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## MULTILATERAL COOPERATION TO CREATE A NUCLEAR WEAPONS-FREE ZONE IN CENTRAL ASIA

**Abstract:** This article examines the multilateral cooperation of the newly independent states of the Central Asian region to ensure stability and strengthen peace in the region, reveals the assistance of the countries of the region to international efforts to ensure global and regional security, their participation in international agreements and treaties in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The article pays special attention to the initiatives of Uzbekistan and other countries of the region to create a nuclear-free zone in Central Asia.

**Key words:** Central Asia, nuclear-free zone, globalization, stability, international terrorism, weapons of mass destruction.

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### Introduction

Since gaining independence, Uzbekistan and other countries of the region are pursuing a comprehensively balanced foreign policy based on national interests, which has received wide recognition in the world community.

One of the main tasks of the foreign policy activity of the states of the region is the preservation and strengthening of peace and stability in Central Asia (CA), the transformation of the region into a zone of security and sustainable development to the heads of state and parliaments of the countries that recognized the state independence of Uzbekistan, in which it was noted that «considering the strengthening of international security as a priority, the Republic of Uzbekistan expresses its determination to pursue a responsible balanced policy in the military field and reaffirms its readiness to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons» [1].

The states of the region actively contribute to international efforts to ensure global and regional security. Realizing the threat to humanity throughout its history posed by the dangers arising from armed

conflicts, especially in the 20th century with the use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), the countries of the region became parties to all important international agreements and treaties in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation, in particular, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, the conventions on chemical and biological weapons, and others. Moreover, in the light of awareness of the possible consequences of a nuclear and, consequently, environmental catastrophe, the closure by Kazakhstan in August 1991 of an important strategic facility located on the territory of Central Asia – the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site, as well as put forward by Uzbekistan in September 1993 on the 48th session of the UN General Assembly, an initiative to create a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia (CAWFZ), which is an effective measure to strengthen the nuclear non-proliferation regime in the region.

At the same time, in the conditions of the modern world, when armed conflicts are intensifying in various regions, the problems of international terrorism, WMD proliferation, and other threats that

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do not recognize national borders are aggravated, the Central Asian states, in the framework of cooperation with influential international and regional organizations, actively participate in the discussion and resolution of issues global and regional nature, and also focus the attention of the world community on the acute problems of ensuring stability and security in the Central Asian region. Preserving and strengthening peace and stability in Central Asia, turning the region into a zone of security and sustainable development, and strengthening the international WMD non-proliferation regime are designated among the priority areas of foreign policy activities of the Republic of Uzbekistan and other countries of the region.

### **Prevention of the threat of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in the former USSR**

As you know, one of the most important modern security problems of the world community is the issue of nuclear disarmament. The collapse of the Soviet Union exacerbated the problem of nuclear arms control since the nuclear weapons of the former USSR ended up on the territory of four new independent states – Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan.

For the Central Asian region, the relevance of this problem was that by the beginning of the 90s. In the last century, a huge arsenal of weapons of mass destruction was concentrated on the territory of Kazakhstan: 1040 nuclear warheads for intercontinental ballistic missiles and 370 warheads for air-launched cruise missiles [2, p. 49]. The most important strategic object was the Semipalatinsk test site, where hundreds of nuclear and thermonuclear explosions were carried out over the course of half a century. And the experience of the only use of nuclear weapons in history (1945) showed the whole world that this weapon poses a threat to the security and even the existence of all mankind.

Under these conditions, with the beginning of the formation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in its fundamental documents, in particular, in the Declaration of Alma-Ata signed on December 21, 1991, to ensure international strategic stability and security, it was determined that the CIS would maintain a united command of strategic military forces and unified control over nuclear weapons. The Declaration also stated that the parties would respect each other's aspirations to achieve the status of a nuclear-free and (or) neutral state. In addition, the signed document declared that “with the formation of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics ceases to exist” and that “the member states of the Commonwealth guarantee, by their constitutional procedures, the fulfillment of international obligations arising from treaties and agreements of the former USSR” [3].

In the initial period of the formation of the CIS, military-political problems were the central issues of

the Commonwealth. It was necessary, along with other issues, to resolve the most complex issues of settling the Soviet nuclear legacy. In this regard, on March 20, 1992, at the summit of the Council of CIS Heads of State in Kyiv, in order to ensure the security of the CIS member states, maintain control of strategic forces and prevent conflicts, the “Decision on the High Command of the Joint Armed Forces of the Commonwealth”, [4] including Strategic the CIS forces and the General Purpose Forces, as well as the “Agreement on the Joint Armed Forces for a transitional period”[5]. In accordance with these documents, the temporary control of strategic nuclear weapons located on Ukrainian, Belarusian and Kazakh territory was carried out by the Commander of the CIS Strategic Forces.

At the same time, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Soviet-American START-1 treaty signed in Moscow in the summer of 1991 [6] could not enter into force without its ratification by not one state – the USSR, but by four – Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan, on whose territories the nuclear weapons of the former Soviet Union were located. In this regard, representatives of the United States, Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan on May 23, 1992, in Lisbon signed the Protocol [7] to the Soviet-American START-1 treaty, according to which the last three countries agreed to assume the obligations of the former USSR under the START treaty -1 and pledged to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons as non-nuclear countries. On December 5, 1994, the START-1 Treaty entered into force. And by the mid-1990s, adhering to the status of non-nuclear-weapon states defined in the Lisbon Protocol, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and Belarus transferred the nuclear weapons located on their territory to the Russian Federation. Russia has become the sole internationally recognized successor to the Soviet Union's nuclear arsenal.

The First President of Kazakhstan N. Nazarbayev, commenting on the issue of transferring nuclear weapons to the Russian side, noted that he had to make difficult decisions at that time, which were not dictated by the political situation. “First of all, the case concerned vital issues. Too many on our earth have experimented with the «nuclear genie». For forty years, 752 nuclear explosions were carried out at the Semipalatinsk test site: 26 in the atmosphere, 78 on the ground, and the rest underground. Nearly half a million people have been directly or indirectly affected by these nuclear weapons tests. In December 1991, when the Soviet superpower collapsed, Kazakhstan got a huge nuclear potential – the fourth largest in the world in terms of its capacity. We had to make a choice, guided by a civilized approach to this problem. From the first days of its existence, our country declared its commitment to the principles of peace. Only Russia could, as a great power, claim

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ownership and real control of this former nuclear complex"[8].

### Initiatives to create a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region

In modern conditions, when full-scale hostilities and armed conflicts are taking place in various regions of the world, the problems of terrorism, extremism, and the uncontrolled proliferation of various types of weapons are aggravating, one of the most important problems in ensuring international security is the nonproliferation and elimination of existing nuclear arsenals.

At the global level, a multilateral international act, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), developed in 1968 by the UN Disarmament Committee, was called upon to put a barrier to the spread of nuclear weapons.

The participants of this Treaty are 190 states of the world, including five newly independent states of Central Asia that signed the NPT: the Republic of Uzbekistan – May 7, 1992; the Republic of Kazakhstan – May 20, 1994; Kyrgyz Republic – July 5, 1994; Turkmenistan – September 29, 1994; Republic of Tajikistan – January 17, 1995[9].

The NPT is a fundamental treaty in ensuring global peace and security, preventing the threat of nuclear proliferation, and the peaceful use of nuclear energy.

At the same time, the creation of nuclear-weapon-free zones (NWFZs) is an effective measure to strengthen the international nuclear non-proliferation regime at the regional levels. The right of any group of states to conclude regional treaties to ensure the complete absence of nuclear weapons in their respective territories" is enshrined in Article VII of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons [10].

Unlike the NPT, the nuclear-free zones that are being created not only prohibit the production and acquisition of nuclear weapons but also prohibit their deployment by nuclear powers on the territory of the NWFZ. In addition, participants in nuclear-free zones receive legally binding security guarantees from nuclear powers, which non-nuclear participants in the NPT are deprived of.

For the first time, a nuclear-weapon-free zone was created by the signing in 1967 of the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean (the so-called Treaty of Tlatelolco). After the ratification of the relevant document by Cuba in 2002, the Latin American and Caribbean nuclear-weapon-free zone includes all the states of this region. After this agreement, three more treaties on the establishment of NWFZs were signed: in the South Pacific (Treaty of Rarotonga, 1985), in Southeast Asia (Treaty of Bangkok, 1995), and Africa (Treaty of Pelindaba, 1996). By these treaties, the entire populated part of the southern hemisphere has a

status free from nuclear weapons. In addition, Mongolia has the status of a nuclear-free state (1998).

The beginning of the policy of creating a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Central Asian region was the closure of the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site by Kazakhstan on August 29, 1991, and eighteen years later, on the initiative of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the UN General Assembly on December 2, 2009, by adopting resolution 64/35, announced 29 August International Day against Nuclear Tests[11].

For the first time, a proposal to create a zone free of nuclear weapons in Central Asia was put forward by the President of Uzbekistan I. Karimov on September 28, 1993, during the 48th session of the United Nations General Assembly. Speaking from the rostrum of the UN, the head of state said that "Uzbekistan stands for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons, for effective actions and the extension without a term of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. The Republic is a staunch supporter of declaring the Central Asian region a nuclear-free zone"[12].

This initiative of Uzbekistan received wide recognition and support in the world community and fully met the interests of the countries of the region on the path of nuclear-free development and active counteraction to the threats of uncontrolled proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. However, the practical implementation of the idea of creating an NWFZ in Central Asia required long and painstaking work on the part of both the Central Asian states and the nuclear powers and relevant UN structures.

On May 1, 1995, the Kyrgyz Republic also made a proposal to create an NWFZ, in which it was noted that the nuclear-free zone being created would contribute to peace, stability, and security in the region. Kyrgyzstan's statement emphasized that "the region is located on the border between two powerful nuclear states (Russia and China – S.R.). The hope was expressed that the creation of the NWFZ would encourage them to reduce their nuclear arsenals and to soften the policy of nuclear deterrence"[13, p.41].

In February 1997, the heads of the five Central Asian states at a meeting in Kazakhstan signed the Almaty Declaration, in which they unanimously supported the initiative to create a nuclear-weapon-free zone, and also called on the eve of the 50th anniversary of the Semipalatinsk test site, all interested countries to support the idea of declaring Central Asia a nuclear-free zone open for accession by other states [14].

This document confirmed the desire of all Central Asian states for the nuclear demilitarization of the region, and from that moment on, the creation of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia acquired the character of a regional initiative.

The NWFZ initiative received further conceptual development during the International

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Conference “Central Asia – a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone” held in Tashkent in September 1997, which made it possible, through the joint actions of many countries and international organizations, to transfer the construction of a nuclear safety zone into practice.

Representatives of 56 states of the world and 16 international organizations took part in the work of the Tashkent conference. Among them: are the UN, the European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the North Atlantic military bloc (NATO), the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and others.

During the Tashkent Conference, Russian First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Igor Ivanov voiced the position of the Russian Federation on the political support of the CWFZ [15, p.41].

As a result of this conference, a Regional Expert Group was established to prepare the Treaty on the CANWFZ.

The activity of the Central Asian states in the formation of a nuclear-free zone was actively supported by the UN, the IAEA, and other international organizations. In particular, UN General Assembly resolutions 52/38S of December 9, 1997, 53/77A of December 4, 1998, 55/33W of December 20, 2000, 57/69 of November 22, 2002, 58 /518 of December 8, 2003, 59/513 of December 3, 2004, and 60/516 of December 8, 2005, titled «Establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia», demonstrating international support Central Asian states to create a zone free of nuclear weapons, contributing to the strengthening of peace and stability at the regional and global levels. The document of the General Assembly of December 9, 1997, also contains an appeal to the UN Secretary-General to provide, within the available resources, assistance to the Central Asian states in developing forms and elements of an agreement on the creation of a regional nuclear safety zone. The initiators of these resolutions of the UN General Assembly were the newly independent states, and members of the UN – Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan.

In July 1998, a consultative meeting of experts from the Central Asian states, the five nuclear powers, and the UN was held in Bishkek, as a result of which practical work began on the development of the text of the Treaty on a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia.

Subsequently, experts from the five Central Asian republics, with the active assistance of the UN Department for Disarmament Affairs and IAEA experts, developed a draft of the future treaty at meetings in Geneva, Tashkent, Sapporo, and Samarkand, which was subjected to comprehensive discussion. In September 2002, the first draft of the Treaty was agreed upon in Samarkand, which was

submitted for consideration to the countries of the «nuclear five».

As a result of intensive consultative meetings and negotiations with the nuclear powers on the text of the draft Treaty, at the seventh meeting of the Regional Expert Group, held on February 7-9, 2005 in Tashkent, the common position of the countries of the region on the text of the Treaty was agreed upon, taking into account the proposals and comments of the nuclear powers, IAEA and the UN Office of Legal Affairs. And the signing of the historic Treaty on a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia by Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan took place on September 8, 2006, in Semipalatinsk. It is necessary to note the symbolism of the place of signing this document on the territory of Kazakhstan, which suffered the most from long-term nuclear tests at the test site of the same name. The UN General Assembly hailed the CANWFZ Treaty as an important step in strengthening regional and international peace and security.

The agreement entered into force on March 21, 2009, after ratification by the parliaments of the Republic of Uzbekistan (10.05.2007), the Kyrgyz Republic (27.07.2007), the Republic of Tajikistan (13.01.2009), Turkmenistan (17.01.2009) and the Republic of Kazakhstan (19.02.2009) and is indefinite.

It should be noted that the Treaty makes a huge contribution not only to strengthening regional security but also to the international regime for the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The treaty provides that all its participants refuse to develop, manufacture or otherwise acquire nuclear weapons, possess or control them, refrain from deploying or transporting nuclear weapons by any means, from testing or using nuclear weapons, and also undertake not to allow such actions by other states on their territory. . At the same time, this Treaty does not prohibit the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.

### **Obligations of nuclear powers on security guarantees to the countries of Central Asia**

It should be noted that the final international legal formalization of the Treaty on the Establishment of a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in Central Asia receives after the signing by the states officially possessing nuclear weapons – Great Britain, China, Russia, the United States, and France – obligations on security guarantees to the states of the region.

On May 6, 2014, a historic event took place at the UN Headquarters in New York – for the first time since the creation of the Organization, representatives of the «nuclear five» unanimously and simultaneously signed the Protocol on Security Assurances to the Treaty.

In his statement, the then UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon welcomed the signing at the UN Headquarters in New York by representatives of the



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nuclear-weapon states of an additional Protocol on Security Assurances to the Treaty on a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in Central Asia, and the high UN Representative for Disarmament Affairs Angela Kanne stressed that today's event was an important milestone in strengthening both regional security in Central Asia and the global nuclear non-proliferation regime[16].

The signing ceremony was also attended by the Permanent Representatives to the UN of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

Speaking at the signing ceremony of the Protocol, the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Uzbekistan to the UN Muzaffar Madrakhimov expressed hope that this act would strengthen regional and global security. «Nuclear-weapon-free zones have become one of the most effective ways to limit proliferation and respond to potential future nuclear catastrophes while ensuring nuclear security and strengthening the non-proliferation regime has become one of the most important international security issues facing the world,» he said. Aksoltan Atayeva, Permanent Representative of Turkmenistan to the UN, said that the signing of the Protocol on negative assurances is the result of many years of work, and “for us, today's Protocol is another huge step towards promoting this Treaty”[17].

The signing by the “nuclear five” of an additional Protocol to the Treaty marked the completion of the process of consultations on the issue of providing security guarantees to the Central Asian states. Namely, in accordance with this Protocol, the states of the “nuclear five” undertake not to use nuclear weapons or threaten to use them against the states parties to the Treaty, and also not to assist in any act constituting a breach of the Treaty, i.e. not to test, support or encourage the testing of any nuclear explosive device, its deployment or transportation within the nuclear weapons free zone in Central Asia.

It is noteworthy that the nuclear-weapon-free zone created in Central Asia differs significantly from all nuclear-free zones existing in the world. In particular, this is the first nuclear-free zone created in a region where nuclear weapons previously existed and were tested, the consequences of which the people living in this territory feel to this day. In addition, the

Central Asian zone directly borders two officially nuclear-weapon states, Russia and China, and neighbors two major de facto nuclear-weapon states, India and Pakistan.

### Conclusion

Thus, an analysis of the historical processes of the initial post-Soviet period and the formation of newly independent states shows that the priority and necessary measures taken within the CIS made it possible to control and prevent the proliferation of WMD in Soviet arsenals. And in the issues of the liberation of the territory of Central Asia from nuclear weapons, along with the actions of Kazakhstan, on whose territory there were nuclear weapons, close and successful cooperation between the Russian Federation and the United States of America, of course, played a big role.

The initiative to create a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia, first announced at the UN by Uzbekistan and supported by the countries of the region, became possible thanks to the joint constructive efforts of all five Central Asian states – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan – in their desire to ensure security and stability and peace in the Central Asian region. It is generally accepted that the member states of the nuclear-weapon-free zone undertake not to transfer or accept from anyone nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices, manufacture or otherwise acquire nuclear weapons, or accept any help in its production. Consequently, this event was an important contribution to strengthening the nuclear non-proliferation regime, encouraging cooperation in the peaceful use of nuclear energy, and environmental rehabilitation of territories affected by radioactive contamination.

It should also be noted that in the context of the stagnation of the process of global nuclear disarmament, the creation of the CANWFZ is a real and significant contribution of the countries of the region to the implementation of the goals of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, to strengthening regional and international peace and security, as well as preventing nuclear materials and technologies from falling into the hands of international terrorist organizations.

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