

The Limited Nuclear Weapon Free Zone in Northeast Asia: Is It Feasible?

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Introduction

The idea of establishing a nuclear weapon free zone (NWFZ) in Northeast Asia has been flourishing for the last decade. Two prominent models have been proposed: one by John Endicott¹ and the other by Kumao Kaneko.² They put forward several important features: e.g., to cover a wide area of around 2,000 kilometers from the center of the Korean peninsula; to envision multiple membership having major nuclear powers in the region; and to tackle a missile issue in the case of Kaneko's proposal. Aspirations for making an enduring and peaceful NWFZ of this region have been partly encouraged by growing international interests in and efforts for nonproliferation and nuclear disarmament.

In the Asia-Pacific region, in particular, such aspirations have been materialized in several parts of the region. As a harbinger, the Treaty of Rarotonga was signed in 1985 to make South Pacific immune from nuclear threat. Next, New Zealand unilaterally declared itself nuclear free in 1987. This was followed by Mongolia in 1992 and its nuclear free status later got a formal recognition from the U.N. General Assembly. And the Bangkok Treaty was signed in 1995 to make the Southeast Asian region nuclear free. The treaty was put into force in

¹ See Background Data: Limited Nuclear Weapons Free Zone for Northeast Asia, 2nd Meeting of the Expanded Senior Panel, October 12-14, 1996, Bordeaux, France.

² See Outline of a "Northeast Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty" by Kumao Kaneko, October 1999; Kumao Kaneko, "Japan needs no umbrella," *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, March/April 1996, pp. 46-51

1997. Thus, the forces of creating a NWFZ had started in South Pacific and have been gradually moving up toward the North. So it is natural and reasonable to envision that the next turn would be Northeast Asia.

A third proposal was made by Seongwhun Cheon and Tatsujiro Suzuki to establish a NWFZ among North and South Korea, and Japan.³ The motivation of the tripartite NWFZ (TNWFZ) is based on the recognition that the previous proposals are too ambitious to bear fruitful results in a foreseeable future. By including nuclear weapon states, they put in front sensitive security issues of redeploying and dismantling nuclear weapons in the very beginning of what might have to be a long cooperative process. Taking difficult issues at the start will no doubt bring about many hurdles in the process. With this in mind, the TNWFZ attempts to realize a NWFZ in Northeast Asia gradually-not necessarily belatedly-by taking into account the feasibility and by avoiding difficulties posed by larger NWFZ proposals. In fact, the TNWFZ can be an intermediate, practical, and hopefully, faster step to reach a full NWFZ in Northeast Asia.

Achievements of the LNWFZ-NEA

Up until today, most international efforts on turning Northeast Asia into a nuclear weapon free zone have gathered under the initiative of John Endicott, a professor at the Georgia Institute of Technology. Under Dr. Endicott's leadership, a group of specialists from China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Russia, and the United States has held meetings every year since January 1995 to consider the feasibility of a limited nuclear weapons free zone for Northeast Asia. As time goes, the original core group has been joined by interested parties from other nations including Argentina, Canada, Finland, France. This group's proposal has been dubbed LNWFZ-NEA (Limited Nuclear Weapon Free Zone in Northeast Asia).

³ Seongwhun Cheon and Tatsujiro Suzuki, "A nuclear-free zone in Korea and Japan," *Korea Herald*, June 13, 2000, p. 6. The idea of creating a NWFZ among the three nations was first put forward by Hiromichi Uneyashiki at INESAP Conference in Sweden in 1996. See Hiro Uneyashiki, "A Northeast Asia NWFZ: a realistic and attainable goal," *INESAP Information Bulletin*, No. 10, August 1996. The proposal was called "A Trilateral Treaty with NSA Proposals" and was renamed as "A Three plus Three Nations Arrangement" in 2000.

The initiative for LNWFZ-NEA was prompted by the significant changes in the structure of the international system since the beginning of the 1990s.⁴ That is, the need to create a cooperative security infrastructure became visible in the region that had enduring legacies of colonialism, World War II, and the Cold War. So it was believed that it was clearly a right time to move forward by recognizing that the security environment in the region could be made increasingly positive by multilateral action, and by this action to head for a new level of regional interaction. The idea of LNWFZ-NEA was put forward as a means to accomplish this change from confrontation to cooperation in the new era.

At a meeting held in Buenos Aires on March 21, 1996, the participants agreed on the following positions that have been important guidelines for the international efforts toward establishing the LNWFZ-NEA.⁵

1. A LNWFZ for Northeast Asia could become an important step in the creation of a new cooperative security system in the region.
2. Such a LNWFZ would not be oriented against any one state.
3. The geographical extent of the zone would need to be examined further, but the concept involves the following countries: China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, and the United States.
4. A time-phased approach to implementation of weapons included for relocation or removal from the zone would have to be allowed.
5. Emphasis would be placed on nuclear weapons not associated with strategic arms.
6. The LNWFZ would not place restrictions on peaceful applications for power generation, but safeguard inspections would continue.
7. Membership should include all interested states of the region with original members, inviting others in the region to join as well as all nuclear weapon states. It is envisaged that the following states

⁴ John Endicott, "Existing criteria for nuclear weapons-free zones and the limited nuclear weapons-free zone concept for Northeast Asia," A Report by the Chairman of the Interim Secretariat Regarding Efforts to Create a Cooperative Security Regime in Northeast Asia, at Hakone Japan in October 1999, p. 5.

⁵ Final Statement of the Buenos Aires Group: Findings and Recommendations of the Buenos Aires Group Regarding a Limited Nuclear Weapons Zone (LNWFZ) for Northeast Asia. The Bordeaux Protocol of the Limited Nuclear Weapons Free Zone for Northeast Asia, Center for International Strategy, Technology and Policy at the Georgia Institute of Technology, March 1997, pp. 79-81.

would be original members: China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Russia and the United States.

- 8 The creation of a specific nuclear weapons free zone was not seen as the ultimate goal, only the first step toward major reductions in nuclear armaments worldwide.

A year later in 1997, the Expanded Panel meeting was held in Bordeaux France. The Bordeaux meeting reached an agreement on the action agenda. In particular, the following items are noteworthy:⁶

1. Endorse the creation of national working groups, who would complete studies in concert with applicable government circles, concerning individual components of the LNWFZ concept, including zone size and shape, specific weapon systems to be contained, verification system, agency structure, and appropriate confidence building measures.
2. Establish formal contact-point relationships with government representatives.
3. Examine the concept of reciprocity to insure proportionality in any actual weapons reduction.
4. Inform the two non-regional nuclear powers (the United Kingdom and France) of the activities and, as developments advance, prepare to offer them observer status in preparation to full adherence.
5. Adopt an overall concept with regard to the notion of a cooperative security regime that stressed how the regime activities would not be harmful to any of the states and would improve or add to mutual trust.

From the beginning, the focus has been on the two specific points. The first was the creation of a specific circular zone from which all nuclear weapons would be removed. And the second, the creation of a regional agency to verify that the agreed nuclear weapons had indeed been removed, and that nuclear weapons were not being possessed by the non-nuclear nations within the zone.

In any nuclear weapon free zone proposal, a key issue is how to define the zone of application. The Expanded Senior Panel, a core discussion group of the LNWFZ-NEA has identified, at its meeting in

⁶ The Bordeaux Protocol of the Limited Nuclear Weapons Free Zone for Northeast Asia, Center for International Strategy, Technology and Policy at the Georgia Institute of Technology, March 1997, pp. 23-24.

Seoul, October 2001, the following four designs to delimit the zone in which the agreement will be implemented.⁷

- **Circle Zone:** A zone in which the center is placed at the center of the DMZ on the Korean Peninsula. The radius of the zone would be about 1200 nm and would involve the following areas: China including Taiwan, Japan, Mongolia, North Korea, South Korea, Russia, and the United States. Here the United States is not physically within the zone but it will be expected to actively participate within the system.
- **Ellipse Zone:** This zone would have its western border located in Northeast China and its Eastern border in Alaska, thus, visibly involving three major nuclear weapon states. North and South Korea, Japan and Taiwan are within the ellipse zone. While the exact boundaries crossing Russia, China, Mongolia and the United States have yet to be defined, the concept would include some territory of all members in the zone.
- **North-Pacific Zone:** This zone is based on the notion that while certain areas within the North-Pacific, i.e. a portion or entire territories of China, Russia, Alaska (the United States), Japan, the Korean Peninsula, and Mongolia would initially be in a non-nuclear zone, the oceans and seas between the territories affected would be excluded. This is designed to remove a very difficult verification issue involving SLBMs of the three nuclear member states.
- **NEA League of Non-Nuclear Weapon States and Prototype Plan for Involvement of Regional Nuclear Weapon States:** This NEA League proposes that Japan, North and South Korea, and Mongolia would join in the formation of a league of non-nuclear weapon states. This could be realized immediately or upon the agreement of the nuclear weapons states to each identify one military base with tactical nuclear weapons present. These steps would form the basis to create the inspection system, agency structure, etc. and other features for an initial demonstration system.

Regarding the nuclear weapons permitted within the zone, the Expanded Senior Panel noted that although it is the ultimate goal of this

⁷ Expanded Senior Panel's Deliberations at the Meeting of Expanded Senior Panel for Limited Nuclear Weapons Free Zone for Northeast Asia held On October 8-9th, 2001 at Swiss Grand Hotel, Seoul, South Korea.

agreement to realize the removal of all nuclear warheads from the areas included in the zone, such an objective can only come after a period of confidence building, dialogue, and developing a record of success in this area among the states of the region.⁸ So the Panel has focused on identifying nuclear weapons appropriate for reduction at the initial steps. It recommends that during the initial stages of LNWFZ-NEA, the emphasis be placed on nuclear warheads applicable to non-strategic missiles and other nuclear warheads or devices with tactical applications.

Limits of the LNWFZ-NEA proposal

In the discussion on creating a nuclear weapon free zone, the two questions are typically raised; whether the idea is desirable and whether it is feasible. For the issue of desirability, no objection could be made against a nuclear weapon free zone. The ultimate goal of a nuclear weapon free zone—to eliminate all nuclear weapons and achieve stable peace in the region—is worth a sincere pursuit. On the other hand, there exist many reservations as to the second question of feasibility. The idea of tripartite NWFZ mentioned above draws on such reservations.

There exist two very practical reasons behind these reservations. First, LNWFZ-NEA mixes two categorically different status of membership of the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT): nuclear weapon states (NWS) and non-nuclear weapon states (NNWS). This is a unique feature of LNWFZ-NEA and what makes its implementation most challenging. With the mixture of NWS and NNWS, LNWFZ-NEA brings about doubly heavy burdens; that is, not only creating a NWFZ among non-nuclear weapon states that is a traditional mission of any NWFZ but also making parts of NWS territories nuclear-free and carrying out reduction of tactical nuclear weapons. It is suspected whether nuclear arms reduction among the three nuclear weapon states in Northeast Asia can be negotiated and conducted in parallel with a nuclear weapon free zone among the non-nuclear weapon states. It seems possible theoretically or at the first glance. But with some second thoughts, it is easily understood how difficult it would be to combine the two already immensely difficult jobs. It is more plausible that either a nuclear disarmament among nuclear weapon states or a nuclear weapon free zone among non-nuclear weapon states come first.

⁸ Ibid.

Secondly, the current LNWFZ-NEA lacks a clear-cut objective. In the Expanded Panel's deliberations, there are some phrases that reflect what the LNWFZ-NEA is trying to achieve; for example, "to create a new cooperative security system," "to support enhanced transparency, dialogue and confidence between all the parties," and "the ultimate goal to realize the removal of all nuclear weapons."⁹ These are, however, just expressions of principles with no practical details. In order to draw as much support and interests from the regional countries as possible, it is important that any idea of establishing a NWFZ harbors clear-cut and realistic objectives that could provide some tangible benefits to the member states.

Each country has its own objectives and they are not necessarily overlapping. Then, the question comes on how much common ground is shared by the countries working for the LNWFZ-NEA. If there exist significant differences between their objectives, the prospect of the LNWFZ-NEA would be as much not bright. The Beijing Summary Report that categorizes various proposals in three baskets demonstrates the wide spectrum of issues expected to cover within the context of the LNWFZ in Northeast Asia.¹⁰ In consequence, this report manifests the fact that the objectives of the LNWFZ-NEA are not well defined and members' interests are diverse and dispersed.

Objectives of a NWFZ in Northeast Asia

Moving toward creating a NWFZ in Northeast Asia, it is important to build consensus on what are the objectives to be attained in the first place. Unless we share common understandings on the role and function of a NWFZ in this region, ongoing efforts for a NWFZ in Northeast Asia would not achieve a successful result. There are three objectives that should be unanimously shared by member states of the LNWFZ-NEA .

They are not mutually exclusive, more or less interrelated. The three objectives are (1) to enhance transparency of the countries' nuclear intentions and activities in the region, (2) to promote prosperity by

⁹ Expanded Senior Panel's Deliberations at the Meeting of Expanded Senior Panel for Limited Nuclear Weapons Free Zone for Northeast Asia held On October 8-9th, 2001 at Swiss Grand Hotel, Seoul, South Korea.

¹⁰ "Beijing Summary Report," Sixth Expanded Senior Panel on the Limited Nuclear Weapons Free Zone for Northeast Asia, September 16-20, 2000.

allowing active cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, and (3) to strengthen peace and security with a verifiable NWFZ supported by firm security assurances and nuclear disarmament from the part of nuclear weapon states. The first two objectives are characteristically important in the fact that Japan and South Korea are heavily dependent on nuclear energy and that North Korea will be in a similar situation in its industrialization process in the future. The third objective is also prominent for the benefit of guaranteeing more stable peace and security in the region where both nuclear weapon states and non-nuclear weapon states live together. A NWFZ can be an effective tool to achieve peace not only by preventing non-nuclear weapon states from the possession of nuclear weapons of all kinds and but also by having nuclear weapon states provide firm security assurances for non-nuclear weapon states and commit to nuclear disarmament for regional stability and peace.

The road ahead

For the successful conclusion of ongoing efforts for the LNWFZ-NEA, at least, two measures need be taken in the future. Firstly, nuclear strategies of nuclear weapon states should be an important part of discussions about a NWFZ. Because redeployment or reduction of some nuclear weapons for a NWFZ will lead to having significant effects on nuclear weapon states' overall security strategies and nuclear strategies in particular. It is surprising that there have been little discussions on the nuclear doctrines and deterrence strategies of the three nuclear weapon states in the context of LNWFZ-NEA.

Therefore, it is important to hold a forum with the purpose of discussing nuclear policies and deterrent strategies of the nuclear weapon states and of coordinating their nuclear policies in possible areas. For example, if a comprehensive security assurance is to be agreed, nuclear weapon states have to adopt no-first-use policy against non-nuclear weapon states. Only China has held such policy at the moment. But North Korea, for instance, has strongly demanded no nuclear-threat from the United States that is more far-reaching than 'no-use' guarantee. It is necessary, therefore, to check whether other nuclear weapon states are willing to modify their nuclear policies for the sake of establishing a NWFZ in Northeast Asia.

Secondly, some measures are also necessary to demonstrate that a multilateral gathering like Expanded Panel is beneficial in itself for

regional peace and stability. Without tangible evidence that multilateral gathering are achieving some success, however modest, external support and interests would diminish in the future. One way to bring about positive evidence is to launch a practical and easy-to-implement project, symbolizing cooperative security in the region. For example, multilateral monitoring of seismic activities or regional monitoring of environmental pollution can be launched as small-scale technical projects.¹¹ That is, a simultaneous move in the LNWFZ track and in the cooperative project track should be the way forward for increasing a possibility of a NWFZ in Northeast Asia.

A NWFZ in Northeast Asia is not an end in itself. It is merely a beginning and opens a new way for strengthening peace and prosperity in the region. Regional endeavors to establish a NWFZ are fit for the concept of cooperative security.

Cooperative security in the 21st century, as opposed to collective security of the Cold War era, envisions cooperative engagement as a strategic principle and emphasizes the importance of institutionalized consents.¹² At the practical level, cooperative security seeks to devise agreed-on measures to prevent war and to do so by preventing the means for successful aggression from being assembled. Regional security cooperation, international arms control treaties and international measures to enhance transparency and increase openness in nations' military postures and strategies are all means to achieve cooperative security. That is, cooperative security is a model of international relations in which disputes are expected to occur but within the limits of agreed upon norms and established procedures.

A NWFZ in Northeast Asia is an effective arrangement to carry out the following principal aims of cooperative security in this region: (1) to prevent large-scale military offensive capabilities; (2) to engage cooperatively with internationally accepted norms and rules; and (3) to foster regional security cooperation. Successful achievement of a NWFZ

¹¹ The Cooperative Monitoring Center at Albuquerque, New Mexico, which is a branch of the Sandia National Laboratories, has focused on launching small-scale technical projects among the adversarial regional parties for the purpose of building mutual trust and maintaining stable peace. Its works are available at <http://www.cmc.sandia.gov>

¹² See Janne Nolan, "The concept of cooperative security," in Janne Nolan, ed., *Global Engagement: Cooperation and Security in the 21st Century* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1994), pp. 3-18.

will and should be followed by extending membership and broadening coverage.

In the long run, it is hoped that a NWFZ in Northeast Asia should become a basis for Pan-Pacific nuclear weapon free zone (PPNWFZ), encompassing East Asia, South Pacific and Latin America. In the future, the PPNWFZ could be turned into a Pan-Pacific Peace Zone (PPPZ), reaching the end of the long journey probing peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region.