

## EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium

Promoting the European network of independent non-proliferation and disarmament think tanks

E-newsletter of the European Network of Independent Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Think Tanks

### NUCLEAR DETERRENCE IN INDIA-PAKISTAN CRISIS MANAGEMENT DYNAMICS: AN INTERVIEW WITH CHIARA CERVASIO – BASIC



**Chiara Cervasio** is a Policy Fellow and Programme Manager of the Programme on Nuclear Responsibilities at BASIC. Chiara's expertise includes nuclear diplomacy, trust-building practices, nuclear risk reduction, and crisis management and de-escalation practices, particularly in Southern Asia. Chiara's research focuses on security dynamics between nuclear-armed states in the Asia-Pacific, especially India-China and India-Pakistan relations, as well as Arctic security dynamics.

**India maintains a declared No First Use (NFU) policy, while Pakistan adheres to a full-spectrum deterrence strategy designed to counter threats at all levels of escalation. How do these doctrinal asymmetries affect crisis stability between the two states?**

The India-Pakistan dyad stands out as the only case of two nuclear-armed states experiencing repeated bilateral crises—often triggered by violent terrorist attacks in Kashmir—involving regular kinetic military exchanges below the nuclear threshold, without undermining nuclear deterrence. Doctrinal asymmetries create a complex but stabilising dynamic in which each side defends against the perceived nuclear threats from the other, helping to maintain a delicate balance of nuclear deterrence. In this context, crisis stability rests on the assumption that, at the conventional level, limited military conflict can be sustained without triggering deliberate or inadvertent nuclear escalation. While fragile, this balance has so far held—but future crises may seriously test its limits, especially after Pahalgam's heightened kinetic military activities, which set a new bar on the India-Pakistan escalation ladder.

**What are the potential long-term implications of the current crisis for crisis management, nuclear signaling, and regional diplomacy between India and Pakistan?**

The Pahalgam crisis marks a turning point in India-Pakistan crisis management dynamics and strategic signaling. Operation Sindoor launched by India on May 7 in response to the attack in Pahalgam marked a significant strategic shift – the key message is that from now on, limited, high-precision conventional strikes deep into Pakistani territory will be used to respond to terrorist attacks perceived to be Pakistan-backed.

Pakistan's response, Operation Bunyanum Marsoos of May 10, also marked a key shift in strategic signaling, conveying its capability to firmly respond within the conventional domain through calibrated multidomain military actions without recurring to nuclear posturing. The long-term implication of these changes lies in the increasing routinisation of high-stakes military exchanges where the ladder to nuclear escalation may become steeper and shorter. For the first time in a conflict between two nuclear-armed states, both sides deployed missiles and drones against military targets deep inside each other's territory. While both India and Pakistan remained confident in their ability to control escalation, this confidence risks slipping into complacency in future crises.

**This crisis underscores the troubling normalization of limited military action under the nuclear shadow. In this context, how does the notion of nuclear responsibility manifest, and what are its broader implications?**

Pahalgam's military exchanges under the nuclear shadow demand that both sides assume more responsibility to prevent future crises. This implies an urgent need to establish robust bilateral crisis prevention and management mechanisms before the next crisis occurs, rather than relying on the assumption that third-party mediation – such as the one provided by the US during the Pahalgam crisis – might again step in. While it remains unclear whether India and Pakistan used bilateral communication channels like the Director-General Military Operations (DGMOs) hotline during Pahalgam, U.S.-led backchannel diplomacy may have played a key role in facilitating de-escalation. Yet, external mediation is no substitute for the responsibility of both states to build and rely on robust bilateral crisis management mechanisms. Nuclear responsibility, in this context, includes establishing a leader-to-leader hotline as a confidential line of communication to provide a vital channel for timely de-escalation, but also addressing the role of media during crises to combat the spread of violent language and to prioritize accuracy, fact-checking, and transparency.

### OTTAWA CONVENTION AT A CRITICAL JUNCTURE

In March 2025, the defence ministers of four EU member states – Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland – all of which border Russia, issued a joint statement announcing their intention to withdraw from the Ottawa Convention which bans anti-personnel landmines. Citing the worsening security environment caused by Russia's aggression against Ukraine, they argued that withdrawal was necessary to “ensure flexibility in adopting new weapons systems”. However, the ministers reaffirmed their commitment to international law and the protection of civilians. Just days later, Finland – whose 1,340 km border with Russia is the longest in the EU – followed suit, emphasising Russia's long-term threat to Europe. The Ottawa Convention, adopted in 1997 and entered into force in 1999, prohibits the use, development, production, acquisition, stockpiling, and transfer of anti-personnel mines. It also binds member states to destroy their existing stockpiles.

The Convention currently counts 165 states parties, yet some of the world's major powers, including the United States, Russia and China, remain outside it. Under its terms, any withdrawal becomes effective six months after notification to the United Nations, although, notably, the Convention prohibits withdrawal by states engaged in an armed conflict.

Over the past two decades, the Convention has achieved remarkable success: tens of millions of stockpiled anti-personnel mines have been destroyed. Yet, anti-personnel mines have been used in several recent conflicts, which has eroded the stigma surrounding them. Russia has employed landmines extensively, and even Ukraine—a state party to the Convention—has used them for defensive purposes.

In October 2024, a UN report identified Ukraine as the most heavily mined country in the world, with approximately one quarter of its territory at risk of contamination. The European Union and its member states have provided more than €370 million to support demining efforts across Ukraine.

The recent declarations by some EU member states expressing intent to withdraw from the Convention have sparked strong criticism from humanitarian organisations, which warn that such moves risk setting a dangerous precedent and eroding the Convention's authority.

The issue has also become a matter of controversy within the European Parliament. Nonetheless, the security rationale underpinning these withdrawal decisions has resonated across parts of Europe's strategic and defence community, reflecting the changing threat perceptions on NATO's eastern flank.

In this evolving context, a candid and urgent debate is needed, not only on the immediate implications of these announced withdrawals, but also on the long-term future of the Ottawa Convention and the credibility of humanitarian disarmament norms in a world where hard security concerns are once again taking centre stage.

**Ettore Greco, Executive Vice President, IAI**

**Sara Vicinanza, Intern, IAI**

Regulating Cyberspace: UN Consensus-Building in a Fragmented Digital World. Federica Marconi, Ettore Greco. ENSURED Research Report. May 2025.

Cloud Labs and Other New Actors in the Biotechnology Ecosystem: Export Control Challenges and Good Practices in Outreach. Kolja Brockmann, Lauriane Héau And Giovanna Maletta. EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Papers, No. 98. May 2025.

Lessons from the EU on Confidence-Building Measures around Artificial Intelligence in the Military Domain. Sofia Romansky. EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Papers, No. 97. May 2025.

New Ways to Frame Responsible Cyber Behaviour Beyond the UN. Louise Marie Hurel. RUSI. May 2025.

The Balance of Confidence and Feasibility in Irreversible Nuclear Disarmament. Noah Mayhew, Dr. Nikolai Sokov, Dr. Adam Bernstein. VCDNP. May 2025.

## Network Calls

The **VCDNP** invites female undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate students as well as recent graduates to apply to a Young Women in Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Mentorship Programme. The mentorship programme will run from 15 September 2025 to 15 May 2026. Application deadline: 30 June 2025  
More info: [here](#)

**RUSI** invites early- and mid-career professionals from NATO countries to apply to its 18-month Deterrence Futures Fellowship. Fellows will explore the evolving role of deterrence in UK and international security. Application deadline: 2 July 2025  
More info: [here](#)

On behalf of the EUNPDC, **IAI** invites students and young professionals to apply for the EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Next Generation Workshop. Selected participants will present and discuss innovative ideas on arms control, non-proliferation, and disarmament. Application deadline: 4 July 2025  
More info: [here](#).

## EU NEWS

### COUNCIL DECISION (CFSP) 2025/889 OF 12 MAY 2025 SUPPORTING THE EUROPEAN NETWORK OF INDEPENDENT NON-PROLIFERATION AND DISARMAMENT THINK TANKS

The Council renewed its support for the European network of independent non-proliferation and disarmament think tanks. This decision aims to strengthen the EU Strategy against weapons of mass destruction and illicit arms by promoting research, informing policymaking, and raising awareness in third countries.

More info: [here](#)

### COUNCIL DECISION (CFSP) 2025/960 OF 20 MAY 2025 AMENDING DECISION (CFSP) 2018/1544 CONCERNING RESTRICTIVE MEASURES AGAINST THE PROLIFERATION AND USE OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

The amendment follows reports from the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), which confirmed the use of CS gas by Russian forces in Ukraine as a method of warfare. The decision adds three Russian entities to the sanctions list: Radiological, Chemical and Biological Defence Troops of the Russian Ministry of Defence, 27th Scientific Centre of the Ministry of Defence, 33rd Central Scientific Research and Testing Institute.

More info: [here](#)

## NETWORK NEWS

### EUNPDC WELCOMES A NEW MEMBER: THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA'S SECURITY, POLICY AND NATIONALISM RESEARCH CENTER

The EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium welcomes a new member: the University of Georgia's Security, Policy and Nationalism Research Center (UGSPN), based in Tbilisi. The centre advances research on national security, defence, and nationalism studies.

More info: [here](#)

### YOUNG WOMEN IN DISARMAMENT MENTORSHIP PROGRAMME CONCLUDES

On 14 May 2025, the VCDNP and the International Affairs Institute (IAI) convened the final meeting of the fourth edition of the Young Women and Next Generation Initiative (YWNGI) Mentorship Programme, an initiative established in the framework of the EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium. The programme offered valuable exposure to the field of non-proliferation, arms control, and disarmament, while also helping participants to build lasting networks and explore career opportunities in a highly specialised and competitive domain.

More info: [here](#)