



## DENUCLEARIZATION OF THE KOREAN PENINSULA: LESSONS FROM KAZAKHSTAN

There were high expectations in the international community that the second Trump-Kim summit held in Vietnam in February 2019 would be a turning point in the nuclear disarmament of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) eventually leading to the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. This optimism was backed by several steps that the DPRK had taken since the beginning of detente on the Korean Peninsula in early 2018 to reduce tensions in relations with the United States, from the cessation of nuclear and missile tests to the return of the remains of American soldiers who had died in the Korean War. However, while the dynamics of bilateral contacts between Washington and Pyongyang provided a good basis for such sanguine hopes, the summit did not result in any historical breakthroughs, and some observers regarded its outcome as a total failure. There were a number of reasons for this outcome. Most importantly, the parties, apparently, did not engage in sufficient preparatory work at the lower diplomatic and expert level on the eve of the summit: they failed to clarify each other's negotiating positions, narrow down differences and come up with constructive proposals that would have made it possible to reach a mutually acceptable compromise. There were no pre-agreed documents, and the leaders of the two countries were unable to achieve a deal during their face-to-face negotiations. North Korea, which was expecting a weakening of the sanctions regime in response to a partial dismantlement of its nuclear facilities, was confronted with the U.S. demand for unconditional, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization without receiving any significant security guarantees and economic benefits. At the same time, there were some positive aspects that held a promise for a better future in resolving the North Korean nuclear issue. Despite the lack of results, the negotiations were held in a friendly atmosphere, and, with Trump and Kim managing to keep a fairly good personal relationship, Washington and Pyongyang expressed their willingness to continue negotiations. Although North Korea resumed missile tests by launching short-range projectiles in May 2019, the parties managed to organize an informal meeting between Trump and Kim at the Korean Demilitarized Zone in late June and announced a forthcoming resumption of nuclear talks. The process further intensified after the dismissal of U.S. National Security Advisor John Bolton, who had advocated applying the Libyan model of denuclearization to the DPRK. However, again, no substantial progress was achieved at the bilateral working-level talks held in Stockholm in October 2019, with North Korea conducting new missile tests and insisting on its end-of-year deadline for the United States to change its negotiating stance and offer more concessions. It should also be noted that the

continuing stalemate in negotiations allows Pyongyang to consolidate its nuclear weapons and ballistic missile capabilities both qualitatively and quantitatively.

Nevertheless, the window of opportunity for improving the situation on the Korean Peninsula is still open, but it may slam shut, as it did on repeated occasions in the past. At the present stage, it seems highly doubtful that the DPRK will abandon the entire arsenal of its nuclear weapons or related production capabilities. The North Korean regime will most likely continue to adhere to the position of partial denuclearization in exchange for concessions from the United States and the international community. In this regard, the disarmament experience of Kazakhstan may offer some lessons or even serve in part as a possible model for efforts to denuclearize North Korea and bring lasting peace to the Korean Peninsula.

There are certain similarities of the DPRK's current situation with the one faced by Kazakhstan at the dawn of its independence. Kazakhstan inherited from the Soviet Union the world's fourth largest nuclear weapons arsenal consisting of 1,410 nuclear warheads, 40 strategic bombers and 104 inter-continental ballistic missiles, in addition to the nuclear weapons testing and uranium production infrastructure. There is some Soviet legacy in the North Korean nuclear and missile programs, too, as they are primarily based on hardware, knowledge and technology received at the time from the USSR. In the early 1990s, Kazakhstan found itself in a complicated geopolitical environment, surrounded by nuclear-armed neighbors, and was wary of possible territorial claims and separatist movements. Therefore, for a brief period of time, the Kazakh leadership considered retaining the nuclear arsenal as a deterrent against potential military threats and balanced between an immediate renunciation of nuclear weapons and a nuclear club membership. In the case of North Korea, a guaranteed protection against acts of aggression and other perceived external risks also seems to be a major motivation for maintaining the nuclear weapons stockpile. At the same time, there are obvious differences between the cases of Kazakhstan and North Korea. While experiencing enormous pressure from major powers, especially the United States and Russia, Kazakhstan clearly understood that it lacked control, funds and local qualified personnel to maintain the nuclear arsenal. It was also understood that the refusal to give up nuclear weapons would make Kazakhstan a pariah state and lead to international sanctions or even intervention. Besides, there was strong domestic antinuclear sentiment as a result of 456 nuclear-weapon tests at the Semipalatinsk site that caused enormous damage to human health and environment. On the other hand, Pyongyang generally managed to develop nuclear weapons indigenously and

maintains them without outside help, despite the severe sanctions regime. Moreover, the North Korean nuclear program, which is believed to be a product of the *Juche* ideology of self-sufficiency and self-reliance, is a source of national pride and international prestige.

Therefore, given the differing contexts and conditions of the two countries' nuclear dilemmas, Kazakhstan's experience cannot serve as a directly applicable practical guidance for North Korea's denuclearization, but it may offer some useful lessons on how to achieve an acceptable trade-off between nuclear disarmament and desirable security, political, economic and other rewards. To move forward on the path of denuclearization, Pyongyang should be offered a reliable combination of security guarantees, confidence building measures, and economic incentives. This is confirmed by the example of Kazakhstan that made a decision to go non-nuclear after becoming part of the CIS collective security system and obtaining assurances of its independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity later backed by written political commitments of the nuclear powers. Equally important was the fact that in exchange for disarmament Kazakhstan received large-scale investment, as well as economic and technical assistance, including for removing nuclear weapons and dismantling military nuclear facilities. According to U.S. Ambassador to Kazakhstan William Moser, the United States spent over \$840 million in Kazakhstan on nuclear non-proliferation issues. Thus, using its de-facto nuclear-weapon state's status as a bargaining chip, Kazakhstan was able to maximize its strategic gains.

To conclude, while Kazakhstan's model is not entirely workable for North Korea, its certain elements can and should be adapted for use in the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. A successful process will require a number of conditions: the political will of the DPRK leadership, firm security guarantees on the part of the United States and other nuclear powers, as well as tangible economic benefits for Pyongyang. The DPRK will not accept coercive denuclearization, and a possible consensus is only attainable through phased, transparent and constructive diplomatic approaches without resort to nuclear threats. In this regard, it is worth considering a revival of the multilateral negotiation mechanism. A verifiable elimination of North Korea's nuclear weapons and related infrastructure will require significant financial costs and technical expertise, so the international community must be ready to bear the burden of denuclearization, as was the case with Kazakhstan. Above all, denuclearization is a slow and complicated endeavor for both political and technical reasons, therefore patience and an atmosphere of trust are essential for succeeding in this effort.

## Politics, Foreign Affairs, and Security

- The Turkish Ministry of Defense hosted negotiations with the Russian military delegation that visited Ankara to jointly draft a plan of military activities to be carried out within the framework of the agreement reached in Sochi between Russia and Turkey. The parties discussed tactical and technical aspects of the agreed measures (MoD of Turkey, 30.10.2019).
- The 30<sup>th</sup> meeting of the working group on Afghanistan under the CSTO Council of Foreign Ministers was held in Dushanbe. The national coordinators for Afghanistan of the CSTO member states, CSTO Secretariat officials, and representatives of the UN and the SCO discussed issues related to the military and political situation in Afghanistan and stressed the need for concerted actions on the Afghan issue (MFA of Tajikistan, 29.10.2019).
- During his working visit to Uzbekistan, Secretary of the Russian Security Council Nikolai Patrushev met with President Shavkat Mirziyoyev. The parties discussed bilateral, regional and international issues, including prospects for peace in Afghanistan. Particular attention was paid to the expansion of practical partnership in the military and military-technical spheres (Kun.uz, 31.10.2019).
- Russia handed over a batch of military equipment and weapons worth \$5 million to the Tajik armed forces. The transferred hardware includes a radar station for controlling Tajikistan's national airspace and upgraded BRDM-2M armored reconnaissance and patrol vehicles capable of accomplishing a number of missions in modern warfare (Kun.uz, 30.10.2019).
- The U.S. Embassy in Tajikistan funded the construction of the Okultun border outpost in Tajikistan, with a cost of \$900,000. The new outpost located in the Shahritus district of the Khatlon region increases the Border Forces' capacity to monitor the Tajik-Afghan border and prevent illegal cross-border activities (U.S. Embassy in Tajikistan, 01.11.2019).
- The 77<sup>th</sup> meeting of the CIS Council of Defense Ministers was held in Baku to discuss issues of multilateral defense and security collaboration. The parties reviewed the concept of military cooperation between the CIS member states until 2025 and the guidelines for the development of the joint system for monitoring and assessment of the radiation, chemical and biological situation (MoD of Azerbaijan, 30.10.2019).
- Defense Minister of Azerbaijan Zakir Hasanov met with Toivo Klaar, EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia. The meeting was devoted to the current situation on the Armenian-Azerbaijani front line. The EU representative noted the importance of an early and peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict to ensure stability in the region (Trend, 31.10.2019).

## Economy, Finance, and Energy

- Tashkent hosted the 18<sup>th</sup> meeting of the SCO Council of Heads of Government. The parties adopted a number of documents, including the updated program of multilateral trade and economic cooperation, the concept of interaction between railway authorities, the program of the development of ecological well-being of the SCO cities, and the memorandum on the mutual integration of national transit systems (SCO, 30.10.2019).
- The EBRD expanded its presence in Uzbekistan by opening an office in Andijan, in addition to the main office in Tashkent. The Andijan office will mainly be supporting local small and medium-sized enterprises through expert advice, training and a variety of financial tools. To date, the EBRD has invested €1.3 billion through 70 projects in the economy of Uzbekistan (EBRD, 30.10.2019).
- During his visit to Belarus, Turkish Minister of Agriculture and Forestry Bekir Pakdemirli met with Belarusian officials to discuss the establishment of joint ventures and ways to increase bilateral trade. The parties aim to increase the trade turnover to \$1.5 billion through enhancing cooperation in agriculture, chemical and textile industries, mechanical engineering, finance, and transport (BelTA, 31.10.2019).
- The 20<sup>th</sup> session of the foreign currency advisory council of the central banks of the EAEU member states was held in Minsk. Participants discussed the current economic situation and monetary management policies in their respective countries and exchanged views on forming the union's common financial market and ways to ensure cybersecurity at financial institutions (BelTA, 31.10.2019).
- A new oilfield was discovered at a depth of 2,834 meters as a result of well testing operations in eastern Mongolia. The peak production recorded during the test was 821 barrels of oil per day. The feasibility of the oilfield's future economic use will be analyzed based on the collected exploration data (Montsame, 29.10.2019).
- Kazakhstan plans to start exporting single-engine helicopters manufactured by the joint enterprise Eurocopter Kazakhstan Engineering to customers in Central Asia. The first such helicopter, intended for business and tourism purposes, was supplied to Tajikistan's Somon Air. A service center was created at the plant to provide qualified technical support (Strategy 2050, 29.10.2019; AKIpress, 30.10.2019).
- Azerbaijan's Economy Ministry and Export and Investment Promotion Foundation jointly organized a business meeting for more than 60 Azerbaijani and Russian entrepreneurs in Baku. Participants representing the food industry, healthcare, banking, logistics, tourism and other sectors learned about investment opportunities of the two countries and discussed ways to expand existing relationships and establish new business partnerships (Azernews, 31.10.2019).

## Society and Culture

- At the session of the Board of Governors of the World Water Council held in Cairo, the State Committee for Water Management of Turkmenistan was elected as its member. The organization established in 1996 brings together more than 300 organizations in 50 countries to mobilize action on pressing water-related issues at all levels (Turkmenportal, 30.10.2019).
- Under the project "EU Water Initiative Plus for Eastern Partnership Countries", the EU provided the latest water monitoring equipment to the Georgian Environmental Agency's laboratory of atmospheric air, water and soil analysis. The new equipment will enable the laboratory to conduct state-of-the-art water analysis and detect a wider range of industrial chemicals, pesticides and other pollutants (Agenda.ge, 31.10.2019).
- According to Azerbaijan's State Committee for the Work with Religious Organizations, out of more than 1,000 Azerbaijani citizens who joined radical groups, more than 400 persons have been deprived of citizenship since 2011. More than 110 persons were brought to responsibility, and more than 300 are reportedly dead, while the rest are hiding in different countries (Trend, 31.10.2019).
- The Uzbekistan Temir Yollari launched a passenger train on a new Misken-Nukus-Beineu route. The train that will run on a daily basis with stops at such stations as Nazarkhan, Kaybakly, Karaozek, Badai, Beruniy, Ellikala, and Turtkul will ensure better connectivity between the western parts of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan (UzDaily, 30.10.2019).
- An official opening ceremony of the branch of Webster University, where more than 470 students began their studies, was held in Tashkent. The initiative to open an American university in the country was first announced during the Uzbek-American business forum in New York in September 2017, while the relevant agreements on the branch's establishment were signed in February 2019 (UzDaily, 30.10.2019).
- The OSCE and Uzbekistan's Academy of the General Prosecutor's Office organized a four-day training course on combating cybercrime and conducting digital investigations. 35 officers from the Uzbek law enforcement bodies attended the event, which covered all aspects of rapid response, from planning and preparation before examining the crime scene to preserving digital evidence and compiling an incident report (OSCE, 01.11.2019).
- Researchers of the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences completed the fundamental work, which began in 1972, on preparing a 15-volumed dictionary of the Sakha language. The dictionary of about 10,000 pages contains about 80,000 words and idioms. This project became a winner of the special competition on linguistics announced by the Russian Federal Agency for Nationality Affairs (TWESCO, 28.10.2019).