

**(Editor's Note:** This viewpoint was written and sent to *The Nonproliferation Review* from Almaty, Kazakhstan, in early December 1993. The Kazakh parliament ratified the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) on December 13th, 1993. On that same day, in Almaty, the United States and Kazakhstan signed the Agreement On Assistance with the Dismantlement of Soviet SS-18 Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles. In his essay, Dr. Laumulin explains the decisionmaking processes and rationale on the Kazakh side that led up to this important agreement. He also discusses Kazakhstan's expectations regarding Western behavior beyond the agreement.)

Kazakhstan's position on nuclear issues became more clearly defined over the course of 1993. During the final months of 1993, the political life of the Republic of Kazakhstan was replete with events concerning nuclear questions. An anti-nuclear conference, organized by the Nevada-Semipalatinsk movement, was held in Almaty at the end of the summer. This latest conference differed from its predecessors in that the demand being made--closing the Lobnor nuclear testing site in Sinxiang (Eastern Turkestan)--affected diplomatic and intergovernmental relations between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Kazakhstan. In recent times, the leadership of Kazakhstan has repeatedly raised the issues of the test ban and China's adherence to it.

In September, delegations representing the governments of Kazakhstan and the United States held intensive negotiations, which resulted in the initialing of a framework agreement on U.S. participation in, and financing of, the dismantling of Soviet SS-18 ballistic missiles. In Almaty, it was hoped that the signing of this document would signify Kazakhstan's true intention of fulfilling the obligations set forth in the START I treaty and the Lisbon Protocol. Finally, during the first week of October, Kazakhstan was officially accepted into the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) at its headquarters in Vienna. This means that for the immediate future all nuclear facilities in Kazakhstan will fall under IAEA safeguards--that is, the agency's regulations for accounting, information, and monitoring. **(Editor's Note:** As of the date of this publication, Kazakhstan has not yet concluded a safeguards agreement with the IAEA.)

Because the Soviet Union was a nuclear state, it had no need for IAEA safeguards. Consequently, Kazakhstan also had no experience with such safeguards. Now, the Atomic Energy Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan--headed by General Director V. S. Shkolnik--has developed a program for including Kazakhstan's nuclear facilities within the framework of the IAEA. Nevertheless, serious obstacles are being encountered in training personnel and providing technical back-up to make sure that our nuclear facilities are covered by IAEA safeguards. A number of Western states have pledged to cooperate with the Republic of Kazakhstan in training personnel to work at nuclear facilities. Thus, with the passing of time, the level of security in our nuclear industry is increasing, unlike security in the military and political spheres, which was once guaranteed by Soviet nuclear capabilities.

#### KAZAKHSTAN AND THE NPT

START I and START II appear ideal if Kazakhstan is to think in terms of definitive disarmament. The reality of the disarmament process has turned out to be somewhat harsher, however. The issues of nuclear disarmament and the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons have now become intertwined, as may clearly be seen from the stance adopted by the United States and Russia. Thus, joining the NPT is

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## VIEWPOINT: NUCLEAR POLITICS AND THE FUTURE SECURITY OF KAZAKHSTAN

by  
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becoming a decisive factor in the resolution of not only those questions surrounding the implementation of START I, but also a wide range of issues concerning Kazakhstan's development as a member of the world community.

Analysis of the existing situation indicates that there are no alternatives insofar as ratification of the NPT is concerned. Kazakhstan will either become a party to the treaty as a non-nuclear state, thereby establishing normal relations with all the major world powers and with the world community as a whole, or be drawn into dangerous games with the nuclear weapons legacy of the former Soviet Union. Kazakhstan chose the non-nuclear path even before the collapse of the Soviet Union, for a reason which is still fresh in everyone's memory: the fight to close the test site at Semipalatinsk. No other country in the world has endured as many nuclear tests as Kazakhstan: 459 nuclear explosions were carried out on Kazakh soil (113 of which were in the atmosphere). 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. The closing of the nuclear test site, the withdrawal of nuclear weapons, and joining the NPT--these are all links in the same chain, the final link of which is the actual ratification of the NPT.

In addition to the moral aspect of this question, there are also significant economic and political aspects. These issues relate to the considerable aid package that Kazakhstan is to receive from the world community and a number of developed countries in order to introduce measures for dismantling strategic nuclear missiles, dealing with the after-effects of nuclear testing, and developing a peaceful nuclear energy program. This aid package hinges on Kazakhstan's unconditional adherence to the NPT as a non-nuclear state. It is common knowledge that Kazakhstan has a tremendous supply of raw uranium at its disposal and, therefore, has great potential for developing its nuclear power industry. We 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.

For a quarter of a century following the signing of the NPT, the promoters of nuclear nonproliferation experienced both successes and defeats. Despite monitoring by the IAEA, by nuclear states, and by the United Nations, a number of countries succeeded in coming very close to creating nuclear weapons. They are known as "threshold," or "nearly-nuclear" states. Yet the overall trend in international relations points towards a non-nuclear world. The huge nuclear arsenals of the United States and the former

Soviet Union are being cut back; the issue of the remaining nuclear states, France and China, joining the NPT is on the agenda. There have been instances in which countries possessing nuclear weapons have voluntarily given them up (South Africa). Talks are ongoing regarding a comprehensive test ban. Regulations have tightened worldwide in an effort to prevent the proliferation of nuclear components and dual-use materials. Moreover, solutions are being found for regional conflicts which were once the reason why certain states were developing their nuclear industries. These changes are encouraging, and Kazakhstan has an opportunity to contribute to this increase in world security.

While there are moral, economic, and political reasons for Kazakhstan to join the NPT, there are also well-grounded reasons for Kazakhstan's delay in ratifying the NPT. Nevertheless, certain spokespersons for the U.S. government maintain that Kazakhstan is hiding behind Ukraine in order to drag out the resolution of the nuclear weapons issue. Indeed, there have recently been major changes on the nuclear scene: the Ukrainian Parliament ratified the START I treaty and the Lisbon Protocol, but with amendments which *de facto* make Ukraine a nuclear state. This has exacerbated tensions between Russia and Ukraine, generating concern in Washington. There can be no talk of Kazakhstan's adopting a wait-and-see attitude, however.

Kazakhstan clearly cannot accept the Ukrainian way of solving this problem, as both Moscow and Washington understand full well. It is in Russia's interest not to aggravate already controversial issues, particularly those concerning agreement on compensation for uranium taken from the warheads of dismantled missiles. It is in the interest of the United States (which is now obliged to resolve this Ukrainian crisis), not to let the same thing happen with Kazakhstan, which will need real security guarantees once START I is implemented. This new situation presents an opportunity to raise cooperation between Kazakhstan and the United States to a new level.

Kazakhstan's gradual shift to non-nuclear status is currently undergoing a decisive stage in its development: that is, the ratification of the NPT and Kazakhstan's joining the NPT as a non-nuclear state. These actions bring to an end an entire era in Kazakhstan's history, over the course of which its territory has seen atomic and nuclear testing, the stationing of strategic nuclear weapons, and the extraction and export of raw materials for the Soviet nuclear power industry. New choices lie ahead of Kazakhstan, perhaps in connection with the creation and development of our own peaceful nuclear structures, but these choices will be ours to make as a sovereign state.

## THE INCREASINGLY CONTRADICTIONARY NATURE OF NUCLEAR ISSUES

In the wake of the events in Ukraine, groups in favor of preserving the nuclear status of Kazakhstan formulated their position as follows:

When the Supreme Rada of Ukraine ratified the START I treaty, it introduced a number of changes and stipulations that fundamentally alter the meaning of the treaty and the status of Ukraine. As a result, there was a change in the status of the nuclear weapons from the former Soviet Union located in the republic. For all intents and purposes, Ukraine broadcasts the fact that it is a nuclear state, which renders problematic its fulfillment of its START I obligations. This situation is an extreme consequence of the contradiction inherent in the Lisbon Protocol. Three former Soviet republics are required to acknowledge their non-nuclear status, while, at the same time, they appear in the protocol as nuclear entities.

One could have predicted all of the potential conflicts surrounding nuclear weapons issues two years ago. After the actual collapse of the Soviet Union, followed by that of its legal system, Russia and the United States tried to resolve such nuclear issues on an emergency basis, relying primarily on their own conceptions of security. This shared conception may be summarized as follows: the Soviet Union's place as a nuclear state may be occupied by only one country, and that country is Russia. Hence, nuclear weapons must be withdrawn from the territory of Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus.

Events took a different course, however. If it were in fact possible to maintain an integrated structure for CIS strategic forces, under joint command--which is apparently what the leaders of the newly-independent states wanted--then the reduction of CIS strategic forces would need to reflect the distribution of former Soviet forces on the territory of the individual republics. The most convenient way to denuclearize these republics now is via START I, which provides for a 50 percent reduction of the former Soviet Union's strategic potential. The Lisbon Protocol of START I states that this 50 percent reduction shall consist of the weapons located on the territory of the republics.

The actions taken by Moscow and Washington demonstrate that they do not trust the remaining republics with nuclear weapons. All important decisions regarding nuclear issues are therefore to be made by Russia and the United States, without the other states' participation. This kind of policy, reminiscent of dictatorship, naturally met with oppo-

sition, even from the republics that were loyal to Moscow. Ukraine, with its considerable political, military, and economic clout, spoke out openly against this policy of forcing decisions upon the republics. Analysis of the Russian/Ukrainian conflict over nuclear issues brings one to the conclusion that Russia has no one to blame but herself for what has happened. First, the tactic of resolving security issues at the expense of the other republics was short-sighted. Second, Russia's unwillingness to make concessions regarding compensation for the nuclear materials extracted from the warheads has undermined confidence that Russia is capable of being an honest partner. Third, Russia's perpetual threats and underhanded way of dealing with the former Soviet republics force one to conclude that Russia is returning to its former imperialistic politics.

The Ukrainian Parliament's ratification of START I is important because it confirmed the sovereign right of a state to arm itself, even with the nuclear weapons on its own territory. In practice, Russia and the United States denied all three republics this right on the grounds that Russia alone has jurisdiction over nuclear issues. Against the backdrop of the struggle being waged by Ukraine to determine the fate of the nuclear weapons located on its territory, Belarus has come out looking like a model student, diligently informing Moscow and Washington that it has performed the obligations set forth in the Lisbon Protocol. As for Kazakhstan, we are heading in the direction of completely destroying the Soviet nuclear weapons on our territory and joining the NPT as a non-nuclear state.

Was there an alternative in 1991 and 1992 to the so-called "dictatorship" of Russia and the United States, insofar as strategic forces were concerned? To reach a different resolution, the three former Soviet republics in possession of nuclear weapons would have had to formulate a joint policy for their relations with Russia. There are solid reasons why this did not occur, however. The respective strategic postures of these states and their relations with Russia are so different from one another that only a real threat from outside--that is, from Russia--could have united them. These incipient states had neither the time nor the opportunity to work out their own independent positions on nuclear forces. Russia, on the other hand, declared itself to be the one and only legal heir of the Soviet Union's nuclear weapons. The START I treaty was a timely development in this respect, because it removed nuclear weapons from the territory of these republics. Thus, the newly-independent states were subjected to powerful political pressure from the United States, which had an interest in their disarmament.

Nonetheless, one thing is clear: Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and

Belarus have signed the Lisbon Protocol. Despite the fact that Ukraine is technically within its rights, Russia has grounds for its claims that Ukraine formally meet the requirements of the Lisbon Protocol. But apparently the United States will have the final say, and it has already begun to apply political pressure on Kiev.

Throughout the disputes between Russia and Ukraine, Kazakhstan has always remained on the sidelines, not openly declaring itself to be on one side or the other. In practice, however, the possibility of Ukraine's withdrawal from START I calls into question the entire structure created by the treaty, including Kazakhstan's participation. The fact that Kazakhstan did not support Russia on this issue clearly demonstrates that both Kazakhstan and Ukraine have had equally negative experiences in holding negotiations with Russia about nuclear issues. Russia has been pursuing only its own self-interests. All of this goes beyond the framework of conventional political and diplomatic relations among states, because what is at stake is the security and respective national interests of the newly-independent states. Taking all these factors into consideration, one cannot help but recognize that the Ukrainian Parliament's decision in regard to START I reminds Kazakhstan once again of its own security issues, which will not automatically be resolved simply by adhering to START I and the NPT. The extent to which these issues are interconnected is at least as significant for Kazakhstan as it is for Ukraine.

How will this situation develop, given that the interested parties (Ukraine, Russia, the United States) are seeking a way out of the crisis?

The first possibility, which is also the worst-case scenario: Ukraine and Russia will not be able to reach an agreement on nuclear issues. In this case, one would expect to see increased tension in relations between the two countries, with Russia applying economic pressure on Ukraine, in addition to diplomatic and political measures. If this were to occur, events could develop in unforeseen ways, causing a considerable deterioration of the general political situation within the CIS and on the international scene as a whole. In such circumstances, Kazakhstan would have no choice but to support Russia, given the imperative of maintaining stability within the Commonwealth. However, the Republic of Kazakhstan's official expression of concern regarding Ukraine's actions must not assume the form of unconditional support for Moscow and Washington.

The second possible scenario is as follows: Ukraine and Russia are able to reach a compromise, with any one of a number of combinations of political factors.

(1) Concessions from Russia. These concessions would pri-

marily concern the issue of compensation for materials removed from nuclear warheads. Such a compromise would serve as a convenient precedent for Kazakhstan. The danger exists, however, that Russia will adopt a harsher stance when negotiating with Kazakhstan, thereby hoping to make up for political clout lost in the struggle with Kiev.

(2) Concessions from Ukraine. Such compromises might occur as a result of collective pressure from all participants in START I. Kazakhstan might ask for certain political dividends in exchange for supporting Russia's position. In the final analysis, this scenario would constitute a return to the status quo as it existed before ratification of the NPT by the Ukrainian Parliament.

(3) Active involvement of the United States. The American government might become actively involved in shaping a compromise, which follows a plan drawn up in Washington. Given the serious nature of nuclear issues, the leadership in Washington might sacrifice support for Russia in order to reach a compromise with Ukraine. If this were to occur, Russia and Kazakhstan would naturally close ranks. Closer relations between Russia and Ukraine--at the expense of some third party--is a more likely scenario, however. If the Moscow-Kiev axis is in fact strengthened, Kazakhstan will need to develop a special relationship with the United States based on bilateral agreements.

The entire START I framework and the Lisbon Protocol are based upon mandatory participation of all the former Soviet republics that possess nuclear weapons. Thus, if any one link in the chain (Ukraine, in this instance) were to break, the entire disarmament process would be disrupted. The only way out of such a situation would be through bilateral agreements (for example, between Kazakhstan and Russia or Kazakhstan and the United States).

The changing situation of nuclear weapons in Ukraine offers Kazakhstan the opportunity to strengthen its position in negotiations with Moscow and Washington. From Kazakhstan's perspective, further development of the negotiations on nuclear issues must proceed within the framework of bilateral relations between Kazakhstan and Russia or Kazakhstan and the United States. Therefore, Kazakhstan's negotiating partners need to understand that we will not accept the Ukrainian method of addressing this issue. Russia should not disrupt the settlement of issues regarding agreements on compensation. Also, Kazakhstan will need new security guarantees once START I is implemented. This new situation will enable Kazakhstan to take its relations with the United States to new levels. It also needs to be made clear to the leadership in Washington that the ultimate goal of our policy vis-a-vis the United States is strategic

partnership.

The harsh debates surrounding the Soviet nuclear legacy, especially between Russia and Ukraine, cannot overshadow the tragic economic legacy of the post-Soviet era. Even if all members of the CIS could agree to maintain a collective defense system with nuclear weapons--assuming relations among them were to improve and all the contradictions and threats were somehow smoothed over or eliminated--they would still be unable to bear the burden of a "nuclear shield" simply for economic reasons. Clearly, this is the true significance of the disarmament process begun in 1987. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 accelerated this process, and from that time on, the policies adopted by the United States and Russia were aimed at making it irreversible.

Yet, the issues related to Kazakhstan's national security still remain unresolved. Kazakhstan's signing of the NPT will not require that there be support from the nuclear states in the event of aggression. Only three of these states (the Soviet Union, the United States, and Great Britain) issued special statements in 1967 that addressed acts of aggression using nuclear weapons. Furthermore, the security guarantees which Kazakhstan receives as a member of the CIS are becoming ever more fragile, not to mention the fact that the very existence of the Commonwealth is problematic. Finally, the inclusion of Kazakhstan in START I was accompanied by verbal assurances from the United States and Russia to the effect that they would guarantee the territorial integrity and security of Kazakhstan following the destruction of Soviet ballistic missiles and the elimination of nuclear-armed aircraft on Kazakh territory. However, these assurances were not backed up by any kind of special written agreements spelling out the obligations of the great powers. At present the political configuration in Kazakhstan offers no answers to these questions. Developing these answers is Kazakhstan's real task for the future.