initiative opened-up critical space in climate litigation.

The Republic of Vanuatu's Special Envoy for Climate Change and the Environment, Ralph Regenvanu, discusses the country's proposal to make ecocide an international crime at an official side event to the 23rd Assembly of States Parties to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. Credit: Patricia Willocq photography.

28 "Vanuatu's Statement," Delivered by Hon. Ralph Regenvanu Vanuatu's Special Envoy on Climate Change and the Environment, International Criminal Court, 3 December 2024, https://asp.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/asp_docs/ASP23-GD-VUT-3-12-ENG.pdf. Accessed on 25 September 2025.

29 "Proposal – Independent Crime of Ecocide," Permanent Mission of The Republic of Vanuatu to the United Nations, 9 September 2024, https://ecojurisprudence.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Vanuatu-Proposal-Rome-Statute.pdf. Accessed on 25 September 2025.

Aid, Governance, and Climate Financing

Climate finance remains a major challenge in the climate adaptation and mitigation efforts. SIDS in the Asia-Pacific particularly depend on multilateral climate funds,[30] loans from development banks and donations from developed countries for climate-related early warning systems (EWS). Dialogue participants noted that the eligibility requirements of 'good governance' and 'organised information' create competition and make it challenging for SIDS in Asia and the Pacific to receive and utilise funding. The current parameters of Gross Domestic Product (GDP)/ Gross National Income (GNI) per capita to determine aid eligibility were specifically criticised, by some experts, as part of this colonial process of determining who is deserving of assistance. The proposed Multidimensional Vulnerability Index (MVI)[31] was discussed as a potential alternative to GNI/GDP for measuring a country's climate vulnerability and capacity to receive aid.

The United States' withdrawal from the Paris Agreement has reduced climate financing through the Green Climate Fund.[32] Aid cuts by other major donors like the United Kingdom and Germany to prioritise greater defence spending,[33] have further widened the climate finance gap, with adverse implications for global climate governance. Private donors and agencies now play a greater role in climate financing.[34] Dialogue participants noted that these agencies not only determine "who is worthy of assistance" but also dictate climate action of the recipient country. On the other hand, poor practices of collecting and representing data in some states result in wastage of aid and loss of investments.

In light of these challenges, experts suggest exploring non-traditional avenues for dialogue, data and diplomacy. Dialogue participants emphasised the need for like-minded countries in Asia and the Pacific to build climate alliances to share best information and governance-related practices and to build leverage in the global climate change governance regime in ways that can centre their climate risks and priorities.

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30 For instance, Early Warnings for All (EW4All) initiative, the Green Climate Fund (GCF), and the Climate Risk and Early Warning Systems (CREWS) initiative.

31 "Multidimensional Vulnerability Index," United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, https://www.un.org/ohrlls/mvi. Accessed on 7 October 2025.

32 Antony Sguazzin, "Top Climate Fund Asks Others to Step Up as US Pulls Billions," Bloomberg, 3 March 2025, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2025-03-03/biggest-climate-fund-urges-china-india-to-step-up-as-us-exits. Accessed on 7 October 2025.

33 "How will major aid cuts by the U.K. and Germany impact development? | Experts' Opinions," Development Aid, 21 October 2024, https://www.developmentaid.org/news-stream/post/186310/how-will-major-aid-cuts-by-the-u-k-and-germany-impact-development-experts-opinions. Accessed on 7 October 2024.

34 OECD, "Scaling Up the Mobilisation of Private Finance for Climate Action in Developing Countries," Green Finance and Investment, Paris: OECD Publishing, 2023, https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2023/11/scaling-up-the-mobilisation-of-private-finance-for-climate-action-in-developing-countries_4edb9782/17a88681-en.pdf. Accessed on 7 October 2025.

Decolonising the Climate Agenda

Dialogue participants agreed that the present climate change agenda is profoundly colonial in its framework, emphasising low carbon emissions over equitable consumption, energy transition over responsible extraction, and technology-led solutions over indigenous-led solutions. This is because the framework rests on Western-centric approaches that view the climate crisis predominantly as a threat to stability and states' security. Multilateral climate change conversation and negotiations do not genuinely reflect the priorities of the communities that are most impacted by climate change.

Pacific communities have proactively pushed back on narratives embedded in climate and nuclear colonialism. Initiatives like the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific Movement,[35] South Pacific Commission's Nature Conservation Programme,[36] and the SPNFZ, as well as concepts like Pacific relationality, Blue Pacific identity, and Ocean of Peace have been centred in ideas of decolonisation and the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Decolonising the climate agenda means dismantling and deconstructing the colonial power structures in climate governance, climate finance and climate policy. It also involves, at the same time, empowering indigenous voices and local communities, investing in resilient infrastructure, promoting climate education, and platforming a values-based climate discourse. Climate coalitions involving indigenous and small island communities from Asia and the Pacific can work together to create the space for replacing aid dependency with economic decolonisation and for indigenous knowledge that emphasises human and ecological security, and push for adaptation and mitigation strategies that reflect their needs.

NAVIGATING THE US-CHINA STRATEGIC COMPETITION

The impacts of an intensifying US-China power rivalry are acutely felt throughout the Asia-Pacific region. Participants at the APLN Suva Dialogue explored how states in Asia and the Pacific are navigating the US-China competition

35 "Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific Movement," Disarmament and Security Centre, https://www.disarmsecure.org/nuclear-free-aotearoa-nz-resources/nuclear-free-and-independent-pacific-movement. Accessed on 15 July 2025.

36 The "South Pacific Commission's Nature Conservation Programme" refers to the environmental conservation efforts that have been supported by the South Pacific Commission (SPC), now known as the Pacific Community, and its successor, the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP). See: https://www.unep.org/secretariat-pacific-regional-environment-programme-sprep-convention#:~:text=Its%20a%20five%2Dyear%20initiative,change%20approaches%20in%20the%20region.

and balancing differing preferences and priorities in the context of broader geopolitical dynamics.

Escalating Geopolitical Competition

The dialogue participants characterized the current situation as the beginning of a "new Cold War" that is likely to intensify, especially under a second Trump administration in the United States. The US-China rivalry in the Asia-Pacific is driven by competition for international leadership, economic dominance, and control over strategic natural resources and technology. Military tensions are rising, marked by an increased US defence budget and the prospect of more Chinese Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) tests overflying the Pacific. In a shift from the traditional narrative, China is now positioning itself as a defender of the rules-based world order, while portraying the United States as a disruptive force in the Asia-Pacific.

Both the United States and China are utilizing economic tools – specifically, the weaponization of trade – to coerce governments in the region. The United States under the Trump administration has issued heavy unilateral tariffs, violating World Trade Organization (WTO) laws and targeting not only adversarial powers like China and Russia, but also US allies and partners in the region, including Australia, South Korea, Singapore and India, and weak economies in South Asia and the Pacific Islands like Fiji, Nauru, and Vanuatu.[37] China can also be accused of weaponizing trade and tourism to pressure countries like Palau to cut diplomatic ties with Taiwan. Moreover, Taiwan's efforts to "derisk" its economy from China by trading more with the United States has inadvertently led to a high trade surplus, resulting in high US tariffs and an over-dependence on the US market. The loss of diplomatic allies remains a significant political issue for Taiwan.

Strategies for Regional Agency

Participants stressed that the Asia-Pacific states are not "pawns" in the big power geopolitical game but are actively seeking to be "players" by leveraging their sense of sovereignty and autonomy. There is scope for states, especially the Pacific Island Countries and Southeast Asian state, to explore shared risks and interests vis-à-vis the growing US-China geopolitical rivalry, and to forge coalitions with like-minded states across the regions to increase their leverage and play a more meaningful role in shaping the emerging international order. Pacific nations are pursuing five key strategies to proactively shape their regional environment. First, they are invoking global regimes and using international legal and political arrangements, such as the UNCLOS and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Regime, to advance their interests. Second, they are building cooperation around collective

37 Fiji was imposed a 32% tariff by the Trump administration. See: Prerna Priyanka, "Fiji hit with 32% US tariff under Trump's new trade policy," *Islands Business*, 3 April 2025, https://islandsbusiness.com/news-break/fiji-hit-with-32-us-tariff-under-trumps-new-trade-policy/.

risks and shared threats. Third, they are forging strategic alliances with key partners and actors in the region on issues like nuclear testing, climate change, and decolonialization. Fourth, Pacific leaders are driving the security conversation using home-grown narratives and mechanisms like the Boe Declaration, 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, and the Ocean of Peace declaration,[38] to assert a "friends to all, enemy to none" posture. And fifth, they are leveraging the Pacific's strategic location and vast oceanic resources as an asset to be managed carefully.

In Asia, ASEAN is increasingly pursuing mechanisms that do not rely on China or the United States to address regional issues. At the same time, they are actively pursuing cooperative and rule-based hedging strategies and diversified partnerships that do not require aligning with a singular power. A 2025 survey report called 'The State of Southeast Asia' conducted by the ASEAN Studies Centre at ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute[39] showed that over half of regional respondents prefer ASEAN not to side with either the United States or China, and to actively pursue neutrality, resilience, and diversified partnerships. Despite being seen as a slow and ineffective organisation in coping with issues like the South China Sea dispute and the Myanmar crisis, the survey recognized ASEAN as Southeast Asia's third most influential economic, political and strategic power, after China and the United States.

Collective Resilience and Security

Dialogue participants concluded that while geopolitical tensions create a sense of hopelessness, they also present an opportunity for enhanced agency. While diversification from the two great powers is necessary, it must be done in a sustainable manner to avoid perpetuating colonial patterns of resource extraction and environmental damage. Asian states and Pacific Island Countries need to share experiences and work collaboratively to mitigate the adverse effects of economic coercion. It is crucial for Pacific nations to strengthen their national governance in order to better manage external engagements, and these engagements must align with and promote to the interests of their own people. Regional experts have argued that Pacific nations must work with each other and with Asia-Pacific partners to manage security challenges and assert regional autonomy amidst great power competition.[40]

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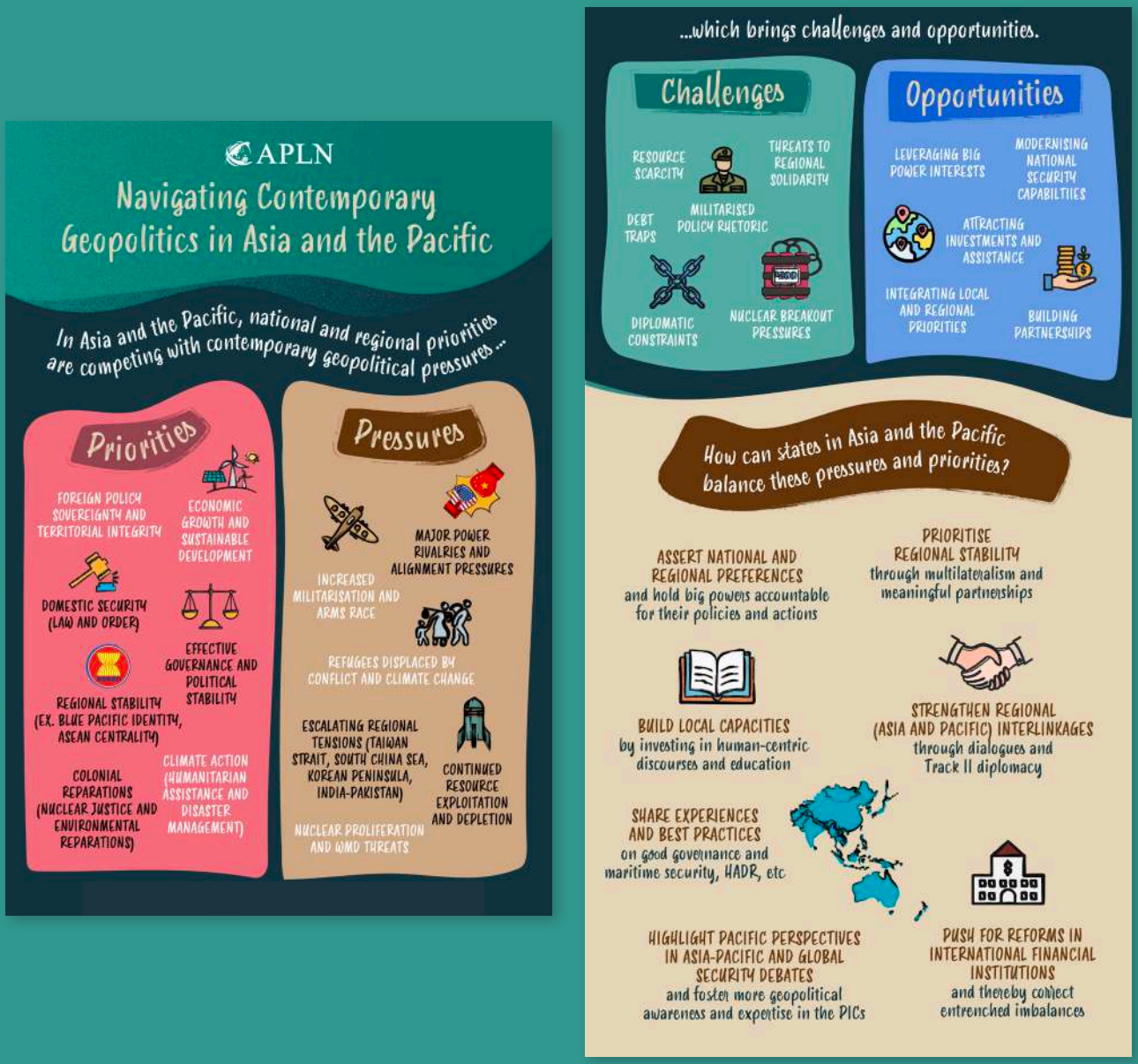
38 Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade, "PM Rabuka's Ministerial Statement – The Proposal of The Ocean Of Peace," Government of The Republic of Fiji, 5 August 2024, https://www.foreignaffairs.gov.fj/oceans-of-peace/. Accessed on 30 September 2025.

39 Sharon Seah et al, "The State of Southeast Asia 2025 Survey Report," ASEAN Studies Centre at the ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore: ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute, 2025, https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/The-State-of-SEA-2025-1.pdf. Accessed on 7 October 2025.

40 Sione Tekiteki and Joel Nilon, "West by Sea: Why the Pacific's Security Should Be Anchored in Indo-Pacific Partnerships," *The Diplomat*, 2 May 2025, https://thediplomat.com/2025/05/west-by-sea-why-the-pacifics-security-should-be-anchored-in-indo-pacific-partnerships/. Accessed on 10 October 2025.

Dialogue participants also stressed that regional states must move past the narrative of "not wanting to choose" sides to assert a positive narrative of "wanting to choose agency and freedom".



APLN Infographic on Navigating Contemporary Geopolitics in Asia and the Pacific. This infographic is based on a roundtable on Asia-Pacific Geopolitics and the US-China Strategic Competition, conducted by APLN in September 2024.

BROADENING THE ASIA-PACIFIC DIALOGUE

The conversations at the Suva Dialogue stressed that Asia-Pacific countries must avoid being constrained by binary geopolitical frameworks like those of big power rivalries. Dialogue participants explored the scope for Asia-Pacific dialogue and cooperation that go beyond strategies for managing strategic competition, and instead strengthen multilateral diplomacy and build shared security frameworks and sustainable capacities across the Asia-Pacific region.

Pre-requisites for Collaboration

Participants offered critical perspectives on the need to fix core internal problems within the subregions of the Asia-Pacific as a pre-requisite for broader Asia-Pacific collaboration. For instance, some Pacific Island countries have the highest global rates of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs),[41] which are exacerbated by climate change and dependence on imported food items. The region is also facing serious challenges of unemployment. Moreover, the region is losing valuable, experienced health professionals (like nurses) to countries like Australia, where aid funding is being received, highlighting a failure to retain national investment with the Pacific Island Countries. Experts also pointed out a severe lack of research and data to inform policy decisions. They attribute these problems to poor leadership, a lack of research, and dysfunctional governance structures in the Pacific Islands, a problem that cannot be fixed alone by foreign investments. Regional experts highlighted that while much can be gained from Asia-Pacific collaboration, it will be "wasted" if the fundamental, gaping holes in Pacific leadership, governance, and research are not first fixed.

Dialogue participants debated whether contrasts in governance systems and development models across the Asia-Pacific were an obstacle to meaningful collaboration. Both Asia and the Pacific have diverse government systems – from democracies to monarchies, communist regimes, military dictatorships, and quasi governments.[42] Similarly, development models in Asia range from socialist and state-sponsored capitalist models to hyper-industrialisation and market-oriented models. The Pacific, by contrast, focuses on natural resources, tourism, and a lot of aid and remittances.

41 "Addressing noncommunicable diseases in the Pacific islands," World Health Organization, https://www.who.int/westernpacific/activities/addressing-ncds-in-the-pacific. Accessed on 10 October 2025.

42 These are semi-autonomous governments, in power sharing arrangements with their metropole, and non-self-governing territories, like New Caledonia, French Polynesia and American Samoa, which reflect the ongoing colonial structures in the Pacific.

Despite many contrasts within ASEAN and PIF, their member states have managed to find common values and principles to facilitate cooperation. The need for ASEAN to issue multiple statements on critical geopolitical events (like the conflict in West Asia[43]) demonstrates the importance of finding common ground. Participants agreed that acknowledging disagreements can help build meaningful consensus. Experts suggested that Asia-Pacific cooperation should focus on "low-hanging areas" and shared challenges to facilitate action, without getting bogged down in differences over governance methods.

ASEAN-PIF Engagement

Dialogue participants agreed that ASEAN and the PIF have the best potential for collaboration in the Asia-Pacific. A major step was the 2023 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Cooperation with the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), which provides an institutional foundation for collaboration. Shared challenges and areas for collaboration reflected in the MOU, include maritime security and ocean governance, regional connectivity, sustainable development and economic cooperation (like technology transfer, renewable energy), climate change and disaster resilience, humanitarian assistance, sustainable development and economic cooperation.

ASEAN and the PIF have the best potential for collaboration in the Asia-Pacific. A major step was the 2023 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Cooperation with the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), which provides an institutional foundation for collaboration

Southeast Asia's growing interest in the Pacific Islands is driven by shared strategic concerns and economic opportunities in this region. Pacific leaders are also actively seeking observer or dialogue status within ASEAN. Both regions face serious climate-vulnerabilities and disaster-risks, which incentivises co-development of climate adaptation policies, early warning systems, and joint strategies to access to global climate financing. ASEAN's growing digital and green sectors could offer support in technology transfer, renewable energy deployment, and development of small and medium enterprises in the Pacific Island Countries. Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing is identified as a huge problem in both Southeast Asia and the Pacific.

43 This refers to the Israel-Palestine/Gaza conflict.

This presents a concrete space for cooperation between the two regions.[44] Cooperation in maritime security could also include regional coordination on maritime domain awareness. In the domain of public health, ASEAN and PIF can also collaborate on aligning health protocols, vaccine distribution and public health workforce development.

To achieve tangible outcomes, states will need to align diverse priorities and mobilise large amounts of financial and technical resources. Dialogue participants recommended promoting a shared Asia-Pacific regional vision rooted in resilience and sustainability and exploring a joint capacity building fund that is outcome-orientated and regionally governed. They also recommended undertaking regular dialogues and a plan of action focused on shared experiences, critiques of existing security forums, and the imperative of human development. The success of the ASEAN-PIF MoU ultimately hinges on both ASEAN asserting its agency and the Pacific Islands resolving critical internal governance and leadership crises. States like Indonesia could lead the way for championing such collaboration.

Moving Forward: Finding Common Ground

Dialogue participants offered further suggestions for more effective Asia-Pacific dialogue and engagement. There is a need for greater mutual "exposure" between leaders and scholars based in Asia and the Pacific. The need for Asian leaders and thinkers to travel to the Pacific, was particularly emphasised, to experience the Pacific's struggles and the community-based reality firsthand, and vice versa. A research-based effort is needed to explicitly identify areas of divergence and tension between Asia and the Pacific, such as on the value of democracy and geopolitical partners, to build meaningful consensus.

There is a shared experience of colonialism that shapes how states in Asia and the Pacific perceive security and cooperation. Therefore, ongoing discussions need to continuously critique and push back against Western-imposed concepts like "traditional" and "non-traditional" security, which are seen as colonial language. Rejecting the language of colonisers that centres on dominance and competition, reclaiming local terms of reference and using a humanised and decolonised approach can contribute to the "betterment of humanity".

44 Such cooperation currently takes place, albeit to a limited extent, through the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, (WCPFC) a treaty-based organisation established to conserve and manage tuna and other highly migratory fish stocks across the western and central areas of the Pacific. See: http://wcpfc.int/about/who-we-are. Accessed on 10 October 2025. Indonesia and the Philippines are full members of the WCPFC. See: "Indonesia Enters The Western And Central Pacific Fisheries Commission As A Member," World Wildlife Foundation-Indonesia, 24 October 2013, http://www.wwf.id/en/blog/indonesia-enters-western-and-central-pacific-fisheries-commission-member#:~:text=WWF%20Indonesia%20highly%20appreciate%20Indonesia%20government's%20bold,General%2C%20Ministry%20of%20Marine%20Affairs%20and%20Fisheries. Accessed on 10 October 2025.

Asia-Pacific cooperation should happen not only at state-level, but also at the non-state level, involving civil society, youth, academia, and the private sector, especially where high-level government structures are dysfunctional. Asia, and particularly ASEAN, can help the Pacific to build capacity in research and data to inform policy and cut through geopolitical "noise". Capacity building must, however, work both ways, where states in Asia can also learn the Pacific's indigenous concepts such as relationality, ecological stewardship, and traditional forms of governance.

An Asia-Pacific dialogue must be reflexive and proactive, acknowledging that norms and values are contested, and that progress can be made by working around these contestations rather than expecting rigid systems.

CONCLUSION

APLN has worked to bridge a dialogue gap between the Pacific Island countries and Asian states on emerging security challenges in the Asia-Pacific. The Suva Dialogue aimed to identify how security perceptions and strategic developments in the different subregions affect the geopolitical landscape of the wider Asia-Pacific region. It also aimed to explore opportunities and scope for collaboration between Asian and Pacific Island countries for addressing shared security threats, including escalating geopolitical competition, growing militarisation, contemporary nuclear dangers, climate change, among other risks. Central to this dialogue has been APLN's efforts of highlighting voices from the Pacific Islands and emphasizing their agency and perspectives in global security conversations.

Discussions at the APLN virtual roundtables and Suva Dialogue revealed that there exists wide variations in the strategic perceptions, security priorities, and historical experiences of states across the four subregions in the Asia-Pacific. This makes it very challenging to build a shared understanding of geopolitical risks and security threats, and to devise collective strategies to address them. Dialogue participants emphasised, however, that potential synergies for collaboration can be built by learning from each other's experiences. Geopolitical tensions, while creating a sense of hopelessness, also present an opportunity for enhanced agency. Asia-Pacific states must move beyond maintaining non-partisan positions to asserting a positive narrative of "wanting to choose agency and freedom".

Dialogue participants further emphasized that Asia-Pacific countries should prioritize cooperation and shared security frameworks over being constrained by binary geopolitical rivalries. A major prerequisite for successful collaboration is the need to fix core internal problems of poor leadership, dysfunctional governance, and a severe lack of research and data, faced especially by several Pacific Island countries. Despite diverse governance systems and development models across Asia and the Pacific, participants agreed that meaningful consensus can be built

by focusing on shared challenges, particularly in “low-hanging areas” such as public health and climate crisis. Dialogue participants stressed the need for like-minded countries from Asia and the Pacific Islands to form climate alliances to share best practices and build leverage in global climate governance, centring their risks and priorities.

There are particularly valuable lessons offered by states in the Pacific Islands burdened by nuclear use and testing legacies. One potential collaboration in this area, as identified at the APLN Suva Dialogue, is to undertake comparative studies of the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free-Zone and South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone to strengthen both zones. Other collaborative efforts could include common education programs linking nuclear, colonial, and environmental history, and using disarmament education as a meaningful scope for joint effort. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) offers an opportunity for solidarity and political intervention on disarmament.

The APLN Suva Dialogue also concluded that greater collaboration between the ASEAN and the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) holds the best potential, formalized by a 2023 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which identifies shared issues like climate vulnerability, maritime security (especially Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing), and sustainable development as key areas for joint action. Ultimately, the success of this collaboration hinges on both ASEAN asserting its agency and the Pacific Islands resolving their internal crises.

Finally, dialogue participants offered several suggestions for more effective Asia-Pacific dialogue and engagement, focusing on fostering mutual understanding and asserting indigenous perspectives. This includes building avenues for cooperation not only at the state level but also at the non-state and civil society levels, promoting greater mutual “exposure” between leaders and scholars in Asia and the Pacific and undertaking research-based efforts to explicitly identify areas of divergence and tension between the subregions and with the objective of building a meaningful consensus for a peaceful and secure Asia-Pacific regional security order.

About APLN

The Asia-Pacific Leadership Network (APLN) is a Seoul-based organisation and network of political, military, and 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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