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## Kazakhstan's Defense Policy: An Assessment of the Trends

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**KAZAKHSTAN'S DEFENSE POLICY:  
AN ASSESSMENT OF THE TRENDS**

**Roger N. McDermott**

**February 2009**

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## FOREWORD

The U.S. war on terrorism, with its deployment of military assets within Central Asia in support of ongoing antiterrorist operations in Afghanistan, ensures the long-term strategic importance of Central Asia in U.S. policy planning. Kazakhstan, with its vast hydrocarbon reserves combined with its high profile support for the war on terrorism, will play a key part in these calculations. As Kazakhstan has developed the capabilities of its armed forces, with American and allied assistance, questions arise over how in the future it may play a more active part either in antiterrorist or in peace support operations. Kazakhstan is also exploring such issues in the context of its forthcoming chairmanship of the Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe in 2010, which may indicate that Astana would like to raise its international security profile further still.

In this monograph, Roger N. McDermott argues that Kazakhstan's armed forces, though subject to many structural changes, have not yet experienced systemic military reform. He assesses the achievements and setbacks of U.S. and NATO defense assistance to the country, while also showing that Kazakhstan remains deeply linked in close defense and security partnership with Russia. McDermott suggests greater sophistication and follow-up is needed from Western assistance programs to ensure that Kazakhstan successfully gains genuine military capabilities and the type of armed forces it needs within the region.

The Strategic Studies Institute is pleased to recommend this monograph for leaders in the Army and Department of Defense to gain more insight into how such complex issues may be addressed.



DOUGLAS C. LOVELACE, JR.

Director

Strategic Studies Institute

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR

ROGER N. MCDERMOTT is an Honorary Senior Research Fellow, Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Kent at Canterbury (UK) and Senior Fellow in Eurasian Military Studies, Jamestown Foundation, Washington, DC. Mr. McDermott is on the editorial board of *Central Asia and the Caucasus* and the scientific board of the *Journal of Power Institutions in Post-Soviet Societies*. His articles appear in scholarly journals including the *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, and his weekly assessments of security developments in Central Asia, *Eurasia Daily Monitor* (Jamestown Foundation), are read by policy planners. He is also the co-editor of the book, *Russian Military Reform 1992-2002* (Frank Cass: London/Portland, 2003). Mr. McDermott is a graduate of the University of Oxford, specializing in defense and security issues in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

## SUMMARY

Kazakhstan's foreign policy, since its independence, has successfully avoided favoring any one country based on what Astana styles as a "multi-vectored" approach to foreign policy. Yet in terms of its conduct of defense and security policies, this paradigm simply does not fit with how the regime makes policy in its most sensitive areas of security cooperation. Indeed, its closest defense ties are still with Russia, which have deepened and intensified at a bilateral level as well as through multilateral initiatives in the context of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

This is most evident in a close analysis of the evolution of its armed forces, including various efforts to reform its military and achieve mobile, combat capable, and professional forces. Since September 11, 2001 (9/11), Kazakhstan's defense posture has favored closer links with the United States and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), while it has also pursued inconsistent efforts to extract better defense cooperation from Moscow. In 2003, shortly after the U.S. intervention in Iraq, President Nursultan Nazarbayev took the controversial step of agreeing to send engineers from Kazakhstan's embryonic peacekeeping battalion (KAZBAT) to support demining efforts placed under Polish command.

Of course, the "deployment," though politically useful for Washington in displaying evidence of the diverse nature of the "coalition of the willing," was also beneficial for a highly ambitious political elite in Astana keen to showcase Kazakhstan's armed forces and project a positive image for the

Kazakhstani military and its contribution to the new international order. It was not without domestic risk, since it represented the first instance of troops being sent beyond the region by any state within Central Asia, but this was managed carefully through the state controlled media and despite opposition from a pacifist contingent within Kazakhstan's parliament. Nevertheless, the Kazakhstani authorities gauged the risk to be manageable, since these engineers were not deployed operationally in the sense of taking on active peacekeeping duties; they were unlikely to see action in the theater itself.

Moreover, the high profile and overemphasized importance of this cooperative initiative, which finally ended with the withdrawal of KAZBAT from Iraq at the request of the Iraqi government in October 2008, reaped dividends for the Nazarbayev regime as it could claim to be active in international stabilization efforts. In reality, the elements of KAZBAT were transported to Iraq using U.S. military transport aircraft since Kazakhstan lacked strategic airlift capabilities, and were maintained and helped through U.S. assistance.

In the aftermath of Uzbekistan's alienation by the West following the tragic events in Andijan in May 2005, Kazakhstan was temporarily willing to acquiesce in being regarded as the region's security leader; NATO officials referred to Kazakhstan as NATO's "anchor" in Central Asia. This, in fact, is way beyond Kazakhstan's capabilities. The authorities have since mostly dropped these claims from official discourse. In other words, by paying close attention to KAZBAT, an entirely false impression of a largely unreformed and cumbersome post Soviet legacy force is engendered, with all the issues this entails, ranging from bullying, poor morale, underfunding, limited combat capabilities, and corruption at senior levels. This is also worsened by the

manifold problems stemming from Soviet or Russian manufactured military equipment and hardware, often aging and desperately in need of repair, which severely inhibits the operational capabilities of Kazakhstan's air force, for example.

Kazakhstan proved willing to receive much aid and assistance for its military from Western donors, principally the United States, Turkey, and NATO. Astana deepened its partnership with NATO and made efforts to strengthen its defense ties with Washington by agreeing to implement longer-term cooperation plans in the frameworks of "5-year plans" agreed between the U.S. Department of Defense and Kazakhstan's Ministry of Defense. In January 2007, Nazarbayev appointed Daniyal Akhmetov as the country's first ever civilian defense minister. This, coupled with Kazakhstan securing the Chairmanship of the OSCE in 2010, seemed to herald promising achievements in its defense posture, but these hopes have rapidly faded since.

Understanding the problems, challenges, and continued failings of the defense leadership in Kazakhstan involves first appreciating how limited its military reforms have proven in practical terms. Akhmetov was reportedly shocked in the early part of his tenure to discover how poorly trained, disciplined, and often corrupt Kazakhstan's armed forces remain, despite several years of the state talking up "military reform." Although corruption is something of a *sine qua non* in the region, it is particularly crucial to recognize its debilitating effect on efforts to reform the armed forces. This will persist as an obstacle to achieving progress in successfully implementing military reform for the foreseeable future.

Also, despite Kazakhstan's closer relations with Western militaries, it has in real terms deepened and



strengthened its ties with Russia. The close nature of this defense cooperation relationship, reflected in Kazakhstan's new military doctrine, its intensified military and security training and educational agreements, as well as stepping up the frequency of military exercises, is also coupled with shared multilateral ties within the frameworks of the CSTO and SCO. Washington's military assistance programs have therefore often run into geopolitical issues, such as the limiting effect on its objectives emanating from Kazakhstan's political and defense relationship with Russia, or sensitivities to its close proximity to China, as well as internal issues surrounding Astana's military reform agenda. Defense spending in Kazakhstan will also be subject in the short to medium term depending on how the government handles its unfolding financial crisis and continued exposure to the global financial crisis, coupled with the sliding price of oil on the world markets.

These issues, sharply refocused by the Russian military exposure of weaknesses within Georgia's armed forces despite several years of time-phased U.S. training and equipment programs, serve to question the aims, scope, and utility of American defense assistance programs calibrated to enhance Kazakhstan's military capabilities. While Astana grapples with these internal issues and remains politically sensitive to the anxieties of Moscow as it perceives U.S. training and aid to the Kazakhstani armed forces, success will be modest. New deeper and more closely monitored programs are needed and, combined with multilateral cooperative initiatives, should be a matter of urgent priority; otherwise, such programs will underperform and languish in the repetition of the misjudgements of the past.

# KAZAKHSTAN'S DEFENSE POLICY: AN ASSESSMENT OF THE TRENDS

## INTRODUCTION

Kazakhstan stands on the threshold of becoming the first Eurasian country to chair the Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which that country will hold in 2010 and will enter the OSCE troika in 2009. This is seen by the regime as international recognition for Kazakhstan's global role, which has emerged rapidly following its independence from the Soviet state. This period has witnessed the abandonment of its nuclear weaponry inherited from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), the harnessing of its vast energy resources, and its avoiding the political instability that has affected other nations in transition in Central Asia. Kazakhstan has also sought to play an active role in the War on Terror, strengthened its relations with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) through Partnership for Peace (PfP), and actively pursued defense relations with the United States and other NATO members. At the same time, it has promoted its regional interests multilaterally through, among others, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and balanced its bilateral relations between the neighboring great powers, China and Russia. In conducting its foreign policy, therefore, Kazakhstan successfully developed a model to which it refers as "multi-vectored" or preferring no particular state over another. Yet in terms of defense and security, the "multi-vectored" approach so acclaimed by President Nursultan Nazarbayev as a beacon of his country's moderate yet ambitious strategy in foreign

relations does not quite fit; practically, Astana (the capital) simply has to prefer one state over another in defense terms for a variety of legal, historical, and political reasons. Indeed, Nazarbayev has successfully conducted this balancing trick in his defense and security relations with the West, but may now face a serious challenge presented by the deterioration of relations between Russia and the West following the 5-day war in Georgia in August 2008. Many of these fissures and underlying tensions have been present for several years, and in the following analysis of Kazakhstan's defense policy, we will examine these in more detail. We will show in essence that Kazakhstan has calculated its military cooperation activities with the United States and NATO more on the basis of image and showcasing its higher readiness formations, helping to project a positive image of the country abroad, rather than undertaking deep systemic military reform that would result in the formation of forces and capabilities to deal adequately with emerging or future threats to the state.

### **Military Reform or Structural Changes?**

Significant changes were made in the structures of Kazakhstan's armed forces since independence. Four ministers of defense served between 1992 and 2000, each with their own divergent views about military reform, but all these were mainly based on the old Soviet doctrine. Also, military reform was hampered owing to economic problems, as the state budget did not even define the percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) for the military until 1999. The Ministry of Defense (MoD) received money to pay personnel salaries and maintain buildings, and to purchase old Soviet weapons

and equipment from the state budget. In this period, the only new equipment that could be ordered was that which could be obtained from compensation offered by Russians in exchange for using military testing areas in Kazakhstan. Throughout the 1990s, defense spending was a low priority, and this was only addressed in 2000 as a result of improved economic performance. The 2001 military budget was 25 billion Tenge (\$172 million), representing an increase of around 8 billion Tenge on the previous year.<sup>1</sup> Since then, the military budget in Kazakhstan has been around 0.9 percent of GDP, and, since the country made fast economic progress, this doubled in 2004, compared to 2001, to become the highest in Central Asia. This growth facilitated some changes in the security structures, and it made plans for the reequipment of the armed forces possible. In 2000 a military doctrine was written and the organization of the Armed Forces in Kazakhstan were divided into four Military Districts: Southern, Western, Eastern, and Central. Mobile Forces were formed, and “. . . the number of contract servicemen has increased to around 12,000. The Armed Forces are outfitted with S-75, S-200, and S-300 air defense missile systems, as well as Su-25, Su-27, and MiG-29 aircraft.”<sup>2</sup>

In July 2001, Kazakhstan held its largest military exercise ever in three southern oblasts (regions), and with U.S. help, began to train commando units for counterinsurgency. Old Soviet equipment was rapidly overhauled, while the United States started supplying new communications and mountain warfare equipment. These changes were a step forward, but nonetheless, all the new equipment Kazakhstan received, and even the creation of the Military Districts, resulted from changes made under the influence of old Soviet military thinking. The United States began its security assistance programs in 1994, starting with

the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program. At the same time, Turkey and Germany suggested training for Kazakhstani officers in their countries. Kazakhstan is also a recipient of the Canadian Department of National Defense's Military Training and Assistance Program, known as MTAP.<sup>3</sup> Kazakhstan, in turn, started sending its military personnel to Western states, but mainly to develop good relations with those countries. The military personnel trained in the West had difficulty building their careers in the Kazakhstani Armed Forces, and, in fact, many of them resigned. Since 1997, the Foreign Military Financing (FMF) and Excess Defense Articles programs have been opened for Kazakhstan to obtain U.S. military equipment, but because Kazakhstan did not rely heavily on these programs and did not know how they worked, usually the U.S. Defense Attaches in Kazakhstan decided what types of equipment to order for the country's armed forces. This, as a rule, did not reflect the actual needs of Kazakhstan's military.

September 11, 2001 (9/11) resulted in a major shift in defense policy in Kazakhstan, partly reflecting intensified defense relations with the United States and NATO. These events coincided with the reappointment of Mukhtar Altynbayev to the post of Minister of Defense in December 2001, ". . . after his resignation in 1999 over controversial arms sales to North Korea."<sup>4</sup>

The appointment of General Altynbayev supplied a new impetus to military reform and the rapid development of international military cooperation. He admitted publicly to the existence of numerous problems within the management structure of Kazakhstan's armed forces, and in many ways his second period as defense minister was denoted by pursuing structural reforms within the military. The

structure during the first decade of independence was defined by the absence of an intermediary post between the Chief of the General Staff and district commanders. From the very beginning of his reappointment, Altynbayev started working on further reforming the military structures. Also, the Decree on the Reform of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Kazakhstan was signed by President Nursultan Nazarbayev on May 7, 2003. In accordance with that decree, the following changes were legalized:

- The Committee of Chiefs of Staff was established whose functions were divided between the MoD and the newly formed structure.
- Transition to a 3-branch structure of the Armed Forces was executed. In addition to the Air Defense Forces (which include the Air Force) Ground Forces and the Navy were to be formed. A “Mobile Force” was transformed to an Airmobile Force, and it was outlined as a separate branch of the armed forces.
- A decision was made on the conversion of military districts into regional commands (West, East, South, and Astana) for promoting closer cooperation between the services.

These changes appeared to signal a defense policy shift towards the West. The creation of the Committee of Chiefs of Staff and regional commands partly reflects the mutual work with the United States and NATO experts on the new structure of the armed forces. After this reform, the Chairman of the Committee for National Security and the Minister of Internal Affairs became civilian positions. This prepared the way for the later introduction of a civilian to the post of Minister of Defense, which at least provides some public display of

strengthening civilian control over the military, even if such ideals are not entirely implemented by the state.<sup>5</sup>

The process of the professionalizing the armed forces is very closely connected with forming a united system of military education, aimed at excluding duplication and waste in the system. Radical steps in the direction of restructuring the national system of military training were made in 2003. Military educational institutions have been reorganized and made subordinate to corresponding main staff according to the troops to which they are related. Kazakhstan's MoD also worked on introducing professional sergeants and recruiting soldiers on a contract basis. Ambitious plans were announced in 2004 to raise the numbers of contract servicemen by 2005 from 40 percent to 80 percent; these plans have not been implemented fully, nor supported in practical terms by further reforms to support the whole concept of professionalizing the armed forces.<sup>6</sup>

### **Armed Forces: Strength and Structure.**

The principal stimulus for military reform is President Nazarbayev's Decree of March 2003, which assigns the main priority to defense against terrorism, calls for improved capabilities for defense against terrorism, and ensures protection and security of the national borders. Under the decree, reorganization is also taking place in the main armed forces structures, which, in addition to the Ground Forces, Air Defense Forces, and the Missile Troops and Artillery, now also comprise the Navy and Airmobile Forces. This envisages a transition from a division/regiment structure to a more flexible brigade structure, with the adoption of Western standards of training, greater professionalism, and strengthening logistics organizations. Of course,

while displaying an apparent resolution to combat terrorism and other transnational threats, the government prefers to concentrate on the military at the expense of prioritizing or giving more resources to police and domestic investigative bodies. In other words, the weakness of Kazakhstan's counterterrorist strategy is revealed in the extent to which it myopically concentrates on the military capabilities in combating terrorism, as opposed to strengthening analysis, intelligence, criminal investigation, and disruption based approaches.

*Ground Forces.* The strength of the Ground Forces is approximately 45,000. A new structure was introduced in 2003 comprising two corps-level regional commands (Southern and Eastern), two division-level regional commands (Western and Central), the Airmobile Forces, and the Missile Troops and Artillery. These changes reflected the political willingness to engage with Western partners in the War on Terror by making the armed forces more efficient. However, these structural reforms also confirmed that the existing structures were inadequate for the task of countering terrorism; essentially lacking in rapid deployment capabilities. The four regional commands included one mechanized division (comprising three tank regiments and one artillery regiment), one motor rifle division (comprising one tank brigade, two motor rifle regiments, and one artillery regiment), one training center with two motor rifle regiments, one motor rifle training regiment, one tank training regiment and one artillery regiment, three independent motor rifle brigades, two artillery brigades, and one engineer brigade. The regional commands are subordinate to the Commander-in-Chief Ground Forces.<sup>7</sup> It is unclear, however, that the new structure is an improvement,



probably representing an external reform designed to make the forces appear more akin to Western militaries.

The basic armament of the Ground Forces consists of 884 main battle tanks (T-72s and T-62s), 2,090 armored combat vehicles (ACVs) and approximately 980 artillery pieces, all of which are serviceable. A large quantity of Soviet equipment was left in Kazakhstan, comprising 2,680 tanks, 2,400 ACVs and 6,900 artillery pieces. This equipment has become unserviceable, and Kazakhstan's MoD plans to destroy or recycle it. Defense funding increased substantially in 2003, and as a result more resources were received for personnel, training, and equipment maintenance; although Kazakhstani defense officials were slow to recognize that more resources does not automatically result in higher readiness. Basic Russian-made armament is old but serviceable, though in some cases not adequate for the tasks given to the armed forces. The number of properly trained and experienced officers is generally satisfactory, but there continues to be a shortfall in skilled noncommissioned officers (NCOs).

Investment plans are primarily geared toward improving living conditions for personnel and acquiring interoperable command and control equipment, but with the exception of contracts for the procurement of two new Mi-17 helicopters, there are virtually no plans for the upgrading or replacement of obsolete basic armament in the near future.<sup>8</sup>

*Navy.* The creation of a Navy in the Caspian Sea is progressing very slowly. Although the government has committed to the idea of forming naval capabilities and has received foreign assistance, the whole project remains controversial. Caspian littoral states raise objections to the militarization of the region, and

Russia remains the key naval power with its Caspian Sea flotilla. At present, there are no confirmed ships, and only a naval college exists. The role and missions of the Navy, on the basis of which its future structure and capabilities will be agreed, have yet to be defined. Kazakhstan plans that a functioning Navy will be in place by 2010, including a basic command and control structure with the requisite number of trained staff officers, training for officers and technical experts, and procurement of the necessary ships, though it is unclear whether this action will be implemented.<sup>9</sup>

*Air Force.* Kazakhstan's Air Defense Forces (ADF) are comprised of an Air Force and ground-based ADF and have an estimated strength of 13,000. Organizationally, the ADF consists of nine air bases and a ground-based AD regiment. The air fleet consists of 164 combat aircraft (including 40 MiG-29s, 14 Su-25s, 37 Su-24s, 14 Su-27s, 16 MiG-25s, and 43 MiG-31s), a number of transport aircraft (Tu-134, Tu-154), 137 helicopters (Mi-8, Mi-24, and Mi-26), and a large number of trainers. Approximately 150 surface-to-air missile (SAM) launchers are in service with the ground-based AD forces (SA-2, SA-3, SA-4, SA-6, and S-300). Kazakhstan planned to procure two C-130 aircraft and two helicopters, using funds from the Foreign Military Financing (FMF) program. Some of the aircraft are new; however, the provision of spare parts remains a problem. All aircraft are being maintained except those which the Air Force plans to replace. The average flying time for combat aircraft pilots is approximately 100 hours per year; pilots of transport aircraft and helicopters enjoy more flying time than combat aircraft pilots.<sup>10</sup> Kazakhstan's ADF is therefore faced with serious challenges for the ability of these forces to meet their mission(s); ranging from adequate training and

flight time for pilots to aircraft crashes resulting from the presence of aging aircraft.

### **Reform and Its Limitation in the Regional Context.**

While Western defense cooperation with the Central Asian militaries has not affected these forces greatly, they are, nonetheless, facing serious challenges which can only be resolved by pursuing more systemic reform. Without an internal assessment and the political ambition to carry out such reform, these formations will stay weak and depend on external actors for their security needs, particularly if faced with a crisis. Central Asian militaries in general terms face the following common defense challenges:

- The local militaries remain burdened with more structure than they can operate or pay for;
- The units are not optimized for contemporary military requirements;
- The national defense infrastructure is still fragile:
  - limited command, control, communications, computers, and intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance (C4ISR) capabilities
  - obsolescent air defense system;
- Often large territories, long borders (as in Kazakhstan):
  - need to patrol and secure key assets (energy infrastructure)
  - need reconnaissance to detect enemy, lead combat forces to him;
- Potential spillover of insurgencies among neighbors:
  - need prompt, flexible response appropriate to circumstances of incursion;

- Possible need to confront and destroy illegal armed bands:
  - need robust forces with formidable combat power;
- Options should exploit equipment in the current inventory.

The equipment in the local military inventories is overwhelmingly Russian, and this is also the case in Kazakhstan. This means that in the medium term (until 2015), the local militaries will depend upon Russian-manufactured equipment and weapons, concentrating on upgrades and repairs of such hardware. Purchasing NATO standard equipment is not only expensive, but entails considerable investment in the necessary support structures to be able to maintain and service such costly options.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, local militaries will seek to procure equipment only when necessary from Russia at preferential prices through terms concluded within the CSTO context, or alternatively elsewhere within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS); this restricts Kazakhstan's scope for diversifying its international military cooperation policies.

### **Challenges Remain in Kazakhstan.**

Despite the many years of "military reform" in Kazakhstan and numerous assertions from the leadership concerning the level of success of those reforms, present Defense Minister Daniyal Akhmetov does not doubt that the country faces a monumental task if this reform is to ever succeed. His visits to military barracks and educational centers since becoming Defense Minister in January 2007 were denoted by his often very public expression of surprise by the poor standards or shocking lack of discipline among

the country's armed forces. In August 2007, during a visit to military units in the Pavlodar Region (northern Kazakhstan), Akhmetov told officers that funding for the army would be increased considerably, in line with the new military doctrine. Yet, he also talked openly about the staffing shortages that were hampering the functioning of Kazakhstan's army, pointing to the need to boost the numbers of officers; he noted that only 75 percent of the total number of required officers were serving at that time. In another admission that something was wrong with the manning system, he called for more sergeants and increased numbers of contract soldiers: these being the very core elements in Kazakhstan's experiment with "professionalizing" its armed forces. Moreover, Akhmetov recognized that it is not simply necessary to increase depleted numbers in key areas of the military, but to enhance the quality of staffing. In this context, the Kazakhstani MoD planned to offer "relevant training" for 3,095 officers at the start of 2008 in a concerted effort to redress some of the more obvious weaknesses within the system. The priority remained, as previously stated by the leadership of the MoD, the creation of a "strong, professional and combat-capable army." But by mid 2008, the defense budget had been cut, reflecting problems in Kazakhstan's economy relating to the "credit crunch."<sup>12</sup>

Varied and interconnected reasons underlie the failures of Kazakhstan's military reform efforts. These are political, institutional, cultural, and historical. Kazakhstan's military reform ventures have not been driven by clear, well-directed political support to achieve certain standards or to form armed forces that meet the actual security requirements of the country. In fact, official statements concerning military reform have not deviated too far from the expression of the common

theme that Kazakhstan should develop mobile, small, well-equipped professional armed forces.<sup>13</sup> In reality, all that such a mantra has served to highlight is exactly the type of forces Kazakhstan does not possess. As the country has implemented three different military doctrines since gaining its independence, there has been no sense of urgency within its threat assessment that would serve to invigorate its ambitions to form professional armed forces, trained to high standards. Instead, defense officials and planners in Kazakhstan have contented themselves with focussing on selected areas of the military to reform; Special Forces, peace support units, border guards, etc., while the vast bulk of the military have remained unaffected by such schemes. Military reform has also suffered as a project, inasmuch as it became eclipsed by national image building; for the elite, it was more important to showcase an image of Kazakhstan's armed forces that would promote a more positive image of the country internationally, one that fitted well with sending a small number of its engineers from its peace support battalion (KAZBAT) to Iraq in 2003. Equally, international efforts to assist in Kazakhstan's military reform programs have been severely restricted by the fact that Kazakhstan is very unlikely to ever seek NATO membership, which means there is no external stimuli to promote higher standards in training, education, and improving combat capabilities throughout the armed forces, since there is no plan for Kazakhstani forces to be NATO interoperable beyond a few key formations. Within Kazakhstan's MoD there was, and to a large extent this is still the case, a lack of expertise or knowledge on how to manage and maximize Western military assistance.

## **INTERNATIONAL DEFENSE COOPERATION: DIVERSIFYING OR “IMAGE BUILDING”?**

### **Washington’s Approach: 5-year Plans.**

In September 2003 the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) signed a 5-year military cooperation plan with Kazakhstan’s MoD. The United States agreed to assist Kazakhstan, ranging from developing NATO interoperable peace support forces to participating in NATO or United Nations (UN) peace support operations (PSO) to providing training for Kazakhstani NCOs.<sup>14</sup> The United States aimed to help Kazakhstan with the development of military infrastructure and its military capabilities in the Caspian Sea region. During 2003 Turkey signed a similar agreement with Kazakhstan and coordinated with Washington to form a trilateral approach to assisting Kazakhstan’s armed forces.

Article Three of the bilateral cooperation plan confirmed the main elements in the assistance, as follows:

- Create, train, and develop a NATO-interoperable rapid reaction unit capable of responding rapidly to any type of attack on Kazakhstan’s off-shore or coastal infrastructure. This included fostering a regional approach to such security issues through utilizing a multiagency counterterrorism training.
- Center to promote cooperation with other countries in the region.
- Develop a rapid response force capable of protecting oil pipelines and other sensitive energy infrastructure.

- Establish a *Huey II* helicopter unit capable of carrying out support operations in the Caspian region.
- Assist in creating Kazakhstan's naval capabilities to protect its energy interests in the Caspian, tasked with monitoring and patrolling Kazakhstani and foreign vessels transiting Kazakhstan's waters.
- Develop the Naval Academy at Aktau with the aim of it gradually evolving into a training center to support all forms of water related military training such as counterterrorism, counternarcotics, search and rescue, and self-contained underwater breathing apparatus (SCUBA) for special operations.

The concept at the heart of this cooperation plan was the aim of giving Kazakhstan ground forces and sea and air support capabilities to protect its energy infrastructure in the Caspian. Ambitious in its scope and its vision for the indigenous military forces, it also had the added benefit of developing NATO interoperable rapid-reaction elements within Kazakhstan's armed forces that could be utilized in future NATO-led operations.<sup>15</sup> Washington wanted to promote greater civil-military control, help establish effective peace support forces, and contribute towards the "professionalizing" the military manpower system in Kazakhstan. Within Kazakhstan's MoD, preference was given to the assistance that resulted in providing American military equipment, such as high mobility multi-purpose wheeled vehicles (HMMVE), which was well-received in Astana but often failed to connect with the real needs of the indigenous military.<sup>16</sup>



In February 2008, Kazakhstan signed a new 5-year military cooperation plan with the United States for the period 2008-13. This builds on the previous agreement and expands into other more ambitious areas, while it fails to recognize that original goals remain unachieved. Kazakhstan's first civilian Defense Minister, Daniyal Akhmetov (appointed in January 2007), told then Commander of Central Command (CENTCOM) Admiral William Fallon that, "in parallel with a project to introduce an automated control system (ACS) into Kazakhstan's armed forces, work to set up a center for training ACS specialists is under way." The plan envisages stepping up the study of American military experience and includes more than 80 bilateral events, of which around 50 will be held in Kazakhstan, with the remainder being held in the United States.<sup>17</sup>

However, Western trained personnel face significant hurdles, including:

- they are in the minority and can be shunned by the system;
- their enthusiasm for change is frequently overcome by their inability to influence the system; and,
- the Western trained personnel, especially those who have received language training, are often hired by the growing commercial sector, where these personnel see a much greater future and more lucrative rewards.<sup>18</sup>

Antiterrorist capability requirements in Kazakhstan focus on the following key areas:

- enhancing the competence of interagency coordination;
- developing airmobility among high readiness formations;

- reequipping the indigenous antiterrorist forces; and,
- developing new tactics and doctrine to facilitate effective use of antiterrorist forces.

All Western security assistance programs designed to enhance the antiterrorist capabilities of the Central Asian Republics concentrate on border security forces and Special Forces. Any coherent attempt to strengthen or reform the intelligence services in terms of collection and analysis of information relating to terrorist groups and individuals is missing, as well as promoting interstate intelligence cooperation.<sup>19</sup> U.S. security assistance suffers from a lack of a time-phased approach, similar to the Georgia Train and Equip Program (GTEP), and a general lack of coordination for the more than 17 different funding streams going into the various security assistance efforts in the region. NATO PfP programs are too generic in their nature, aimed at generally improving standards, and they lack bite in effecting real change for the better within these structures. Finally, all security assistance efforts in the region break down on the following points:

1. failure to promote actual cooperation between the Central Asian states, essential in confronting international terrorism;
2. lack of developed understanding within the Western planning staffs on the region, which was low-priority until 9/11 increased its importance;
3. failure to coordinate such assistance efforts with Moscow, as well as to explore potential areas of cooperation properly;
4. U.S. planners in particular often prefer to supply equipment to these countries, rather than tackle the more difficult task of strengthening and helping to reform key elements of these militaries;

5. The U.S. program is hampered by an inability to develop and manage a long-term program. Why? The budgeting cycle, major command (MACOM) (CENTCOM) priorities—fighting two wars (Afghanistan and Iraq), and the political strings that are tied to every program for this region.<sup>20</sup>

6. As evident in Georgia, assistance directed towards enhancing key elements of the force structure can result in a dangerous widening of the gap between such forces and the armed forces as a whole<sup>21</sup> (which could be exploitable by a determined, organized nonstate actor).

### **Foreign Military Education.**

Educating Kazakhstani officers in the United States and elsewhere in the military academies of NATO members is increasingly resulting in a hemorrhaging of these officers from the military. Instead of improving the standards overall in the armed forces, many officers receive their education abroad and return to Kazakhstan only to become disillusioned with the “system” and then leave the military.<sup>22</sup> The statistics prove the point; recent reporting observed that of the 250 officers who received an education in the United States, 110 have already quit the military, citing “various reasons.” Despite a contractual obligation placed on graduates of foreign universities to serve a minimum of 10 years, many use loopholes to exit early. Kazakh military servicemen attend courses in 160 specialist fields at 55 foreign universities. Around 550 personnel are sent abroad for education annually. Of these, 300 are servicemen being sent for full-time education, and 250 are officers sent for short-term courses. Approximately only *one-third* of the graduates

of foreign courses enter into the service ranks of the armed forces in Kazakhstan. Retention is significantly higher in cases of high-ranking officers attending short-term courses abroad, but the real challenge exists within the junior and middle-ranking officers; here the hemorrhaging appears to be greatest.<sup>23</sup> For example:

- Of the 114 cadets who received education in Turkey, 23 have left to find employment in the civil sector.
- Yelena Milyuk, Kazakhstan's first female graduate of West Point, became a cause celebre in this context. The high-profile officer entered West Point in 2001; after returning to Kazakhstan, she found her career aspirations suffered as a result of her privileged foreign education. Although wanting to become a military attaché, she was, in fact, posted to the logistic support of the rear services. Unhappy, she returned for further post-graduate study at West Point, then married and quit Kazakhstan's army.<sup>24</sup>

### **Embracing NATO.**

Kazakhstan's cooperation with NATO has been shaped and propelled to new levels as a result of its intensified defense cooperation and partnership in the War on Terror with the United States. It has not, and probably never will be, guided politically by any aspiration to join the Alliance, and in this sense, its defense cooperation activities may be regarded as having limited scope for success as it will not match standards achieved elsewhere in the former Soviet Union, such as in the cases of the Baltic States, or the countries in Eastern Europe now integrated into NATO. Therefore, in what follows, we will outline the nature

and scope of Kazakhstan's defense cooperation with NATO, as well as highlight some of the weaknesses and challenges in that process. Perhaps most significantly, as in the case of U.S. military assistance programs, it will be suggested that Alliance concentration on key formations in Kazakhstan is in itself potentially dangerous for the country, since it is making wider the fissure between these units and the rest of the armed forces, following the recent experience of Georgia (whose higher readiness formations trained and equipped by the United States and NATO gave a misleading impression of the combat readiness levels throughout the rest of Georgia's armed forces, which were exploited rapidly during the Russian military operation in Georgia in August 2008).

Kazakhstan's partnership with NATO has undergone several transformations since independence. In 1991 Kazakhstan joined the newly formed North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC), which promoted dialogue, partnership, and cooperation through seminars and symposia on economic, ecological, defense, scientific, and other issues. Abandoning nuclear weapons in the early 1990s also fostered more contact with NATO and its member states while raising Kazakhstan's international profile. In 1994 a second stage began in which Kazakhstan's relations with NATO deepened. Since its armed forces were relatively newly formed and very weak, President Nazarbayev prioritized cooperation with international organizations in order to promote training and assist in the formation of the armed forces; logically this was expressed in the decision to enter the PfP Program in May 1994.<sup>25</sup> The NATO PfP Program served to stimulate closer cooperation between Kazakhstan and the Alliance, focusing on planning in national defense, establishing democratic control over the armed forces,

and training the army for peacekeeping operations. Practical cooperation also included Science for Peace and the Virtual Silk Road. After the failure of Western-sponsored efforts to help create a Central Asia-wide peacekeeping battalion (CENRASBAT) owing to disunity among the Central Asian states over the issue, on June 14, 2000, President Nazarbayev announced Kazakhstan's intention to form, train, and equip its own peacekeeping battalion (KAZBAT), with the express aim of achieving NATO interoperability so that it could participate in UN- or NATO-led peacekeeping operations.<sup>26</sup> KAZBAT had to master modern military skills, transform its communications systems, develop sufficient command and control and decisionmaking procedures, and develop military English language skills among its personnel; tasks that would necessarily take time to implement successfully.

A third and dramatic intensification of Kazakhstan's partnership with NATO occurred as a result of 9/11, as the Alliance shifted strategically both in terms of strengthening counterterrorism and in the level of importance it attached to its partners. Kazakhstan, for example, opened its airspace to NATO member states participating in Operation ENDURING FREEDOM in Afghanistan, allowing emergency landings at its airfields for coalition aircraft. In 2002, Kazakhstan became the first Central Asian country to join NATO's Planning and Review Process (PARP), and in 2003 this was followed by Kazakhstan joining NATO's Maintenance and Supply Organization (NAMSO). Annual Steppe Eagle military exercises conducted in Kazakhstan started in 2003, alongside units from the United States and the United Kingdom (UK). In 2004, the country entered NATO's Operational Capabilities Concept, with an information and documentary center opening in Astana; later that year it acquired observer

status at the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. Also in 2004 NATO took a small but significant step towards enhancing its partnerships with the Central Asia states by creating the post of Special Representative for the Caucasus and Central Asia to the NATO Secretary-General, appointing the American Robert Simmons.<sup>27</sup>

A fourth stage in that process occurred in 2006, when Kazakhstan and NATO raised their partnership to a new strategic level. In January 2006 a meeting at NATO headquarters in Brussels of the NATO-Kazakhstan Military-Political Committee discussed and endorsed the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP), which seeks to harmonize all aspects of practical cooperation between Kazakhstan and the Alliance. Kazakhstan's designated priorities in this regard are defense planning, military reform, modernizing its armed forces, combating terrorism and drug trafficking, establishing enhanced border security, and cooperating in science and environmental projects.<sup>28</sup>

Simmons believes that Kazakhstan is attaining higher military standards and making good progress in its partnership with NATO, suggesting the country has successfully implemented the first stage of its IPAP agreement with the Alliance. During an official visit to Kazakhstan in April 2008, he commented, "We have a good political dialogue established with Kazakhstan, and within which we carry out discussions on a number of important issues, particularly in ensuring security at the regional level." As an example of "successful military cooperation," he mentioned the creation of KAZBRIG, which he claimed was already compatible with NATO standards and has been engaged in demining activities in Iraq as part the coalition forces in the past several years. "Now a field is opening for wider cooperation," Simmons said.<sup>29</sup>

## **NATO Interoperability in Kazakhstan's Peace Support Operations Forces (KAZBRIG).**

It is vitally important to appreciate that Kazakhstan's PSO capabilities are drawn from the Airmobile Forces headquartered in Kapchagai, as these also have a role to play with the CSTO Collective Rapid Deployment Forces. The Airmobile Forces are comprised of three independent assault-storm brigades (1,785 airborne personnel) and KAZBRIG. Unlike KAZBRIG, the Airmobile Forces are unreformed, have not been receiving Western military training, and are almost exclusively equipped with Russian manufactured weapons and equipment. NATO plans to eventually extend NATO interoperability to the formations in the Airmobile forces, depending on the evaluation of the experiment with KAZBRIG; which may in theory present direct competition between NATO and Russia over these forces, as Kazakhstan seeks to avoid being caught in the dilemma of choosing between its treaty obligations inside the CSTO and future participation in UN/NATO-led PSO deployments.<sup>30</sup>

Of course, NATO's public diplomacy tends to exaggerate the success of its engagement with Kazakhstan's armed forces, as well as glossing over very real problems, setbacks, and frustrations. Since joining PARP in 2002, Kazakhstan has consistently failed to meet many of its partnership goals relating to achieving NATO interoperability in its PSO units; first this was set for 2004, and then delayed several times. In order to avoid any confusion over the sensitive issue of NATO interoperability, this should be clarified. Achieving this in practical terms meant that KAZBAT would need to reach certain basic standards in combat readiness (capable of conducting defensive and offensive combat



operations at the operational and tactical level in accordance with ground forces tactical doctrine) and be equipped with interoperable tactical communications systems meeting NATO standards, develop strategic airlift capabilities to facilitate deployment abroad, form sufficient logistical support, and form a ground liaison unit to help improve demining capabilities. It also must train personnel to participate in staffing a Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF), train a medical platoon and enlarge it to a company, meet NATO communications criteria (in Iraq communication between the deployed subunit and the national staff was effected via a commercial SATCOM [INMARSAT] link and the Internet), improve KAZBAT's nuclear, biological, and chemical (NBC) capabilities (especially in detection capabilities, vaccine stocks, and ensuring adequate quantities of NBC protective equipment for personnel), and ensure military English language skills meet basic NATO standards. By 2004 progress had been made in introducing higher standards of military English among KAZBAT personnel, and it was expected that this would be widened out to include all officers, NCOs, and signals personnel in the unit; this also developed more slowly than NATO officials anticipated. However, defense officials in Kazakhstan were reluctant to push through these reforms and agree to training the battalion in accordance with NATO doctrine.<sup>31</sup>

KAZBAT would require the following structure in order to achieve NATO interoperability, according to guidance provided to Kazakhstan's defense officials in 2004:

- HQ and logistic support department
- three assault-storm companies
- one fire support company

- one reconnaissance company
- one HQ company
- one administrative company
- one military police company
- one medical platoon.

It was an enormous undertaking on the part of the Alliance both to train and to overcome the institutional inertia in Kazakhstan's MoD in this project. The structure of KAZBAT when it first deployed (with U.S. assistance and strategic airlift) a small number of engineers for demining tasks in Iraq was entirely Soviet with a top-heavy officer component.<sup>32</sup> Steppe Eagle in 2007 provided an opportunity to assess KAZBRIG, especially given intensification on the part of NATO in seeking operational deployment of Kazakhstan's PSO units. U.S. military representatives overestimated KAZBRIG's capabilities, suggesting they were in fact "ready." However, Kazakhstani MoD officials listened attentively to objections and considered criticism from U.K. defense officials, resulting in a delay to any declaration of interoperability. Having secured the OSCE's backing to chair the organization in 2010, Kazakhstan's MoD leadership stepped up efforts to ready KAZBRIG for its participation in Exercise Steppe Eagle in September 2008. Yet, before the declaration of NATO interoperability was finally granted, members of the assessment team had been leaking several months in advance to NATO MoDs that the "interoperability status" would be granted; underscoring the politicization of the whole project.<sup>33</sup> In any case, despite the success for Kazakhstan in becoming the first country in the region with NATO interoperable PSO capabilities, some officials note that, in reality, it will take at least another 2 years before

the country is capable of making such a deployment, and even then it must face the thorny political issue of where to deploy such forces.

### **NATO Interoperability: Military Language Training.**

In September 2005 Kazakhstan took an important step towards achieving its core military reform goals and securing NATO interoperability in key formations, such as its PSO units. Addressing its need for adequately teaching its cadets military language skills, the MoD opened a new Defense Institute for Foreign Languages (DIFL) based in Almaty, with branches in Kapchagai, Shuchinsk, and Aktau. Kazakhstan's Defense minister at that time, Army General Mukhtar Altynbayev, invited the defense attaches from France, Germany, UK, the United States, Russia, and Turkey to the DIFL's opening ceremony. He explained that DIFL would prepare officers to carry out interpretation work and access to "regional studies" that emphasize military intelligence analysis based on a knowledge of two or more languages. Initially the institute organized training in Chinese, English, French, German, Korean, Turkish, and several oriental languages. Altynbayev noted that Kazakhstan,

has formed a national system of military education that has a complete cycle. Education and combat training programs are being developed taking into account new challenges and threats. The priority in the development of the military education system is that graduate experts should be in demand by both military and other security agencies.

Altynbayev noted that the crucial aspect of the institute

was that in 2006 it would also serve as a regional educational center within the framework of NATO's PfP. DIFL should also be open to military personnel from the other Central Asian Republics. The success or failure of the new language institute in particular would be a key underlying factor in developing the utility of Western security assistance programs. U.S. assistance, as well as British and Turkish advice and practical aid, helped in making the plan to open such an institute a reality.<sup>34</sup>

In 1998, the forerunner of DIFL existed in the MoD Linguistic Center until it was reformed in 2005 into DIFL. The appointment of Colonel Talesbayev (which was driven by General Bolat Sembinov), a former military police officer with limited English language skills, was matched only by the surprising decision to appoint Colonel Ualiyev, a former Air Force pilot, as the deputy of curriculum and regional studies, especially since he had no foreign language training himself or any teaching background. Gradually, the leadership of DIFL was marked by its singular absence of military linguists. Indeed, far from the teaching duties being carried out by linguists, recent graduates with no teaching experience were used to deliver the courses to cadets of a similar age to themselves. (Some cadets selected for entry to DIFL had good personal ties and got themselves sent to military language institutes in Russia or Germany.) Those teaching regional studies often lacked basic knowledge about other countries in Central Asia, and used internet-garnered materials to teach the subject. Although in theory the DIFL should be open to military personnel from elsewhere in Central Asia, Kazakhstan's MoD only offered access to five Kyrgyz cadets in late 2006; they were scheduled to commence their study the following

year. In practical terms, the offer was somewhat symbolic, as none arrived. All these issues were more than teething problems, as the misgovernance of the institute became deeper and structural: the 400 staff responsible for teaching only 80 cadets illustrates the point. Most military linguists trained during the 1990s with experience of the MoD Linguistic Center have either resigned or been sacked. There is some expertise in the DIFL in German and Chinese (possessing a part-time teacher of Chinese), yet surprisingly, given the regime's aspirations to achieve NATO interoperability in key formations, English is one of the weakest areas in the DIFL. The last new books arrived at the DIFL in 2005.<sup>35</sup> Although it also serves as a PfP Regional Center, in real terms this has only entailed NATO assistance in setting up a library; the value of the PfP Regional Center status is, therefore, purely political. In short, the DIFL is a chaotic and newly reformed structure which in turn now requires drastic reform itself.

### **Searching for New Defense Partners.**

Since 9/11 Kazakhstan has intensified its international military cooperation activities, expanding beyond its traditional security partners such as Russia and to a much lesser extent China, to include greater levels of interaction with Western and other militaries. The United States and Turkey have led the way in this sphere, while Canada, Germany, and the UK have also stepped up assistance to Kazakhstan. Denmark, France, Norway, Slovakia, and Spain have also been developing similar ties with Kazakhstan's MoD, while in the area of defense technology, Israel has mostly assisted in promoting cooperation between defense companies to strengthen Kazakhstan's domestic arms manufacturing potential. Since Akhmetov's period as

defense minister, Astana has also looked competitively within the CIS when seeking to have aircraft repaired or even for the placement of cadets in foreign military educational institutes, which has seen links growing with Azerbaijan and Belarus, for example.

While Kazakhstan has expanded its military cooperation with Western countries and NATO, it has also looked elsewhere for assistance in its military evolution. One notable recent trend has been the fostering of defense ties with Middle Eastern countries, such as Israel, or actively pursuing such arrangements with other Asian countries such as Pakistan. In February 2008 Pakistan and Kazakhstan reiterated their political aim to promote and strengthen bilateral cooperation, particularly in the area of defense. This was discussed at a meeting between Syed Salim Abbas Jilani, Pakistan's Caretaker Federal Minister for Defense and Defense Production, and Kazakhstan's Admiral Ratmir Komratov, Commander Western Command (Naval Chief) of Kazakhstan; both agreed to hold more high level defense orientated bilateral meetings, assist in training Kazakhstani military personnel, and promote bilateral naval cooperation. Defense Minister Akhmetov and his Slovakian counterpart, Jaroslav Baska, signed an agreement in April 2008 on military and technical cooperation. Under this agreement, the Slovakian side will repair training planes for Kazakhstan's air defense forces. "The agreement will become the basis which will promote further development of mutually beneficial relations between the two countries' armies in the military sphere," according to the Kazakhstani MoD. It also provides for expanded cooperation in the sphere of education, particularly training junior officers from the Kazakh armed forces in the town of Liptovsky Mikulas (Slovakia) and in the NATO

PfP Center.<sup>36</sup> The trend towards adding new sources of international military cooperation to the country's already fairly large network of existing defense partnerships will continue in the foreseeable future. This is not essentially politically driven, as there is no evidence that planning staffs in Kazakhstan's MoD consciously politicize such diversification, nor does it necessarily expose any actual trend away from defense reliance on Russia. Quite the contrary, because of the aging components of Kazakhstan's military hardware, there are fundamental needs to repair aircraft, for instance, and this has led to searching for countries able to provide the necessary repairs in Belarus (fighter planes) and in Slovakia (training aircraft). Unless there is a complete overhaul of the existing airframes and new aircraft are procured for the Air Force and Air Defense Forces, this trend will continue during the next 10-15 years.

One important inadvertent consequence in this diversification is that, in some cases, countries that the West would prefer not to become a stronger influence over Kazakhstan's armed forces are already achieving such inroads. U.S. military planners argue that providing military assistance to Kazakhstan, as well as other former Soviet countries, promotes democratic values and encourages civil-military control of the indigenous armed forces. Since 2003 approximately 400 Kazakhstani officers have received education or training at U.S. military institutes, although many are either backwatered by the hierarchy on their return or some of them leave the military. In September 2008 Kazakhstan began sending 50 officer cadets to the military academy in Minsk, thus comparatively speaking, it can be said that in terms of military education Belarus now has more influence on Kazakhstan's armed forces than does the United States.<sup>37</sup>

## **ENDEMIC CHALLENGES: CORRUPTION WITHIN KAZAKHSTAN'S ARMED FORCES**

The issue of pay, always given lip service within official statements, has reemerged more seriously in the language adopted by Defense Minister Akhmetov. In October 2007 he promised to double the salaries of contract servicemen from the start of 2008, reaching 70,000 Tenge per month (around \$580). Akhmetov also committed the Kazakh MoD to addressing the equally thorny issue of housing for military personnel, long since the source of discontent within the ranks of those involved in the experiment to “professionalize” the armed forces. “We will build 80,000 square meters of houses this year alone. With these rates, we will provide houses for 5,000 servicemen, who are queuing up for them, within 3 years,” the minister said. Despite the advances allegedly made during the second tenure of Army General Mukhtar Altynbayev as Defense Minister, Akhmetov presented a picture of the Kazakh armed forces in near disarray, with low morale, poor discipline, low pay, inadequate access to housing, and low levels of military education. Indeed, he expressly singled out education as one area that he would emphasize in his reform efforts. “Funding for military education in Kazakhstan will increase 100-fold in 2008, from 47 million Tenge this year to 4.8 billion (about \$40 million dollars) next year [2008],” Akhmetov said. He noted that only 12 percent of conscripts had graduated from military departments at civilian higher educational institutions at that point. Akhmetov also added to his growing list of objectives the introduction of a NATO standard uniform into the armed forces,



as well as upgrading the content and quality of dry rations for Kazakhstani soldiers.<sup>38</sup>

Despite these declarations of intent on the part of the leadership of Kazakhstan's MoD, problems remained endemic and unresolved in addressing concerns among servicemen about pay and conditions of service. Especially significant was the evidence that this fissure was developing in the all important sergeant rank, since the training of sergeants was considered a key feature in the processes of building a professional component within the army. In late March 2008 an air crash occurred at an airbase near Karaganda (northern Kazakhstan), resulting in the crew of the MiG-31 fighter having to abort the training flight and make an emergency landing. As the aviation investigation began, it soon revealed the extent of the problems facing the armed forces as a whole: due to low wages, many of the sergeants serving in the military, referred to by Akhmetov as the backbone of Kazakhstan's army, were preparing to leave in 2008-09 en masse. "Wages of sergeants have become equal to, and sometimes even lower than, wages of their subordinates," say servicemen at the Forces of Air Defense (FAD) units. Sergeants are deputy commanders, so their wages should reflect the importance of that post. No additional benefits accrue to sergeants in their command pay structure. As a result, sergeants' posts in the army are becoming "unpromising," and junior commanders are now preparing a "massive retreat" from the army. Such a hemorrhage from the army would present a critical challenge for the MoD, since this would leave no one to prepare sergeants of battalions, companies, and platoons.

This has resulted as a consequence of the MoD abolishing the "sergeant bonuses," sergeants of bases and brigades lost up to 55 percent of their financial

allowances in addition to their official salaries. In other words, if a sergeant serving in the army from 17 to 20 years once received 67,903 Tenge (about \$560) in keeping with wage grade No. 8 (36,839 Tenge as salary, 7,373 Tenge for military rank, 3,430 Tenge as “flat money,” and 20,261 Tenge in bonuses), then after abolishing the bonuses, they received only 47,642 Tenge (about \$470).<sup>39</sup> These problems resulted in social and financial hardship for military personnel while also sapping morale militating against attempts to minimize the effects of the culture of corruption which remains an embarrassing yet endemic feature of the Kazakh armed forces.

Corruption with Kazakhstan’s military was once noted and highlighted by Western observers of the process of military reform, or on the part of those Western militaries offering assistance to their Kazakhstani counterparts. It is now so rife, eating away at many of the achievements of reforming parts of the military and reducing the operational capabilities of the armed forces while undermining further still any sense of “professionalization,” that it is the subject of more frequent comment internally among the military hierarchy itself. In January 2008, one year after the appointment of Kazakhstan’s first civilian Defense Minister, Justice Colonel Nurlan Sisimbayev, senior aide to the Chief Military Prosecutor of Kazakhstan, told *Kazakhstan Today* that corruption remains one of the key problems facing the Kazakhstani army. “The results of investigations into corruption cases in the sphere of public procurement show that large budgetary allocations have remained in the pockets of military officials who have been in charge of ensuring the country’s defense and security,” Sisimbayev said. He illustrated this by referring to a particular case

involving Medical Colonel Idrisov, head of the armed forces' main directorate for military and medical supplies. Due to his corrupt practices, the State lost 200 million Tenge (around \$1.5 million); he is currently serving a sentence in prison. Though the scale of his corruption was massive, it is not an isolated incident. As Sisimbayev explained, a criminal case was opened in early January 2008 against Colonel Alpysbayev, commander of military unit No. 11098, allegedly inflicting financial damage estimated at 160 million Tenge (around \$1.3 million).<sup>40</sup>

Corruption, both in terms of uncovering its presence and impact as well as bringing prosecutions against individuals, has become a greater public theme owing to the approach and style of Akhmetov as Defense Minister. In fact, as an economist and ex-Prime Minister, Akhmetov seems keen to learn how the army spends its money, addressing issues where they arise in a "financial management" pattern. This has led, inadvertently, to highlighting further still the staggering nature of the problem inside Kazakhstan's military structures. In October 2007, Akhmetov took precisely this stance, sending teams of auditors into the southern regional command. The command felt "turned inside out" by the systematic investigation conducted by 122 auditors: Akhmetov was signalling his seriousness. They assessed the state of armaments and equipment, the full strength and combat readiness of personnel, and the condition of the armed forces' material support and rear services. To draw an objective picture, external checks were carried out along with the internal audits on the activities of 153 state structures of the MoD during the 2005-06 period; under the close scrutiny of the Kazakh Finance Ministry's committee for financial checks and state purchases. The findings

were damning: deception was common, and the MoD had failed to properly supervise the construction of military facilities. There were numerous cases in which design estimates were overvalued and not abided by, as well as numerous cases of making payments for bogus work and overvalued volumes of completed jobs. Examples were plentiful, including one military unit that paid 11 million Tenge (\$100,000) for work never carried out. They paid 7 million Tenge for construction materials that were never delivered, and overestimated construction work costs by 2 million Tenge. The auditors suggested that 57.81 billion Tenge (about \$500 million) were spent to finance the army in 2005; and the MoD received 76.12 billion Tenge (around \$700 million) from the state budget in 2006. The ex-defense minister, Mukhtar Altynbayev, said that “some 27 percent of the 2006 budget will be spent for the development of [armaments, equipment, and construction].” Payments for bogus work were one well-tried and tested method of benefitting from corruption. It was also found during these checks that the Main Directorate for Logistical Support (MDLS) of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Kazakhstan committed violations that set the state back 1.286 billion Tenge as it held tenders for state purchases of goods, services, and work. This was staggering since by late 2007, there were at least 5,000 homeless officers in the Kazakh army waiting for flats.<sup>41</sup> Eighteen officers have been reprimanded. Akhmetov was rumored to be pushing for more severe punishments, but the real culprits often escaped by shifting the blame, while the authorities were reluctant to sack the instigators of such corruption. Equally, some Kazakhstani officers said off the record that these officers were often signalled out as scapegoats, and that the sources of corruption lay further up the military commands.<sup>42</sup>

It appears that 2007 marked a milestone in the level of corruption existing within Kazakhstan's armed forces, despite the first U.S.-Kazakhstan 5-year plan of military cooperation having been introduced in 2003. Defense Minister Akhmetov was himself stunned that the number of discipline violations committed by officers exceeded those of soldiers, particularly as the latter are expected to look to the officers as behavior models. Kazakhstan's MoD confirmed that the number of discipline violations committed by officers was eight times higher in 2007 than in the previous year. This is significant: this is the country to which NATO refers as its "anchor in Central Asia" and which, since the collapse in relations between NATO/U.S. and Uzbekistan in 2005, has been consistently overestimated by Western military planning staffs. Akhmetov, only several months into his post, knew an altogether different and more realistic assessment existed. To address this trend, Akhmetov argued it would be necessary to dismiss senior officers found guilty of such violations. To improve the overall state of military discipline, Akhmetov ordered that officers undergo demanding training courses from the start of 2008; thus the announcement of additional spending on military education and training must not be misleadingly interpreted as another sign that Kazakhstan's armed forces are progressing towards a highly professional and well-trained force, rather it must be viewed in this complex and rather frustrating context. "We have checked the state of affairs in the ministry earlier in October and revealed a number of shortcomings. We discussed them and made some conclusions today. One officer was sacked. Yet I think the best solution to the problem is when officers consider these shortcomings and make conclusions themselves," Akhmetov suggested.<sup>43</sup>

Unlike his predecessor, Altynbayev, Defense Minister Akhmetov clearly intended to follow through with threats to remove senior officers failing to redress these issues. On November 2, 2007, Akhmetov sacked the deputy head of the Defense Ministry directorate for information technology and communications. Akhmetov had publicly expressed his dissatisfaction with discipline among Kazakhstan's officer staff. Following high profile serious reprimands, the minister said that he had undertaken measures in relation to undisciplined officials. He explained:

The announcement of punishment is one of the methods of improving discipline. But it is not the main factor. It will not help us resolve all problems. In my opinion, the main factor is the analysis of mistakes these officers have made and conclusions they drew. Today I saw that those officers who committed serious errors are concerned about that. They drew their conclusions, and this is the main thing we can talk about. Nevertheless, some officers will suffer punishments.

Yet on the same day, the former head of the Kazakh Defense Ministry's main intelligence directorate, who was being investigated, was detained in Almaty being caught red-handed while attempting to give a bribe of \$30,000. A report circulated by the press service of the Kazakh National Security Committee's Almaty department claimed that,

staff at the military counterintelligence department and the National Security Committee detained a retired colonel of the country's armed forces while he was attempting to give a bribe of 30,000 dollars to a civil servant—an operative of the National Security Committee.

The press service said the man,

intended to bribe the members of a National Security Committee operational group investigating a criminal case under Article 380 of the Kazakh Criminal Code (abuse of power) launched against senior officials of the Kazakh armed forces. By offering a bribe of \$30,000, he aimed to shield from criminal liability not only himself but also other participants in the case.

The investigation directorate of the National Security Committee's Almaty department subsequently launched a criminal case under Article 312 of the Criminal Code (giving a bribe to a civil servant in especially large amounts). This suggests that perhaps the more normal solution to senior officers being investigated or under suspicion of corruption is to utilize such "back-door" methods through their active or retired contacts in the intelligence services.<sup>44</sup>

Several years after the much publicized "military reform" campaigns led by Mukhtar Altynbayev, evidence emerged that Kazakhstan's armed forces remain largely unreformed in many elements of their structures and are relatively unscathed by these "paper" processes. Akhmetov was arguably shocked by the woeful state of discipline, corruption, and inadequate training and education that he discovered following his appointment in early 2007. By fall 2007 he had no doubt that he faced a Herculean challenge in addressing the manifold problems confronting the armed forces. The results of training, in his view, were unsatisfactory, reflecting badly on the management system, including the central command, and raising "big questions." The minister said:

This is a reason for a big investigation, because in several cases we are coming across with not only amateurism, but also with gross violations of all military regulations and statutes. Today, even several staff members of the central office, including high-ranking officials, are missing when they are required to be there. This shows that several high-ranking officials at the Defense Ministry obviously do not meet the requirements, which we should make in accordance with the new military doctrine, and the requirements of the supreme commander-in-chief.<sup>45</sup>

Other arms of the military service also came in for sharp criticism; Akhmetov explained similar checks were required in units of the air defense forces, since provisional inspections had uncovered “serious violations of barrack regulations” among air defense forces placed on combat duty. He noted that these results “together with today’s check give grounds to question the efficiency of several agencies of the Defense Ministry.”<sup>46</sup>

## **KAZAKHSTAN’S CLOSEST MILITARY AND SECURITY ALLY: RUSSIA**

National and multilateral Western military planning staffs need to appreciate the limitations placed on the potential dividends from their defense cooperation and assistance programs offered to the Kazakhstani armed forces. Among these limiting factors are the depth, scope, and long-term durability of Kazakhstan’s defense and security relations with the Russian Federation. That relationship is rooted in close historical, linguistic, and cultural ties, as well as a shared military culture and heritage, extending into military doctrine, strategy, tactics, training, weapons, equipment, manning systems, and, perhaps most



importantly, mindset. This is enshrined in Kazakhstan's 2007 military doctrine, the ongoing close nature of bilateral defense and security cooperation, which is cemented further still through multilateral mechanisms such as the CSTO and SCO. Kazakhstan plays an important role in each of these bodies, consistently supporting Russian security policy and being regarded by the Russian government as Moscow's closest ally in the former Soviet Union. The nature and scale of this military cooperation, revealing how intertwined it is in its substance, will be analyzed. It will be argued that since 2005, despite the perception in NATO capitals that Kazakhstan has been more open to military cooperation both with the Alliance through the PfP Program and at a bilateral level with individual Alliance members, the defense relationship between Kazakhstan and Russia has, in fact, substantially deepened. It is crucial that this relationship is understood in the calibration of Western military cooperation with Kazakhstan, as it is precisely on this point that many of the Western-led programs falter: put simply, for every Kazakhstani officer open and receptive, if not enthusiastic about Western military methods and ideas, there are nine more officers sceptical of these programs and wanting to maintain the "Russian outlook" which is so embedded in the Kazakhstani armed forces. There are also many examples of officers who, after receiving military education and training in NATO countries, upon their return find that their careers are effectively damaged as a result, with peers and hierarchy prone to "backwater" such individuals rather than maximize their potential to share knowledge and experience.

Although "military reform" was pursued as part of Kazakhstan's defense policies, which also included deepening its defense relations with Western countries

to facilitate some of these objectives, Kazakhstan has remained closely tied to Russia in terms of defense cooperation, and to a large extent “outlook.” In December 2003, Altynbayev observed:

I want to emphasize that military-technical cooperation between Russia and Kazakhstan is a priority since our army is equipped with hardware and arms of Soviet and Russian production. Our armed forces have the demand for supplies of air, armored vehicles, military trucks, missile and artillery armament, air defense technologies and spare parts and other parts *needed for their maintenance and servicing from Russia.*<sup>47</sup>

### **Kazakhstan-Russia Defense Cooperation: Actively Growing.**

Shortly after the announced renewal in February 2008 of the U.S.-Kazakhstan Five Year Plan of military cooperation, 2008-13, Kazakhstan also sealed its new deepened defense relationship with Russia. Russia’s Defense Minister Anatoliy Serdyukov and his counterpart in Kazakhstan, Daniyal Akhmetov, agreed that in the period 2008-10 Kazakhstan will purchase and modernize military equipment and weapons in Russia. The statement was made on February 12, 2008, at the talks held in Moscow between Serdyukov and Akhmetov, who had been in Moscow on an official visit. Kazakhstan’s MoD press service reported:

Serdyukov and Akhmetov have discussed a number of questions, the solution of which will give a fresh impetus to the military cooperation between the two countries. Among the other things, Serdyukov and Akhmetov discussed the questions of cooperation in military education and science, as well as weapons and military equipment deliveries, maintenance, and modernization on favourable terms, and joint operations training.<sup>48</sup>

In addition to agreeing to step up the purchase of Russian weapons and equipment, Akhmetov suggested that experts from the Main Directorate for International Military Cooperation and the military universities of Russia should participate in the selection of cadets and students for Russian military universities. In the longer term, Kazakhstan's MoD planned to send the officers who are to serve in Kazakhstan's agencies abroad, to study at short-term courses under the auspices of the Russian Military Academy; there they will study international legal support for defense attaches, operational country studies, and personal security courses for defense attaches in cases of emergency. The press release asserted:

As a part of the joint operations training program, it is planned to hold several military exercises this year. The cooperation in responding to the challenges and dangers of today may not only bring together the two country's military people, but it will also build up their experience in conducting combat operations.

Akhmetov also met Anatoliy Isaykin, the Director General of Russian defense export firm, Rosoboronexport. The agenda of those bilateral talks was on defense cooperation related to exploring military training, supplying and maintaining as well as modernizing arms, accessing Russian manufactured military hardware on preferential terms, and conducting joint operational training courses. Interestingly, the plan envisaged sending Kazakhstan's defense attaches on short-term courses in Russia's Frunze Military Academy in Moscow, suggesting that Astana is open to "Russifying" its defense attaches prior to posting abroad. Certainly, all Western military cooperation

programs agreed with Kazakhstan are also known to Moscow, as the information, detail, and progress has to be shared through an existing mechanism of the CSTO, combined with the close intelligence relations maintained between both countries. The main feature of the deepened bilateral defense cooperation is related to procuring Russian arms on preferential terms combined with agreeing to increase the frequency of joint military exercises, suggesting greater political commitment to potential future joint operations, perhaps under the legal framework of the CSTO.<sup>49</sup>

### **Center 2008.**

On September 4, 2008, joint Russian-Kazakhstani military exercises began at the Chebarkul training range near Chelyabinsk, Russia. The exercises, long planned in the framework of the deepening military cooperation between both countries, involved around 2,000 servicemen, more than 100 units of armored hardware, and 30 planes and helicopters (MiG-31, Su-24, Su-27, Il-76 aircraft and the Mi-24 and Mi-8 helicopters). However, "Center 2008" represented a departure from previous joint military exercises with a focus on security in Central Asia, it was not only the largest joint military exercise conducted between Russia and Kazakhstan since the collapse of the Soviet Union: in the scenario, the Russian and Kazakhstani armies were rehearsing how to repel an attack on Kazakhstan by an "adjacent state." This contradicts Kazakhstan's 2007 military doctrine, since the principal threat to the state stems from international terrorism, raising the question as to which potential "aggressor state" either country imagines as the justification for the exercise. "Center 2008" unfolded around an attempt by an

“aggressor state” to seize control of Kazakhstan energy assets. Russian military intervention in the exercise saw the use of PGMs, unlike the real Russian military operation in Georgia in August 2008. Kazakhstan contributed to the exercise by providing reinforcement in the form of Soviet-made BMPs and BTRs. A Russian infantry company from the Ulyanovsk airborne division assault force was finally inserted into the “conflict zone” using two IL-76 transport aircraft, resulting in the rapid disruption of enemy forces, destruction of hardware, and the inevitable fleeing of the enemy from the battlefield. Moreover, the allied response to the aggressive military intervention in Kazakhstan ends with forcing a whole military bloc to “make peace.”<sup>50</sup>

The presentation of Kazakhstan’s position in its international defense relations is often confused with its much vaunted and largely successful “multi-vectored” foreign policy, which eschews favoring any one particular state in its conduct of policy. In Kazakhstan’s MoD, there is little room for such Western-inspired ambiguity. Defense Minister Akhmetov boasted in May 2008 of the depth of the relationship between Kazakhstan and Russia: “Russia’s armed forces are the *main strategic ally of the Kazakh armed forces*. I can say that, of late, interaction between our establishments in all spheres of military-technological and military-humanitarian cooperation has been *considerably stepped up* and taken to a qualitatively new level.”<sup>51</sup> He went on to explain the nature of the deepening defense relations between Astana and Moscow, which included holding two large-scale military exercises in 2008 marking the first bilateral exercises in several years and increasing cooperation in naval assistance, air defense, and between the respective air forces, combined with prioritizing the purchase of Russian manufactured

arms for each branch of service in Kazakhstan's armed forces. In fact, the leadership of Kazakhstan's MoD during this period of intensified cooperation with Moscow began to unequivocally view Russia as its key defense partner, tying the future development of its military to the interface between the militaries of each country. "We are satisfied with this cooperation, as we understand that our armed forces will improve *only in partnership with Russia*," Akhmetov said.<sup>52</sup>

Experts within Kazakhstan also place great emphasis on the security relationship with Russia. In February 2008 Bulat Sultanov, director of Kazakhstan's Institute of Strategic Studies under the country's president, noted that, "as a nuclear power, *Russia is a guarantor of national security for Kazakhstan*." For its part, Kazakhstan protects Russia from challenges and substate threats from Central Asia and at the same time serves as a link with Asian countries for Russia, according to Sultanov. In his view, it is exactly during Putin's presidency that relations between Russia and Kazakhstan reached "a new level of strategic partnership and have a trend towards becoming allied relations."<sup>53</sup>

### **Military Doctrine.**

Kazakhstan's second military doctrine that was passed in 2000 had become largely obsolete as a result of the changed security environment following 9/11 and was consequently long overdue an overhaul. President Nazarbayev committed Kazakhstan to formulating a new military doctrine during his Annual Address to the Nation on March 1, 2006. Thus, the secretariat of the Security Council was tasked with overseeing and drafting the new doctrine. That process involved consultations with international experts

and nongovernment organizations (NGOs). Among Western bodies, this included three experts from the George C. Marshall Center for Security Studies in Germany visiting Kazakhstan's MoD in October 2006. One of those experts praised the draft military doctrine for its "principles of openness and transparency."<sup>54</sup> Yet it should be noted that U.S. experts participating in the drafting of Kazakhstan's military doctrine in 2000 attended several sessions and examined the principles of forming military doctrine in detail. When the doctrine was passed, many of these experts were "surprised" to discover how much the actual doctrine deviated from the drafting phase, with the parts with which they had most input completely removed. The 2000 military doctrine from the perspective of these experts was a disappointment, but provided an insight into how the machinery of the Kazakhstani MoD functioned, positioning itself in a "Western friendly" guise only to pass a doctrine that reinforced Kazakhstan's close defense relations and mindset with Russia. It is unclear whether the experts who were given access to the drafting phase of the new military doctrine also had a similar experience.<sup>55</sup> What is clear from the new military doctrine passed in March 2007 is that it serves to confirm beyond doubt the close, ongoing defense relationship between Kazakhstan and Russia. Lieutenant-General Sembinov, Kazakhstan's Deputy Defense Minister, tasked with overseeing military cooperation with the West, claimed that the experience of Western countries had been taken into account when the doctrine was drafted.<sup>56</sup>

The 2007 military doctrine reiterates the mantra of ensuring the conditions are met for formation of a mobile, well-equipped professional army: in fact, describing an aspiration rather than what Kazakhstan's armed

forces currently represent. It advocated combining military and nonmilitary measures to ensure security. Equally, it envisages Kazakhstan's active participation in the War on Terror and international peacekeeping operations. Yet this is hardly surprising since Kazakhstan has had 27 engineers from its peace support battalion, KAZBAT, deployed in Iraq under Polish command with U.S. military airlift and logistical support since 2003. In the sphere of international military cooperation, the doctrine mentions cooperation with Russia, China, Central Asian neighbors, the CSTO, SCO, UN, OSCE, NATO, European Union (EU), and the United States. The order is crucial, although it envisages cooperating with Western countries, expanding security cooperation with the EU and its member states for example, it is all placed in the context of Kazakhstan's legal and political obligations to prioritize Russia, avoid problems with China, and actively participate in the CSTO and the growing security dimension of the SCO.<sup>57</sup> The language of threat assessment in the 2007 doctrine reflected broadly that adopted in the CSTO and SCO, while its sense of ambition matched the aim of the ruling elite to secure the Chairmanship of the OSCE, which was only secured after the passing of the new military doctrine. In other words, we can detect signs of a highly politically ambitious element contained within the doctrine. Nevertheless, the mismatch between the doctrine and the current condition of Kazakhstan's armed forces as a whole should be emphasised. Claims of pursuing closer military cooperation with its neighbors in Central Asia contained within the doctrine represent nothing more than political posturing rather than having any real bearing on policy. Quite frankly, any claims the leadership has advanced to being the regional defense and security leader, is *way beyond* its current capabilities. In examining the Kazakhstani



military, it should be viewed objectively as remaining in need of substantial, genuine, and systemic military reform. Such fanciful claims have since declined even from official rhetoric in Kazakhstan.

### **Recent Historical Basis for a Close Partnership with Russia.**

Kazakhstan's close defense relations with Russia are, of course, historical and doctrinal. Kazakhstan signed a military cooperation treaty with Russia on March 28, 1994, and has furthered the legal framework for its bilateral defense cooperation activities through signing numerous documents since that time. Kazakhstani officers are sent to Russia annually to receive education and training on preferential terms. Estimates of figures illustrating this vary, but in general terms, between 1993 and 2006, more than 2,500 Kazakhstanis were sent to Russia for military and security training from Russia's MoD, Federal Security Service (FSB), Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), and the Emergencies Ministry. In fact, Kazakhstan sends more officer cadets and officers to Russia's military educational establishments each year than any other former Soviet country.<sup>58</sup> Even the formation of the national system of military education in Kazakhstan drew largely on the models and experience of Russia, while also utilizing Russian instructional staff in these institutions. Since 2003, for example, Russia has regularly sent instructors to Kazakhstan National Defense University.<sup>59</sup> Access to such courses necessarily presupposes continued and long-term commonality between the military doctrine of Kazakhstan and Russia; in other words, regardless of how much Astana tries to convince Western military planners, strict limits guide and shape just how far

Kazakhstan is practically able to deviate from Russian influence in its military doctrine.

In addition to close bilateral cooperation between the security structures responsible for border security and national intelligence agencies, Kazakhstan also provides important military facilities for Russia, leasing more than 11 million hectares of Kazakhstan's territory for these purposes. Russia uses the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan for around 70 percent of its space launches; the original lease was agreed in 1994, renewed a decade later, and extends to 2050. Russia also maintains access for its air force and naval aviation trials of new weapons at ranges in Atyrau, Western Kazakhstan, for the Chkalov State Flying Trials Center's use. There are also firing ranges for testing missiles and ammunition located in Western Kazakhstan, as well as ranges in Karaganda, Aqtobe, Kyzlorda, and Zhambyl, covering 80,000 square kilometers for the testing of air defense and strategic ballistic missiles; an independent radar node "Balkhash-9" which serves as part of Russia's Space Forces' integrated missile attack warning system; and a regiment of the Russian Air Transport Branch located at Kostanai which is tasked with fulfilling the air transport requirements of the above facilities.<sup>60</sup> In February 2000, the Russian defense company Rosvooruzhenie signed an agreement with the Kazakhstan state company Kazspetseksport outlining the main areas of cooperation in supplying defense equipment to Kazakhstan. Since then, additional agreements combined with providing Russian arms on favorable terms, has helped to procure BTR-80 APC's, Mi-17 Multi-Role helicopters, MiG-29, MiG-31 and Su-25 fighter jets and air defense systems. Meanwhile, as Kazakhstan considers options for acquiring naval assets, Russia is offering possible

assistance through building vessels at Zelenodolsk in Russia. In February 2007, a meeting of Kazakhstan's Security Council adopted a strategy for procuring and upgrading equipment for the armed forces from Russia.<sup>61</sup>

### **Air Defense Cooperation.**

Air defense is a particularly sensitive yet crucial issue for Kazakhstan, almost overemphasized in the level of importance attached to it by senior Kazakhstani defense officials. Currently, two air defense systems are used to protect Astana and Karaganda: the S-300 (Favorite), which is capable of shooting down any hijacked aircraft posing a threat to either city. Of course, Kazakhstani defense officials have pursued more ambitious systems and actively sought their procurement, which also included exploratory talks with BAE systems about upgrading the country's dated air defense components. Inevitably, in such sensitive areas, Russia was always the favored choice, and finally the authorities agreed to pursue Russian assistance in air defense issues exclusively. In February 2008, a delegation of defense officials from Kazakhstan arrived in Moscow to discuss the procurement of air defense missile systems. Leading that delegation, Army General Mukhtar Altynbayev, Kazakhstan's first Deputy Minister of Defense and Chairman of the Committee of Chiefs of Staff, explained, "During a meeting in Moscow, the Russian and Kazakh defense ministers also discussed the issues of supplying air defense tools to the Kazakh armed forces." Purchasing additional S-300 as well as the S-400 (*Triumph*) was discussed, suggesting that the Kazakhstani MoD wants to increase the number of protected cities in the country, or also "defend" other key infrastructure, though on

the latter system Altynbayev appeared more cautious. "In future, we expect to buy the S-400 complex. This is a complicated and very expensive complex, and I am against hurrying to purchase it. It is necessary that the Russian military breaks it in within their country," Altynbayev said in this regard.<sup>62</sup>

Of course, this is by no means a "new" development, but one that has been intermittently addressed by Kazakhstan's MoD, as officials struggled to decide which systems were needed and from where these should be procured. The negotiations, as appears a common theme with defense delegations in Kazakhstan, have proven painstaking and protracted. Major-General Almaz Abdulmanov, Deputy Chief of Staff, announced on June 15, 2006, that Kazakhstan wanted Russia to modernize its armed forces. General Abdulmanov explained that "primarily, we are interested in modernizing the Kazakh air force, and as members of the CIS unified air-defense system, we are interested in air defense systems, and in purchasing S-300 missile systems." At that time, the Kazakhstani MoD expressed its interest in acquiring Russian surface-to-air missiles and armored personnel carriers in order to replace outdated or obsolete Soviet era stock in its inventory. Much of the planned weapons procurement was scheduled to be financed on the basis of a revised agreement with Russia for its use of four training ranges in Kazakhstan. According to the agreement, Russia would pay Kazakhstan about \$3.2 million annually and provide some \$19.6 million in military hardware, equipment, and military training.<sup>63</sup> This agreement was furthered during a visit to Moscow to attend the Russian military air show, MAKS 2007. Army-General Mukhtar Altynbayev, Deputy Defense Minister, signed an agreement on August 22, 2007,

to purchase substantial Russian military aviation equipment and missile-defense systems. The scale of the deal involved \$60 million worth of Russian equipment, including repair and modernization of MiG-31s, MiG-29s and Su-25s, as well as Russian S-300PS, 300PMUS2 (*Favorite*), and supplying S-400 antimissile systems. Altynbayev explained this was a key element in Kazakhstan's strategy to bolster its air-defense capabilities and modernize its air force. Sergei Tsivilyov, Deputy Director of Russia's MiG Aircraft Corporation, confirmed his company also signed additional contracts with Kazakhstan to provide space simulators and necessary training in their use. The message from Kazakhstan's defense leadership was clear, Russia remains its long-term security partner, and, as such, Astana looks to Moscow for the procurement not only of the bulk of its weapons and military equipment, but its most sensitive and sophisticated systems. "We are part of the CSTO. We have the same tasks, and we will focus on purchasing Russian military equipment in the future," Altynbayev said.<sup>64</sup>

### **S-400 (Triumph): Russian Defense Industry Success.**

Vladislav Menshchikov, General Director of the Almaz-Antey concern producing the S-400 (*Triumph*) air defense missile system, saw this agreement as a success for his company which served to confirm the marketability of the new system. He said that in the foreseeable future the S-400 air-defense missile system would be the company's main export product. "Over the past few years our traditional foreign partners have been saying that they are ready to buy the S-400 air-defense missile system. Above all, these

are countries that have the S-300 system and expect to have a priority right to buy the latest air-defense missile system," Menshchikov said. He also pointed to the advantage of the S-400 as being that the system was created using only domestic hardware components. "From the technological point of view, this will make it possible to avoid the problem issues which S-300 has," Menshchikov noted.<sup>65</sup>

It is entirely unclear, however, what or whom Kazakhstan considers it necessary to protect its cities from, using such systems. The real explanation perhaps lies in the nature of the systems themselves, and serves as another illustration of the appetite in Kazakhstan for symbols of power and sophistication, though they may not face genuine threats justifying such expensive procurement plans. Colonel-General Aleksandr Zelin, Commander-in-Chief of Russia's Air Force, considers that the S-400 systems could be rapidly deployed as part of the nonstrategic antimissile defense of Europe, such is his confidence in the system. According to him, "Russia's mobile air defense missile systems have better tactical-technical characteristics than similar foreign systems for fighting attacking missiles, and they can be rapidly deployed as part of the nonstrategic antimissile defense system of Europe." He elaborated its main features: "The S-400 system is capable of engaging aircraft and cruise missiles at all altitudes used in combat, in practice from 10 meters, while the minimum altitude for engaging targets of the American *Patriot* system is 60 meters. Thanks to the vertical start of the missiles, the S-400 can engage targets flying from any direction without turning around the launchers," Zelin explained. Since the American *Patriot* is launched under an angle, "in a maneuvering battle, it has to turn around launchers or set them beforehand

in missile-dangerous directions, inevitably reducing its firing capabilities." In modern combat, reliance is often placed on low altitudes in order to overcome air-defense systems. The required time to bring the system from its transport state to combat ready is another key factor; the *Patriot* needs around 30 minutes, whereas the S-400 needs only around 5 minutes. "They are capable of effectively repelling massive air raids by modern means of aerial attack in conditions of intensive radio-electronic suppression and fulfilling combat tasks in various weather conditions."<sup>66</sup>

### **Aging Aircraft.**

On February 12, 2008, a MiG-29 fighter jet from Kazakhstan's Air Force crashed while landing at a military airfield in Almaty region. Alexander Kovyazin, a highly experienced Kazakhstani Air Force pilot, died on impact, while another, Vitaly Dilmukhamedov, a pilot with more than 800 hours flying experience, survived with multiple injuries. The ensuing investigation soon ruled out human error; confirmed by experts from MiG corporation itself who identified that the crash was caused by an on-board failure of an electrical power supply unit. A similar crash occurred only 4 days later involving a MiG-31 interceptor in Karaganda Region in Western Kazakhstan, killing two pilots. Both accidents were the direct result of technical failures, a consequence of struggling to maintain Kazakhstan-Russian supplied aging aircraft. Russian MiG-31 interceptors are the mainstay of Kazakhstan's Air Force, though many are now 25 years old or more, and in desperate need of modernization. It presents a problem with no quick fix for Kazakhstan's MoD, as a delegation from its Defense ministry visited Moscow

in 2006, only to be informed that because many of these aircraft are so old, Russian manufacturing plants often lack qualified technical staff to update and repair them. Modernizing all aircraft in Kazakhstan's air force is regarded by the MoD as an unrealistically expensive option. In November 2007, Kazakhstan signed an agreement with Belarus to modernize 10 Russian made Su-27 fighters at the Baranavichy based aircraft repair plant for Kazakhstan's Air Force; these aircraft were all manufactured in the late 1970s.<sup>67</sup>

Thus the search for alternatives to Russian plants to repair and modernize aircraft is often through economic necessity rather than signalling any political shift away from dependency on Moscow. Yet the frequency of crashes and negative publicity that followed worry senior defense officials in Kazakhstan, as they recognize the problems will endure for the foreseeable future. On February 27, 2008, a Mi-8 helicopter crashed in the Kyzylorda Region in southern Kazakhstan carrying Mukhtar Kul, the governor of the region, senior officials from the Emergencies Ministry, and several journalists: three people were killed and 15 injured. A malfunctioning fuel-injection unit was the established as the cause of the crash.<sup>68</sup>

However, Defense Minister Akhmetov confirmed in August 2007 that Russian made arms and equipment will continue to be core of Kazakhstan's arsenal, though this would not rule out seeking appropriate deals with other suppliers. He said:

We have excellent contacts, and we are grateful to the Defense Ministry of the Russian Federation for its good and effective assistance. Undoubtedly, Russian arms will be our fundamental weapons. But this does not mean that we will purchase only Russian weapons. Work is coming to a close now, and I hope that it will be finished



completely in September or October: we are setting up four joint facilities to produce a state-of-the-art artillery systems, something no CIS country has. They are state-of-the-art Israeli systems. We have already received 6,000 volumes of documentation, which is an excellent step forward, obvious evidence that it will be produced in Kazakhstan.

This trend reflects Kazakhstan's ambition to be a leading arms trader within Central Asia, and export its domestic manufactured weapons internationally.<sup>69</sup>

## CONSPECTUS

As occurred in the case of Georgia, Western military engagement with Kazakhstan focusing on its higher readiness formations risks widening the gap between these units and the remainder of the armed forces, thus conveying a misleading impression of the country's combat readiness. Military reform in Kazakhstan has tended to be structural in its nature, and even in some cases these new structures should now become the focus of further military reform. Slowness, competing interests, and inadequate planning are all factors underlying the course of military reform in Kazakhstan and tend to mitigate the effects of Western military assistance to its armed forces. In terms of the uniform, until 2007 the change was to remove the Soviet buttons and replace these with Kazakh ones. Now, the regime is able to boast that Kazakhstan is the country in the region whose military personnel wear NATO standard uniforms, which enables "knees, elbows, and bottoms" to be reinforced (parts subjects to most wear and tear).<sup>70</sup> Nonetheless, this illustrates the attitude of the regime towards its military; one based on projecting an image of competence and modernization that covers over the wider cracks emerging within the armed forces.

In short, as Kazakhstan's defense officials know it is cheaper to look after "knees, elbows, and bottoms" than offer pensions, adequate housing, and foster professional development of its military personnel.

## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Consideration must be given to finding ways of overcoming the policy planning challenges that emerge as a consequence of USCENTOM currently fighting two wars (Afghanistan and Iraq), and the tendency for planners to view Central Asia as a lower priority and peripheral to these conflicts. Equally, the long-term role of Russia in the region, and in particular its close defense and security relationship with Kazakhstan, needs to be understood and viewed differently among planners.
- Priority should be given to in-country training that concentrates on developing a skills and knowledge base that can be utilized by the host military.
- Follow-up assessments need to be built into all military engagement activities with Kazakhstan; left to their own devices, specific areas within which assistance is provided can soon fall into decline or simply deteriorate through institutional inertia and resistance to change.
- Analysis and identification of the widening gaps emerging within Kazakhstan's armed forces, those elements being prioritized for assistance and developing higher readiness compared with the rest of the force structure should be encouraged at Kazakhstani MoD level alongside input from U.S. and/or NATO planning teams;

with the target of bridging these gaps and strengthening security capacities.

- Kazakhstan's political and military elite need to be convinced that in terms of counterterrorism, the military should not be playing the lead role. Intelligence and police structures need to be placed center stage in this process and encouraged to professionalize and reform away from the Soviet legacy approach which is still endemic with Kazakhstan's intelligence agencies.
- In the planning processes, attention must be focused on assessment of the success of defense assistance programs, with adjustments and modifications that reflect the evolving and changing nature of the local requirements and progress or failings of individual aspects of these programs.
- Planning must also include introducing mechanisms through which local interagency rivalry can be minimized or offset as these programs proceed.
- Financial management is fundamentally important in the successful functioning of any modern military: Kazakhstan needs to receive targeted U.S./NATO support, advice, and expertise in this area in a way that takes account of the endemic corruption in the system.
- U.S. and NATO military assistance in Central Asia as a whole and especially in Kazakhstan needs to be underpinned by a sophisticated, well-developed, and open public relations campaign that circumvents political pressure from Moscow, and in fact addresses Russia's concerns about the motives and intentions in Western assistance programs.

- Kazakhstan needs greater human resource expertise in the relevant planning and personnel departments of its MoD in order to maximize the potential benefits that may derive from suitably placing personnel exposed to Western military education and training. This not only involves U.S./NATO staff openly in “alumni tracking” but envisages guidance and recommendations on career development for local personnel. (Such an approach would overcome the tendency for such personnel to be shunned by the system and through their example, over time, senior Kazakhstani planners would recognize the merits of using this underestimated resource.)

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