

Prospects and Challenges For Establishing a NEA-NWFZ

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Importance of NWFZs. Nuclear-weapon-free zones (NWFZs) are a practical and concrete mechanisms for strengthening the global non-proliferation regime that advances the cause of nuclear disarmament until all nuclear weapons are prohibited and abolished. Its tangible security benefits are verifiable and enforceable confidence-building measures (CBMs) among the states of the region and security assurances provided by the five nuclear-weapon states (P5) to the zone and states parties to zone treaties. As such they are important building blocks for elimination of nuclear weapons.

NWFZs cover around 56 percent of the Earth's surface where almost 30 percent of world's population live. 115 states of such zones represent 60 percent of UN membership. With respect to ASEM, they cover South Pacific, South East Asia and Central Asia. There is a growing need to establish such zones in North-East Asia (NEA), if not yet in Europe.

North-East Asia. Security is increasingly interconnected. A threat to one region is a threat to other regions. NEA is a region that needs to develop its own concept of and take practical measures in establishing a regional NWFZ, since it is a military flashpoint that could easily escalate into outright confrontation. DPRK's nuclear weapon program is highly destabilizing that can have a nuclear domino effect in the region and beyond it. It provides grounds to promote destabilizing regional missile defense system that would affect strategic balance and great power relations. It also provides grounds re-interpret Article 9 of Japan's Constitution and increase its military role in international affairs. On the other hand, NEA is also one of the most important economic and strategic hubs, home to the second, third and fourteenth largest economies and is a key engine for global

economic growth. However, political mistrust presents a huge stumbling bloc to promoting or expanding mutually beneficial cooperation.

The idea of establishing a NEA-NWFZ is not a new one. However, there are political and security issues of principle that need to be addressed so as to create a conducive political environment to pursue the issue at the governmental level. Many factors can hamper establishment of a NWFZ. However, there are two that need to be seriously addressed if any movement is to be made in this area. They are: policy of DPRK and extended nuclear deterrence.

Policy of DPRK. We should be realists. The DPRK will not just give up its nuclear weapons. At present time is on its side since as time passes, its nuclear program will further expand. As of today sanctions and pressures are not having the needed effect. On the contrary, sanctions and pressures are only strengthening the hardliners and the military. However, with the passage of time full enforcement of sanctions and further isolation will seriously affect DPRK at which time it would have to negotiate seriously the conditions of freezing or abandoning its nuclear weapons program. But that will take some time. Iran's inspiring example will hardly affect DPRK's policy since it already possesses nuclear weapons and is working on miniaturizing the warheads.

The logical policy, in the view of Blue Banner is to change the political environment by reducing joint ROK-US military exercises which would weaken their argument of hostile US and ROK policies. That would, in its turn, induce DPRK to pursue negotiations rather than saber rattling.

Extended nuclear deterrence. Without seriously addressing the issue of nuclear deterrence (commonly known as the nuclear umbrella) it would be impossible politically to make any headway in discussing the issue of NEA-NWFZ. Nuclear deterrence is a concept and military doctrine based on the notion that an enemy can be deterred from using nuclear weapons as long as it can be destroyed as a consequence. The concept and its practical application are meant to deter not only possible adversaries from attacking, but also to reassure the beneficiaries of nuclear deterrence that they need not have nuclear weapons of their own. Logically it is an antipode to trust and confidence-building and hence runs counter to the concept and spirit of NWFZs.

So far the concepts of extended deterrence and establishment of NWFZs have been discussed in NEA separately, governments and their supporters focusing more on deterrence and the academia and civil society - on NWFZs. Only recently some attempts are being made to try to bring together these two opposing approaches to nuclear security.

NEA is not Europe. Unlike the latter, where US keeps nuclear weapons on territories of 5 NATO member states, Japan and the Republic of Korea do not have nuclear weapons on their territories. Therefore, politically it is possible to discuss the issues of making changes to nuclear extended deterrence in NEA. Since the threat of chemical or biological weapons is relatively low, and since the US, Japan and the Republic of Korea have a credible superiority in conventional weapons, there is a possibility, as an interim measure, to adopt a “sole purpose” deterrence policy¹ or convert it to conventional deterrence. This would be in line with the broad decision to diminish the role of nuclear weapons in security concepts, doctrines and policies. To be effective, this needs to be done in parallel with the cessation of hostile propaganda and military drills on all sides, which would create a favorable climate for substantive negotiations.

Despite the logical need for establishing a NEA-NWFZ, so far no government of the region has initiated or called for establishing such a zone. The main reason is that Japan and ROK are committed to the extended nuclear deterrence, while DPRK feels that it can gain politically by pursuing further its nuclear weapon program.

Proposals regarding NEA-NWFZ. The idea of establishing a NEA-NWFZ are being seriously discussed at the academic and expert levels, especially since early 1990s. They include proposals to establish a limited NWFZ (meaning in respect to geography and weapons system) as a transitional measure until a full-fledged zone is established², a 3+3 arrangement, its revised Model treaty³, a Tripartite NWFZ⁴, a proposal to include Taiwan in NEA-NWFZ⁵, a proposal to limit the NEA-NWFZ to a 2000 kilometer

¹ i.e. use of nuclear weapons only in response to the use of such weapons in the first place

² John Endicott proposal

³ Dr. Hiromichi Umebayashi proposal

⁴ Dr. Seonwhun Cheon and Tatsujiro Suzuki proposal

⁵ Andrew Mack proposal

radius from DMZ⁶, etc. However, these proposals have been discussed at the academic and civil society levels only. Lately a broader approach to this issue is being discussed. Thus in 2011 a proposal was made to establish a NEA-NWFZ as an element of a Comprehensive Agreement (CA) on regional peace and security. The agreement is to include also termination of the state of war, creating a permanent council on security, mutual declaration of no hostile intent, provision of assistance for nuclear and other energy, and termination of sanctions/response to violation of the CA.

Such a comprehensive approach is being hailed by regional think tanks and the academia. Research Center for Nuclear Weapons Abolition of Nagasaki University (RECNA) has organized a series of workshops and further developed the comprehensive approach. Last year it proposed a Comprehensive Framework Agreement (CFA) for the Denuclearization of NEA. This framework agreement is to be flexible, just like the 2015 Paris Agreement on the climate change, with some provisions of principle being legally binding, while other elements and provisions could be of a political nature. The CFA includes prior moratoria⁷, alleviation or lifting of sanctions, flexibility of entry into force of provisions of the CFA, etc. RECNA's report and its concrete proposals have been communicated to Japanese authorities and made public during the 2015 NPT Review Conference. It should be pointed out that this proposal is not intended to compete with the Six Party Talks, but rather to complement the talks and provide ideas for governments to ponder upon. It is up to governments to examine them, display political will and take the necessary follow-up measures, if deemed possible. It goes without saying that inter-Korean relations and US bilateral and direct dialogue with DPRK would only reinforce these measures.

At the international level, UN Secretary General's Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters has recommended and the Secretary General has urged states of the region "to consider appropriate action to establish a zone, including by promoting a more active role for the regional forums in encouraging transparency and confidence-building among the countries of the region." In September 2013 Mongolia's President Ts. Elbegdorj, when addressing the High Level meeting of the General Assembly devoted

⁶ Dr. Kumao Kaneko's proposal

⁷ On nuclear weapon tests and joint military exercises, respectively

to nuclear disarmament, has underlined that “as a country with firsthand experience in ensuring security primarily by political and diplomatic means, Mongolia is prepared, on an informal basis, to work with the countries of Northeast Asia to see if and how a nuclear-weapon-free zone could be established in the region. Though we know well that that would not be easy and would require courage, political will and perseverance, it is doable, if not right away.”

On the margins of the 2014 NPT Prepcom and 2015 NPT Revcons Blue Banner jointly organized regional NGO meetings on the need to establish a NEA-NWFZ. These meetings adopted joint statements in support of the idea and the proposals.⁸ Blue Banner also organized a special event at ASEM’s Asia-Europe People’s Forum which during which participants expressed support for the idea of a NEA-NWFZ and that Mongolia’s experience in consolidating its nuclear-weapon-free status and acquiring the P5 pledge to respect the status and not to contribute to any act that would violate it would be useful in contribute to promoting it.

Mongolia’s possible input. Mongolia has reasons to be active in this field since it is part of NEA. The country’s aim is to ensure its security through strengthening regional confidence and security, in line with the proverb that “ducks are calm when the lake is calm”. That is why, as mentioned above, Mongolia has proposed to start discussing the issue informally. At present no country of the region, except for Mongolia, is in a position to make such a proposal due to their alliance commitments or for some other political reasons. Also Mongolia has no unresolved territorial or even border issues with its neighbors, nor does it harbor any selfish political designs regarding the region. Politically, it maintains good relations with all the states of the region, including the two Koreas. It has also accumulated experience when negotiating with the P5 the content of its nuclear-weapon-free status. In 2013 Mongolia has called for a 1.5 channel regional security dialogue on such issues as economic cooperation, energy, environmental and other non-traditional security. Three productive Ulaanbaatar dialogue meetings have been held so far, the third on 16-17 June.

⁸ In 2014 a workshop entitled “Time for action to establish a NEA-NWFZ” and in 2015 - “NEA-NWFZ contributes towards Global nuclear zero: pursuing a shift of security policy on nuclear weapons” were held.

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In 2014 and 2015 Blue Banner, together with its NEA/GPPAC⁹ partners, including from DPRK, have discussed the issue of the possibility of establishing NEA-NWFZ and what initial measures needed to be taken. There is an understanding that in November of this year the Ulaanbaatar process, an inclusive NGO process to promote regional peace and stability, will consider some ideas related to raising awareness of establishing a NEA-NWFZ. In short foresight, flexibility, out of the box thinking and perseverance would be needed to establish a NEA-NWFZ. However, one should not discount that further nuclear or missile tests could sour the atmosphere that could delay the process and progress.

⁹ Global Partnership to Prevent Armed Conflict