

Report of the 8th International Student/Young Pugwash (ISYP) Conference

This report summarizes the proceedings and discussions of the 8th International Student/Young Pugwash (ISYP) conference, “Conflict and Cooperation – The Global Impact of National and Regional Security Issues,” held in Istanbul, Turkey from October 30 to 31, 2013. The conference included 25 participants from 18 countries, who presented papers on a diverse set of global security issues including nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, regional dynamics in the Middle East and Asia, the role of norms, non-state actors and institutions in the delegitimization of nuclear weapons and other issues central to the mission of the Pugwash Conferences. Some of the papers will be prepared for possible publication in the ISYP Journal at: www.scienceandworldaffairs.org.

The following is a summary of the themes and topics covered in the conference. ISYP is grateful for the opportunity to share our thoughts with the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs. It is our hope that this report and the activities of ISYP will enrich the ideas and actions of the entire Pugwash community.

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Promoting disarmament and delegitimizing nuclear weapons

Participants discussed prospects for nuclear disarmament and ongoing efforts to establish new norms to delegitimize nuclear weapons in international relations. In his Berlin address, US President Barack Obama has repeated his call for deeper reciprocal reductions in the strategic nuclear arsenals of the United States and the Russian Federation, but he continues to face a “two-front battle” with both Russia and the domestic opposition within the US Congress. While each option for achieving this goal raises challenges, a unilateral commitment to further cuts by the US may provide the most feasible way to sustain momentum towards nuclear disarmament.

On the global level, concerned state and non-state actors are working to establish new norms and models for nuclear weapons governance. A growing number of nations are supporting a humanitarian approach to disarmament as defined by the newly formed Humanitarian Initiative of the NPT, creating the potential for a substantial shift in how disarmament is discussed and achieved. A crucial element for delegitimizing nuclear weapons will be to recognize the incompatibility of the paradigms of deterrence and disarmament. Participants also discussed the potential for countries such as Japan to demonstrate that nuclear weapons are not necessary for a state to play an important role in global affairs.

Understanding why states seek nuclear weapons

The establishment of new norms requires an understanding of why certain states seek nuclear weapons. Analysts thus far have reached conflicting conclusions regarding the motivating factors behind the decisions of states to develop and acquire nuclear weapons. Addressing this question will require more consistency in the applied analytical parameters, as well as critical reflection on how such studies are framed and conducted.

Empirical cases remain at the core of tackling this question. Discussions focused on the case studies of Turkish and Saudi perspectives on the role of nuclear weapons. Turkey, while not a nuclear weapon state (NWS) as defined by the NPT, hosts US tactical nuclear weapons on its territory not only to address immediate security concerns, but also to cement its alliance with NATO and the US. In contrast, within the context of the shifting US role in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia may view pursuing a future nuclear weapons capability as a means to ease its security concerns, regardless of possible negative reactions from the US. The complexity of these motivations demonstrates the difficulty of reducing or delegitimizing the role of nuclear weapons in international relations.

Mapping the dynamics of domestic and regional instability

A crucial step in analysing the complexity of geopolitical instability is untangling and understanding the webs of relationships between key domestic and international players. In South Asia, the US-India bilateral nuclear deal seems to aggravate tensions between the Pakistani and the Chinese governments vis-a-vis India. This nuclear accord is seen by many as another example of double standards – recognizing and legitimizing the nuclear status of India while maintaining a critical stance against Pakistan.

¹ This document summarizes the conference presentations and discussions but its content is the sole responsibility of the rapporteurs.

In the Middle East, the domestic instability in Egypt, a maze of incongruous conflicts and alliances between domestic, regional and international factions underlies the rapid succession of changes in political leadership since the so called “Arab Spring” started.

As a key regional actor, Turkey has sought to position itself as a “bridge” or “hub” to bring together competing interests in the Middle East, promote stability and provide a political model for the region. Despite the attending challenges and rivalry, Turkey has strengthened its relationship with Iran through political and economic engagements, while also maintaining its strong ties with the North Atlantic Alliance and the US. Despite its influence, Turkey has yet to fully realize its aspirations and potential for regional leadership which is challenged by many states in the Middle East.

Overcoming mutual mistrust

Although Turkey’s bid for regional leadership has its shortcomings, its continued engagement with both the US and Iran is an important component for overcoming mutual mistrust and constitute a “bridge” between the two sides. The “securitization” of Iran’s nuclear program, whereby international negotiations are removed from the context of diplomacy to one of adversarial confrontation, has aggravated tensions rather than establishing the conditions for compromise. In an era of free trade, economic engagement with Iran through, for example, its inclusion in the WTO framework could lead to a turning point in Iran-US relations. However, participants also recognized the limitations of economic engagement, especially when these measures take place in a vacuum and are not followed by additional measures on the political level. This argument was based on examining the weaknesses of South Korea’s effort to engage North Korea by jointly establishing the Kaesong Industrial Complex. The closure of the Complex earlier this year by North Korea reflected the fact that economic considerations remain but one of many elements to be addressed in overcoming mistrust.

Participants discussed potential confidence-building measures that could address specific technical aspects of mistrust between conflicting parties in the nuclear sphere. In the 2012 US National Academy of Sciences report, experts assessed the implications of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) ratification for US national security, providing recommendations that cooperative confidence-building measures could improve the ability to assure that states are not testing nuclear weapons in violation of the CTBT. Furthermore, the application of “open source” principles to the use and sharing of software for verifying warhead dismantlement and compliance with international safeguard commitments could increase transparency and mutual trust between states and foster collaboration on the development of technical solutions to disarmament.

Addressing weaknesses in the disarmament and non-proliferation regime

Successful engagement between nuclear “haves” and “have-nots” will require changes in the discourse of international discussions. The UN Conference on Disarmament has been in deadlock for the past 17 years, unable to reach an agreement on whether and how a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty (FMCT) should place a prohibition on the future production of highly-enriched uranium and plutonium stockpiles. Besides the frozen negotiations on the FMCT, the CTBT has also yet to enter into force, and the “domino” theory of successive ratification overlooks the ways in which the CTBT entrenches the dominant global position of the US. Altogether, in their pursuit of stability, current arms control and disarmament efforts have not sufficiently addressed the issues of justice, raised by many non-nuclear weapon states, and risk perpetuating existing inequalities inherent in the current international structure.

The global nuclear non-proliferation regime continues to face challenges in managing the tension between its two main pillars, preventing nuclear weapons proliferation and respecting the rights of member states to access peaceful nuclear technology. The US-India nuclear cooperation agreement has raised questions over the continued viability of the NPT, but at the same time may provide a model for supplementing the NPT with arrangements that address the presence of nuclear weapon possessor states outside of the NPT framework.

Enhancing the role of non-state actors and Track II diplomacy

The Pugwash Conferences are a leading example of endeavours among both state and non-state actors to resolve issues relating to arms control and to reduce the threat of war across the world by engaging a second track of unofficial experts. In Africa, efforts continue among academics and concerned citizens to create regional hubs to promote disarmament and non-proliferation, particularly in the build-up to the 2015 NPT Review Conference. The role of organizations such as the Pugwash Conferences could be enhanced by engaging experts from a wider range of technical areas, including actors of the private sector who play a front-line role in bringing into effect non-proliferation policies such as the implementation of export control regulations and sanctions. The role and nature of Track II diplomacy remain under-examined topics, and further analysis and refinement of the effectiveness of Track II efforts is welcome and will help to promote the mission of Pugwash.