

# **The Central Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone and Shanghai Cooperation Organization**

**(abstract)**

**By PAN Guang**

## **Background**

**The Central Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (CANWFZ, not including China's Xinjiang and Russian Central Asian region) was proposed at first by Uzbekistan in 1993. It obtains support of all member countries of the SCO now and becomes an important objective on their security cooperation. That Central Asian countries and SCO support to establish CANWFZ is based on the following reasons.**

**First, though the nuclear materials left by the former Soviet Union have been handled properly, the possibilities of the proliferation of nuclear materials, technology and experts in Central Asia still exist.**

**Second, terrorist and extremist forces are operating in Central Asia by**

**various means, which makes “nuclear terrorism” and “radiological terrorism” realistic danger.**

**Third, the nuclear arms race in South Asia and the Kashmir conflict might escalate to a nuclear conflict, putting Central Asia under a greater threat.**

**Fourth, the worsening of the situation in Pakistan recently, and the intensification of the disputes over the Iranian nuclear issue, may all give rise to a new wave of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, even nuclear weapons, thus putting Central Asia at huge risks.**

**Under such conditions, it is the best option to establish CANWFZ to enable Central Asia to avoid suffering nuclear proliferation and attacks. It is glad to see two nuclear powers, Britain and France, have already expressed support to this plan. It is understandable the United States has still some technical obstacles in this regard, but it is hoped US will finally support the plan.**

## **New Development**

**On September 8, 2006, in Semipalatinsk, Kazakhstan, Central Asian states finally approved the Central Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty. Following this step, the UN General Assembly officially adopted a resolution to support CANWFZ Treaty.**

**Supporting a nuclear-free zone in Central Asia had always been the policy of SCO, as demonstrated by the ratification of the Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty. The heads of SCO member state note the significance of approval of the Central Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty and welcome the adoption of the respective resolution at the 61st session of the UN General Assembly, which highly values the contribution of Central Asian states to the cause of consolidating the regime of nuclear non-proliferation, advancing cooperation on peaceful use of nuclear energy, as well as strengthening the international and regional peace and security. The heads of SCO member state support the efforts of the participating states of the Central Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty on concluding a Protocol on Security Guarantees with the nuclear-weapon states, which would ensure genuine existence of a nuclear free zone in the region.**

**Such attitudes clearly facilitate the signing of Protocol on Security Guarantees with Central Asian states by China and Russia. UK and France are likely to sign the protocol as well. However, up till now, the US attitude towards the Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty remains unclear. Another tricky question lies with India and Pakistan, who are currently “observers” of the SCO. If they were to offer to sign the protocol, SCO would be caught in a difficult position, as neither has been recognized as a nuclear power by the international community.**

**The problem for the present is that the oral commitment of the nuclear powers to Central Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty is not ascertainable and verifiable. Only when the nuclear powers formally sign and join the treaty will such a zone in Central Asia be guaranteed and institutionalized in the sense of international law.**

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