

Nuclear arms wake-up call

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HO CHI MINH CITY – Nuclear weapons pose an existential threat to humanity that is unmatched by any other contemporary threat in magnitude, gravity and urgency.

Consider the indicators of the high policy salience of the nuclear weapons challenge: the new START Treaty between Russia and the United States, President Barack Obama's speech in Berlin in June 2013, North Korea's third nuclear test in February 2013, tightening sanctions on Iran to compel it to abandon a suspected nuclear weaponization path, unresolved tensions between India and Pakistan, growing nuclear arsenals of China, India and Pakistan, and the fear of an act of nuclear terrorism that lies behind the series of past and forthcoming nuclear security summits.

The Asia-Pacific Leadership Network on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (APLN: aplن.anu.edu.au) is a group of about 40 people from 14 countries in Asia and the Pacific dedicated to halting then reversing the nuclear weapons drift. While most are former heads of government, Cabinet ministers, heads of departments and military forces, others are key opinion shapers and movers from the media, universities and civil society.

The group met most recently in Ho Chi Minh City and issued a declaration on Oct. 13 calling on present world leaders to act now to resolve the problem of nuclear weapons because "the risks associated with the possession of nuclear weapons in today's world far outweigh any deterrent utility they may have had in the past or continue to have."

The Ho Chi Minh City Declaration noted that Asia and the Pacific is the only region in the world where the number of nuclear weapons is growing with expanding arsenals in China, India and Pakistan and the growing sophistication of their weapons, delivery systems and platforms and doctrines of use.

Nuclear policymaking in Asia, as elsewhere, is still trapped in the Cold War habits of mind, in which too much reliance is placed upon dubious arguments about the utility of nuclear deterrence and not enough on the risks of nuclear weapons.

In the short and medium term, the APLN called for freezing and reducing existing nuclear weapon stockpiles, minimizing their deployment and amending nuclear doctrine to dramatically reduce reliance on them. In the longer term, they called for overcoming the technical, geopolitical and psychological barriers to the complete elimination of nuclear weapons. They urged the United States to speed up the ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty while also pressing China, India and Pakistan not to wait upon U.S. Senate ratification before joining the CTBT.

Moscow and Washington are encouraged to negotiate a follow-on agreement to New START that will move beyond reduction in the number of deployed strategic weapons, to major reductions in the number of all nuclear weapons in their respective stockpiles; to reduce significantly the number of nuclear weapons deployed with launch-on-warning alert status; and to commit to the principle of "No First Use" in their respective nuclear doctrines.

Washington was urged also to address the concerns of Russia and China about the potentially

destabilizing impact of its Ballistic Missile Defense program, and the further development of conventional capability, particularly Conventional Prompt Global Strike.

China, India and Pakistan are being asked not to increase their nuclear weapons numbers from their present relatively low levels and to enter into both bilateral (China-India, Pakistan-India) and trilateral strategic dialogues.

In addition, India and Pakistan are both asked to refrain from developing new nuclear weapon systems, including battlefield nuclear weapons, new missile delivery systems and ballistic missile defense.

Individually China is encouraged to maintain a “No First Use” nuclear posture and to take all possible steps to persuade North Korea to dismantle its nuclear weapons facilities and capability.

India is asked to adopt a “No First Use” posture without qualification (it presently reserves the right to use nuclear weapons if attacked by biological or chemical weapons). Pakistan is urged to cooperate in the commencement of serious formal negotiations on a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty, designed to halt further production of fissile material for weapons purposes, and to embrace the “No First Use” principle.

North Korea is urged to immediately freeze the production and testing of fissile material, nuclear weapons and delivery systems; to enter into serious negotiations, and complete them expeditiously, to dismantle its nuclear weapons capability, in the context of achieving the permanent denuclearization of, and sustainable peace on, the Korean Peninsula; and to rejoin the NPT as a nonnuclear weapon state.

U.S. allies like Australia, Japan and South Korea are asked to accept a significantly reduced role for nuclear weapons in their security protection, in particular by accepting and encouraging moves by the U.S. toward embracing the principle of “No First Use” in its nuclear doctrine.

In addition, in the first instance, they should support a U.S. declaration that the sole purpose of its nuclear weapons is, so long as nuclear weapons exist, to deter their use by others.

The APLN emphasized that movement toward disarmament should not be held hostage to improvement in the overall geopolitical situation, globally or within our region. The two are complementary and mutually reinforcing, and should properly be pursued in parallel.

Finally APLN members agreed that an Asia-Pacific Nuclear Energy Community could strengthen nuclear energy governance in the region, across all three crucial areas of safeguards, safety and security. However, many complex and sensitive issues would need further study by governments, industry and civil society before the idea can bear fruit.

Accordingly individual and state champions are needed to place the proposal on the agenda of regional governments through an existing regional dialogue forum. ASEAN seems likely to be the forum in which there is the greatest commonality of interest in the matters that might be dealt with by a nuclear energy community.

Member states should encourage ASEAN to initiate a study on the pros and cons of the community concept, including the possibility of such a community extending in due course beyond ASEAN to its various dialogue partners.

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http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2013/10/21/commentary/nuclear-arms-wake-up-call/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+japantimes+%28The+Japan+Times%3A+All+Stories%29#.Umhwahao9Bt

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