

Administration of Barack Obama, 2012

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With President Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan in Seoul, South Korea

March 26, 2012

President Obama. Well, it is wonderful to see, once again, President Nazarbayev from Kazakhstan. And I want to first of all congratulate him on his leadership for the issues that are going to be discussed over the next two days.

Twenty years ago, Kazakhstan made a decision not to have nuclear weapons. And not only has that led to growth and prosperity in his own country, but he has been a model in efforts around the world to eliminate nuclear materials that could fall into the wrong hands. So I very much appreciate his leadership.

In fact, one of the major deliverables that will take place at this summit is a outstanding effort to deal with nuclear materials that were a carryover over from the Soviet era. Working with Russia and the United States, Kazakhstan has been able to secure those materials, and that makes us all safer.

I know that we'll have an opportunity during this bilateral meeting to also discuss some of the other efforts that Kazakhstan has made when it comes to highly enriched uranium, plutonium, their efforts at helping to develop a international fuel bank that can lessen the need for countries to pursue their own enrichment capabilities.

And so across the board, Kazakhstan has been a key leader on these issues and is appropriately going to be featured during the next two days at this nuclear security summit.

The close relationship between our two countries extends beyond just the nuclear security issue, so this meeting will give us an opportunity to discuss the cooperation that we have built over the last several years with respect to Afghanistan and the help we've received in supplying our troops and helping to assist the Afghan Government.

We obviously have commercial ties as well, and we'll be discussing how we can deepen those. I'll be interested in discussing with the President efforts to further expand democracy and human rights within Kazakhstan, which will help to lead to further growth and prosperity in the future.

And so I very much appreciate his leadership, his efforts. And I look forward to continuing to strengthen the relationship between our two countries.

President Nazarbayev. Well, I'm very grateful for this opportunity to participate in this important summit in Seoul. We are discussing a very crucial issue: nuclear security. And I am very grateful to you, Mr. President, for the invitation to participate at the Washington summit, and now we are here in Seoul to discuss a very important issue: nuclear security.

And, Mr. President, I support your call to all nations to struggle for a nuclear-free world, and we fully support the nuclear strategy of the United States. When you said that all the countries that support the Non-Proliferation Treaty will get the support of nuclear powers and will never be threatened by any nuclear state, and I think this is very important over the future.

You discussed in details—and your plan in details—the joint work that we carry out between our nations. And Kazakhstan 20 years ago was the first country to close its nuclear test

site—in Semipalatinsk we voluntarily renounced our nuclear arsenal. And you know very well that at that time, on the territory of Kazakhstan, was 1,100 warheads were deployed on the intercontinental missiles.

And in the last years, we have worked closely—I mean, Russia, the United States and Kazakhstan—to demolish the infrastructure that was left over on the polygon, and we did a lot to rehabilitate the part of the Kazakhstan territory that was radiated. And the people of Kazakhstan, who suffered a lot and who lost many lives in that tragedy, they appreciate that efforts very much.

And we worked very closely with the United States, and we have achieved a lot. We worked jointly on many projects. And about 20 billion U.S. dollars have been invested in the Kazakhstan economy so far. And 80 percent of all foreign investments that were directed in Central Asia ended up in Kazakhstan. And I always show this collaboration as a very shining and bright example of good collaboration. And I talk to all the nuclear powers and those who are threshold countries, and I talked to the leaders of Iran, and I explained that there can be better collaboration with the two countries will strive for peace.

And of course, we work very closely on struggling terrorism, on Afghanistan, and the issues of transportation and transit through the territory of Kazakhstan that we discussed two years ago are all settled and solved now.

And, Mr. President, we hope that the good and strong relations between us and the United States will strengthen further in the future, especially in economics and politics. And we're ready to work shoulder to shoulder on this particular issue of nuclear safety and in other—all of the issues that we believe that will involve our part of the world.

President Obama. Thank you, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:27 p.m. at the Grand Hyatt Seoul hotel. President Nazabayev spoke in Russian, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter.

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