

Kazakhstan, an unlikely purveyor of peace

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Turkish Foreign Ministry Deputy Undersecretary Sedat Onal, left, and Kazakh Foreign Minister Kairat Abdrakhmanov shake hands, as Russia's special envoy on Syria Alexander Lavrentiev and Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Hossein Jaber Ansari, right, shake hands and UN Syria envoy Staffan de Mistura stand after the final statement following the talks on Syrian peace in Astana, Kazakhstan, Tuesday, Jan. 24, 2017. Russia, Iran and Turkey _ sponsors of talks in Kazakhstan between Syria and rebel factions _ pledged Tuesday to consolidate the country's nearly month-old cease-fire and set up a three-way mechanism to ensure compliance of all sides. (AP Photo/Sergei Grits)

With North Korea and Iran pushing the world toward Armageddon, there is one former nuclear power that has shown a measure of responsibility in the nuclear arena, and continues to be a catalyst for peace in the violent region of Central Asia.

[Kazakhstan](#) gave up its nuclear weapons in the 1990s and has forged a reputation as an example of nonproliferation for the world. In addition, it continues to punch above its weight as a forum for great powers to attempt to make peace.

Since its independence in the early-'90s, [Kazakhstan](#) has pursued a coherent and focused policy on nonproliferation.

While still a republic of the Soviet Union, [Kazakhstan](#) has shut down the Semipalatinsk (Semey) nuclear test site, which caused cancer in tens of thousands of its citizens.

Upon giving its nuclear-tipped ICBMs to Russia for destruction after the dissolution of the Soviet Union under the Nunn-Lugar program, the ninth-

largest nation in the world in terms of territory has called for Iran and others to follow its example and end their quest to join the nuclear club.

Now Kazakhstan is also calling for North Korea to stop its dangerous and irresponsible nuclear weapons program aided and abetted by Iran.

[Kazakhstan](#), having given up its nuclear capability, has been able to develop its economy and natural resource, while North Korea, intent on destroying other nations, has suffered in poverty, living in the proverbial dark ages.

Perhaps the most visible, concrete example of [Kazakhstan](#)'s maturity regarding the nuclear issue is the establishment there of the Low Enriched Uranium (LEU) bank, which will open in September of this year. The project will ensure fuel for peaceful, low-enrichment nuclear activities to ensure continuous energy supplies for areas experiencing crisis, without affecting market conditions for the hi-tech commodity.

Run by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the bank is the first such site fulfilling this purpose. [Kazakhstan](#)'s commitment to the peaceful development of nuclear energy is fitting for the world's largest producer of natural uranium. Such a facility will store 90 tons of LEU, which is enough for one full load of a most common civilian nuclear reactor, the 1,000-megawatt light-water one.

Beyond nuclear issues, [Kazakhstan](#) contributes to security and stability in Central Eurasia and beyond. Perhaps the key contribution to peace that [Kazakhstan](#) has recently made is the hosting of multilateral talks, beginning this year, on ending the fighting in the Syrian civil war, which has literally changed the face of Europe.

As a Muslim-majority secular nation with a large Russian-speaking minority, think of [Kazakhstan](#)'s role as one of providing a neutral venue for Russia, Turkey and even Iran and others in the greater region to hash out their differences.

This role is amplified by [Kazakhstan](#)'s contribution as a nonpermanent member of the U.N. Security Council, whose two-year term started in January of this year, to be highlighted further when the nation accepts the chairmanship of the global body starting in 2018.

In addition to the efforts to become an indispensable diplomatic nation on the world stage, [Kazakhstan](#) has become an economic power in the region. Having been granted "market economy" status by the United States, its natural wealth in terms of hydrocarbons and minerals has ensured [Kazakhstan](#) with 60 percent of the gross domestic product of Central Asia.

As with any developing economy, its different facets move quicker than others. [Kazakhstan](#)'s contribution to world peace and stability compensates for other weaker components of its economic reality. Its Strategy 2050 is aimed at bringing [Kazakhstan](#) to the membership of Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development, joining the top 30 developed countries in the world.

[Kazakhstan](#) has become a model for growth in the region, although the decline in the commodities prices has made this trajectory challenging to maintain. Economic diversification is the key, and the country is pursuing agriculture, service industries, manufacturing and health sciences as alternatives.

[Kazakhstan](#) is well on its way to being a powerful influence on world markets and geopolitical realities. Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev's participation in the recent Arab-Islamic-U.S. Summit in Riyadh and his interactions there with President Trump and Secretary of State Rex W. Tillerson are welcome steps in the direction of a greater and more substantive engagement between the U.S. and this nation.

The meetings suggest that while the U.S. is strengthening its ties with traditional allies, such as Saudi Arabia, the Gulf monarchies and Israel, it is time for Washington to also develop new alliances, including with [Kazakhstan](#), a high-impact international strategic partner with a lot of growth potential.

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