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**“STRENGTHENING MODELS FOR DENUCLEARIZATION IN  
THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION”**

## **Strengthening Models for Denuclearization in the Context of Social Transformation**

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A unification process between a country with nuclear weapons and a non-nuclear country, as in the Korean case, implies a resolution of the nuclear issue either before the negotiations or in the process of unification. It is my assumption here that the international community will not accept an additional nuclear weapon state at least not under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the NPT. Given all the other problems between two different state structures in unification, the nuclear issue should be resolved at the earliest possible stage. Furthermore, the unification process could catalyze exit from nuclear weapons, as the security of the new state, even if it is only a confederation, has to be redefined and guaranteed one way or the other.

In this paper models for nuclear exit that today exist are looked at as a background for a discussion of the situation on the Korean peninsula. The transformation has either taken place either as a process within existing social structures or under strong social transformations within a state or between states. The four models are: the South Africa model, the Iran model, the Soviet model and the nuclear weapon-free zone (NWFZ) model.

It should be underlined, firstly that all cases are different, there is no one recipe for denuclearization. Secondly, that outcomes are not easily defined, even if both parties subscribe to the goal of unification as in the Korean case. The power play within a state or between the states involved as well as in the external environment create a situation, where the nuclear issue become just one piece in the puzzle.

### **The Iran Model**

After 12 years of negotiations, in July 2015, the EU, China, France, Germany, Russia, the UK and the US concluded a nuclear agreement with Iran. Iran accepted limits to its nuclear program, cutting effectively the state's paths to nuclear weapons, in response to sanction relief. The deal has the strictest ever verification regime. After the provisions expire Iran is to remain a non-nuclear country and a member of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

The agreement was a victory, and an example to follow- for nuclear multilateral diplomacy. It was a result of the EU's enduring efforts to engage with Iran and the political will on both sides to achieve results. In more concrete terms, the Obama administration abolished the goal of regime change and removed the preconditions preventing constructive negotiations (in the Iran case the permanent suspension of uranium enrichment).

The Iran case could well serve as a model for North Korea in spite of the fact that North Korea already has nuclear weapons. Three conditions would have to be met in order even to be able to start a process. One is that there is a negotiating table, where the parties can meet even at times of strained relations and military threats. Although many have proposed mediation, the Swiss, the Swedes, the UN just to name a few, no table exists today. On the North Korean side there is the fear of regime change and a mistrust towards all the partners, even China. On the US side, the main opponent, the precondition of the "denuclearization" of the Korean peninsula and military threats prevent any constructive negotiations.

Possible, neutral negotiation table providers could be the EU, which has so far not been very active in this question, and Mongolia. At a recent nuclear disarmament conference in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia the participants agreed that Mongolia with its good relations to all the states involved in the Six Party negotiations could be an alternative.

### **The South African Model**

South Africa is one of the few examples of a nuclear weapon state that has abolished nuclear weapons voluntarily due to changes in both internal and external environment. Accordingly, it might be helpful to consider the factors that led South Africa to develop nuclear weapons in the 1970s, and the reasons why it decided to dismantle them in 1989.

In 1974, as Soviet influence began expanding in southern Africa, the country decided to build a small number of nuclear bombs. After the Portuguese left Africa in 1975, the buildup of Cuban forces in Angola from 1975 reinforced the state's perception that a deterrent was necessary. A further factor was South Africa's growing international isolation and the fact that it could not rely on outside assistance in case of an attack. South Africa produced six fairly simple Hiroshima-type atom bombs.

In 1989, when de Klerk became president in 1989, there was a policy to improve South Africa's relationship with the world. The first step was to release Nelson Mandela. The second was to dismantle nuclear weapons and to ratify the NPT. The withdrawal of the Cuban forces in 1988 and independence of Namibia in 1990 showed that positive outcomes were possible even with one's bitterest enemies. Furthermore, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of Soviet Union created a completely new global environment.

Internally, there were escalating tensions between black and white South Africans due to apartheid. The solution was not the acquisition of greater military power through the development of nuclear weapons but the abolition of apartheid and the negotiation of a new non-racial constitution. In this situation it no longer made any sense for South Africa to retain its limited nuclear weapons capability.

Could North Korea follow the South African model of voluntarily dismantling its nuclear weapons? What are the conditions under which the state would see that it no longer needs nuclear weapons? A peace treaty combined with sufficient and trustworthy security guarantees would be, at least, a theoretical possibility. In the current situation, without any on-going negotiations, this is not very likely.

But like in the South African case, sudden changes in the external and internal environment might result in astonishing effects. The withdrawal of Cuban forces, Namibia's independence, the fall of the Berlin wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union combined with escalating tensions between the black and white populations produced a combined effect, where the country did not feel it needed nuclear weapons.

### **The Soviet Model**

The collapse of the Soviet Union meant independence for Ukraine and Kazakhstan, both nuclear weapon states. This posed a problem not only for these states but also for the international community and for the NPT. Would there be two additional nuclear weapon states and what would this imply for the treaty?

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991, Kazakhstan inherited 1,410 nuclear warheads, the fourth largest arsenal in the world. Under President Nursultan Nazarbayev the country renounced its nuclear weapons and voluntarily repatriated its warheads back to Russia. Following this Kazakhstan signed the NPT, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and Start-1.

Kazakhstan was also instrumental in establishing the Central Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone along with Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Furthermore, in August, 1991 the world's second largest nuclear weapons testing site Semipalatinsk was closed. Today, the area (which is not surrounded by a barrier of any kind to prevent humans and animals from roaming freely) has been called the "world's worst radiation hotspot."

While Kazakhstan has become a front state for a nuclear weapon-free world Ukraine followed another path. Upon independence in 1991, Ukraine inherited the world's third largest nuclear arsenal, consisting of approximately 1,900 strategic nuclear warheads and 2,500 tactical nuclear weapons. In the January 1994 Trilateral Statement, Ukraine committed to full disarmament, joined the NPT as a non-nuclear state in 1994, acceded to the Start-1, and transferred all of its nuclear warheads to Russia for elimination.

In the process there was some hesitation. The Rada (parliament) adopted the Declaration of Sovereignty in July 1990, which proclaimed Ukraine's wish not to maintain, produce or acquire nuclear weapons. Once Ukraine gained independence, support for denuclearization began to vacillate. Kiev asserted administrative control over the nuclear weapons on its territory, the Rada delayed Start ratification and 162 deputies signed a statement which set preconditions for ratification. In May 1993, a U.S. envoy suggested that in exchange for START ratification, the U.S. would provide financial assistance and act as a mediator between Russia and Ukraine on nuclear issues.

In the summer of 1993, the concept of a trilateral deal between the United States, Ukraine and Russia arose during discussions among the three countries. An agreement was reached in mid-January 1994. Under the Trilateral Agreement, Ukraine agreed to denuclearization in exchange for security assurances, financial assistance, and a denuclearization implementation timetable. The Rada agreed to Start-1 ratification in February 1994 and approved Ukraine's accession to the NPT in November 1994. Ukraine had transferred all of its nuclear warheads to Russia by May 21, 1996. In total, Ukraine received over \$500 million in U.S. financial assistance for nuclear dismantlement through the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction program.

On 5 December 1994, a memorandum was signed in Budapest, Hungary providing security assurances by its signatories, Russia, the US and the UK relating to Belarus's, Kazakhstan's and Ukraine's accession to the NPT. The memorandum included security assurances against threats or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan.

It is this memorandum that in 2014 has been referred to in the case of Krim. Russia was seen to be in breach with the agreement having changed Ukrainian borders. Russia has claimed that the situation in Ukraine was revolutionary and the country another, without any Russian commitments. Accused of also breaking the promise of the security guarantees the US has claimed that the memorandum was not about guarantees but only about territorial integrity.

## **A NWFZ-Model**

In 1999 the UN Disarmament Commission approved guidelines for the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones. They confirm that the initiative must come from the states concerned and that they are free to form these zones. The nuclear states should commit themselves not to use or to threaten to use nuclear weapons against any of the states party of the treaty. The Latin American and Caribbean Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone is a case, where two potential nuclear weapon states, Argentine and Brazil not only abolished their nuclear programs but established a free-trade zone and a common market.

The treaty was ratified by 1977. Argentine became a full member in 1994. The same year also Brazil accepted fully the obligations of the treaty. Under the treaty, the states agree to prohibit and prevent the testing, use, manufacture, production or acquisition by any means whatsoever of any nuclear weapons and the receipt, storage, installation, deployment and any form of possession of any nuclear weapons. There are two additional protocols to the treaty: The first one binds those overseas countries with territories in the region to the terms of the treaty. The second requires the declared nuclear weapons states to refrain from undermining in any way the nuclear-free status of the region.

The aspirations of these two countries to become nuclear weapon states were more symbolic than strategic in nature. More than seeking to threaten one other, each state sought to enhance its position on the world scene. If their nuclear programs were successful, this could even gain legitimacy for their unpopular military regimes. When the civilian rule returned in both countries by the late 1980s, one of the priorities for their civilian leaders was to get rid of their “parallel “nuclear programs

The Latin American and Caribbean Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone has been successful. Although a long time in the making, all 33 states have not only signed the NPT but also created an atmosphere of trust and peace.

A North East Asia nuclear weapon-free zone (NEA –NWFZ) has also been proposed to prevent a nuclear conflict on the Korean peninsula. While the idea dates back to 1972, it has lately gained support as a new approach replacing the Six Party talks. It could initiate the creation of a new regional security mechanism, usually seen as a 3+3 construction, where China, Russia and the US (3) would provide negative security guarantees for the DPRK, the Republic of Korea and Japan (3). While this approach may sound idealistic, as nuclear weapons are enshrined in the North Korean constitution, it has clear merits amid acute military confrontation.

Rather than focusing on North Korea, the regional view enables to deal with the region’s nuclear threats in an even-handed way. North Korea could comply with the requirements at a calibrated pace, moving forward only as the nuclear weapon states provide negative security assurances and establish no-first-use policies. A first step toward establishing a nuclear-weapon-free zone would be for the six parties to request that the UN secretary-general and the UN Office of Disarmament Affairs convene an expert meeting to examine the concept behind the zone (4).

## **Conclusions**

All the models represent an exit, nuclear weapons are renounced and programs abolished, weapons destroyed or moved to another country. There are, however, great differences.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the political changes, both external and internal, in South Africa created a situation, where nuclear weapons were no longer needed. The changes were due to deep transformations in the societies. In Kazakstan and Ukraine the whole system collapsed, in South Africa apartheid had to go in order to break the country's isolation.

These kinds of changes are difficult, if not impossible to predict, although they are long under way. They happen quickly, surprising both experts and the outside world. Nuclear exit becomes a side effect of a changing security regime. North Korea's social system did not collapse alongside with the Soviet one. The state even survived the hunger of millions of its citizens in the 90ies. And while many have predicted North Korea's collapse, the state is today more resilient than ever, partly because of the US as an outside enemy.

Nuclear diplomacy, as in Iran or in the NWFZs, focuses on the nuclear issue only. In the Iran case it was three European foreign ministers that took the initiative in 2003 as a reaction to the US entry into Iraq. The negotiations took 12 years. The necessary confidence for a deal was built only after the threat of regime change and the precondition of suspension of uranium enrichment were removed. It is hard to imagine, that the current rhetoric on North Korea would allow for any negotiations to start. And to use pressure of sanctions as a means to get North Korea back to the table, seems futile when there is no table.

Of the existing historic alternatives, the North East Asia nuclear weapon –free zone carries most potential but presents also challenges of which there is no previous experience. When Brazil and Argentine joined the NWFZ in Latin America, the situation was symmetric. Both had a nuclear weapons program and both were transforming from a dictatorship to a democracy. In the North East Asia there is only one of the three that has nuclear weapons, the other two are under the US nuclear umbrella. Also the three superpowers that would provide the necessary security guarantees have completely opposite interests.

A unification perspective under the right conditions could provide the necessary changes in the current security regime and catalyze a situation where North Korea, South Korea and Japan would end up with a cost benefit analysis, where security based on nuclear weapons could be traded with security guarantees, conventional armament and increased economic cooperation.