



Program Summary: Roundtable on the Cyber-Nuclear Nexus in South Asia
Hosted by International Student/Young Pugwash (ISYP) on 24 February 2023

Convenors: [Laura Rose O'Connor](#), Dr. [Tanvi Kulkarni](#), with institutional guidance from Ruhee Neog, Muneer Ahmed, Rabia Akhter, Prerana Priyadarsh, Syed Ali Zia Jaffery, and Pramod Jaiswal

Introduction

Until the early 2010s, International Student/Young Pugwash (ISYP) was active in South Asia via ongoing multitrack dialogue programming. This programming was re-launched by ISYP in August of 2022, when we held our first South Asia Nuclear Roundtable, hosted in partnership with the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS), New Delhi and the Centre for Security, Strategy and Policy Research (CSSPR). This two-hour roundtable sought to take stock of the nuclear dialogue landscape in South Asia, and determined a pressing interest in continuing dialogue between early- and mid-career scholars in the region, with particular interest in exploring the cyber-nuclear nexus and the climate-nuclear nexus.

On February 24th, 2023, ISYP, in partnership with IPCS, CSSPR, and the Nepal Institute for International Cooperation and Engagement (NIICE), held our second roundtable on the cyber-nuclear nexus. This roundtable included three speaker presentations, a scenario-building exercise, and breakout room discussion, with the aim of exploring whether or not threats are perceived at the intersection of cyber and nuclear politics in South Asia, where these concerns and priorities may lie, and what the future may hold for this intersection.

Participants

Thirty-five early-to-mid career individuals participated in this roundtable, many of whom had attended our first roundtable, and many of whom heard of our programming through the post-roundtable reporting from 2022. Indian and Pakistani participation were relatively even, and participation from Nepali and Bangladeshi colleagues has increased since our first roundtable, addressing this key objective. We hope to further engage Sri Lankan colleagues and continue to increase our regional engagement.

Roundtable Agenda

The roundtable opened with welcome remarks and introduction by Laura O'Connor. This was followed by short presentations on:

- Dr Jayadev Parida - Security Implications of the Intersection of Cyber and Nuclear Capabilities
- Nahian Reza - Cyber Diplomacy and Nuclear Dialogue in South Asia
- Palwasha Khan - Building a Bilateral Cooperative Framework for Cybersecurity

Following these presentations, a brief discussion was held, meditating on the following questions:

- Which emergent technologies do you think are most significant and consequential to the future of conflict in South Asia?
- Is there a new technology arms race in South Asia?
- In what way, according to you, can cyber and other emergent technologies most impact deterrence stability, and regional stability in South Asia, especially in the context of nuclear weapons in the region?
- Would these (and if yes how) technologies and their interactions increase or decrease miscalculations in conflict? What should be done, in response?
- What frameworks are/need to be in place in the region to address the consequences and security impacts of emergent technologies, including cyber?

Participants were then assigned to breakout rooms to discuss our scenario-building exercise and additional thoughts. The five rooms were moderated by individuals from ISYP, IPCS, CSSPR, and NIICE. The exercise imagined a scenario wherein a series of cyber-nuclear threats have emerged and a regional dialogue is convened, and participants are asked to draft a prioritized agenda for the summit and discuss the threats at hand.

The program then held a plenary discussion led by Dr. Tanvi Kulkarni, with closing remarks from Pramod Jaiswal, Rabia Akhter, and Ruhee Neog.

Observations

- Participants reiterated ongoing support for the activities of ISYP and a growing sense of comradery within the roundtable group(s).
- Participants stated that South Asia is in the process of a “technological catch-up” and therefore many of the imagined cyber-nuclear threats are more far-off than they may be in other regions. That being said, uncertainty was acknowledged, as was the possibility of future threats being posed.
- Participants felt that extra-regional involvement could be the most alarming scenario, and explored how regional states may respond to such a situation.
- Participants observed that in South Asia, incidents like Fukushima have not heavily entered public discourse, and that cyber threats are largely the topic of public discourse.
- The threat and question of terrorism in South Asia remains ongoing.
- Consensus-building within South Asia is additionally very difficult, and the question of attribution and the “black box of information” was brought forward.
- Participants largely agreed that there is a lack of cyber literacy among leaders and decision-makers, and that decisions are largely reactionary, with little foresight or risk assessment. There is opacity within the cyber-nuclear space in South Asia.
- Participants requested additional discussion time to further hash out observations, questions, and topics for further exploration, which will be taken into account for future agenda.

The Path Forward

- **International Student-Young Pugwash (ISYP) seeks to continue dialogue work in South Asia in 2023, including a climate-nuclear roundtable and a hopeful in-person dialogue.** Our prospects of continuing institutional ties with IPCS and CSSPR remains strong. We hope to build other regional partnerships (for example, with organizations in Bangladesh and Nepal).
- ISYP hopes to expand our participant network. We also hope to engage more nuclear scholars in Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh.
- ISYP aims to explore additional online engagement opportunities, such as co-authoring papers with outlets in South Asia who align with our work.