

**In Commemoration of Dr. Oumirserik Kasenov**

*by Dr. Dastan Eleukenov, Advisor to the Foreign Ministry of Kazakhstan*

Dr. Oumirserik Kasenov died of a sudden stroke on August 30, 1998. His untimely death came on the eve of his departure for a nonproliferation conference in Japan, for which he had prepared the following paper on the creation of a Central Asian nuclear-weapon-free zone. He was 53 years old.

After graduating from the elite Moscow State Institute of International Relations in 1970, Dr. Kasenov served for many years in high-level positions in the Kazakhstani Komsomol (Communist Youth Party Organization) and the Kazakhstani Communist Party. Following Kazakhstan's independence in the early 1990s, he maintained a prominent position as advisor to the vice president and head of external relations at the Office of the Kazakhstani Supreme Soviet. During this period, Dr. Kasenov made a number of important contributions to the debate within Kazakhstan on what to do with Kazakhstan's inheritance of Soviet nuclear weapons. He thus helped his colleagues and his government to choose the path that eventually led to Kazakhstan's signing and ratifying the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons as a non-nuclear weapon state.

In 1993, Dr. Kasenov became the first Director of the Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Due to his hard work and creative spirit, the Institute quickly gained recognition from around the world. Dr. Kasenov's great erudition, strong analytical abilities, and prolific writings in Kazakhstani and international publications reinforced his position as one of the country's foremost experts on international and regional security, and on nonproliferation issues in particular. In recognition of his expertise, in 1995 he was appointed to the Special Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters to the Secretary-General of the United Nations. During the last year of his life, Dr. Kasenov served as Vice-Rector and Professor at Kainar University in Almaty and Director of the Center for Central Asian and Strategic Studies.

Dr. Kasenov was more than an accomplished policymaker; his colleagues respected his decency and appreciated his sense of humor. He was a true intellectual. His death is a great loss for Kazakhstan.

Dr. Kasenov had been a friend and colleague of the Center for Nonproliferation Studies of the Monterey Institute of International Studies for many years. This paper was kindly contributed by his widow, Ragna Kasenova, to *The Nonproliferation Review*. Dr. Kasenov had not intended to present this work as a finished article, as it was prepared for an oral presentation at the above-mentioned conference in Japan. Therefore, as a long-time colleague and close friend of Dr. Kasenov, I have attempted to clarify his position on the prospects for a Central Asian nuclear-weapon-free zone in a brief commentary that follows his report.

## ON THE CREATION OF A NUCLEAR-WEAPON-FREE ZONE IN CENTRAL ASIA

**by Oumirserik Kasenov**

Seven years after the breakup of the Soviet Union, the most urgent task for all five newly independent states of Central Asia is the ongoing challenge of developing methods and institutions to provide for sustained development, political stability, and regional security.

The creation of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia could be an important element in the strengthening of regional security. It could make a significant contribution towards ensuring global and regional security after the withdrawal from Kazakhstan of the nuclear weapons inherited from the Soviet Union and the deci-

sion of the governments of Central Asia to join the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) as non-nuclear weapon states.

This report discusses some of the current factors affecting the establishment of a Central Asian nuclear-weapon-free zone (CANWFZ), particularly possible new difficulties in the wake of the South Asian nuclear tests.

### **CENTRAL ASIA AS A UNIQUE SECURITY ENVIRONMENT**

There are different geographical and historical definitions of the region of Central Asia, but the most established in international relations is the definition of Central Asia as the region comprising five former Soviet Asian Republics: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. These states are united not only by their geographical proximity, but also by their historical past under the Russian Empire and then within the Soviet Union. Today, in the period of post-Soviet transition, they face common problems of determining how to integrate effectively into the world community

Kazakhstan, as a state having a developed uranium mining industry, several nuclear research and power reactors, and other nuclear-related technologies, has signed a safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and participates actively in the safeguarding of the nuclear technologies and materials according to its regime commitments. The other states of Central Asia are embarking upon a similar path.

The Almaty Declaration adopted at the summit of the heads of Central Asian states on the Aral Sea problems on February 28, 1997, reflected their aspiration to create a CANWFZ. However, the realization of this idea will take a great deal of time and much effort. The experience of negotiations on the establishment of NWFZs in Antarctica, Latin America, the southern part of the Pacific Ocean, and Southeast Asia attests to this fact. It took many years for these treaties to be signed, ratified, and come into force. The process of negotiations on the establishment of NWFZs in the Middle East, Central and Eastern Europe, and on the Korean Peninsula will have to overcome many obstacles if these efforts too are going to come to fruition. It is quite obvious that the process of the establishment of an NWFZ in Central Asia is not going to be easy.

### **FACTORS AFFECTING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A CANWFZ**

What are the factors that might hinder the process of the international acknowledgment of Central Asia as a nuclear-weapon-free zone? There are several, and they are worth analyzing in detail:

1) The region of Central Asia is rich with natural resources, and primary among them are energy resources, especially oil and natural gas. Central Asia is situated between Russia, China, and the "Islamic world" and at the crossroads of the Eurasian mainlines; it is therefore of great geopolitical and geoeconomic importance.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, five newly independent states emerged in Central Asia with fragile economies and weak defense capabilities. This region is vulnerable to possible conflicts because of the intersecting interests of powerful neighboring states, including Russia and China, such regional powers as Turkey and Iran, such new nuclear powers as India and Pakistan, and finally more distant powers like the United States and a number of European countries.

It should be emphasized that we are talking about the involvement of several nuclear weapon states and also so-called "threshold states" (which have largely crossed the threshold). Complications connected with the establishment of possible NWFZs in South Asia—caused by the Indo-Pakistani conflict and associated nuclear arms race—and in the Middle East—where Iranian-Iraqi, Iranian-Israeli, and Arab-Israeli tensions are hindering any progress—may affect the establishment of a CANWFZ.

2) The nuclear tests conducted by India and Pakistan in May 1998 have clearly complicated the task of the creation of a CANWFZ from the perspective of security as well. The newly independent states of Central Asia are beginning to fall into the range of possible nuclear weapons launched from India and Pakistan, particularly as the existing confrontation between these two states fuels a nuclear arms race. A similar nuclear race between India and China seems inevitable because each side perceives the other as a geopolitical rival and a threat to its national security. As a result of nuclear tests in South Asia, there is also a potential threat to the entry into force of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and a weakening of the NPT.

3) Complications might also arise in delineation of the boundaries of the zone due to a number of ongoing

disputes. Before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the borders between the Central Asian states and between Kazakhstan and Russia were considered administrative only. Nevertheless, even seven years after independence these borders have not have not undergone a process of demarcation in terms of international law. Moreover, the new legal status of the Caspian Sea has not been determined; therefore, the *de jure* division of Caspian offshore regions into national sectors with fixed borders for territorial waters and exclusive economic zones under the U.N. convention on Maritime Law of 1982 has not been carried out. The conflicting claims of Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan on the Azeri and Chirag oilfields are but one example of these disputes.

4) All five Central Asian states have signed agreements with the Russian Federation on friendship, cooperation, and mutual assistance. These agreements provide for the use of Russia's nuclear umbrella in case of aggression against any of them. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan have also signed the Tashkent agreement on collective security with Russia, Belarus, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia.

If the CANWFZ is to proceed, the obligations proceeding from these bilateral security agreements and the multilateral Tashkent agreement must be worked out. In this connection, the question arises of whether a state can be simultaneously a member of an NWFZ and a member of a military alliance with a nuclear state. This refers even to neutral Turkmenistan, which, although it did not sign the Tashkent agreement on collective security, does maintain certain military relations with Russia (such as in the area of border protection) that are close to relations characterizing a military alliance.

5) It is quite obvious that there will be problems for the nuclear weapon states in granting security guarantees to the members of the CANWFZ. Russia, which continues to view Central Asia as a zone in its vital interests, leases the Baikonur space-launch facility and four important military bases in Kazakhstan, while also guarding the Chinese section of the external borders of the Commonwealth of Independent States through joint agreements with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. It also guards Tajikistan's border with Afghanistan and Turkmenistan's border with Iran. Finally, it has regular military forces deployed in significant numbers in Tajikistan. Thus, Russia could act to hinder the process of forming a CANWFZ.

The other important nuclear neighbor of the Central Asian states—China—will certainly support the establishment of a CANWFZ since its formation would rule out the possibility of reappearance of Russian nuclear weapons on its northwestern border.

As for the United States, Great Britain, and France, they are likely to welcome the establishment of another NWFZ as a positive factor promoting the nonproliferation of nuclear weapons.

6) Through their efforts over the past year-and-a-half towards establishing a CANWFZ, the states of Central Asia have gained a deeper knowledge of its possible problems and consequences. Their learning about the potential difficulties might eventually cause the Central Asian states to lose their initial euphoria and finally back away from their own initiative.

They might realize not only the difficulties connected with its establishment but also the danger for regional security of adopting unilateral and far-reaching obligations, while the region's neighbors, including such long-time nuclear states as Russia and China and such new nuclear states as India and Pakistan, continue to hold nuclear weapons. This influence may be particularly significant if the number of countries in the category of new nuclear states should increase in the future.

## CONCLUSION

There are a number of complex factors that the states of Central Asia will have to face before they can successfully conclude an NWFZ treaty. However, there has been much positive experience in the negotiations that have taken place in various venues to date. What remains unclear is whether the states of the region have the political will to push the treaty through to its conclusion. In many ways, this will be a test of the degree to which the states of Central Asia will be able to cooperate on such a sensitive and important topic, or whether the region is not yet ripe for such developments.

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### Commentary by Dastan Eleukenov

After reading this article by Dr. Kasenov, one might conclude that Dr. Kasenov did not support the idea of a Central Asian nuclear-weapon-free zone (CANWFZ). However, this is not the case.

He notes in the beginning of the article that the creation of such a zone “could be an important element in the strengthening of regional security.” This is not a trivial statement. Dr. Kasenov was one of the first Central Asian specialists to make a serious attempt to initiate the process of the creation of a CANWFZ. In October 1994, the Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies and the Monterey Institute of International Studies’ Center for Nonproliferation Studies organized a conference in Almaty devoted to discussion of the forthcoming 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference. Before that conference Dr. Kasenov asked me, then his deputy, to prepare a draft Kazakhstani proposal to start the negotiation process on a CANWFZ. Dr. Kasenov approved that draft document and sent it to the leadership of Kazakhstan. Accompanying the document, he sent a more detailed letter in which he argued for the necessity of launching such an initiative.

The Kazakhstani leadership judged this idea to be good but premature. Indeed, at that time, there were still many nuclear warheads and a significant amount of weapons-grade nuclear material on the territory of Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan and the United States were preparing for the unprecedented “Operation Sapphire,” in which 600 kilograms of weapons-grade nuclear materials were transported from Kazakhstan to Tennessee. It is conceivable that Kazakhstani policymakers were too busy with other nuclear matters to focus on a possible CANWFZ. Around this time, some people even said that there was nobody in Kazakhstan interested in a CANWFZ other than Dr. Kasenov. Nevertheless, Kazakhstan’s strong nonproliferation policy generated strong support for the zone in the other Central Asian states. Dr. Kasenov characterized this in his paper with his statement: “The other states of Central Asia are embarking upon a similar path.” An important step toward achieving this mutual objective took place in 1997, when all five Central Asian states declared that they would begin the process to establish such a zone.

Dr. Kasenov’s methodology was quite simple: first, indicate possible obstacles; second, work to overcome them. This paper, his last work, focuses on the first part of this methodology. Kazakhstan must now work to overcome these obstacles, but, unfortunately, without Dr. Kasenov.