**Kazakhstan: From Denuclearisation to Industrialisation**

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The disintegration of the USSR is a painful historical fact in Central Asia, which not only paved the way for the independence of several states in Central Asia, previously part of the USSR but also ushered in an era of instability and unpredictability regarding their future as sustainable political and economic actors in the region. Still, the fall of the iron curtain was welcomed in Central Asia where Northern Asia was embedded with Eastern Europe making it Eurasia. Thus, it raised the hope of building a safe world in a region where nuclear proliferation will no longer be a concern except for Russia. The security of nuclear weapons of the USSR could be breached if states like Kazakhstan and Ukraine refused to nationalise the nuclear weapons and strove to build comprehensive nuclear weapons, but it chose peace over warheads and gave up on hundreds of Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles and thousands of nuclear warheads.

It was obvious that newly-established Kazakhstan was in a position to securitise nuclear weapons. Any margin of insecurity could expose them at the hands of international terror organisations operating in the region, especially Afghanistan. It is pertinent to mention the rare case study of margin of error when Moscow forgot a secret warehouse of nuclear weapons at Ulba Plant in Kazakhstan. Later in 1994, 600 kg of highly enriched uranium ready to be used in nuclear warheads were discovered. Kazakhstan, with the help of the US, designed a then-secret Operation Sapphire to extract the contaminated container out of Kazakhstan.

It is pertinent to mention that the then President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev was offered billions of dollars in lieu of retaining the nuclear weapons and declaring itself a nuclear weapon state, first in the Muslim world. Libyan leader Gaddafi intended to get hands on nuclear weapons from Kazakhstan against a hard to ignore sum of money. It could have been disastrous for the nascent state and its leader to get the money against the transfer of nuclear weapons and to use this money for state-building.

Remarkably, Kazakhstan decided to dismantle and get rid of nuclear weapons and declare itself a nuclear-free state following complicated negotiations with the non-proliferation regime. The US intended a low budget solution while Kazakhstan asked for guarantees against nuclear weapon states and economic cooperation to boost the national economy. Resultantly, Central Asia became a nuclear-weapon-free zone, an active advocate of the anti-nuclear movement and Kazakhstan became the leader in attracting foreign investments.

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Another significant development that could have watershed impacts on the political life of Kazakhstan was the coup d’etat attempt in Moscow, which, if successful, could have returned the whole course of history. Soviet-era President Gorbachev was detained by the State Committee for State of Emergency, which took political power into its hands. Gorbachev appeared nowhere in this episode to prevent any violence and the attempts to prevent the disintegration of the USSR.

Nazarbayev was offered to head the government of the Soviet Union because of his political strength as a heavyweight. He refused to introduce a state of emergency and declared the actions by the State of Emergency Committee unconstitutional. When the putschists gathered to attack the White House in Moscow where the then President Boris Yelstin took refuge, it was Nazarbayev who through his farsightedness and political negotiations and consultation resolved the crisis. In the historic archives and records, the conversation between Minister of Defense of the USSR Yazov and Nazarbayev reflects how he negotiated with Yazov to withdraw the troops and tanks that he ordered to send to Moscow.

The third crossroads threatened the collapse of the USSR according to the “Czechoslovak scenario.” After the Belovezhskaya agreements on December 8, 1991, a total management crisis arose on a vast territory. Three Soviet republics–Russia, Ukraine and Belarus–in fact, unilaterally announced the termination of the existence of the USSR as a “subject of international law and geopolitical reality.” At this time, when the negotiations were ongoing, there was a threat of collapse of the Soviet Empire like clay, provoking tectonic shifts around the world. At that time, the West tried to take advantage of the entire situation. This collapse of an empire led to conflicts later, including Nagorno-Karabakh, and tensions in the post-Soviet republics, including Tajikistan, where civil war broke out.

The Russian Slavic states began forming alliances while the Turkic republics felt they needed to create their association. As a result, new dividing lines begin to emerge in Eurasia based on ethnic, religious and territorial grounds. This resulted in a new source of global instability.

How did all this chaos and conflict stop? Nazarbayev has a great role to play in this regard. He gathered the leaders from Soviet Republics at the capital of Kazakhstan to form and establish the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The CIS put a legitimate end to the collapse of the USSR. Reviewing all the mentioned facts, a simple conclusion can be drawn that Kazakhstan’s visionary leader Nursultan has played a major role in making the process of collapse of the USSR more benign for everyone. This has led to less chaos and conflict as was threatened for the world and the region. As a result of his actions, the entire process of peace and stability in the region was strengthened. Kazakhstan has become an anchor for peace and stability in Central Asia. It is the only country that has managed to resolve the border issue with all its neighbours, including the Caspian Sea, which is rich in oil resources.

Neither the Russian Empire in the 19th century nor the Soviet Union in the 20th century could agree with China on the division of territories. Nazarbayev was able to. And not by concessions, but by the method of mutual compromises. Here is just one very eloquent figure: the area of Kazakhstan within the USSR was 2 million 717 square kilometres, the area of independent Kazakhstan today is 2 million 725 thousand Square kilometres. History reveals that skilful diplomacy, negotiations with acumen and political will to develop a vibrant economy has helped the Kazakh people evolve into a strong nation, which not only settled its disputed borders with neighbouring countries but also grew in territories.

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