Regional nuclear non-proliferation regimes have been evolving along with the global non-proliferation regime virtually since its formation in the mid-20th century. This tendency manifested itself most clearly in the 1990s-2000s, thus exemplifying regionalisation as one of the contemporary global trends.

Asia Pacific is one of the most rapidly developing regions of the world in terms of economy and demographics, which inevitably reflects on its role in the global affairs. The region, in its broad geographical understanding, comprises three official nuclear weapons states, namely, People’s Republic of China, Russian Federation and United States. Curiously enough, these powers act as UN Security Council permanent members at the same time, together with France and United Kingdom. Apart from that, the situation in this part of the world is aggravated by the fact that one of the regional countries, North Korea, has been engaged in developing its own military nuclear programme, having opted out of the NPT, Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and conducted several nuclear tests. Moreover, some scholars argue that such states as India and Pakistan, two more countries that de facto possess nuclear weapons not being parties to the NPT, also belong to the Asia Pacific region, both from the geographical and political points of view.

From the theoretical standpoint, the mentioned phenomenon can be regarded through the prism of international regimes theory. At the same time, major IR schools of thoughts have different approaches to international regimes within the mentioned theory. Political realism claims that states remain main actors in international relations and conflict is still an attribute inherent in international relations, whereas neorealism goes further, suggesting that balance of powers is the feature that determines international regimes. Neoliberal institutionalism, in its turn, focuses on the institutional nature of a regime, which is especially important for the nonproliferation regimes, taking into account their legal nature. Social constructivism presupposes that stakeholders act in accordance with perception of their behaviour on international arena, performing corresponding roles.

One has to bear in mind that some countries in Asia Pacific, owing to their high-speed economic growth as well as increasing energy demand, have been considering nuclear energy as one of the options. This tendency serves as another argument in favour of institutionalisation of
the regional non-proliferation regime, for instance, through signing agreements between states with corresponding technologies and IAEA.

The problems of nuclear non-proliferation in the Asia Pacific are deeply interconnected with regional security architecture. It is crucial to understand that regional non-proliferation regime represents not simply a sum of countries’ obligations in the non-proliferation sphere but also certain regional organizations, both intergovernmental and non-governmental ones. This premise predetermined numerous efforts undertaken at the regional level recently, such as International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament, initiated in 2008 by Australia and Japan.

As such, it was demonstrated that all three components of nuclear non-proliferation regime (i.e. nuclear non-proliferation, disarmament and peaceful use of nuclear energy) are intrinsic to non-proliferation regime in Asia Pacific; threats and challenges in this field determine regional security in many respects.