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My Advice to Iran

By Nursultan Nazarbayev, President of Kazakhstan

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As the world is concerned with the testing of long range missiles by North Korea and by the intentions of Iran, I would like to share my personal experience. My country, Kazakhstan, since its independence, has opted to become a nuclear weapon free nation and to eliminate nuclear materials which were left on our territory as grim legacy of the past. I believe we have successfully overcome these problems thanks to unwavering striving for peace and stability.

I had to make difficult decisions which were not dictated by political expediency. First of all, they were crucial issues. Our land had seen too many experiments with the “nuclear genie”. During 40 years, 456 nuclear explosions were carried out at the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site, including 26 atmospheric, 78 ground, and the rest underground. Almost half a million people were either directly or indirectly affected by consequences of these nuclear weapons tests. Hundreds of thousands of hectares of land are still unusable.

That was why when I became the President of Kazakhstan, I first of all declared a moratorium on nuclear tests. On August 29, 1991, I signed a decree prohibiting any nuclear weapons tests on our territory.

The fate of the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site was not our only worry. In December 1991, when the Soviet superpower collapsed and the Commonwealth of Independent States was born, an issue arose of what to do with the Soviet nuclear arsenal left with the newly independent states. Kazakhstan was left with a huge nuclear arsenal, the world’s fourth largest. We had to make a choice based on a civilized approach to this problem. Our country declared its commitment to principles of peace from the very first days of its existence. Only Russia, as a great power, could claim to own and really manage this former nuclear complex.

But the issue of our national security loomed as large for us then as it, perhaps, does now for Iran. At that time, I initiated the process of multilateral and multilayered negotiations which helped us receive security guarantees from major nuclear powers. These powers promised Kazakhstan that if we get attacked they will take immediate measures to rebuke the attack and preserve the territorial integrity of our country, as well as to demand an extraordinary session of the United Nations Security Council.

I must say our status as a nuclear weapons free country has strengthened our positions in the fight for nuclear disarmament, stability, peace in the world and global security. Our renunciation

of nuclear weapons has become an important factor of our economic and political development, and our internal stability.

The very existence of weapons of mass destruction, both nuclear, and conventional, cannot be the means to solve problems of global and regional security. I believe the world community is still beholden to its old concepts as far as many issues go. That is why our today's situation is full of paradoxes, ambiguities and half-measures. We need to take into account the fact that the use of nuclear weapons, just as a complete end to wars between countries, is very unlikely; we need to set our sights on the goal of eliminating the threat of terrorism.

Currently, no country of the nuclear club expresses firm desire to renounce its nuclear weapons nor offers to begin negotiations on this issue. It is time to face the reality. It is necessary to minimize the consequences of the expansion of the nuclear club, especially, as far as its illegal and semi-legal members are concerned.

I believe that to ensure global security we must move forward toward full nuclear disarmament, being aware that this type of weapons, like any weapons of mass destruction, is a direct threat to mankind. But here, another problem arises: it is time for all of us to think about using alternative energy resources and about global energy security. There are no reasons to erect obstacles for countries which aspire to have peaceful atom. Iran, like other countries which have or are planning to build atomic power plants, must have the opportunity to conduct scientific and technical research, seek improvements in ensuring safety of its atomic power plants and think about problems with nuclear fuel and waste. This activity must be transparent, and the international community must have the opportunity to supervise it.

I am talking about improving the control over the entire set of problems with nuclear weapons and technology, as well as any activity in the area of peaceful atom, so that there is no use of fissile materials for military purposes. It seems very logical to think of creating an organization under the IAEA's auspices which would ensure the supply of fuel for atomic power plants and manage the storage and processing of waste. This way it will be possible to control any leaks of raw materials needed for the production of military nuclear devices. It is obvious issues of political, commercial and financial nature will have to be resolved to achieve this.

The G8 will have an important role to play, particularly, in the area of reducing strategic offensive weapons. My proposals may sound unrealistic. But we need to move forward in this direction. The nuclear threat and the proliferation of nuclear weapons have become an inevitable part of the international relations, economy and science. And only by radically changing the situation will we be able to free ourselves of its side products, such as nuclear waste, and to make a step forward to solving global and pressing problems of nuclear security.

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News Bulletin of the Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the USA and Canada
Contact person: Roman Vassilenko
1401 16th Street NW, Washington, DC 20036
Tel: 202 232 5488, ext. 104, Fax: 202 232 5845