

Dena Sholk

M.A. Candidate in Russian, Eurasian, Eastern European Studies
School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University
Washington, D.C.

The U.S. and Kazakhstan's successful denuclearization partnership between 1991 and 1995

Annotation

As a rule the countries possessing the nuclear weapons are trying to keep them and to increase their nuclear potential. Furthermore, at the present time some countries are working on their nuclear program, trying to enter the nuclear states club. Definitely, it is an impressive moment in the world history when sovereign state voluntarily chooses to remove all their nuclear weapons and associated infrastructure. Fortunately, there is example of such actions. Upon achieving independence and receiving all the necessary guarantees of safety from USA and international organizations, Kazakhstan became Non Nuclear Weapons State. It was an unprecedented action and it succeeded due to effective partnership between the USA and Kazakhstan. The success of denuclearization process can be explained by the following factors: President Nursultan Nazarbayev's steadfast commitment to a policy of denuclearization, U.S. security assurances to Kazakhstan, U.S. technical and financial assistance to Kazakhstan ensured that the country would cooperate in transporting strategic nuclear weapons, the attention of high-level American officials to Kazakhstan was essential to keeping Kazakhstan politically on track towards fulfilling its stated commitment to becoming a NNWS, and by the fact that the U.S. adopted a facilitative diplomatic role in working with Russia and Kazakhstan to overcome the challenges associated with a shortage of information.

Keywords: Kazakhstan, USA, denuclearization partnership, Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT), Non Nuclear Weapons State (NNWS).

It is a rare moment in world history when upon achieving independence, a sovereign state inherits nuclear weapons. It is even more unusual when the state voluntarily chooses to remove those weapons and associated infrastructure. When the Soviet Union dissolved on December 25, 1991, the Republic of Kazakhstan inherited 104 SS-18 Inter-Continental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) with a total of 1,040 strategic warheads [1, p. 97]. The largest missile in the Soviet arsenal, the SS-18 could carry ten independently targeted warheads, each with a payload of 7.6 tons and a range of 12,000 km. [2, p. 11]. Additionally, 40 Tu-95 Bear-H bombers and associated Kh-55 Air-Launched Cruise Missiles (ALCMs) were deployed at the Semipalatinsk Nuclear Test Site [3, p. 6].

The denuclearization of Kazakhstan was a technically and diplomatically challenging experience for Americans and Kazakhstanis alike that shaped Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy and domestic institutions, created the foundation for a stable and beneficial bilateral relationship. This article is a general overview of how the process of diplomatic and technical cooperation between the U.S. and Kazakhstan between 1991 and 1995 created the basis for future relations. Between December 16, 1991 and April 1995, when the last SS-18 ICBM was removed from Kazakhstani territory, American and Kazakhstani diplomats concluded the Lisbon Protocol, Budapest Memorandum and signed several umbrella and implementation agreements for the implementation of Nunn-Lugar assistance.

The challenge for U.S. foreign policy was to keep Kazakhstan on track towards signing the Lisbon Protocol to the START Treaty and Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) as a Non Nuclear Weapons State (NNWS), providing Kazakhstan with security assurances and removing nuclear weapons from Kazakhstan to Russia. American diplomats balanced diplomatic interaction with Kazakhstan alongside similar activities with Ukraine, Belarus and Russia. Kazakhstan's leaders recognized that their newly independent state lacked the infrastructure and technological capacity to maintain a nuclear arsenal, but they were unwilling to forgo weapons without obtaining security assurances from all five nuclear powers. Additional challenges involved in the denuclearization of Kazakhstan centered on the "newness" of diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Kazakhstan, the weakness of Kazakhstani ("Kazakh" is an ethnic Kazakh while "Kazakhstani" is a citizen of the Republic of Kazakhstan and includes all ethnicities) institutions, and the relationship of Kazakhstan to the military-industrial complex headquartered in Moscow during Soviet rule. Ridding the country of nuclear weapons was difficult because Moscow retained a monopoly over the information related to Kazakhstan's nuclear arsenal and the history of weapons tests. Neither the Kazakhstanis nor the Americans had a comprehensive understanding of the technical situation in the country with respect to the number of nuclear weapons and the extent of human and environmental devastation. Ultimately, bilateral diplomatic and technical cooperation between 1991 and 1995 resulted in the successful elimination of nuclear weapons and established the foundation for future relations.

The Five Explanations for the Successful Denuclearization of Kazakhstan

The successful denuclearization of Kazakhstan was made possible by the five following conditions:

First and foremost, President Nursultan Nazarbayev's steadfast commitment to a policy of denuclearization, in conjunction with the absence of domestic political opposition, facilitated the implementation of disarmament and dismantlement programs and reduced the risk of Kazakhstani defection from its agreements with the U.S. In contrast to Ukraine, where American diplomats had to convince the country's executive and legislative branch

to support denuclearization, amiable people-to-people relations marked American diplomatic engagement in Kazakhstan. U.S. diplomats did not have to convince Kazakhstan's parliament to support the country's denuclearization. Kazakhstan's military was not created until May 1992, thereby eliminating any source of opposition from the armed forces. Plus, members of Kazakhstan's scientific and military community supported the President.

President Nazarbayev was committed to securing Kazakhstan's independence and national sovereignty while ridding the country of nuclear weapons. On December 16th in Almaty, Secretary of State James Baker III met with President Nazarbayev, who was still "engrossed with the Nevada-Semipalatinsk movement" [4]. Baker presented U.S. policy: Kazakhstan's failure to forgo its nuclear weapons stockpile would prevent it from having a normal relationship with the United States. President Nazarbayev, whose long-term aspiration was for Kazakhstan to become a NNWS, told Baker that he would keep nuclear weapons for Kazakhstan's defense and security [5, p. 60]. Kazakhstan would solve the nuclear issue "when we knew we were safe" [5, p. 60]. In the meantime, Kazakhstan agreed to maintain existing arsenals in a safe, secure and responsible manner and adhere to international safeguards administered by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) [6, p. 7].

Second, U.S. security assurances to Kazakhstan, formalized in the Budapest Memorandum, acted as a safeguard that ensured Kazakhstan would have the attention of U.S. policymakers in the event the country's security was under threat. U.S. security assurances effectively were a promise that the newly independent state of Kazakhstan would exist with the full benefits of national sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Third, U.S. technical and financial assistance to Kazakhstan ensured that the country would cooperate in transporting strategic nuclear weapons to Russia and adhering to its START commitments. The distinct effort by U.S. diplomats to broaden the scope of the bilateral relationship to include Science and Technology (S&T) and investment with the establishment of the Gore-Nazarbayev Commission and the International Science and Technology Center, ensured attention by high-level American policymakers and continued engagement with the people of Kazakhstan.

The U.S.' ability to facilitate Kazakhstan's nuclear disarmament was made possible through the Nunn-Lugar Bill, or Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) Act of 1991. Signed into law on December 12, 1991, the Nunn-Lugar Bill provided \$400 million in financing for the goals of secure and environmentally safe measures for storage, transportation and dismantling of nuclear weapons, as well as measures to improve physical protection for them [7, p. 39]. Initial U.S. assistance to Kazakhstan in 1991 totaled \$70 million [8, p. 110-111]. As of December 1993, Kazakhstan was allocated \$84 million for Nunn-Lugar projects [8, p. 110-111]. In Kazakhstan, CTR assistance was used to ensure the country's compliance with its obligations under the START Treaty, and implement projects for

dismantling strategic and chemical weapons, protecting, controlling and accounting for fissile material, providing new employment for former weapons scientists and converting factories from defense work to civilian production.

The International Science and Technology Center (ISTC), a grant-giving organization founded by the U.S., European Union, Japan and Russia, was established in November 1992 to employ Soviet scientists who previously worked in the military-industrial complex [9]. Because ISTC grants require that at least 50% of the scientists working on a proposed project were formerly employed in the Soviet nuclear-industrial complex, the program productively employed Kazakhstan's domestic talent [10]. In 1994 alone, through the Ministry of S&T, some 700 projects were granted to 250 scientists in Kazakhstan [10]. Many S&T projects that began under Nunn-Lugar continue today, with the scientists conducting quality, world-class research [11]. Thus, through Nunn-Lugar assistance, the U.S. financed programs to encourage the scientists who stayed in Kazakhstan to find alternative means of income generation, apply their talents for peaceful purposes and learn how to conduct research in accordance with global standards for publishing [12].

Fourth, the attention of high-level American officials to Kazakhstan was essential to keeping Kazakhstan politically on track towards fulfilling its stated commitment to becoming a NNWS. The May 1992 visit of President Nazarbayev to Washington strengthened the bilateral relationship and provided Kazakhstan with a sufficient sense of security in their partnership with the U.S. necessary to carry out disarmament and dismantlement activities within seven years, in accordance with the START Treaty. Because security assurances were not formally secured until December 1994, when the Budapest Memorandum was signed, the involvement of high-level Western policymakers reaffirmed international support for Kazakhstan's statehood and allowed for the removal of strategic missiles back to Russia.

In December 1993, in Almaty, Vice President Gore and President Nazarbayev signed the Safe, Secure Dismantlement (SSD) Agreement, establishing the legal framework for the transportation, storage and destruction of nuclear and other forms of weapons of mass destruction on Kazakhstan's territory [8, p. 110-111]. They also signed nuclear umbrella agreement and five implementing agreements, providing \$85 million in U.S. denuclearization assistance to Kazakhstan [13, p. 18]. Furthermore, Kazakhstan and the U.S. signed a Framework Agreement on elimination of consequences of emergency situations and prevention of proliferation of nuclear weapons, as well as five executive agreements for practical implementation of specific directions of cooperation [14, p. 39]. Most importantly, Kazakhstan's parliament ratified the country's accession to the NPT, as Vice President Gore was not about to go to Almaty without this [15].

In February 1994, President Nazarbayev visited Washington and met with President Clinton. This was a symbolic visit that reaffirmed bilateral cooperation in the area of nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation [16]. President Clinton pledged an additional

\$400 million to Kazakhstan. Reciprocally, President Nazarbayev presented him with the original copies of the NPT ratification documents, marking Kazakhstan's formal accession to the NPT as a NNWS. The February 1994 meeting between Presidents Clinton and Nazarbayev in Washington, D.C. marked the establishment of the U.S.-Kazakhstan Joint Commission, also called the Gore-Nazarbayev Commission. Modeled after the Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission created in April 1993 in Russia, the Gore-Nazarbayev Commission was formed to serve as a permanent framework to manage bilateral relations and foster cooperation in the areas of science, technology, security and nuclear disarmament.

Fifth, the U.S. adopted a facilitative diplomatic role in working with Russia and Kazakhstan to overcome the challenges associated with a shortage of information. U.S. funds through Nunn-Lugar rewarded Kazakhstan for its political compliance, while providing Russian and Kazakhstani personnel with the technical resources and physical conditions to secure weapons materials and transport missiles to Russia transparently in accordance with international environmental and safety standards. The Department of Defense (DoD) outfitted Kazakhstan with Kevlar blankets and secured railway cars for the transportation of strategic weapons back to Russia. When DoD officials needed information, they went through the Kazakhstanis rather than approach their Russian colleagues directly [17].

The Long-Term Effects of Cooperation

In many ways, the denuclearization of Kazakhstan continues to the present day, as the country's scientific community surveys former nuclear test sites and evaluates the long-term damage to the environment and the Kazakhstani population of Soviet nuclear weapons tests. Scientists and engineers partner with the U.S. and international organizations to clean up residual materials and secure former test-tunnels. The most recent example of scientific cooperation is the Degelen Mountain Project, which was concluded in October 2012.

Kazakhstan's commitment to innovation, S&T research and R&D continues. The ongoing research in atomic energy, conducted by public and private Kazakhstani universities, reveals that American diplomacy and assistance expanded areas of bilateral cooperation beyond disarmament. When I spoke with a scientist in December 2012, he noted how at the time of independence, there were no Kazakh atomic scientists. Now, there is a thriving scientific community. Kazakhstan's scientific community continues to research the long-term effects of nuclear weapons testing on the environment, human populations, water and ecosystem. Atomic scientists at Kazakhstan National University at Al-Farabi are leading a project to measure levels of tritium in the water surrounding the Polygon, as this has never been done before [18]. Many public and private universities also partner with companies, such as Kazatomprom, to conduct research and gain employment opportunities.

The conversion of Soviet factories previously used for military purposes for civilian use contributes to Kazakhstan's position in the global economy today. Kazakhstan is the world's largest producer of uranium. The national uranium company, Kazatomprom, acquired 10% of Westinghouse Corporation. Kazatomprom has invested significantly in modernizing the uranium enrichment facility in Ulba-Kamenogorsk, and it is now a new, modern facility [19]. Kazakhstan became the world's leading exporter of uranium in 2009 and contributed to 37% of world uranium output by 2012 [20]. Kazatomprom seeks to export value-added fuel and supply 30% of the world fuel fabrication market by 2015 [20]. In January 2013, President Nazarbayev announced plans to construct a domestic Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) [21]. The early experience of denuclearization, with a focus on S&T, is central to the core of Kazakhstan's foreign policy and Kazakhstani identity.

More recently, in 2002, Kazakhstan became a member of the Nuclear Suppliers group. Kazakhstan spearheaded the formation of the Central Asia Nuclear Free Weapons Zone (CANWFZ), the agreement for which was signed in 2005. Kazakhstan chaired the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in 2010 and the Organization of Islamic Conference in 2011. With \$150 million in support from the international community, Kazakhstan is close to opening the first IAEA nuclear fuel bank [22].

As of the time of this writing in February 2013, the constructive bilateral relationship between the U.S. and Kazakhstan continues. Kazakhstan is the U.S.' foremost ally in Central Asia, as the two countries work together in the areas of international security, nuclear non-proliferation and trade. The U.S.' bilateral relationship with Kazakhstan is its strongest in Central Asia. Kazakhstan and the U.S. extended the CTR agreement in 2000 and again in 2008 [14, p. 40].

Kazakhstan's positive partnership with the U.S. modified its domestic and international economic orientation, reveals that initial conditions are important, but not decisive determinants of a country's economic and political development. Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy and stated policy objectives of achieving innovation in science and technology is largely a result of the country's diplomatic and technical cooperation with the U.S. between 1991 and 1995.

References

- 1 Togzhan Kassenova. *The Rollback States*//Tanya Ogilvie-White and David Santoro, eds. *Slaying the Nuclear Dragon: Disarmament Dynamics in the Twenty-First Century* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2012). – P. 97.
- 2 Nursultan Nazarbayev. *Epicenter of Peace* (Hollis: Puritan Press, Inc., 2001). – P. 11.
- 3 Steven Pifer. *The Trilateral Process: the United States, Ukraine, Russia and Nuclear Weapons*. *Foreign Policy at Brookings* (May 2011). – P.6.
- 4 Interview with Senior American official in the U.S. Department of Defense. – Washington, D.C. – October, 2012.

5 Nursultan Nazarbayev. On the Threshold of the Twenty-first Century (Almaty: The JSC Baspalar Uyi, 2010). – P. 60.

6 Ivo Daalder and Terry Terriff eds. Rethinking the Unthinkable: New Directions for Nuclear Arms Control. – Portland: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1993. – P. 7.

7 Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the United States of America and the Nuclear Threat Initiative, Kazakhstan's Nuclear Disarmament: A Global Model for a Safer World (Washington, D.C., 2006) – P. 39.

8 Jim Shevis. U.S., Kazakhstan Sign Nuclear Disarmament Pack — United States Information Agency News Release, December 13, 1993, reprinted in Kazakhstan: Reducing Nuclear Dangers, Increasing Global Security (Washington, DC: Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Nuclear Threat Initiative, 2004). – P. 110-111.

9 “ISTC Fact Sheet,” ISTC, <http://www.istc.ru/istc/istc.nsf/va.WebPages/ISTCFactSheetEng>.

10 Interview with Natalia Tomarovskaya. – Almaty, Kazakhstan – December 27, 2012.

11 Interview with 2010 U.S. Science Envoy Alice Gast. – Washington, DC. –October 14, 2012.

12 Interview with American official in the U.S. Department of Defense – Washington, D.C. – January, 2013.

13 William C. Potter. The Politics of Nuclear Renunciation: The Cases of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine.// The Henry L. Stimson Center Occasional Paper No. 22 (April 1995). – P. 18.

14 Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the United States of America and the Nuclear Threat Initiative, Kazakhstan's Nuclear Disarmament: A Global Model for a Safer World. –Washington, D.C., 2006. – P. 39-40.

15 Interview with Senior American official in the U.S. Department of Defense. Washington, D.C. – October, 2012.

16 Interview with Senior official in the U.S. Department of State. – Washington, D.C. – October, 2012.

17 Interview with American official in the U.S. Department of Defense. Washington, D.C. – January, 2013.

18 Urabek Bulat, Interview with author. – Almaty, Kazakhstan – December 27, 2012.

19 Interview with U.S. Department of Energy official. – Astana, Kazakhstan – January, 2013.

20 Storm Rocks Kazakh Uranium Industry, World Nuclear News – February 05, 2013// http://www.world-nuclear-news.org/C-Storm_rocks_Kazakh_uranium_industry-0502137.html.

21 Aynur Jafarova. Kazakhstan to Build Nuclear Power Plant in Energy-Deficient Region – Azernews. // <http://www.azernews.az/region/49258.html>. – February 04, 2013.

22 Josh Kucera, “Kazakhstan Set to Open Nuclear Fuel Bank,” Eurasianet, February 12, 2012 // <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/64988>.

Мақалада Қазақстанның 1991-1995 жылдары ядролық қарусыздану іс-шарасын нәтижелі түрде жүргізгені түрде қарастырылған. АҚШ пен Қазақстан арасындағы сол жылдардағы дипломатиялық және техникалық қарым-қатынасты қазақстандық көпвекторлық сыртқы ұстанымға әсер еткені нақтыланған. Аталмыш мақала биылғы, яғни 2013 жылы жарық көретін ауқымды еңбектің қысқартылған нұсқасы болып табылады.

Резюме

В данной статье приведены пять причин успешного ядерного разоружения Казахстана (1991 – 1995 гг.). Дипломатические и технические договоренности между США и Казахстаном в этот период послужило фундаментом устойчивых двусторонних отношений и стало основой казахстанской многовекторной внешней политики. Данная статья является сокращенным вариантом более объемной работы, которая должна быть опубликована весной 2013 г.