

NUCLEAR ADVENTURE OF KAZAKHSTAN

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Abstract

Kazakhstan emerged as the world's fourth largest nuclear state at the beginning of the post-Cold war era, the era associated with emerging nuclear nonproliferation, especially to rogue states and terrorists. In this new and uncertain security environment, the Kazakh leadership and people decided to join the international community, giving up Nuclear Weapons (NW) and materials and opting for the peaceful use of nuclear energy. This paper depicts how this process evolved and discusses domestic and international policies. It argues that Kazakhstan became a model for non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament policies, and played a crucial role in challenging theories that regard the Muslim and/or Turkish community as potential nuclear threats.

Key Words: Kazakhstan, Nuclear Weapons, Semipalatinsk, Uranium, Nuclear Fuel Bank

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Kazakistan'ın Nükleer Macerası

Öz

Kazakistan nükleer silahların özellikle serseri devletler ve teröristlere yayılımının gündemde olduğu Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönem başlangıcında dünyanın dördüncü büyük nükleer devleti olarak ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu yeni ve belirsiz güvenlik ortamında Kazak yöneticileri ve Kazak halkı nükleer silahlardan ve materyallerden vazgeçerek ve nükleer enerjinin barışçıl kullanımını tercih ederek uluslararası kamuoyunun bir parçası olmaya karar vermiştir. Bu çalışma bu sürecin nasıl geliştiğini ortaya koymakta ve bu konuya yönelik iç ve dış politikaları tartışmaktadır. Çalışmada, Kazakistan'ın nükleer silahların yayılımının önlenmesi ve nükleer silahsızlanma konusunda örnek model teşkil ettiğini ve Müslüman ve/veya Türkleri potansiyel nükleer tehdit olarak gören teorileri boşa çıkardığını iddia etmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kazakistan, Nükleer Silahlar, Semipalatinsk, Uranyum, Nükleer Yakıt Bankası

Introduction

Deterrence theories between superpowers dominated nuclear politics during the Cold War. However, proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), especially proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NW), nuclear materials, and nuclear expertise from the former Soviet Union to non-nuclear states and terrorist organizations emerged as one of the biggest threats in the new security environment, becoming the main security problem for the international community after the Cold War. Non-proliferation theories replaced traditional deterrence theories at the beginning of the post-Cold War era, accompanied by intense debate between nuclear pessimists and nuclear optimists.

With the dissolution of the former Soviet Union, Kazakhstan inherited a large group of strategical and tactical NW, a huge test site, an important nuclear reactor, one of the world's largest uranium reserves and a huge amount of nuclear material. Kazakhstan therefore stood at the crossroads of becoming either the world's fourth largest nuclear power, under considerable pressure from other nuclear states, or a non-nuclear state that remained fully part of the world community with political, security and especially economic incentives. Hesitating at first, the newly independent state finally chose the latter option in collaboration with the international community, especially the US and Russia.

As the first Muslim and Turkic nuclear state in the history, Kazakhstan emerged as a pioneer in disarmament and non-proliferation policies as well as peaceful use of nuclear energy regionally and globally. One of the largest victims in the nuclear era, and the world's largest uranium producer, Kazakhs succeeded not only in turning their state into a nuclear-free zone, interestingly under the strong influence of a civil movement, but also promoted the peaceful use of nuclear energy. In this way Kazakhstan emerged as the model for a rational state that conformed to international norms in terms of NW, as part of the international community. Kazakhs not only changed the security perception regarding nuclear proliferation, invalidating the assumptions and arguments of nuclear pessimists, but also played an important role in representing Muslim-Turkic states as part of the international community.

The Debate over Nuclear States

NW have been described as the most important and effective weapons technology to date. As Brodie pointed out, "the coming of NW overshadow-

owed in importance every previous military invention of recorded history, including gunpowder, because its effects were not only tactical but basically strategic.”² They not only brought World War II to a close but also overwhelmingly influenced the course of the Cold War worldwide, shaping the political and military relationship between the two superpowers, whose military power was characterized largely by their NW capabilities. As Waltz put it, “while strategies may do more than weapons to determine the outcome of wars, NW dominated strategies”³ during the Cold War

The collapse of the former Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War changed the security paradigm regarding WMD. The proliferation of WMD, especially of NW, constitutes one of the most important security threats for international security, and thus the chaos in the former Soviet Union increased concern about the loss of materials, expertise, and even the weapons themselves. Alarmed Western states, especially the US, intensified efforts to control the proliferation of WMD and related materials in the former Soviet states.

With concern about the spread of NW increasing, scholars and policy analysts turned in earnest to nonproliferation issues, with the major question becoming whether NW are a stabilizing factor in international politics.⁴ The debate about rational behavior by states and the proliferation of NW emerged as the prime foci of theorists of international relations during this period. Surprisingly, most analyses of the spread of NW and of the corresponding value of National Missile Defense have not grounded themselves directly in nuclear deterrence theory.⁵

Realists mainly argued that the new security environment will urge some states to acquire NW. As Hymans pointed out, adopting the realist vision of international relations inexorably led to the conclusion that all states that can go nuclear should go nuclear, and the sooner the better.⁶ Mearshheimer pointed out that “the international system’s new architecture

2 Bernard Brodie, *Strategy in the Missile Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), V.

3 Kenneth Waltz, “Peace, Stability, and Nuclear Weapons” (Washington D.C., Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation, University of California at Berkeley, August 1995), 742.

4 David J. Karl, “Proliferation Pessimism and Emerging Nuclear Powers”, *International Security*, 21 (3), (Winter 1996/1997), 87.

5 Robert Wall, “Nuclear Deterrence Theory, Nuclear Proliferation and National Missile Defense”, *International Security*, 27 (4), (Spring 2003), 87

6 Jacques E.C. Hymans, “Theories of Nuclear Proliferation: The State of Field”, *The Non-proliferation Review*, 13(3), (2006), 456

created powerful incentives to proliferate.”⁷ Benjamin Frankel noted that the reduced security guarantee by superpowers was expected to cause proliferation.⁸

Realists consider proliferation of NW, especially to rogue states, as the most important security problem on which the international community should focus, which has largely shaped the non-proliferation policy of the US. William Perry, former Defense Secretary of the US, for example, stated that “the possibility of a rogue nation or terrorists acquiring a nuclear bomb is one of the most serious threats facing the world.”⁹ US security and defense politics also focused on increasing risks of NW proliferation.

On the other hand, a few scholars, especially Kenneth Waltz, argued that the slow proliferation of NW would decrease the risk of wars among nuclear states: “NW dissuades states from going to war more surely than conventional weapons do.”¹⁰ He argued that the slow spread of NW would provide a better world¹¹, but his views had limited impact on international politics and especially on US politicians, and the US intensified its efforts to prevent nuclear proliferation globally.

NW of the former Soviet Union in Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan’s nuclear adventure started in 1947 with the decision of the Soviet Union to establish a nuclear test site for research, development and testing of NW at Semipalatinsk, which became the most important nuclear site for the Soviet Union during the Cold War. The Soviets made their first nuclear test on 29 August 1949 at Semipalatinsk. Of the 752 Russian nuclear explosions from 1949 to 1989¹², 466 occurred at the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site.¹³

7 John J. Mearsheimer, “The Case for a Ukrainian Nuclear Deterrent”, *Foreign Affairs*, 72 (3) (Summer 1993), p.61

8 Benjamin Frankel, “The Brooding Shadow: Systemic Incentives and Nuclear Weapons Proliferation”, *Security Studies*, 2 (3), (Spring/Summer 1993), 37.

9 Kim Murphy, “Rogue Nation’ or Terrorist Poses Serious Nuclear Threat, Perry Says”, *Los Angeles Times*, 09 January 1995.

10 Kenneth Waltz, “Nuclear Myths and Political Realities”, *The American Political Science Review*, 84 (3), (September 1990) 743

11 Waltz, “Peace, Stability, and Nuclear Weapons”, 12.

12 Jonathan Aitken, *Kazakhstan: Surprises and Stereotypes after 20 years of Independence*, (London: Continuum 2012), 4.

13 Sara Z. Kutchesfahani, *Politics and the Bomb: The role of Experts in the Creation of Cooperative Nuclear Non-Proliferation Agreements*, (New York: Routledge, 2013), 115.

Moscow viewed Kazakhstan was perceived as a remote, isolated, empty region, an underpopulated and faraway place capable of absorbing any amount of pollution.¹⁴ A total of 114 nuclear tests in the atmosphere or at ground level (until the signature of the Partial Test Ban Treaty of 1963) were conducted at Semipalatinsk, but the Russian authorities did not inform inhabitants of the tests and their effects. It is estimated that 1.5 to two million people were affected by radioactive pollution in northern Kazakhstan¹⁵, without knowing anything about the existence of the site. Moscow repeatedly denied information to Kazakh officials and citizens living around the test sites, whether about the tests or the hazardous impact on the health of the people affected.¹⁶

Kazakhstan also hosted Soviet nuclear forces in various locations. In addition to the 330 tactical NW¹⁷ that the Soviets deployed during the Cold War, they mounted 1,410 nuclear warheads onto 104 SS18 Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) (equipped with ten MIRV with a range of 12,000 km), and 40 Bear-H strategic bombers with 370 nuclear-tipped air launched cruise missiles¹⁸. These weapons remained on Kazakh territory after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. It is worth to note that Soviet authorities deployed large amount of nuclear weapon only to Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Belarus among many former Soviet states.

Kazakhstan also hosted a BN-350 nuclear reactor at Aktau, the only nuclear reactor located outside of Russian territory; it was one of five reactor series designed, built, and operated as technology demonstration facilities for a Soviet program to develop a multiuse fast breeder reactor.¹⁹ Construction began in 1964 and operations began in 1973, producing plutonium for Russian NW as well as electricity for the surrounding cities. The reactor had the capacity to produce 100 kg of plutonium (Pu) a year.

During the Cold War Kazakhstan was the largest uranium provider in the Soviet Union, while the Ulba Metalurgical Plant played an especially im-

14 Christopher Robbins, *In search of Kazakhstan: The Land that disappeared*, (London: Profile Books, 2008), 223.

15 Curtis, Glenn. E. (2003). “Kyrgyzstan: A Country Study”, *Central Asia in Focus: Political and Economic Issues*, Lydia M. Buyers (ed), (New York: Nova Science, 2003), IV.

16 Medeu Sarseke, “25 Let Nazad Bil Zakrit Semipalatinski Poligon”, *Central Asia Monitor*, 34 (610), (August-September 2016), 12.

17 Nursultan Nazarbayev, *Na Poroge XXI Veka*, (Almati: Atamura, 2003) 72

18 Mike C. Brown, “Case Study: Nonproliferation activities at the BN-350 Reactor, Kazakhstan”, *Nuclear Safeguards, Security and Nonproliferation: Achieving security with technology and policy*, James Doyle (ed), (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2008) 180 (pp.179-194)

19 Brown, *ibid*, 180.

portant role in the production of uranium. The plant was established in 1949 and uranium production began in 1954. Before the collapse of the Soviet Union, more than 70,000 tons of uranium was extracted in Kazakhstan and the Ulba Production Centre provided 80% of the fuel pellets used by the Soviet Union.²⁰ After the Cold War, Kazakhstan inherited uranium mines and deposits that made it owner of the world's largest uranium - 21% of identified uranium reserves in the world.²¹

Despite hosting a large amount of NW, Kazakhstan did not have access to the command and control of NW weapons on its territory, and insufficient knowledge about NW facilities since the Soviet authorities had run the facilities and test sites during the Cold War. As Zagalsky pointed out, the huge nuclear site was run by Russians; Kazakhs were not involved and few of them understood what nuclear power and weapons were.²² For Ustiugov, "Kazakhstan had never been a nuclear republic. It was merely a testing site and launching pad for the military political elite in Moscow."²³

End of NW Adventure of Kazakhstan

With independence, Kazakhstan became the world's fourth largest nuclear state, after the US, Russia, and Ukraine, in a chaotic security environment in the region. During the Cold War the Kazakh leadership understood that control of the Kazakh nuclear armaments complex belonged to Moscow. When briefed about the site and NW in Kazakhstan after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, new Kazakh president Nazarbayev realized that he did not know much about the program and stated that "it had previously been a tightly-held secret known only to the highest officers of the Red Army."²⁴

Facing a great many problems, the new government hesitated at adopting a NW policy at the onset. First they tried to preserve common control over the strategic forces under the CIS, but under pressure from the US

20 G. V. Fyodorov, "Uranium production and the environment in Kazakhstan", Access 22 July 2017, http://www.iaea.org/inis/collection/NCLCollectionStore/_Public/33/032/33032913.pdf

21 Bulat Sultanov, *Kazakhstan: 20 Let Nezavisimosti*, (Almaty: KISI, 2011) 192.

22 Leonid Zagalsky, "Finding its Own Way", *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 49 (8), (1993), 17.

23 Mikhail Ustiugov, "A Temporarily Nuclear State", *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 49 (8), (October 2013), 32.

24 Jonathan Aitken, *Nazarbayev and Making of Kazakhstan: From Communism to Capitalism*, (London: Continuum, 2009) 78.

and Russia, Kazakhstan decided to pursue disarmament.²⁵

Kazakhstan's path to become a non-nuclear state evolved in different stages. The first stage was the signing of treaties to set the framework, beginning with the Alma Ata agreement of 21 December 1991 that created the CIS, signed by former Soviet states, declared that single control over NW would be preserved and all sides would respect each other's desire to attain the status of a non-nuclear and/or neutral state. Additionally, the decision to use NW would be taken by the president of Russia in agreement with Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine and in consultation with other CIS members. Most importantly, the states accepted dismantling and returning to Russia all tactical NW by 1 July 1992 and strategic NW by the end of 1994.

The US, Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus and Ukraine then signed the Lisbon Protocol on 23 May 1992, which made these three former Soviet states party to the 1991 START Agreement. They also promised to accede to the NPT as non-nuclear weapon states "in the shortest time possible". The parties agreed to return all strategic NW to Russia within a seven-year period. Kazakhstan ratified the Lisbon Protocol even earlier than the US and Russia, and submitted its instrument of accession to the NPT as a non-nuclear-weapon state. As party to the Treaty, Kazakhstan intensified its efforts in disarmament, non-proliferation, and peaceful use of nuclear energy.

However, none of these states had technical capability, knowledge or enough financial resources to dismantle existing NW or to secure nuclear materials. The US under the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) program, started in 1991, helped former Soviet states dismantle their nuclear, biological and chemical weapons. Under this program, the US and Kazakh governments signed a Framework Agreement on 13 December 1993.

Based on the Alma Ata agreement, Kazakhstan returned all tactical NW to Russia by January 1992. On the other hand, in signing the Lisbon Protocol Kazakhstan promised to return all strategic NW within seven years. All strategic NW and delivery vehicles in Kazakhstan were returned to Russia by 24 April 1995 as the first country among the three former Soviet states (Nazarbayev, 2003, p.242) so that, as President Nazarbayev stated,

²⁵ Murat Laumulin, "Kazakhstan's Nuclear Policy and the Control of NW", *The Nuclear Challenge in Russia and the New States of Eurasia*, George H. Quester (ed.), (Armonk, M.E. Sharpe, 1995), 191.

Kazakhstan proved it is a peaceful state and simultaneously contributed to regional security and stability.²⁶

Closing the famous Semipalatinsk test site was also an important and difficult process for Kazakhstan. Before the collapse of the Soviet Union, Nazarbayev had been criticized by Soviet leaders for initiating the anti-nuclear movement “Nevada-Semipalatinsk, and despite announcement by the Soviet Military that three more nuclear tests would be held at the site, Nazarbayev banned nuclear testing in Semipalatinsk. As he stated, “Kazakhstan closed the test site to prevent negative effects of the tests and for the security of Eurasian region”²⁷, furthermore signing the “Decree on the Closing of the Semipalatinsk Nuclear Proving Ground” on 29 August 1991, shutting down the facility after 52 years of operation.²⁸ As he later described this step, “the foundation of democracy was laid in the decision for a non-nuclear Kazakhstan”.²⁹ By July 2000 the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site was completely gone---a significant turning point for Kazakhstan.

Remnants of weapons-grade nuclear material, both uranium and plutonium, in Kazakhstan has been another problem. The US and Russia provided technical or financial support for the removal process. In 1994, the US announced removal of roughly half a ton of weapons grade uranium, enough to make 20 NW, from Kazakhstan to the US³⁰, under a joint US-Kazakh operation known as Project Sapphire. With support of the US, 10 tons of HEU and 3 metric tons of weapons-grade plutonium (enough to produce 775 NW) from the BN-350 reactor was transferred to safer areas in Kazakhstan³¹ in 2010.

And yet it should be noted that Kazakhstan has not stopped uranium mining, processing, and reactor fuel production and the nation positioned itself to become one of the world’s major suppliers of reactor-grade uranium fuel assemblies.³² The state-owned company Kazatomprom has been

26 Nursultan Nazarbayev, *Piyat Let Nezavisimosti: Iz Dokladov, Vstupleniy i Statei Prezidenta Respubliki Kazakhstan*, (Almati: Kazakhstan,1996) 307.

27 Nursultan Nazarbayev, *Episentr Mira*, (Astana: Elorda, 2001) 53-58.

28 Victor Kianitsa, “Test Anxiety”, *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 49 (8) (1993) 38.

29 Nursultan Nazarbayev, *Juz Jilga Tatitin On Jil*, (Almati: Atamura, 2001) 11-12.

30 William J. Perry, “DoD News Briefing Press Conference Transcript”, U.S. Department of Defense, 23 November 1994.

31 Lyudmile Zaitseva, “Illicit Trafficking in Nuclear Materials: Assessing the Past Two Decades”, *Routledge Handbook of Nuclear Proliferation and Policy*, Joseph F. Pilat and Nathan E. Busch (eds), (London and NY: Routledge, 2015) 451.

32 Brown, *ibid*, 180.

gradually pursuing an advanced nuclear fuel cycle, including the capacity to produce nuclear fuel. Further, Kazakhstan is the only country in Central Asia that has made a firm commitment to developing nuclear energy.³³ As of 2015, Kazakhstan has become the world's largest uranium producer with 41% of total world production.

Since Kazakhs made the decision for a non-nuclear state, they have intensified their efforts to denuclearize as well as pioneer regional and global nonproliferation. Kazakhstan joined NPT as a NNWS in 1993. In July 1994, Kazakhstan signed agreements with IAEA, which placed a number of industrial facilities, including Aktau plant under IAEA standards.³⁴ The state also signed an Additional Protocol for the Application of Safeguards in Connection with the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of NW with the IAEA in February 2004 and has been a member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group since then.

Kazakhstan signed the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) in 2002, thereby calling for a ban on all nuclear explosions in any environment and at the hands of any actor, whether civilian or military. According to the Treaty's Preparatory Commission, Kazakhstan also hosts three seismological stations that "are capable of registering vibrations from a possible nuclear explosion" and thereby help to verify Treaty compliance.

Kazakhstan also worked for regional denuclearization. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan signed the Treaty on a Nuclear-Weapons-Free Zone (NWFZ), known also as the Treaty of Semipalatinsk, on 8 September 2006, and with it the Central Asian Nuclear Weapon Free Zone (CANWFZ) was established, on 21 March 2009, whereby Treaty members pledged not to manufacture, acquire, test, or possess NW.

Kazakhstan possesses the world's second-largest uranium reserves and, as stated, is the world's largest uranium producer. Upon US Senator Sam Nunn's offer, Kazakhstan, one of two pioneers of the Nuclear Threat Initiative, and which has fuel fabrication capability, agreed to establish a nuclear fuel bank for the use of IAEA Member States unable to acquire nuclear fuel supplies from the market due to political reasons in its territories. In June 2015, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Board of Gov-

33 Toghzan Kassenova, "Kazakhstan and the Global Nuclear Order", *Central Asian Affairs*, 1 (2), (2014), 173.

34 Mikhail Ustiugov, "Kazakh Power Play", *The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, 52 (4) (July/August 1996) 46.

ernors approved the establishment of a low-enriched uranium reserve in Kazakhstan and the «Host State Agreement for the LEU Bank» was signed on 27 August 2015. The reserve will be managed by the IAEA and opened in 29 August 2017.³⁵

Kazakhstan and six other states submitted a proposal to the UN to celebrate an ‘International Day for a World Free of NW’ on August 29th, the date of the closure of the Semipalatinsk test site, and the UN General Assembly declared the date as the ‘International Day against Nuclear Tests’ on 2 December 2009. Additionally, Kazakhstan launched the ATOM Project, which “aims to mobilize public opinion against nuclear tests and subsequently completely renounce NW worldwide.” Kazakhstan’s efforts towards nuclear disarmament are highly appreciated by the international community. In April 2010 UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon paid an official visit to the Semipalatinsk nuclear test facility and stated that he calls “on all NW States to follow suit with Kazakhstan,” highlighting that they look to Kazakhstan for inspiration and Kazakhstan has led by example.³⁶ Moon again praised Kazakhstan’s role in nuclear disarmament in the Conference “Building a Nuclear-Free World” in Astana on 29 August 2016.³⁷

In sum, despite hesitation at the beginning and domestic pressure, and in choice it reached due to a combination of international pressure, Kazakhstan opted to integrate into the international community³⁸, and secured Western assistance in dismantling its NW and facilities³⁹, supporting the goals of disarmament, nonproliferation and peaceful use of nuclear energy.

The Debate over NW

Right after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, there was intense debate among Kazakh politicians and scholars as to whether the state should

35 Nursultan Nazarbayev, “Kazakhstan Tandıı – Kauipsiz Alem”, *Egemen Kazakhstan*, 166 (29147), (August 2017), 1-2

36 “From atom test ground zero, Ban pleads for NW-free world”, UN News Center, 06 April 2010, Access 13.05.2017, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=34290#.WRW-golXyiM8> [Access:]

37 Gulyayım Tuleshova and Anastasiya Prilepskaya, “Na Puti K Bezyadernomu Buduşemu”, *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda*, 166 (28292) (August 2017) 1-3

38 Mehmet Seyfettin Erol, “Büyük Kazakistan Projesi ve 2050 Stratejisi”, *Yeni Türkiye*, 54, Türk Dünyası Özel Sayısı II, (Eylül-Ekim 2013) 1565.

39 Togzhan Kassanova, ‘Kazakhstan’s Nuclear Ambitions’, Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, Access:05.11.2018, www.thebulletin.org/web-edition/features/kazakhstans-nuclear-ambitions

continue with NW or become a non-nuclear state. The first group strongly supported the idea of giving up NW, pointing out the suffering of Kazakh people because of Soviet nuclear tests, while the second group advised the new Kazakh government to keep NW due to the emerging security environment of the region.

Anti-nuclear sentiment in Kazakhstan has been the main incentive for denuclearization policies. No other country in the world endured as many nuclear tests as Kazakhstan. The consequences of this testing affected the life and health of the local population, as well as the ecological balance of a vast expanse of land. It also made the people of Kazakhstan strongly “allergic” to nuclear issues.⁴⁰ as the public became aware of the disaster when the first impacts of radiation (cancer and birth deformities) emerged around Semipalatinsk. The anti-nuclear activity gained momentum after the Chernobyl disaster in Ukraine and the leak of the 1989 test plans, leading to mass protests in Almaty, considered the beginning of the Semei-Nevada movement. The movement gathered more than two million signatures from all ethnic groups in its first week, including from politicians. As points out, Nazarbayev gave at first clandestine and later open support to this movement.⁴¹

Integration with the West, and subsequent economic incentives, especially investment in Kazakhstan’s vast natural resources, has been another incentive for the anti-nuclear movement in the newly born and economically weak state. There was broad support for denuclearization and moving closer to the West for economic reasons.⁴² The aid package from developed states hinged on Kazakhstan’s unconditional adherence to the NPT as a non-nuclear state and Kazakhs were aware that they “cannot trade this raw material and effectively develop our own nuclear power industry without IAEA cooperation, which is a condition of our joining the NPT”.⁴³ As Nazarbayev pointed out, Kazakhstan had to have good relations with the US and satisfy American demands to achieve its strategic targets and develop economically without encountering roadblocks in international politics.⁴⁴

40 Murat Laumulin, “Nuclear Politics and the Future Security Of Kazakhstan”, *The Nonproliferation Review*, 1 (2), (Winter 1994), 62.

41 Aitken, *Kazakhstan: Surprises and Stereotypes after 20 years of Independence*, 18.

42 Dena Sholk, *The Denuclearization of Kazakhstan (1991-1995)*, Access:05.11.2018, https://isd.georgetown.edu/sites/isd/files/JFD_Sholk_Denuclearization.pdf.

43 Laumulin, “Nuclear Politics and the Future Security Of Kazakhstan”, 62.

44 Nazarbayev, *Na Poroge XXI Veka*, 61.

On the other hand, supporters of retaining NW stressed the lack of legally binding security assurances as one of the key weakness of NPT and urged Kazakh leaders to seek more substantive guarantees of their sovereignty and security from nuclear states in exchange for giving up NW.⁴⁵ They were afraid of a resurgent Soviet imperialism and claimed that a nuclear deterrent might dissuade provocation from Moscow⁴⁶ and did not consider the Russian nuclear umbrella secure enough to warrant giving up NW. They argued that “if ultranationalists come to power in Russia and if they are willing to use force to rebuild the Soviet Empire, that same umbrella would be a threat.”⁴⁷

Opponents pointed to the location of Kazakhstan, squeezed between two superpowers whose political systems could undergo a number of complicated and dangerous changes in the near future. They claimed that without NW, their country would become a weak and vulnerable state situated between two nuclear armed powers, Russia and China.⁴⁸ This was also highlighted by Nazarbayev as “Our neighbor China has NW, our neighbor Russia has NW. Some Russian politicians have territorial claims on Kazakhstan. There are Chinese textbooks that claim that parts of Siberia and Kazakhstan belong to China. Under these circumstances, how do you expect Kazakhstan to react?”⁴⁹

Therefore, Kazakhstan’s posture on nuclear disarmament was unclear in the immediate aftermath of the Soviet collapse. Nazarbayev, a fervent supporter of the anti-nuclear movement, tried to use the opportunity for security and economic incentives. He tried to use the Soviet legacy as a tool for shaping the country’s relation with Russia and the West, and to extract from states some political and economic dividends in return for Kazakhstan denuclearization.⁵⁰ Nazarbayev declared in 1991 that Kazakhstan would retain its nuclear missiles as long as Russia did.⁵¹ He de-

45 Stephen F. Burgress and Toghzan Kassenova “The Rollback States: South Africa and Kazakhstan”, *Slaying the Nuclear Dragon: Disarmament Dynamics in the Twenty-First Century*, Tanya Ogilvie-White and David Santo (eds.), (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 2012) 100.

46 Kutchesfahani, *ibid*, 115.

47 Ustiugov, “Kazakh Power Play”, 46.

48 Kutchesfahani, *ibid*, 115.

49 Nikolai Sokov, *Russian Strategic Modernization: The Past and Future*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000) 108.

50 Thomas Bernauer and Dieter Ruloff, *The Politics of Positive Incentives in Arms Control*, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999) 35.

51 Thomas L. Friedman, “Soviet disarray; Yeltsin rebuffed by Asian Republic on Nuclear Arms”, *The New York Times*, 18 December 1991.

clared in 1992 that Kazakhstan is entitled to belong to the nuclear club because tests on its territory were being carried out 18 months before the signing of the NPT.⁵² On the other hand, in his meeting with the US delegation, he reassured his American guests that Kazakhstan had no aspiration to join the nuclear power club.⁵³

At a Press Conference on 18 February 1993, Nazarbayev listed five conditions that could accelerate the process of nuclear disarmament; “receiving adequate security guarantees” was one of these conditions.⁵⁴ The problem was solved with a Memorandum, signed by Russia, the US, the UK and Kazakhstan on 5 December 1994, that provided security assurance to Kazakhstan by signatory nuclear states, stating that they will not use NW against Kazakhstan and will assist if Kazakhstan is victim of a nuclear assault. Receiving security commitments from nuclear weapon states was at the top of Kazakhstan’s objectives, and it succeeded in receiving them.⁵⁵ Later France and China also acceded to the memorandum.

Kazakhstan finally made its decision as a rational state and decided to be part of the international community as a non-nuclear state. Nazarbayev described the decision in these terms: “With independence, we became the world’s fourth-largest nuclear power. One of our first acts as a sovereign nation was voluntarily to give up these weapons. Since then, we have worked tirelessly to encourage other countries to follow our lead and build a world in which the threat of NW belongs to history.”⁵⁶ The decision of Kazakhstan to reverse its nuclear course was based on political factors rather than technological incapability.⁵⁷

As Kassenova pointed out, “the country represented an interesting case for a discussion about the global nuclear order, which suffers from intensifying divisions between nuclear-weapons states and non-nuclear-weapon states. While there was growing tension between nuclear-weapon states that promote nonproliferation and non-nuclear-weapon states that emphasize disarmament, Kazakhstan is uniquely attuned to both nonprolif-

52 Sokov, *ibid*, 108.

53 Jonathan Aitken, *Nazarbayev and Making of Kazakhstan: From Communism to Capitalism*, (London: Continuum, 2009) 139.

54 Ustiugov, “A Temporarily Nuclear State”, 34.

55 Kassenova, “Kazakhstan and the Global Nuclear Order”, 3.

56 Nursultan Nazarbayev, “What Iran can learn From Kazakhstan”, *The New York Times*, 25 March 2012.

57 Bhumitra Chakma, *Strategic Dynamics and NW Proliferation in South Asia: A Historical Analysis*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2004) 20.

eration and disarmament values.”⁵⁸

Conclusion

NW have been attractive to many states for different reasons such as power, international prestige, security or domestic politics. Despite strong reaction and political and economic international pressure against new nuclear state candidates, some new nuclear states, such as Israel, India and Pakistan, remained part of the international community. However, nuclear proliferation became one of the main threats against the international community, and new candidates such as Iran and North Korea remain under strong pressure to discontinue their nuclear efforts.

Kazakhstan has a quite different nuclear proliferation story. Emerging with independence as a nuclear state hosting many NW, facilities, and materials, (the dream of many other states and the nightmare of the international community), Kazakhstan, as the first Muslim and Turkic nuclear state in history, decided to convert itself into a non-nuclear member of the international community, despite the uncertain security environment in the region at the beginning of the post-Cold war era and despite the threat of regional nuclear powers such as Russia, China and India. Additionally, Kazakhs played an enormous role in regional and international nuclear disarmament, nonproliferation, and peaceful use of nuclear energy, truly an unprecedented example. They also urged nuclear non-proliferation theorists to revise their main arguments regarding NW and rational state behavior.

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