

China and a Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone in Northeast Asia

Recommended Citation

Pan Zhenqiang, "China and a Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone in Northeast Asia", NAPSNet Special Reports, May 15, 2012, <https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-special-reports/china-and-a-nuclear-weapons-free-zone-in-northeast-asia/>

by Pan Zhenqiang

May 15, 2012



This report was originally presented at the [East Asia Nuclear Security workshop](#) held on November 11, 2011 in Tokyo, Japan. All of the papers and presentations given at the workshop are available [here](#), along with the full agenda, participant list and a workshop photo gallery.

Nautilus invites your contributions to this forum, including any responses to this report.

CONTENTS

- [I. Introduction](#)
 - [II. Report by Pan Zhenqiang](#)
 - [III. References](#)
 - [IV. Nautilus invites your responses](#)
-

I. Introduction

Pan Zhenqiang states that while China would support the creation of a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone

(NWFZ) in Northeast Asia at least two issues must first be resolved: 1) North Korea's nuclear weapons program must be dismantled and 2) the United States policy of extended deterrence (both nuclear and conventional) in the region must be discontinued. Both North Korea's weapons program and US deterrence create an atmosphere of distrust and insecurity in the region. Pan argues that establishing a regional NWFZ "has to be a multilateral, comprehensive, and cooperative process, aimed first and foremost at improving the security environment, and strengthening the political basis for a nuclear free arrangement that will take into consideration the security interests of all the countries concerned, and thus be acceptable to all of them. There is no alternative to such a multilateral, comprehensive, and cooperative approach to resolving the DPRK nuclear crisis, and US [deterrence] as well, thereby effectively removing the two major obstacles to the NWFZ in Northeast Asia."

Major General Pan Zhenqiang (retired) is deputy chairman of the China Foundation for International Studies, senior adviser to the China Reform Forum, and director of research at the Institute for Strategy and Management of the Central University of Finance and Economics in China.

The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Nautilus Institute. Readers should note that Nautilus seeks a diversity of views and opinions on significant topics in order to identify common ground.

II. Report by Pan Zhenqiang

"China and a Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone in Northeast Asia"
by Pan Zhenqiang

The creation of nuclear weapons-free zones (NWFZ) has been one of the great achievements for the purpose of prevention of nuclear proliferation and promoting nuclear disarmament, pending the complete prohibition and thorough destruction of nuclear weapons. So far, six such zones have formerly been built up, covering more than the whole Southern half of the globe, for the prohibition of all the nuclear activities for military purposes. Since the end of the Cold War, the international and regional efforts to build up more NWFZs have continued. One of these efforts has been the increasing interests in exploring a NWFZ in Northeast Asia.

Although the idea of building a NWFZ in Northeast Asia is highly desirable, it has proved to be extremely difficult and complex against a volatile and uncertain background in the region. This short paper offers a Chinese perspective on the possibility and feasibility of a NWFZ in Northeast Asia. It first analyzes why China welcomes the concept of creating such a zone in Northeast Asia, then highlights two major obstacles that have so far made any efforts to build the NWFZ an unfulfilled dream, and finally gives some suggestions as how countries in the region should work together to develop a framework for the establishing of a NWFZ that is sustained, effective, and acceptable to all the parties concerned in Northeast Asia in the future.

China supports a nuclear weapons-free zone in Northeast Asia

In China's strategic calculation, Northeast Asia occupies an extremely important place to its security. From both a geo-political and geo-economic point of view, China's security largely hinges on peace, stability and prosperity in the region. This objective, however, has been threatened by the spread of nuclear weapons to non-nuclear weapon states, and the US continuing to threaten to use nuclear weapons in the region. To remove the nuclear element in the security landscape of Northeast Asia is undoubtedly in China's best interests, and a NWFZ in the region would ideally

serve that purpose. Compared with other nuclear weapon states, and in line with its consistent no-first use nuclear policy, Beijing feels more comfortable and less constrained undertaking due responsibilities for a NWFZ in the region. More fundamentally, to China a NWFZ would also be perceived as a significant step towards facilitating Beijing's efforts to strengthen the nuclear non-proliferation regime, reduce nuclear competition among the major nuclear powers, and contribute to stability and peace in the region. A NWFZ, in China's perspective, should be a welcome building block in creating a propitious security architecture in Northeast Asia in the future.

A NWFZ, first of all, can put the nuclear non-proliferation efforts on a more enduring track in Northeast Asia. Such a zone would most likely cover the Korean Peninsula (both North and South Korea) and Japan in geographical scope. The three countries are all known to see incentives, in varying degrees, in developing nuclear weapons. If a NWFZ is agreed upon by them, it would be a very effective and sustained preemptive measure to prevent nuclear proliferation by legally binding all the non-nuclear weapon states to forswearing their nuclear option in Northeast Asia.

A NWFZ in Northeast Asia would demand that all the relevant current nuclear powers undertake their due obligations for the non-nuclear arrangement. This includes, among other things, agreeing not to station nuclear weapons and their carrying vehicles, as well as not to carry out nuclear activities in Japan and the two Koreas and in their adjacent seas. It also excludes the use or threatening the use of nuclear weapons against these countries. All these commitments would entail dramatic changes in nuclear strategy and doctrine of those powers based on the first use of nuclear weapons—US extended deterrence in particular would have to be reviewed. As a result, although it would not entirely remove the nuclear element out of Northeast Asia, a NWFZ will hopefully put the nuclear weapons on the backburner in the security strategies of the nuclear weapon powers, thus greatly helping strengthen strategic stability among the major nuclear powers.

A sustained and effective NWFZ would be inconceivable without minimum political mutual trust among the countries involved. Thus, in China's perspective, the process of building a NWFZ in Northeast Asia should also include normalizing relations among countries in the region, including reducing tension, strengthening communication and understanding, and seeking political reconciliation among the countries involved. This is particularly helpful in the relations between the DPRK on the one hand, and the United States, the ROK, and Japan on the other. The two sides still look at each other either with serious suspicion or in sheer hostility and confrontation. Obviously, the efforts for a NWFZ in Northeast Asia would have to go hand-in-hand with the improvement of the political situation. China would be happy to see all these positive developments in the process of creating a NWFZ in Northeast Asia as they all are conducive to the creation of a more peaceful and stable neighborhood in Northeast Asia.

DPRK nuclear crisis—the major obstacle to the NWFZ in Northeast Asia

China's interests in a NWFZ in Northeast Asia, however, are not shared by the governments of other countries in the region. This is ironic considering that all the non-nuclear weapon states (except perhaps for North Korea) in the region are members of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), and should have, in theory, no qualms endorsing the creation of a NWFZ in Northeast Asia since they have undertaken solemn commitment not to seek a nuclear weapon option under the NPT, anyway. [1] In addition, all the nuclear weapon states have also offered negative assurances (that is, not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states) in one way or the another. [2] Despite all these commitments, the painful truth is that all these countries still seem to believe that nuclear weapons still have a vital role to play in their security strategies. This over-obsession with the advantage of nuclear weapons has generated at least two major obstacles that make the concept of a NWFZ virtually an impossible target.

The first obstacle is the acquisition of a nuclear weapons capability by North Korea, which has not only given rise to increasing tensions on the Peninsula, but also added dynamics to a nuclear proliferation wave in Northeast Asia. A truly nuclear North Korea would most probably precipitate South Korea and Japan following suit. The DPRK nuclear crisis thus has become the first and most immediate obstacle to the exploration of a NWFZ in Northeast Asia.

North Korea's nuclear ambition can be traced back to the early 1960s when Pyongyang started to build a small research reactor of 5 megawatts at Yongbyon capable of producing plutonium. Although forced to join the NPT in 1985, and accept the IAEA safeguards in 1992, the DPRK's efforts to build a weapon capability have continued in a secret manner ever since, ending finally with a head-on confrontation with the United States under the Clinton administration in 1993, which made non-proliferation one of the priorities on its national agenda. Thanks to restraint from both sides, the nuclear crisis was resolved through peaceful negotiation in a form of an Agreed Framework between the United States and the DPRK in 1994.

The Agreed Framework had its merits as it succeeded in achieving the resolution of the nuclear issue in a spirit of mutual respect and mutual compromise, depicting common but differential obligations for both sides in order to achieve the goal of denuclearization in the Korean Peninsula. Moreover, it also tried to put the resolution of the nuclear crisis in a broader context, realizing that it cannot be isolated from the improvement of the political and military mistrust and the correction of the abnormality in their relations. Among other things, the agreement stressed that: "the United States and North Korea committed to move toward normalizing economic and political relations, including by reducing barriers to investment, opening liaison offices, and ultimately exchanging ambassadors"; and that "both sides commit not to nuclearize the Korean Peninsula. The United States must "provide formal assurances" not to threaten or use nuclear weapons against North Korea. Pyongyang is required to "consistently take steps" to implement the 1992 North-South Joint Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. [3]

For all its merits, the Agreed Framework was soon aborted. It never had the domestic support in the US for the Clinton administration to carry it through, and subsequently provided little incentives for Pyongyang to really terminate its nuclear weapons programs. When the more conservative George W. Bush took power in the White House, he decided on an outright hostile policy towards North Korea, generating the second nuclear crisis with Pyongyang in 2002. North Korea reacted in a more defiant way, lifting a freeze on its nuclear reactor, expelling the IAEA inspectors on its soil, announcing the immediate withdrawal from the NPT, declaring reactivation of its nuclear facilities and getting ready to resume missile tests. The US responded by threatening a preventive military strike, and raising the issue to the UN Security Council.

Against this backdrop, China offered a multilateral approach first in the form of trilateral talks between the US, the DPRK, and China, and then through the Six Party Talks to resolve the nuclear crisis. Drawing on the experience and lessons of the Agreed framework, the Six Party Talks aimed at a resolution in the spirit of mutual respect and mutual compromise, and in a phased manner. Despite deep suspicion and hostility between Pyongyang and Washington and its allies, the multilateral negotiation body did achieve some significant progress towards the goal of denuclearizing the Peninsula. On September 19, 2005, during the fourth round of the Six Party Talks, a joint statement was unanimously adopted, which stipulated six principles to guide the future resolution of the nuclear issue on the Peninsula. These principles included:

1. Reaffirmation of the goal of the verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula in a peaceful manner. To that end, the DPRK committed to abandoning all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs and returning, at an early date, to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and to IAEA safeguards. The United States affirmed that it has no nuclear

weapons on the Korean Peninsula and has no intention to attack or invade the DPRK with nuclear or conventional weapons. The DPRK also insisted that it has the right to peaceful uses of nuclear energy, meaning light-water reactors. The other parties expressed their respect and agreed to discuss, at an appropriate time, the subject of the provision of light water reactor to the DPRK.

2. Abiding by the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and recognized norms of international relations.
3. Promotion of economic cooperation in the fields of energy, trade and investment, bilaterally and/or multilaterally. The other five parties stated their willingness to provide energy assistance to the DPRK.
4. Commitment to joint efforts for lasting peace and stability in Northeast Asia. The directly related parties will negotiate a permanent peace regime on the Korean Peninsula at an appropriate separate forum.
5. Taking coordinated steps to implement the afore-mentioned consensus in a phased manner in line with the principle of "commitment for commitment, action for action".
6. Commitment to future talks.

Under the guidance of these essential principles, a roadmap was also agreed on in the later round of the Six-Party Talks, pointing to a gradual way leading to the denuclearization of the peninsula. But again, for all these agreements, disputes soon arose as to who should do what first. Emotional pointing finger followed, leading to the paralysis of the Six Party Talks by the end of 2008. Political tensions have also increased, particularly between the North and South during the past four years. At some points, the military frictions were so acrimonious that they almost pushed the two sides to the verge of a real war. However, thanks to last-minute restraint by all involved parties and proactive mediating efforts by China, tensions have gradually ameliorated, and a vague window of opportunity has emerged for the resumption of the Six-Party Talks in 2012. However, few trust that a solution to the DPRK nuclear crisis will be found soon through multilateral diplomacy in the current atmosphere of intense political mistrust and hostility. After almost 10 years of these multilateral efforts to solve the DPRK nuclear issue the region seems unable to square the circle. Here, the painful lesson to be learned is that one has to be aware that the nuclear issue has been firmly imbedded in the rigid confrontation between the North and South, and between the DPRK and United States. Unless there is a more propitious political environment, it is extremely difficult to seek a solution to the nuclear crisis. It is in this sense that it can be argued that nuclear nonproliferation in Northeast Asia is a political rather than a military or technical issue.

The nuclear extended deterrence of the United States-another major obstacle to the NWFZ in Northeast Asia

Of course, North Korea is not the only country in Northeast Asia who sees a vital role that nuclear weapons can play in its security strategy. The United States has consistently stressed the value of its extended nuclear deterrence (END) for its security as well as that its allies. The US has used nuclear bombs against Japan and has ever since maintained a nuclear deterrence policy that threatens to use nuclear weapons in Northeast Asia if it or its allies were attacked by an adversary—even if that attack was with non-nuclear weapons. To the US, this so-called END has been significant both in a military and a political sense in the region since the Cold War. Militarily, it was part of a strategy the scramble with the Soviet Union for military supremacy. Politically, it was also an essential means to put the allies under its firm control, and to dissuade them from going nuclear. The end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union has evidently reduced the military value of END. The political importance of END to the US, however, seems to have been enhanced out of its need to consolidate its military presence and put a lid on the nuclear ambition of

its allies in Northeast Asia.

The emphasis on END has even been given impetus with Washington's refocus on the Asia-Pacific, Northeast Asia in particular, in its military redeployment in recent years. The US noticeably has been making efforts to strengthen its military presence in the region while substantially reducing its commitments in the other parts of the world. This has included deploying more strategic arms, expanding the military base structure, and deepening military cooperation with its allies and security partners in the region. As a result of these efforts, the majority of the US SSBNs have been now deployed in the Pacific. The number of patrols has increased in the Pacific, and dropped in the Atlantic. In the meantime, the US has energetically developed its missile defense in Northeast Asia.

The negative implications of the US enhanced nuclear posture with its END have been enormous. It has not only set the stage for nuclear competition among the nuclear powers, but has also become the major driving force for the proliferation of nuclear weapons in Northeast Asia. Needless to say, there is no question of a NWFZ in whatever form in Northeast Asia under such circumstances. North Korea in particular has repeatedly argued that it is the nuclear threat posed by the United States that forced Pyongyang to resort to the nuclear option for self-defense. Pyongyang also argued that if the United States and its allies can claim that the US nuclear weapons are legitimate for their security, that this same reasoning should also apply to the DPRK's nuclear weapons. The US has lost the moral high-ground in pursuit of nuclear non-proliferation. Evidently, Washington is now in a true dilemma with its nuclear weapons. If it thinks that nuclear weapons will continue to play a role in the region, how can Washington persuade other countries to believe otherwise? And more fundamentally, is its huge nuclear arsenal really usable?

The good news is that Washington's predicament has set off a new wave of rethinking at home about the value of nuclear weapons and nuclear deterrence in particular. Starting in 2007, four US senior statesmen—George P. Shultz, William J. Perry, Henry A. Kissinger, and Sam Nun—wrote a series of op-eds in the Wall Street Journal arguing that nuclear deterrence had become an “obsolete” concept. They argued that with the end of the Cold War, there is virtually no possibility of a nuclear exchange among nuclear powers. The greatest threat to the United States posed by nuclear weapons is the possession of these weapons by non-state actors. To cope with this threat of nuclear proliferation, the US nuclear deterrence is virtually irrelevant. The four gentlemen therefore called on Washington to give up its nuclear deterrence policy, reduce the role of nuclear weapons, and take a leading role in helping the world head toward the abolition of nuclear weapons. This new vision, posed by what was formerly the most ardent advocates for nuclear deterrence in the US, has played a significant role in setting off a heated debate about nuclear weapons at home, and in rekindling the interests and enthusiasm of many Western governments as well as nongovernmental organizations in exploring effective ways to push forward progress on nuclear disarmament and arms control. What is more inspiring is that the US President Barack Obama has openly and explicitly embraced this new idea. He promised significant changes in US nuclear policy and priorities compared with the George W. Bush administration. His pledge was reflected in the new Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) released in 2010. Although the document continued to argue for the importance of the US nuclear protection to its allies because of the political constraints from both domestic critics and allies abroad, the new NPR has nevertheless left room for a further debate on the possible modification of US END in the future.

In the meantime, the challenge to END is vigorously reinforced by a view increasingly shared by many in the US and its allies that END is historically questionable and currently an unnecessary assurance concept. It is questionable because few allies truly believe that Washington would really use nuclear weapons if it meant risking that its own cities would be attacked with nuclear weapons in retaliation. It is unnecessary given the United States' great supremacy in conventional military

capabilities. Washington could safely replace extended nuclear deterrence with conventional extended deterrence to its allies. As a prominent observer in this field recently stressed:

“The US nuclear umbrella remains reasonably credible as a deterrent to possible nuclear attack on its North East Asian allies, and is not in the slightest dependent on the presence of US weapons on regional soil. But it’s just as well that it is never likely to be tested by any such attack, because Tokyo, Seoul or Taipei (or Sydney for that matter) could not be totally confident that the US would be prepared to risk San Francisco for any of them. What really matters for the region is US extended deterrence, not extended nuclear deterrence -- i.e. ability to rely on US conventional military capability, which for the foreseeable future will be amply sufficient to deal with any non-nuclear threat contingency (and indeed probably any nuclear threat contingency as well).

Regional allies could live more comfortably than they now think they can without nuclear protection” [4]

Impacted by this increasingly popular view in the West, it seems a ray of hope is emerging that Washington may eventually reconsider replacing its long-held END with conventional extended deterrence, removing one of the major obstacles to the establishment of a NWFZ in Northeast Asia. The window of such an opportunity does exist. However, one should not be too optimistic about such a prospect.

Domestic constraints are simply too strong for any US administration to take practical steps towards modifying END in any dramatic manner. Despite the fact that the use of nuclear weapons has already become a political taboo, there is some conceptual inertia in the US as some continue to cling to the value of these horrible weapons as if the world were still living in the Cold War. Many in the US still seem to believe that nothing can replace nuclear weapons as the most powerful instrument with which to maintain its world hegemony. Others disagree, but still have serious concerns about the implication of the US lifting the nuclear protection to its allies. They argue that END has a political usage in cementing the security ties between the US and its allies. Once the nuclear umbrella is gone, the centrifugal trend of the allies would grow, fundamentally eroding US dominance in the world. This is particularly probable as Washington finds itself in a declining position. Moreover, there are also various groups in the US who simply do not want to lose their established interests when and if the US really reduces the role of nuclear weapons and embarks on the road of nuclear disarmament leading to a world free of nuclear weapons. All these combined continue to form a powerful inhibiting force for the substantial readjustment of the US nuclear strategy in the foreseeable future.

Finally, even if Washington does agree to replace its nuclear deterrence with conventional deterrence, is a NWFZ under the shadow of the United States' powerful conventional deterrence conducive to peace and stability in the region?

Conclusions and suggestions

The regional exploration for a NWFZ in Northeast Asia will continue to be long-term and uphill effort. As stressed earlier, lack of a new vision for nuclear weapons, as well as adequate political will and courage from state leaders to break away from the heavy yoke of stereotypical thinking and political short term considerations have constituted the most difficult part of the issue.

Against this backdrop, meaningful exchanges on the issue in the research community are conducive to a healthy debate in the decision-making circles on nuclear weapons, providing good fodder for

new ideas, and creating dynamics for the exploration of building a NWFZ in Northeast Asia on the right track. To that end, the following points may be in order from a Chinese point of view:

1. All the problems with regard to a NWFZ in Northeast Asia boil down to a fundamental question of whether nuclear weapons are allowed to play a role in the security strategies of countries, nuclear or non-nuclear alike. Take the two major obstacles to the NWFZ in Northeast Asia—the DPRK nuclear crisis and the US END—security seems to be claimed by both countries as the justification for their need for nuclear weapons. But if security is the justification for the possession of nuclear weapons, there will be no hope for substantial progress towards nuclear disarmament, or nuclear arms control, including the establishment of a NWFZ in Northeast Asia. To successfully build a sustainable NWFZ in the region, one must define a more fundamental and convincing reason to encourage regional efforts. That reason is humanity. For all their merits, nuclear weapons are weapons of mass destruction (WMD). They are inhuman weapons and should be completely prohibited and thoroughly destroyed just like other WMDs. This has already become a consensus in world public opinion. Only based on this world consensus, can the regional efforts for a NWFZ in Northeast Asia hope to succeed.
2. The discussion of the two major obstacles has also demonstrated that underlining the difficulty and complexity of the two problems is a more tenacious core issue of a deficit of trust among the countries involved. States continue to regard state-to-state relations as a game of zero sum nature. Historical grievances, territorial and maritime disputes, and Cold War mentalities have added to the super-sensitivity surrounding the nuclear issue in Northeast Asia, and to the great reluctance to renounce the nuclear option without prior and adequate security assurances. It is for this reason that building a NWFZ in Northeast Asia is much more than a nuclear issue per se. It has to be a multilateral, comprehensive, and cooperative process, aimed first and foremost at improving the security environment, and strengthening the political basis for a nuclear free arrangement that will take into consideration the security interests of all the countries concerned, and thus be acceptable to all of them. There is no alternative to such a multilateral, comprehensive, and cooperative approach to resolving the DPRK nuclear crisis, and US END as well, thereby effectively removing the two major obstacles to the NWFZ in Northeast Asia.
3. Following this reasoning, the call for a NWFZ wherein US conventional deterrence replaces US END in Northeast Asia contravenes China's basic security culture, which calls for building a NWFZ in the region through cooperation and reconciliation. China criticizes the US END, not only because it involves the use of nuclear weapons, but also because deterrence itself is an obsolete concept, whether nuclear or conventional. If lessons in the Cold War are any guide, it is clear that, although deterrence may help preserve a very fragile peace and stability for a period of time, it has perpetuated and inflamed divisions, mistrust, suspicion, and miscalculation among the countries concerned, and eventually gave rise to new instabilities in the region. Thus even if a NWFZ were to be created in the shadow of US conventional deterrence, Northeast Asia may not be any better off than it is in the current, nuclear threat-based system. It would not take much imagination to envisage that absent nuclear weapons, but with continuing regional confrontation, an uncontrolled conventional arms race would be bound to follow in the region, as paranoid countries scramble to seek to be better conventionally armed. Lesser countries like the DPRK, ROK or even Japan may be more inclined to develop a nuclear weapons capability if they feel they are unable to catch up with the major powers in a conventional arms race. The NWFZ under such circumstances could only become an empty shell. Worst of all is the fact that conventional deterrence may more easily evolve into a conventional war once the region is free of nuclear constraint. For those who have conventional superiority, the use of sophisticated precision-guided conventional weapons is deemed to be more militarily efficient, and with far less collateral damages, thus less moral implications. In short, to these countries, sophisticated conventional weapons may be thought to be militarily as well as politically more usable. Another

concern is that conventional deterrence will also jeopardize the strategic stability between major powers. With the increasing possibility of conventional weapons taking on the role of strategic nuclear weapons, there is growing ambiguity between the two kinds of weapons. For example, it would be almost impossible to distinguish between an incoming ICBM tipped with a nuclear or conventional warhead in a volatile and confusing situation if two major powers are militarily confronted with each other. In China's perspective, therefore, it is deterrence that is ultimately the source of instability. To imagine the replacement of END with conventional deterrence in Northeast Asia is very short-sighted to say the least.

4. Pending the resolution of the DPRK nuclear crisis, South Korea and Japan could make a large contribution toward establishing a regional NWFZ if the two countries first established a NWFZ covering their own territories, then gradually expanded to other countries in Northeast Asia. This pioneer effort, if implemented, could go a long way towards building greater trust between countries in the region, thus providing an exemplary impetus to expand the nuclear free zone to other candidate countries. However, the utility of such an effort could be sustainable only when the two major obstacles as mentioned above are substantially removed, that is, there should be no more US nuclear protection over Japan and South Korea, and Pyongyang must eventually abandon its nuclear weapon programs.
5. A NWFZ in Northeast Asia should ideally involve Taiwan, as the island is geographically located in Northeast Asia. China would certainly consider the issue positively if the time were opportune for a decision on Taiwan's relations within the arrangement. The complicating issue is the fact that Taiwan is not a sovereign state; it is part of China. A NWFZ, in whatever form, would involve the commitments of sovereign states, but Taiwan has no legal qualification to participate. Beijing may show some flexibility to allow Taiwan to share both obligations and rights in certain capacities as it has done on some previous occasions concerning Taiwan's participation in international organizations. Again, that would first require an agreement between the two sides across the strait. Arguably, it may be an appropriate topic when the two sides start their talks on ending hostility, building a mechanism for military mutual trust, and negotiating a peace accord across the strait. Taiwan's participation should not be a major stumbling-block, and it is Beijing's hope that the issue will be solved within the framework of the cross strait relations. There is no reason for outside countries to use Taiwan to compound the issues surrounding the regional exploration of a NWFZ in Northeast Asia.

III. References

[1] See Article II, NPT, which stipulates that non-nuclear weapon states "not to receive the transfer from any transferor whatsoever of nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices or of control over such weapons or explosive devices directly, or indirectly; not to manufacture or otherwise acquire nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices; and not to seek or receive any assistance in the manufacture of nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices".

<http://www.un.org/en/conf/npt/2005/npttreaty.html>.

[2] Except for China, all the other NPT nuclear weapon states, however, have a caveat for their obligations for negative assurance. See "U.S. 'Negative Security Assurances' At a Glance", Arms Control Today, June 2010. <http://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/negsec>.

[3] See the US-North Korean Agreed Framework at a Glance by Paul Kerr, Arms Control Today, January 2003.

[4] Gareth Evans, Prepared remarks for “Is a Nuclear-free East Asia Possible? Opportunities and Constraints”, 6th Jeju Forum Panel, May 28, 2011.

IV. Nautilus invites your responses

The Nautilus Peace and Security Network invites your responses to this report. Please send responses to: napsnet@nautilus.org. Responses will be considered for redistribution to the network only if they include the author’s name, affiliation, and explicit consent.

View this online at: <https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-special-reports/china-and-a-nuclear-weapons-free-zone-in-northeast-asia/>

Nautilus Institute

608 San Miguel Ave., Berkeley, CA 94707-1535 | Phone: (510) 423-0372 | Email:

nautilus@nautilus.org