

Program Summary: Roundtable on Nuclear Issues in South Asia

Hosted by International Student/Young Pugwash (ISYP) on Tuesday, 30 August 2022

Convenors: Dr. [Tanvi Kulkarni](#), [Talia Weiss](#), [Laura Rose O'Connor](#), with institutional guidance from Dr. [Rabia Akhtar](#) and [Ruheen Neog](#)

Introduction

On August 30th, 2022, International Student/Young Pugwash convened a two-hour virtual roundtable among early- and mid-career professionals on nuclear weapons issues in South Asia. The program was hosted in partnership with the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS), New Delhi and the Centre for Security, Strategy and Policy Research (CSSPR) at the University of Lahore. The roundtable took stock of participants' perspectives on contemporary nuclear issues in South Asia, laying groundwork for future ISYP dialogues. **Topics discussed during include the status of nuclear threats in South Asia, strategies to rejuvenate productive nuclear dialogue in the region, and the interplay of nuclear issues with emerging technologies and the climate crisis.**

The roundtable opened with welcome remarks by Laura O'Connor, followed by presentations on lessons from the Russia-Ukraine war regarding nuclear risks and Nepal's stand in the current non-proliferation regime. After these presentations, participants were assigned to breakout rooms for moderated discussions. The program concluded with a plenary discussion led by Dr. Tanvi Kulkarni.

Observations

- Participants reiterated that **initiatives like this ISYP roundtable are crucial for understanding “what the other side is thinking,”** influencing the narrative on nuclear issues in South Asia and ultimately reducing nuclear risks.
- **Participants tended to agree that nuclear threats are increasing in South Asia.**
- In addition, participants agreed that rejuvenating nuclear dialogues requires discussion of threats beyond the traditional nuclear dynamics. **Cyber capabilities and AI applications received the most attention. The intersection of climate change and nuclear issues also gained traction throughout the discussion.**
- Participants raised the following topics and expressed interest in discussing them further:
 - The NPT and TPNW's roles in South Asia. Participants also expressed interest in thinking broadly/creatively about strategies to reduce nuclear risk.
 - China's relevance to nuclear politics in South Asia.
 - The socio-economic implications of channeling resources into nuclear modernisation.
 - The challenge of translating outcomes of track II dialogues into political change; how to also stimulate (backchannel) dialogue at the military/political level.

- The need for countries (i.e., their decision makers) in the region to have a more nuanced understanding of each other's domestic contexts, and how to achieve this.
- The value of engaging individuals from non-nuclear states in South Asia, as well as experts in environmental issues, in these discussions.

The Path Forward

- **International Student-Young Pugwash (ISYP) seeks to continue dialogue work in South Asia in 2022-23, including a possible in-person dialogue in 2023.** We look forward to further engaging with IPCS and CSSPR and hope to build additional regional partnerships (for example, with organizations in Nepal and Bangladesh).
- ISYP will work to expand our network in Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh.
- ISYP aims to explore additional online engagement opportunities, such as co-authoring papers with outlets in South Asia.