

**Confidence building measures – necessary
component establishing Nuclear Weapon
Free Zone in the region**

By Alexander Nemov (Russia)

Maintenance of security in the North-East Asia is a problem, the solution of which is still significantly influenced by the consequences of the Cold War confrontation period. The evidence of that, for instance, is the presence of considerable military contingents in the countries of the region. Such army presence is viewed by the states of North-East Asia as a basic guarantee of stability and security. Nevertheless, the array of problems in the region, first of all concerning the Korean Peninsula, requires a search for political solution to solve them on the international level.

As admitted by many experts, including those from the region, Asia, unlike Europe, is lacking strong multilateral political institutions. Indeed, the formation of the European Union and all the European multilateral institutions were preceded by a long, painstaking work. As a result, the countries of the region abandoned many of their ambitions in order to set up collegial structures taking into account collective interests.

Here, on the contrary, we witness a high level of mistrust among the North East Asian states. This situation is aggravated by their historical experience, political and economic divergence, and claims on leadership in the Asian Pacific region.

It should be also recognized that for the moment none of the countries of the region has enough opportunities (meaning power) to turn the situation to their benefit through unilateral activities. In their politics the North East Asian states have to take into consideration each other's positions on various issues.

From this point of view, the words of the Russian Foreign Minister S. Lavrov have particular relevance: "The experience of the last six

years convincingly shows that any attempts to ignore the reality of a multipolar world ultimately end in failure. Whatever examples we may take, the conclusion remains the same: modern international problems cannot be solved by force. Attempts to do so only aggravate and throw the situation into a stalemate. The deficit of security, or a sense of deficit, also stems from stagnation in the disarmament sphere, which increases the threat of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction."

Thus, the most important political task of the present time is creating an effective system of cooperative international security in the region - meaning security built upon the basis of multilateral cooperation and a balance of interests, not upon bloc-based confrontation with unavoidable elements of deterrence and containment. This way of ensuring security is the only acceptable one. Otherwise, even without large-scale wars, the humanity would be in a constant state of "cold peace" or a break between recurrent local conflicts.

In this context, Mongolia's consistent and constructive line towards creation of Nuclear Weapon Free Zone (NWFZ) may become the first legal precedent in the case of a real denuclearization of the region and reduction of the conflict level.

At the same time, it is quite evident that consideration of questions connected with the expanding of NWFZ in the region may be still only theoretical, aimed at a long-term prospect. Among the reasons for this approach one can name not only the unfinished process of officially recognizing Mongolia as NWFZ, but also the sharp discord in the political priorities of the states of the region. In order to define the possibility of expanding the area of NWFZ and the effectiveness of creation of a similar component in the regional security structure, long, comprehensive work must be carried out, to enhance mutual confidence among the Northeastern Asian states.

One may regard the setting up of a working group on security measures in the North- East Asia under Russian chairmanship as the first practical step in this direction; the group started its work on March 15, 2007 within the frame of the six-party talks on denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. Considering that the group targets include creating a favourable, confidential climate among the participants of the talks, the prospects of a mutually acceptable and equal dialogue among the Northeastern Asian states on the pressing issues of the region largely depend on the results of its activities.

It is also necessary to note that, unlike the intergovernmental regional forum Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD) rallying 30 countries of the South, Central and the Middle East, the so-called "Russian working group" includes only representatives of the North-East Asia and the US. Taking into account the limited number of participating countries in this group it is possible to raise specific problems relevant for all the states of the region at this forum.

Drawing up the agenda of the meetings requires special attention. The maintenance of a constructive spirit of the participants could be facilitated by discussing issues that, being considered "universal", nevertheless retain their significance and correspond to the level of challenges in the modern society. And the willingness of all the parties to discuss them, coupled with the aspiration to search for mutually acceptable solutions on specific or general problems, would allow a corporate approach.

It appears that the following issues could be chosen for discussion:

- The problem of cooperation in the field of information technology and information security;
- Cooperation in the field of disaster prevention and dealing with the consequences of emergency situations;
- Environmental protection, joint ecology monitoring programs;
- Mutual use of trans-boundary rivers and water bodies;
- Struggle against trans-boundary crime: narcotics, smuggling, and money-laundering;
- Development of economic security measures and promotion of economic integration of regional countries including security of international sea, air, land and other communications, etc.

In case the nuclear problem of the Korean peninsula is settled on a mutually acceptable basis providing for compensatory payment and political security guarantees one may count on the continuation and acceleration of the multilateral consultations process on security in the region (as well as on the topic of NWFZ expansion).

Specific agreements accompanying the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula would themselves signify a sufficiently high level of confidence among the participants. Only on these terms it would be possible to extend the range of questions under discussion at the expense of military problems.

If there is the political will of all the regional countries' leadership, creating an additional positive background, it would be possible to discuss the following questions:

- Reduction in the quantity of military exercises, including the joint ones with the US, in North-East Asia;
- Development of an overall regional military stability model;
- Reduction in conventional weapons according to the progress in relations between countries of the region;
- Possible transformation of the existing military alliances towards overall regional partnership interests;
- Perspectives of a peace treaty conclusion on the Korean peninsula, etc.

The enumerated topics can be considered as a natural addition to the establishment of NWFZ (first in Mongolia and then its expansion to the other places in the region), especially taking into account the fact that the Korean peninsula denuclearization gives a unique possibility to extend this experience to the both Korean states.

Let me summarize all mentioned above:

1. The practical realization of Nuclear Weapon Free Zone in the region is impeded by the consequences of the cold war period confrontation;
2. Their elimination will be promoted by confidence building measures among all countries of the region;
3. The existing dialogue mechanisms, that is the Asia Cooperation Dialogue, 6-party talks on the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, should be used for this purpose;
4. At the first phase the agenda should include issues of current importance to all countries of the region which will make it possible to ensure parity in the discussion progress;
5. The denuclearization of the Korean peninsula will give an additional impulse to the process of regional political integration;
6. In this case the problems of military and political stability in the region can be discussed and settled;

The development of situation according to this scenario will make it possible to raise the problem of the NWFZ expansion, at the same time tackling the issues of the Korean peninsula.