

## **Key Findings**

### **Ninth Meeting of the CSCAP Study Group on Nonproliferation and Disarmament in the Asia Pacific Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, July 27-28, 2022**

USCSCAP and CSCAP Vietnam, with support from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, co-chaired the ninth meeting of the CSCAP Study Group on Nonproliferation and Disarmament (NPD). The meeting took place in Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam on July 27-28, 2022. Approximately 30 scholars and officials, including members of Pacific Forum's Asia-Pacific Affairs Program, all in their private capacity. The off-the-record discussions focused on recent developments on nonproliferation, disarmament, and nuclear security; regional developments and arms control in Asia; regional security architecture in Asia; nonproliferation regime developments; nuclear energy and small modular reactors; and strategic trade controls. Key findings from this meeting include:

The attack on Ukraine has reinforced concerns about the role nuclear weapons play in conflict. For some, Ukraine's lack of nuclear weapons made it vulnerable to an attack from a nuclear weapon possessing state and has reinforced the perceived deterrent value of nuclear weapons. There was agreement that Russia's threat of a nuclear response led to caution among NATO countries in their support for Ukraine. Similarly, many argued that Russia was deterred by a NATO response.

The Ukraine war and China's apparent willingness to press on with an ambitious build-up of its nuclear arsenal have increased the potential for proliferation. Japanese strategists are now discussing the benefits of nuclear sharing arrangements with the United States. Some in South Korea have called more forcefully for the return of US nuclear weapons to the Korean Peninsula or an independent nuclear weapon capability. Many think that Russian actions in Ukraine could lead North Korea and Iran to press ahead with their indigenous nuclear programs.

The combination of the Covid-19 pandemic and the Ukraine war has led to a lack of progress on multilateral arms control and disarmament agreements. The pandemic has delayed several review conferences and the war has reinforced the lack of trust among countries, leading to a significant increase in defense spending (and a setback for disarmament efforts).

The current imbalance between the United States and Chinese military capabilities makes it difficult to initiate an arms control dialogue in Asia, though some (cautiously) identified crisis management as a potential starting point to jumpstart bilateral discussions. Meanwhile, it remains unclear how new advanced weapon technology will impact existing arms control regimes.

There is an urgent need for an escalation control dialogue in Asia, especially in the context of the increased competition between the United States and China. Key elements of this dialogue should include efforts to develop a shared understanding of strategic stability, the potential benefits associated with acknowledging US-China mutual vulnerability, the value of crisis communication, the introduction of risk reduction measures (notably on nuclear power plants), and the control of proliferation of missiles and intermediate range nuclear weapons. Managing missiles was identified as a potential area of focus for CSCAP, including through a dedicated expert group.

Participants acknowledged the growth of mini-lateral mechanisms such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue and Australia-UK-US (AUKUS) in Asia. While recognizing the value of ASEAN centrality, some argued that these mechanisms are inclusive and provide public goods. Others questioned their value and saw them as too focused on countering Chinese influence.

A main concern with AUKUS is the potential impact the introduction of nuclear submarines in Australia will have on nuclear proliferation. This concern is partly driven by the lack of clarity about the utilization of the submarines, the potential use of highly enriched uranium for propulsion, and misinformation regarding the potential for arming them with nuclear weapons.

The first meeting of states parties of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) was held in June 2022. While there was strong support by the 86 states that have signed the Treaty as expressed by the Vienna Declaration at the end of the meeting, the Nuclear Weapon States (NWS) and those under the US nuclear umbrella continue to reject the Treaty. Still, some analysts argue that the TPNW will become the driving force for the development of disarmament norms.

While expectations are low that the August 2022 Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference will be a success, the collapse of the NPT is unlikely because it continues to serve the interests of many states. Another reason is that there has been some progress on the establishment of Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in the Middle East. Many, however, said the lack of leadership, notably from the United States, was a major problem.

The potential role of small modular reactors and floating nuclear power plants have captured the imagination of proponents of nuclear energy as a potential solution for decarbonizing electricity production and providing a clean source of base load energy, including to remote and isolated regions. While there is still uncertainty about the technology, the development of these capabilities has raised concerns about the capacity of existing nuclear safety, safeguards, and security standards for regulating their use. Politics and economic considerations will play an important role in the deployment of these reactors, but nuclear governance mechanisms should be put in place before their initial deployment. Right now, the nuclear governance community is behind the curve.

Implementing strategic trade controls is complicated. While some states struggle with implementing the basic controls to prevent the spread of WMD-related materials and technologies to non-state actors associated with UNSCR 1540, others often use export control mechanisms to implement sanctions and limit the exchange of goods and technologies as a form of economic punishment between states. Such dynamics create confusion about the difference between sanctions enforcement and the development of a strategic trade control management system.

There was agreement that convening the CSCAP NPD Study Group in person, a first since the Covid-19 pandemic began, was immensely useful and necessary to making progress on the issues at hand. Several participants stressed that *all* CSCAP Member Committees should send representatives to the Study Group so that discussions are inclusive and solving problems benefits every regional state.

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