

For Denuclearization and Non-proliferation, We Need a “Pax Russica-Sinica”

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On August 29th, Kazakhstan's first president Nursultan Nazarbayev called for the construction of new global nuclear-arms-control infrastructure. While addressing the awards ceremony for the Nazarbayev Prize for a Nuclear-Weapons-Free World and Global Security, he stated:

“There is a need to review the outdated concept of strategic stability based on nuclear weapons and build a new nuclear arms control system. It is important to launch talks on developing a comprehensive nuclear reduction treaty....Guarantees should be provided to the countries that voluntarily abandon nuclear weapons and those that have a non-nuclear status. Otherwise, it is at least naive to expect threshold countries to stop trying to acquire nuclear arms. It means that while nuclear powers seek to maintain and upgrade their nuclear weapons, they expect others to abolish and ban them. It's impossible and unfair.”

Former President Nazarbayev also said that he had presented formal proposals to the governments of the United States, Russia, China and other nuclear powers to hold multilateral arms-control talks in Kazakhstan's capital, renamed Nur-Sultan in his honour upon his decision to vacate the office of the presidency in March.

Before we do anything else, it is necessary for us to break down the wording of President Nazarbayev's remarks very carefully, as several key phrases are loaded with implications.

Firstly, while nuclear non-proliferation is a shared priority of all of the world-powers, the country which pursues it most obsessively as a geo-strategic policy objective is the United States. Indeed, Russia and China have played mediating roles in denuclearization dialogue with North Korea, and the JCPOA's signatories include Russia, China, the European Union, and several EU member-states. However, we need to bear in mind that so many players became invested in the JCPOA, not essentially because they feared Iran's nuclear program, but at least equally as much because they wished to offset the risk of direct US military aggression against Iran. So when Nazarbayev draws attention to the hypocrisy of the nuclear powers on the issue of non-proliferation for threshold countries, he is primarily highlighting the hypocrisy of the United States.

Secondly, when former President Nazarbayev states that “guarantees should be provided to the countries that voluntarily abandon nuclear weapons,” it is implicitly understood that, as the United States' historical track-record of military aggression clearly demonstrates, any security-guarantees offered by the US would be meaningless. Therefore the implication of

Nazarbayev's remarks are that, in order to further the shared goal of nuclear non-proliferation, in practical terms, Russia and China would have to become the guarantors of threshold-nations' security against the prospect of military aggression. The implication is that nuclear non-proliferation can be a realistic goal only if it becomes accepted that Russia and China will expand their spheres of influence, and that this process would include zones of shared influence. By a process of elimination, who else could the guarantors realistically be? In short, we need a Pax Russica-Sinica.

However, in making these remarks, former President Nazarbayev is also playing a very shrewd game in furthering Kazakhstan's own geo-political interests. He sees an opportunity for Kazakhstan to position itself as a key broker in the project of non-proliferation. As American hegemony fades, very many nations and inter-governmental entities eye a multiplicity of diplomatic, economic, cultural and military means to bolster their own quotients of geo-political capital.

As the most robust economy in the western alliance and the hegemon of the EU, Germany is assuming a role of more central economic leadership.

France is once again becoming more militarily assertive in sub-Saharan Africa.

Poland has resurrected and rebranded the Pilsudski-era "intermarium" project through the Three Seas Initiative and de facto leadership of the Visegrád Group, finances Roman Catholic missions in western Ukraine and Kiev (implicitly, a resurrection of the Pilsudski-era "Promethean" project), and uses NATO article 5 to provide cover for an increasingly unilateral geo-political agenda.

The EU seeks to establish its own standing army.

Turkey also uses NATO article 5 as cover for its primarily central-Asia focused neo-Ottoman project.

Meanwhile, Iran has become the greatest regional power in the Middle East, with political, ideological and economic tentacles extending into Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen. Infrastructural integration will quickly follow.

In short, everybody, not only the conventionally recognized "superpowers," is now looking for ways to expand into the power-vacuum created by the fading away of American hegemony. We live in a time of renewed multi-polar imperial competition.

So why not Kazakhstan too?

Kazakhstan's population is only 18 million, but with extremely impressive mineral and hydrocarbon resources, and as the world's largest producer of uranium ore, diplomacy is not the only lever which Kazakhstan can employ in positioning itself as an important broker, most particularly on the issues of denuclearization and non-proliferation.

However, it would be unjustifiably cynical to see former President Nazarbayev's remarks as simply a matter of geo-political jostling. In 1991, the newly formed government of Kazakhstan under Nazarbayev closed the Semipalatinsk nuclear test-site and voluntarily gave up the 1,400 nuclear warheads which it had inherited from the USSR, to be transported to and decommissioned in Russia. Furthermore, President Nazarbayev was instrumental in the formation of the Central Asia Nuclear Weapon Free Zone in 2006. This extremely clear,

consistent and principled commitment to denuclearization over the past 30 years, and for that matter his exceptionally capable “safe pair of hands” in the stewardship of a stable, pluralistic emergent Kazakh nation, underlie his status as one of the most under-regarded statesmen on the world-stage over that period. It’s a cliché, but Nazarbayev really has been a father to his country.

I really can’t think of a single currently living political leader worldwide who is more deserving of having his nation’s capital renamed in his honour.

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