

Kazakhstan: A Dependable Ally in Defence of Global Security?



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Kazakhstan: A Dependable Ally in Defence of Global Security?

Introduction

Upon Independence in 1991, Kazakhstan was far from a major player in global security. The country's nascent economy and the traumas of imperial breakup threatened inter-ethnic harmony, while Kazakhstan involuntarily inherited the world's fourth largest arsenal of nuclear weapons from the Soviet Union. The thought of a destabilised Kazakhstan was chilling.

Two decades later Kazakhstan is a stable, gradually democratising, solidly middle-income country and a key contributor to global security. Soon after Independence, President Nursultan Nazarbayev renounced the country's nuclear arsenal and closed the Semipalatinsk nuclear-testing site in eastern Kazakhstan. The dark prediction of ethnic conflict did not come to pass. On the contrary, Kazakhstan skilfully pulled off the feat of building a civic nation in which a multitude of ethnicities and religious groups live peacefully side-by-side.

Kazakhstan's contributions to global security today are many. For example, it is a recognised global leader on nuclear non-proliferation, and Kazakh peacekeepers now serve under the UN flag. Building on fifteen years of rapid economic growth, Kazakhstan is in the process of launching its own development aid agency, KazAID, and is contributing humanitarian assistance to conflict zones and areas of natural disasters worldwide.

This paper reviews Kazakhstan's commitment to global security to date, focusing in particular on its strategic partnerships, nuclear security, peacekeeping, and efforts aimed at international confidence-building. It concludes by noting how Kazakhstan's maintenance of alliances and contributions to global security could serve as a model for other countries.

The Pillars of Kazakhstan's Security Policy: Strategic Partnerships and Security Organisations

Cordial relations with other states are the cornerstone of Kazakhstan's security policy. Kazakhstan has signed strategic partnerships with all poles of the global security order: Russia, China, the USA, and key European countries such as France and - in 2013 - the United Kingdom. In the past few years, Kazakhstan has deepened these strategic partnerships: Russia and Kazakhstan signed a Good Neighbour and Alliance Treaty for the 21st Century in 2013¹; a Strategic Partnership Dialogue Commission has recently been established with the USA²; last year China and Kazakhstan signed a declaration to strengthen their strategic partnership³; and France and Kazakhstan have declared their intention to raise their partnership to a new level.⁴ Next to this foundation of relationships underpinning

¹ <http://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/field-reports/item/12863-russia-and-kazakhstan-clinch-%E2%80%9Calliance-for-the-21-century%E2%80%9D.html>

² <http://www.astanatimes.com/2014/03/kazakhstan-u-s-strategic-partnership-rise/>

³ http://en.tengrinews.kz/politics_sub/Kazakhstan-and-China-to-sign-a-declaration-to-deepen-strategic-partnership-21940/

⁴ <http://en.trend.az/business/finance/2125501.html>

security policies, Kazakhstan has formed strategic partnerships of no lesser significance with Hungary, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Canada, India, Spain and other countries.

Kazakhstan's multilateral engagement in security organisations complements and reinforces these strong bilateral relations. Kazakhstan joined the Collective Security Treaty Organisation in 1992, which now is comprised of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan. It is a member of NATO's Partnership for Peace since 1994 along with the other CIS states, the countries of the former republic of Yugoslavia, and several EU countries. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), established in 2001, is a third major foreign policy priority. The SCO today includes Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan but the organisation is considering the inclusion of four observer states: India, Pakistan, Iran and Mongolia.⁵

Last but not least, Kazakhstan has launched its own security structure - the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA). Proposed by President Nazarbayev at the 47th Session of the United Nations General Assembly on October 5th 1992, CICA is today a fully-fledged international organisation headquartered in the city of Almaty, with 26 member states spanning from Israel in the West to South Korea in the East, and gathering more than half the world's population.⁶

The distinguishing characteristic of Kazakhstan's security policy is balance, and this has been embraced by other Central Asian states as well as Afghanistan.⁷ As will be detailed below, Kazakhstan's diverse base of allies is the single most important asset in its efforts to promote global security. More often than not, such partnerships have their origins in Kazakhstan's own domestic challenges, and the partnerships needed to address them. Nuclear security, for one, has mandated a strong relationship with United States and Russia, and Kazakhstan's nuclear arsenal was also dismantled with their assistance.

Preventing a Nuclear Apocalypse: The Imperative of Leadership

The disintegrating USSR left behind a nuclear arsenal in Kazakhstan made up of more than 1,400 nuclear warheads and 110 ballistic missiles. In May 1992, Kazakhstan renounced possession of these weapons and in December 1993, it became a party to the Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. This voluntary nuclear weapon disarmament was not as inevitable as some may think. Kazakhstan had both the experts and capacity needed to conduct military nuclear programs, and could have kept the weapons and joined the club of countries with nuclear capacities had it desired to.⁸

Moreover, had the fate of the nuclear weapons been determined by referendum or entirely through the democratic process it is by no means certain that Kazakhstan would have disarmed. Pacifist forces in Kazakhstan advocated the complete disarmament of nuclear weapons, to be sure, but there were also other factors who lobbied to retain the weapons. As

⁵ <http://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13022-shanghai-cooperation-organization-set-to-expand.html>

⁶ Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia www.s-cica.org

⁷ <http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/silkroadpapers/1409Kazakhstan.pdf>

⁸ http://www.akorda.kz/en/page/page_remarks-by-president-nursultan-nazarbayev-at-the-international-conference-titled-%E2%80%9Cfrom-a-nuclear-test-ban-to-a-nuclear-weapon-free-world%E2%80%9D_1346905293

the various sides of this debate traded arguments, Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev took the bold decision to disarm the weapons in exchange for security assurances, foreign investments, and aid.⁹

This act of faith marked the start of a decade-long effort to safely dismantle and destroy the arsenal and its associated nuclear programs. In 1994 Kazakhstan, in partnership with the USA and Russia, secured approximately 600 kilograms of highly enriched uranium from the Ulba Metallurgical Plant.¹⁰ Another milestone was reached in April 1995 when Kazakhstan had fully repatriated its nuclear warhead inventory back to Russia. By 1996 all Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles had been dismantled, while missile silos and silo structures were destroyed under the USA's Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) program by September 1999.¹¹

Voluntary nuclear weapons disarmament was a clear investment in global security, but Kazakhstan's commitment to non-proliferation does not end there. In 1997, for example, Central Asian heads of state signed a Treaty in Almaty on the establishment of a Central Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (CANWFZ), which came into force in 2009.¹² Kazakhstan has since worked for the establishment of similar zones in other parts of the world, including in the Middle East,¹³ as recognised by the Astana Declaration for a Nuclear-Free World adopted in 2011.¹⁴ During Foreign Minister Erlan Idrissov's recent tour of Southeast Asia in August - September, 2014, he reaffirmed Kazakhstan's support for the Southeast Asian nuclear weapons-free zone.¹⁵

CANWFZ is unique in several aspects. It was the first nuclear weapons free zone to include a former nuclear country, namely Kazakhstan; it was the first denuclearised zone in the Northern Hemisphere; and finally, CANWFZ was the first denuclearised zone bordering two nuclear states – China and Russia.¹⁶ Diplomatic activity has been intense. During 2012 - 2014, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan held more than 20 meetings and negotiations with representatives of the P5 and member states of the Treaty, in both bilateral and multilateral formats and on different levels.¹⁷

Another initiative promoting nuclear disarmament is the ATOM Project. ATOM – an acronym for "Abolish Testing, Our Mission" – is an international campaign initiated by Kazakhstan which aims to create awareness of the devastation caused by nuclear weapons testing.¹⁸ ATOM has today 95,336 supporters worldwide.¹⁹ Moreover, in 2012 Kazakhstan

⁹ Kazakhstan: Linchpin of Eurasia, pp. 67-68.

¹⁰ http://www.kazesp.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=204:nuclear-security-summit-2014-national-progress-report-kazakhstanresident-nazarbayev-of-kazakhstan-on-cooperation-in-the-sphere-of-nonproliferation-and-strengthening-nuclear-security&catid=1:noticias

¹¹ <http://www.nti.org/country-profiles/kazakhstan/>

¹² Erlan Idrissov, A New Step Forward to Greater and Regional Security, *Astana Times*, 13 May 2014, <http://www.astanatimes.com/2014/05/new-step-forward-greater-regional-global-security/>

¹³ <https://www.nss2014.com/en/nss-2014/countries-and-statements/kazakhstan>

¹⁴ <http://eurodialogue.org/Kazakhstan-stands-for-nuclear-free-world>

¹⁵ <http://www.astanatimes.com/2014/09/indonesia-fm-idrissov-promotes-dialogue-civilisations-bilateral-ties/>

¹⁶ <http://www.kazakhembus.com/page/contribution-to-international-security>

¹⁷

<http://www.eurodialogue.eu/A%20New%20Step%20Forward%20to%20Greater%20Regional%20and%20Global%20Security>

¹⁸ http://www.akorda.kz/en/page/page_remarks-by-president-nursultan-nazarbayev-at-the-international-conference-titled-%E2%80%9Cfrom-a-nuclear-test-ban-to-a-nuclear-weapon-free-world%E2%80%9D_1346905293

hosted the international conference “From a Nuclear Test Ban to a Nuclear Weapon-Free World”, which in the eyes of one observer was the closest to a “prototype of the global antinuclear parliamentary assembly” that the world has seen to date.²⁰

Work on nuclear security is equally extensive. Kazakhstan is a member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group since 2002 and in 2005 it joined the Krakow Proliferation Security Initiative, a global effort to stop WMD trafficking.²¹ A year later Kazakhstan founded the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism along with other countries, and in 2008 it was accepted into the Zangger Committee, which serves as the “faithful interpreter” of the NPT’s Article to harmonise nuclear export control policies.²² Kazakhstan, together with 27 other countries, is also a member of the G8 Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction, which has pledged to allocate \$20 billion over a decade towards the elimination and security of WMD installations in Russia and the post-Soviet space.

To oversee all issues related to nuclear security, including the control of nuclear materials and the strengthening of export, customs and border controls, Kazakhstan established a Commission on Non-Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction, which operates under the Office of the Kazakh President, in 2010.²³

The National Progress Report of the 2014 Nuclear Security Summit notes tangible progress achieved thus far. For example, Kazakhstan has strengthened legislation related to nuclear materials and radioactive waste; it is converting a research reactor from high enriched uranium to low enriched uranium and exploring the possibility of converting two more; it has equipped border checkpoints with radioactive materials control systems in partnership with the USA; it is establishing a nuclear forensics database with methods for defining the origin of nuclear materials; and a Regional Training Centre for accounting, control and physical protection of nuclear materials and facilities is in the development stage.²⁴

Kazakhstan is presently ranked 15th in the Nuclear Threat Initiative index on nuclear security, ahead of both Italy and Israel and shortly behind the USA and the United Kingdom.²⁵ It is presently negotiating with the IAEA to host the world’s first international low enriched uranium bank – a recognition of Kazakhstan’s achievements in non-proliferation and nuclear security. The bank would be run with the backing of the IAEA and international community, working to create an additional mechanism of ensuring the stability of global nuclear fuel cycle and, indirectly, of strengthening the nuclear non-proliferation regime.²⁶

¹⁹ <http://www.theatomproject.org/en/sign-the-petition/>

²⁰ http://www.akorda.kz/en/page/page_remarks-by-president-nursultan-nazarbayev-at-the-international-conference-titled-%E2%80%9Cfrom-a-nuclear-test-ban-to-a-nuclear-weapon-free-world%E2%80%9D_1346905293

²¹ <http://www.consul-kazakhstan.org.hk/news2.php?serial=179>

²² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, *Building a Nuclear Safe World: The Kazakh Way*, p. 200.

²³ http://www.kazesp.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=204:nuclear-security-summit-2014-national-progress-report-kazakhstanresident-nazarbayev-of-kazakhstan-on-cooperation-in-the-sphere-of-nonproliferation-and-strengthening-nuclear-security&catid=1:noticias

²⁴ <https://www.nss2014.com/sites/default/files/documents/kazakhstan.pdf>

²⁵ <http://ntiindex.org/data-results/interactive-map/>

²⁶ <http://www.iaea.org/OurWork/ST/NE/NEFW/Assurance-of-Supply/iaea-leu-bank.html>

Leadership has been key to realising these efforts. President Obama alluded to this at the 2010 Nuclear Security Summit in Washington, where he declared that “we could not have this summit without [President Nazarbayev’s] presence.”²⁷ The decision to disarm was an historical achievement which, to quote an article in *New Europe*, “few other countries have followed”.²⁸ Kazakhstan expects the signatories of the Budapest Memorandum, which gave security assurances to Kazakhstan, to live up to their promises should Kazakhstan’s sovereignty be threatened. Such mutual solidarity is the key to an alliance that is working towards global nuclear security.

Military Reform and Peacekeeping: From KAZBAT to KAZBRIG

Like the other newly independent members of the CIS, Kazakhstan was confronted with the unenviable task of creating modern military institutions from the ruins of the Soviet military-industrial complex. This proved to be complex, costly, and cumbersome, and Kazakhstan had difficulties sustaining adequate levels of defence spending during the first years of its Independence. From the late 1990s, however, Kazakhstan has steadily modernised the Armed Forces in lockstep with its rapid economic development. Kazakhstan’s partnerships with Russia and the West have been particularly valuable in this effort, and both entities have made their own mark in Kazakh military reform.

Kazakhstan’s military partnership with NATO has primarily focused on developing professional and better-equipped forces, both to ensure a high degree of interoperability with the alliance and to train Kazakh forces for international peacekeeping.²⁹ Peacekeeping exercises with the participation of Kazakh Defence Ministry units and NATO countries have been carried out since 1997.³⁰ In 2000 Kazakhstan created a peacekeeping battalion, KAZBAT, which from 2003 formed part of the USA’s Enhanced International Peacekeeping Cooperation (EIPC) program, involving the training of Kazakh military personnel by American Special Forces and NATO-sponsored Western language training. Turkish instructors were also assigned to KAZBAT.³¹

During 2003-2008, Kazakhstan deployed a platoon out of its KAZBAT to Iraq on a rotating basis, to assist with bomb disposal, the construction of fresh water facilities, and the provision of medical treatment. The Kazakh military engineers cleared and eliminated more than 4.5 million pieces of explosives and other military ordnance in Iraq. In December 2006, the battalion was formally expanded to brigade size and renamed KAZBRIG³², which has participated in Steppe Eagle, an ongoing military exercise project between the USA, UK and Kazakhstan.

²⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, *Building a Nuclear Safe World: The Kazakh Way*, p. 39.

²⁸ <http://www.neurope.eu/article/kazakhstan%E2%80%99s-contribution-global-security>

²⁹ <http://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/12816-kazakhstan-steppe-eagle-exercise-helps-sustain-nato-ties.html>

³⁰ http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_43627.htm?selectedLocale=en

³¹ <http://old.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/1809>

³² CACI Analyst <http://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/12816-kazakhstan-steppe-eagle-exercise-helps-sustain-nato-ties.html>

A trilateral project, the purpose of Steppe Eagle is to bring the training of Kazakh forces up to UN standards, enabling Kazakhstan to send peacekeeping troops on UN operations³³. The first of these exercises took place in 2003 as a drill involving the abovementioned Western countries and Kazakhstan, but have since expanded to include other European and Central Asian countries. The 2013 exercise in Kazakhstan, for example, included participants from Italy, Lithuania, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, the United Kingdom and the USA.³⁴

Since 2006 the training has been linked to the country's NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP) goals, and Kazakhstan also signed an Individual Partnership Action Plan with the alliance that year. In 2008 a NATO assessment team formally declared that KAZBRIG had achieved a level of NATO interoperability. To date, KAZBRIG is the only peacekeeping force in the region to attain such a level of interoperability with the Alliance³⁵. The next step is for the brigade to reach NATO Evaluation Level 2.³⁶

Further, in 2008 a 'Partnership for Peace' training centre (KAZCENT) was established in Kazakhstan with support from a range of international partners, including the United Kingdom, the USA and Germany. Being the first of its kind in Central Asia, the purpose of the centre is to train soldiers of the Armed Forces of Kazakhstan, NATO countries and its partners to participate in peacekeeping operations. The training centre has held several dozen courses since its founding, on topics such as English military terminology, military-civilian interaction, and NATO military staff procedures. Senior Kazakh officers also participate regularly in English-language training programs at the Royal College of Defence Studies and the Royal Military Academy in the United Kingdom.³⁷ In June 2009, Kazakhstan hosted NATO's third Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) Security Forum - the first such forum to be convened on post-Soviet territory and on the Asian continent.³⁸

The groundwork laid in such international cooperation led Kazakhstan's Parliament to pass a bill on 20th December 2013, approving the dispatch of 20 military servicemen to peacekeeping operations in the Cote d'Ivoire, Haiti, Liberia and Western Sahara (5 military observers will go to each country). This is the first UN mission in which Kazakhstan will participate with Observer status, the primary task of which will be to monitor developments in these areas and report to the UN. It will mark, to quote the Chairman of the Mazhilis' Committee on Foreign Affairs, "a new stage of cooperation between Kazakhstan and the UN".³⁹

In early September 2014, 20 qualified individuals were selected for this first UN peacekeeping mission after meticulous vetting. Kazakhstan's Defence Ministry has said it is considering sending combat troops of up to 150 individuals following a comprehensive evaluation of this first mission. The Kazakh Defence Ministry is also currently working to

³³ United Kingdom Government press release (2013) <https://www.gov.uk/government/world-location-news/british-military-assist-KAZBAT-with-steppe-eagle>

³⁴ <http://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/12816-kazakhstan-steppe-eagle-exercise-helps-sustain-nato-ties.html>

³⁵ The Jamestown Foundation, 'Eurasian Daily Monitor' (2012) http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=39828&cHash=eca07db663f1c38b9f1a49af7580588f#.U2IjFshwZMs

³⁶ <http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/silkroadpapers/1409Kazakhstan.pdf>

³⁷ <http://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/12816-kazakhstan-steppe-eagle-exercise-helps-sustain-nato-ties.html>

³⁸ <http://www.neurope.eu/article/kazakhstan%E2%80%99s-contribution-global-security>

³⁹ <http://www.astanatimes.com/2013/12/kazakh-military-join-un-peacekeeping-forces/>

draft a law on peacekeeping operations, allowing Kazakh troops to engage in combat situations.⁴⁰ Clearly, Kazakhstan's intention is to significantly enhance its contribution to the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operation, the Department of Political Affairs,⁴¹ the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), and the Peace Building Support Office (PBSO).⁴²

In addition to the country's NATO and UN engagements, Kazakhstan's armed forces maintain a robust relationship with Russia, with their respective defence establishments closely aligned on matters of doctrine, weapons, and training. Russia-Kazakh military cooperation takes place both bilaterally, through the CSTO's council, and through the CSTO's rapid reaction forces in which Kazakh military personnel have a significant presence. In August 2014, more than 3,000 personnel participated in the CSTO's "Interaction" exercises held in Kazakhstan.⁴³ As a member of the CSTO, Kazakhstan is eligible to purchase Russian military equipment at subsidised prices and they share joint air defence and other partnered units and missions.⁴⁴ In 2011, this cooperation intensified when Moscow pledged to transfer several S-300 air defence systems to Kazakhstan.⁴⁵

International Reconstruction Efforts and Development Aid: An Integral Part of Kazakhstan's Security Policy

Poverty and lack of opportunities are two key causes of instability in countries around the world. Kazakhstan's first few years of Independence were defined by such hardship and the transition from a planned economy to a market economy was fraught with difficulties. Kazakhstan had no national currency until 1993, inflation soared in the Ruble-zone, and the state had little capacity for providing basic public services. Kazakhstan overcame these difficult years, and between 2000 and 2010 it became the third fastest growing country in the world behind Qatar and China. In 2013, Kazakhstan's per capita GDP (PPP) amounted to \$14,391, just below that of such advanced countries as Turkey.⁴⁶

Kazakhstan's own experience has shown that security and development are two sides of the same coin. Security cannot be achieved without development and *vice versa*: Kazakhstan's economic development has enhanced security and material well-being, while security has created the necessary preconditions for further economic development and foreign investments. Development assistance is therefore an integral part of Kazakhstan's foreign policy and contribution to global security.

⁴⁰ http://en.tengrinews.kz/politics_sub/Kazakhstan-selects-20-people-to-join-UN-peacekeeping-missions-255956/

⁴¹ <http://www.kazembassy.hr/c/1066/1/EN/Why-Kazakhstan-Should-be-an-Elected-Member-of-the--United-Nations-Security-Council-for-2017-2018---The-Embassy-of-the-Republic-of-Kazakhstan-in-the-Republic-of-Croatia.wshtml>

⁴² <http://www.kazembassy.hr/c/1066/1/EN/Why-Kazakhstan-Should-be-an-Elected-Member-of-the--United-Nations-Security-Council-for-2017-2018---The-Embassy-of-the-Republic-of-Kazakhstan-in-the-Republic-of-Croatia.wshtml>

⁴³ <http://www.strategic-culture.org/pview/2014/08/18/csto-special-task-forces-launch-drills-in-kazakhstan.html>

⁴⁴ <http://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/12816-kazakhstan-steppe-eagle-exercise-helps-sustain-nato-ties.html>

⁴⁵ <http://www.globalsecuritynews.com/Russia-Peace-and-Conflict/Valvo-Giovanni-/Kazakhstan%E2%80%99s-contribution-to-a-Russian-missile-shield>

⁴⁶ <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2014/01/weodata/index.aspx>

Since 2006, Kazakhstan has pledged more than \$60 million in humanitarian aid – primarily to Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan but also elsewhere.⁴⁷ For example, in 2007-2008 the Governmental Action Plan on Assistance set aside \$3 million towards agriculture, school and hospital construction and road building in Afghanistan. From 2009 to 2011 Kazakhstan allocated \$5 million to support Afghanistan’s water supply, infrastructure development, and the delivery of grains and other commodities.⁴⁸ Among other important Kazakh projects sponsored in Afghanistan is the reconstruction of the Talukan-Kunduz-Shirkhan-Bandar trunk road to the north of the country.⁴⁹ Grain, flour, and food products have also been delivered to Afghanistan under the FAO’s and WFP’s procurement programs, the latter of which named Kazakhstan as one of the most important grain suppliers to Afghanistan in 2011.⁵⁰

In the sphere of education, Kazakhstan has budgeted \$50m to the Agreement on Cooperation in Education with the Afghan Government, which has provided university education for 1,000 Afghan citizens starting in 2010 and extending to 2019.⁵¹ The Kazakh government has donated a MI-171 airplane (to use for humanitarian cargo and rescue operations in Afghanistan), an IL-76 (for transporting humanitarian aid cargo from the United Arab Emirates to Afghanistan within the UN World Food Program), and other transport-related and infrastructural aid to Afghanistan.⁵²

Kazakhstan’s commitment to Afghanistan extends beyond humanitarian aid. In 2001, Kazakhstan made flight routes and landing fields available to UN-sanctioned Western-led military operations, and in 2013 Kazakhstan granted the British military a further northern airspace route for transportation⁵³. Kazakhstan has also been providing logistical support to the USA, Germany, France, and Spain bilaterally.⁵⁴ In particular, transit potential for NATO cargo has been greatly helped by the use of Kazakhstan’s Aktau port on the Caspian Sea.⁵⁵ In 2013 the British Prime Minister, David Cameron, visited Kazakhstan and highlighted the important role it has played in Afghanistan and as a regional ally, resulting in the signing of a bilateral Strategic Partnership.⁵⁶

Humanitarian and food assistance programs in the neighbouring states of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan deserve equal recognition. In 2012, for example, Kazakhstan delivered 80,000 litres of vegetable oil and 120 tons of wheat flour to Tajikistan, while two years earlier Kazakhstan extended 3,700 tons of diesel gas to support Kyrgyzstan’s agriculture and spring

⁴⁷ The United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “Kazakhstan”, Available at: <http://www.unocha.org/rocca/about-us/about-ocha-rocca/kazakhstan> (2014-06-03)

⁴⁸ Embassy of Kazakhstan to the United States, see: <http://www.kazakhembus.com/page/commitment-to-assist-afghanistan> (2014-06-03).

⁴⁹ <http://www.kazakhembus.com/article/main-points-of-president-nursultan-nazarbayevs-speech-at-the-istanbul-process-ministerial-co>

⁵⁰ World Food Program, “Regional Commitment to Afghanistan Critical,” November 14 2011, <http://www.wfp.org/content/regional-commitment-afghanistan-critical> (2014-06-03).

⁵¹ Kazakhstan Government <http://www.kazakhembus.com/page/commitment-to-assist-afghanistan>

⁵² The Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the United States, see: <http://www.kazakhembus.com/page/commitment-to-assist-afghanistan> (2014-06-03).

⁵³ United Kingdom Government <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/kazakhstan-visit-prime-ministers-press-conference-with-nursultan-nazarbayev>

⁵⁴ <http://www.kazakhembus.com/article/main-points-of-president-nursultan-nazarbayevs-speech-at-the-istanbul-process-ministerial-co>

⁵⁵ <http://www.kazakhembus.com/article/main-points-of-president-nursultan-nazarbayevs-speech-at-the-istanbul-process-ministerial-co>

⁵⁶ United Kingdom Government <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/kazakhstan-visit-prime-ministers-press-conference-with-nursultan-nazarbayev>

sowing, worth approximately \$1.93 million.⁵⁷ Such assistance is also visible at a global level. One could cite, for instance, the 5,000 tons of Kazakh food aid delivered to Turkey after its devastating earthquake in 2011, as well as similar donations to Serbia and other countries.⁵⁸

Kazakhstan is now working to create an agency for official development assistance, KazAID. In recognition of this major step, the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) has expressed the need to reinforce “Kazakhstan’s role of a regional leader in responding to emergencies and providing humanitarian aid to the region and worldwide.”⁵⁹ This regional leadership is not new. In 1996, for example, Almaty hosted an emergency summit of Central Asia and Russia, in reaction to an increasingly unstable situation in northern Afghanistan. This subsequently led the UN Security Council to pass resolution No. 1076 on Afghanistan, the first of its kind in the 1990s.⁶⁰

Furthermore, in the same decade Astana was instrumental in launching a UN Economic and Social Commission for Central Asia, which was renamed the United Nations Special Program for Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) in 1998. SPECA unites Azerbaijan, Afghanistan and the five Central Asian states, and was pioneering in its efforts to reintegrate Afghanistan with its northern neighbours.⁶¹ Kazakhstan firmly supports investments in regional infrastructure projects as well including, but not limited to, the "Western Europe - Western China" transit corridor, the "Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran" railway route and the USA’s New Silk Road initiative. Kazakhstan is also backing large regional energy projects such as the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline, CASA-1000 (an electricity project straddling Central and South Asia) and railways within and around Afghanistan.⁶²

Kazakhstan’s commitment to its neighbours has favoured regional cooperation and strengthened relations with all Central Asian countries, including Afghanistan. Strategic Partnerships have been signed with Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan’s contribution to Afghanistan’s reconstruction has reinforced the US-Kazakhstan Strategic Partnership. As noted by Assistant Secretary of State Nisha Biswal: “Afghanistan is an outstanding example of Kazakhstan’s growing regional engagement and leadership.”⁶³

Putting Kazakhstan’s Credibility to Work: Mediation and Confidence Building

Kazakhstan’s determination to facilitate confidence building in Asia and Europe spans more than two decades. CICA, as noted earlier, is at the core of these efforts. The first CICA

⁵⁷ “Kazakhstan Provides Humanitarian Aid to Tajikistan,” *Asia Plus*, June 16 2012. Available at: <http://news.tj/en/news/kazakhstan-provides-humanitarian-aid-tajikistan-0> (2014-06-03); and Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan to Greece, see http://www.kazembassy.gr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=63&Itemid=42&lang=en(2014-06-03).

⁵⁸ The Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the United States, February 17 2012, see: <http://kazworld.info/?p=19785> (2014-06-03).

⁵⁹ The United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “Kazakhstan”, Available at: <http://www.unocha.org/rocca/about-us/about-ocha-rocca/kazakhstan> (2014-06-03).

⁶⁰ <http://www.kazakhembus.com/article/main-points-of-president-nursultan-nazarbayevs-speech-at-the-istanbul-process-ministerial-co>

⁶¹ <http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/0604Kabul.pdf>

⁶² <http://www.kazakhembus.com/article/main-points-of-president-nursultan-nazarbayevs-speech-at-the-istanbul-process-ministerial-co>

⁶³ <http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/texttrans/2014/04/20140402297297.html#ixzz3D5TbyhLb>

summit was held in Almaty in 2002, and adopted the Almaty Act, the Charter of the CICA. The signatories of the Almaty Act declared their determination to form an indivisible area of security in Asia, where states peacefully coexist, and their peoples live in peace, freedom and prosperity, “confident that peace, security and development complement, sustain and reinforce each other.”⁶⁴ CICA summits have been held every four years since, while Foreign Ministers of member states meet biannually.

Next to this initiative, Kazakhstan has convened inter-faith dialogues such as the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, held every three years since 2003. The initiative has strengthened Kazakhstan’s relations with countries of all different faiths, and has given participating nations a platform for engagement with states of other religions. Israel is one example. In the words of a recent assessment by the Begin-Sadat Center, “Relations with Kazakhstan allow Israel to circumvent its hostile near abroad [*sic*], but also provide a bridge for Israel to re-engage with the wider Islamic world, particularly through the more neutral terrain of inclusive, interfaith dialogue that Astana has prominently championed.”⁶⁵

Kazakhstan’s has spearheaded a similar agenda within the framework of the OSCE. During its OSCE chairmanship in 2010, Kazakhstan hosted a conference on “Tolerance and Non-Discrimination”, proposed the establishment of a Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Centre in Central Asia, and worked intensely towards the creation of a new OSCE High Commission for Inter-Ethnic and Inter-Religious Dialogue. Kazakhstan’s role as a bridge between East and West, and between the world’s major religions, has already served to mend relations between civilisations. It is for these reasons that Kazakhstan has been entrusted with tasks of international mediation.

In 2013 the P5 countries and Iran held two crucial meetings in Almaty concerning the Iranian nuclear programme. The talks have been widely recognised as among the most successful thus far, and former U.S. Senator Sam Nunn advocated further engagement of Kazakhstan’s expertise in this and related international problems. In his words, “Kazakhstan’s diplomacy could be brought to bear in places like North Korea and Iran... I don’t think Kazakhstan’s leadership has been given enough recognition by our country and the G8, nor do I think we’ve used the power of their example nearly to the degree we could.”⁶⁶

Likewise, Kazakhstan’s OSCE chairmanship focused extensively on the settlement of frozen conflicts in the South Caucasus and the reinvigoration of the OSCE Minsk group.⁶⁷ Most recently, Kazakhstan was asked by the European Commission to host the next talks on the conflict in Ukraine, following those held in Minsk in late August 2014.⁶⁸ France has placed similar value on Kazakhstan’s neutrality, which last year compelled Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius to suggest including Kazakhstan in “a number of negotiation processes touching upon such topical issues, as the future of Afghanistan, Iran’s nuclear program, as well as the situation in Syria.”⁶⁹

⁶⁴ http://www.s-cica.org/page.php?page_id=7&

⁶⁵ <http://besacenter.org/mideast-security-and-policy-studies/israel-kazakhstan-reassessing-state-bilateral-relations/>

⁶⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, *Building a Nuclear Safe World: The Kazakh Way*, p. 62.

⁶⁷ Nursultan Nazarbayev, “The OSCE and Global Security,” Press Release <http://kazakhstanun.org/press-releases/the-osce-and-global-security.html>

⁶⁸ <http://www.kyivpost.com/content/politics/kazakhstan-offers-to-host-customs-union-eu-raine-meeting-if-required-361222.html>

⁶⁹ <http://en.trend.az/business/finance/2125501.html>

The country's role in deliberations over Afghanistan's future is equally noteworthy. Kazakhstan has taken the lead on the Istanbul Process, launched in November 2011, which resolves to build greater confidence, trust and cooperation within Afghanistan and the wider region. On April 26th 2013, Kazakhstan hosted the 3rd Ministerial Conference of the Istanbul Process, gathering more than 50 delegations led by the Foreign Ministers of the participating states and others. The group endorsed six implementation plans of confidence building measures, consolidating the regional countries' efforts to promote trust and result-oriented cooperation on Afghanistan.⁷⁰

Finally, Kazakhstan has been instrumental in defusing tensions over water in Central Asia. Tajikistan's construction of a dam at Rogun, which will result in reduced water to downstream countries including Uzbekistan, has been particularly contentious. UN officials have expressed their support for Kazakh initiatives "to dampen the tensions", including President Nazarbayev's suggestion of a Central Asian water energy consortium. In March, 2013, Kazakh Foreign Minister Erlan Idrissov visited Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to help settle their differences over Rogun, urging both countries to respect the international norm that upstream and downstream countries should have equal management rights.⁷¹

Assembling Allies: Kazakhstan's Lesson

Many post-colonial states, including 19th century USA, tend to be inward-looking at first. The consolidation of sovereignty and the protection of territorial integrity typically and understandably take precedence over other, loftier international goals. Kazakhstan has been protective of its newly won sovereignty too but, uniquely, this has not precluded it from playing a prominent role on the world stage.

Kazakhstan gave up its nuclear weapons but this was, in hindsight, merely the first step in a much greater mission to achieve a nuclear weapons-free world. Likewise, Kazakhstan's international inter-faith dialogues are a reflection of its own harmonious domestic polity writ large. Kazakhstan has not closed its border to the rest of Central Asia and Afghanistan and "thrown away the key", but has instead opened up to them by extending aid and scholarships. It is indicative of Kazakhstan's global thinking that it has placed such importance on the professional development of KAZBRIG, the international peacekeeping battalion, among its many competing military priorities.

Kazakhstan's voluntary nuclear disarmament, development aid, peacekeeping, and mediation efforts have gained it many friends. Many of Kazakhstan's allies were integral in helping Kazakhstan through its first years of Independence, and several of the Strategic Partnerships formed have their basis in this formative period. For example, the process surrounding the dismantlement of Kazakhstan's nuclear weapons paved the way for the strong strategic partnerships that Kazakhstan has enjoyed with Russia and the USA ever since. Kazakhstan's renouncement of nuclear weapons gained it further allies in Southeast Asia, Africa, and Latin America working for the same cause. In a similar vein, Russia along with the USA, Turkey, the United Kingdom and other NATO members have played key roles in Kazakhstan's military reform, which have earned them respect.

⁷⁰ <http://www.kazakhembus.com/article/almaty-ministerial-conference-of-the-istanbul-process-on-afghanistan>

⁷¹ <http://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/12721-explaining-kazakhstans-meditation-mission.html>

Kazakhstan's rapid economic progress owes much to its openness to the outside world and the diversification of the country's trade and foreign investment. Neighbouring China has been a key partner in this endeavour, and a major component of Kazakhstan's economic strategy since Independence. The Strategic Partnership established with China is a symbol of this work, resulting in vital eastward trade arteries and a major oil pipeline (Atasu-Alashankou) from Kazakhstan to China. All of this has resulted in a long list of allies matched by few other nations.

Who would have thought in 1992 that Kazakhstan would aspire to become the world's safety valve for uranium within a little more than two decades? Or that it would succeed where no other country had before – in maintaining strategic partnerships with China, Russia, and the USA alike? Or with both Israel and Iran for that matter? Developing countries looking for a model for their security policies could turn to the secular and prospering Kazakhstan as a source of inspiration. Global security would benefit from more allies with a similar commitment to the cause.

ABOUT THE ECFA

Central Asia is a region larger than Western Europe and contains five countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Blessed with some of the richest and most diverse resources anywhere in the world, over the last twenty years the region has shown its commitment to become a reliable, long-term partner of the West.

Kazakhstan is Central Asia's engine for economic growth, and the Government of Kazakhstan has taken the lead in developing relations with the European Union. In its commitment to the process of deepening political and economic relations with the European Union, Kazakhstan is participating in the establishment of the **Eurasian Council on Foreign Affairs (ECFA)**, which is a new and dynamic think tank working at the heart of the European Union.

The first Honorary President of the Eurasian Council on Foreign Affairs is H.E. Erlan Idrissov, Foreign Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

The Eurasian Council on Foreign Affairs has been modelled on the Council on Foreign Relations in the US, the United Kingdom's Royal Institute of International Affairs at Chatham House and the EU's own European Council on Foreign Relations. It is envisaged that over time, the Eurasian Council on Foreign Affairs will become a valuable and independent source of high-quality research, publications and information that will keep Europe fully abreast of the fast-changing development of the Central Asian region. This is a work-in-progress, and it will require dedication and commitment from the ECFA's team of researchers and writers.

The grant for the establishment costs and first-year programme of the ECFA has been provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The ECFA and its staff are grateful for this generous donation and thank the MFA. It is envisaged that, as with similar institutions in other countries, governments in the region as well as corporate sponsors and private individuals will over the longer-term join the funding base of the ECFA.

A list of upcoming publications can be [found here](#). The formal launch of the ECFA took place in November 2014, attended by distinguished members of its [Advisory Council](#). The Director, Rauan Kenzhekhanuly, will provide regular news updates on the region in his [Blog](#), and you can [subscribe here](#) to receive all news updates as well as the ECFA's regular newsletters and bulletins.

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