

KAZAKH-U.S. MILITARY-POLITICAL COOPERATION IN THE CONTEXT OF U.S. GEOPOLITICAL INTERESTS IN CENTRAL ASIA

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As is known, Central Asia is an important strategic element of the U.S.'s foreign policy. It is interesting both from the energy perspective and in the context of Washington's expanding geopolitical influence in the region.

Today, the U.S.'s key objectives in Central Asia are as follows:

- *First, establishment of dominant positions in Central Asia.* The Washington administration is striving to assert its dominance in Central Asia by playing on the contradictions between the countries in the region, on the one hand, and Russia and China, on the other. U.S. interests would be best served by the following scenario: The maximum possible weakening of Russia and maintaining a balance of forces between the Central Asian states without any one of them playing a dominant role. This is a long-term priority. Military-political rapprochement with one or several Central Asian countries is essential for the implementation of U.S. plans.
- *Second, broader access to Central Asia's energy resources* is one of the most powerful incentives for the U.S.'s foreign policy. In this context, U.S. military presence in Afghanistan increases the chance

of the successful implementation of U.S. lobbied south- and west-bound pipeline projects in Central Asia.

- *Third, advancement of Western democratic ideals and values* is an important U.S. priority in Central Asia, as, incidentally, in other parts of the world. It is an open secret that the U.S.'s apparently democratic slogans oftentimes serve as a cover for rather pragmatic goals, specifically, increasing other countries' loyalty to U.S. foreign policy that often does not conform to the rules of international law and looks openly aggressive. This interest is usually secured by financing various nongovernmental organizations and media outlets on the part of American private and state foundations. Consider: On 1 March, 2006, a House subcommittee endorsed a Central Asian Democracy Act, under which \$188 million was earmarked for support of democracy in all five Central Asian states in 2006 and following years.¹
- *Thus, U.S. interests in Central Asia can be subdivided into three main groups—*

¹ See: "Kongressmeny podderzhali 'Akt o demokrati v Tsentral'noi Azii,'" available at [<http://sngnews.ru/archive/2006/03/01/2409.html>].

military-political, economic, and ideological, which are achieved by expanding contacts with the Central Asian states in all spheres. Military-political cooperation is one of the main priority areas for the United States, which is due to the

increasing role that the fight against international terrorism plays in Washington's foreign policy. As a result, this aspect of U.S. relations with other countries has a most profound impact on the transformation of global political processes.

Astana and Washington: Motives

Today, military-political cooperation is an important aspect of bilateral Kazakh-U.S. relations. It is noteworthy that compared with other Central Asian countries, Kazakhstan plays a leading role in military-political cooperation with the United States. What is the reason for such a high level of relations between the two countries in this area? It seems that there are several objective reasons.

- *First*, the character of Kazakhstan's foreign policy. Ever since it gained independence, Kazakhstan has been following a balanced foreign policy course, as befits a young, peace-loving state. Officially, this course is known as "multi-vector policy." The multi-vector policy of good-neighborly relations with all states has been a major factor in Kazakhstan's peaceful development for the past 15 years after the breakup of the Soviet Union. As a result, today, Kazakhstan is the only state in Central Asia that has managed to settle territorial issues with its neighbors along the entire perimeter of its borders. As far as the U.S. is concerned, here Kazakhstan adheres to the same principles, promoting partnership and friendly relations. These relations are always based on mutual interest. Furthermore, Kazakhstan stays out of any regional military-political associations or blocs designed to resist the "West" or the "East," which also is conducive to the successful development of bilateral relations. Astana's commitment to the multi-vector policy was reaffirmed by Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbaev on 11 January, 2007 in Astana. Thus, presenting the country's new foreign minister, Marat Tazhin, he said in part: "We are a state that is at the center of the Eurasian continent. Our goal is a multi-vector policy, taking into account our country's interests, both economic and political."²
- *Second*, Kazakhstan is the most stable state in Central Asia, both economically and politically. Until recently, Uzbekistan had been the U.S.'s principal ally in the region, but the Andijan events (May 2005) changed the situation drastically. From Washington's closest ally, Uzbekistan is turning into little short of a rogue state in the Western eyes, the most authoritarian regime in Central Asia. The apparently good relationship was irreparably spoiled by the U.S. criticism of I. Karimov's regime following the ruthless suppression of the popular uprising in Andijan and blatant violations of human rights. After the Andijan events, the relations between Uzbekistan and the United States took a turn for the worse. As a result, Tashkent made a U-turn in its foreign policy, setting the course for a rapprochement with Moscow, leading, in particular, to the signing of the Treaty on Allied Relations between Uzbekistan and Russia in November 2005. The treaty marked the start of the Uz-

² "Kazakhstan sokhranit mnogovektornost' vo vneshnei politike," 11 January, 2007, available at [http://www.interfax.kz/?lang=rus&int_id=10&function=view&news_id=1740].

bek-Russian rapprochement and Uzbekistan's involvement in Russia-initiated integration processes in Central Asia. In this context, following yet another geopolitical realignment of forces in Central Asia, Kazakhstan has become the most acceptable partner to the United States in the region.

- *Third*, Kazakhstan's geographic location at the center of Eurasia. The United States knows that stability in Kazakhstan is crucial to stability in the entire Central Asian region. In this connection, a stable Kazakhstan is an important partner in fighting drug trafficking and international terrorism. On the other hand, the United States is interested in developing relations with Kazakhstan in the military-political area to prevent the strengthening of regional powers, in particular Russia and China, in Central Asia. The development of relations with Kazakhstan, on a par with Russia and China, will enable the United States to maintain its political presence in the region and as a result, influence the subsequent course of political and economic processes in Central Asia. For its part, Kazakhstan gives high priority to developing its relations with the United States alongside those with Russia and China, because Astana is not interested to see an excessive strengthening of any one country in the region, which is bound to disturb the geopolitical balance of forces and possibly increase Central Asia's potential for conflict.

The aforementioned reasons are major factors in the development of Kazakh-U.S. relations in the military-political sphere. It is also important to note here that the development of relations in this area responds to the interests of both the United States and Kazakhstan, while the deepening of military-political cooperation between the two countries cannot be seen as the strengthening of U.S. influence on Kazakhstan.

Kazakhstan and the United States started giving higher priority to their military-political cooperation, as well as cooperation in the security area, almost as soon as bilateral contacts were established. At the same time, it is important to note that the U.S.'s declaration of a global war on international terrorism was a major stimulating factor in advancing relations between the two countries in this sphere. In the wake of the 9/11 events, Kazakhstan strongly condemned the attacks and supported the U.S. antiterrorist operation in Afghanistan. In particular, the Kazakhstan Foreign Ministry, in a statement dated 11 September, 2001, said that "Kazakhstan decisively condemns the terrorist and barbarous acts that were perpetrated in the largest U.S. cities, leading to a heavy loss of life, and expresses its readiness to provide any possible assistance and support to the United States of America in overcoming the effects of the tragedy, as well as its readiness for further joint measures to counter terrorism in all of its manifestations and practices."³ By way of support for the U.S. antiterrorist operation in Afghanistan, Kazakhstan provided an air corridor for aircraft within the framework of Operation Enduring Freedom.

In 2003, Kazakhstan became the only Central Asian state to send a military contingent to Iraq as part of an international coalition. A Kazakhstan engineer battalion (Kazbat) is performing a peacekeeping mission in Iraq as part of a coalition force. Kazbat has since neutralized or destroyed more than 4 million explosive devices. Kazakhstan's assistance in Iraq is especially valuable in light of the recent escalation of inter-confessional violence and the country's ongoing political instability.

Thus, Kazakhstan's support for the U.S.-led global war on terror had a substantial impact on the further development of Kazakh-U.S. military-political cooperation.

³ *Zaiavlenie Ministerstva inostrannykh del Respubliki Kazakhstan v sviazi s teraktami v SShA 11 sentiabria 2001 g.*, Official website of the Kazakhstan Foreign Ministry, available at [<http://www.mfa.kz/rus/PHP/article.php?article=1&selected=44>].

Military-Technical Cooperation

The signing of a five-year military cooperation plan (in 2003) became the most important event in Kazakh-U.S. military-political relations. It is noteworthy that Kazakhstan became the only post-Soviet country to have signed such a document with the United States, which also points to expanding contacts in the military sphere. The five-year plan laid the groundwork for military cooperation between Kazakhstan and the United States. It encompasses such areas of interaction as countering international terror, peacekeeping operations, strengthening the capability of the Kazakhstan Air Force, development of military infrastructure in the Caspian region, development of naval forces, creation of a military institute of foreign languages, and so on.

Under the five-year military cooperation plan, the U.S. launched two programs in Kazakhstan—Foreign Military Financing and International Military Education and Training.

Apart from financial support, this plan provides a sound foundation for military-technical cooperation. The practical effectiveness of this document is demonstrated by the intensification of bilateral contacts in this area in the past few years.

In accordance with the plan, the U.S. is going to deliver to Kazakhstan Huey-2 helicopters to perform counter-terrorism missions in the Caspian region and C-130 military transport aircraft, as well as a warship with the displacement of up to 1,000 tons for the Kazakhstan Navy and Hummer off-road vehicles in three (combat, medevac, and transport) modifications for the Kazakhstan Air Mobile Forces and for the Kazbat peacekeeping battalion. Thus, on 1 July, 2005, Kazakhstan received 27 Hummer vehicles.

In November 2005, a technical service center, Asia Hummer, was opened in Kazakhstan. The center provides technical maintenance and repair services for Hummer vehicles. Then, from 31 January through 2 February, 2006, S. Thomas, AM General Corp. international marketing director, visited Almaty to discuss prospects for Kazakh-U.S. military-technical cooperation. In March 2006, a team of Hummer service and maintenance specialists from the Arizona Army National Guard arrived in Kazakhstan to conduct practical classes with personnel at the Asia Hummer personnel and Kazbat mechanists. Kazakhstan personnel training is part of a multi-level training program for specialists servicing and operating Hummer vehicles.

On the whole, Kazakh-U.S. military-technical cooperation is designed to bring Kazakhstan peacekeeping units in line with NATO standards for joint antiterror operations in Central Asia.

Kazakh-U.S. Military-Political Cooperation within NATO

Partnership within NATO is an important component of Kazakhstan's military-political cooperation with the U.S. The character of this cooperation is acquiring a special dynamism. Today, meetings at the level of defense ministers and deputy defense ministers on various aspects of military-political cooperation are becoming a regular feature of interaction with NATO.

Kazakhstan's cooperation with NATO proceeds within the framework of the Partnership for Peace program and through participation in the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC).

Kazakhstan's participation in the EAPC is designed to maintain dialog with NATO member countries on key international security issues. Kazakhstan is also involved in the EAPC's Planning

and Review Process program (PARP) that aims to assist and facilitate Kazakhstan military reform, specifically in planning and personnel training for peacekeeping operations, as well as to ensure prompt and effective interaction between the Kazakhstan Armed Forces and the U.S.

There are three stages of cooperation under the PARP program, whose ultimate objective is for PARP member countries to conduct joint operations with NATO. Stage 1 is concerned with the general training of NATO partner countries' armed forces, including language training and the study of principles underlying NATO military and staff activities. Stage 2 covers practical aspects of interaction with NATO armed forces in the interest of conducting joint military exercises and peacekeeping operations. Stage 3 provides for direct training and preparation of combat formations of NATO partner countries for participation in joint peacekeeping operations beyond the areas of NATO's direct responsibility. In this connection, Kazakhstan's interest in this program was related to the fact that the PARP is an initial stage of adaptation to NATO military standards.⁴

Participation in the Partnership for Peace program enables Kazakhstan to interact with NATO along the following lines:

- civil emergency response;
- crisis management;
- democratic control of the armed forces and defense structures;
- defense policy and strategy; and
- military exercises and military training.

The U.S.'s interest in involving post-Soviet states in cooperation within the NATO framework consists in establishing and expanding military-political contacts. From a geopolitical perspective, getting the Central Asian states involved in cooperation with North Atlantic structures enables the U.S. to create an alternative in the region to the initiatives of Moscow and Beijing that also seek to intensify military-political cooperation with countries in the region and strengthen their own geostrategic positions in Central Asia. Furthermore, the U.S. is seriously concerned not only by Russia's or China's unilateral actions in Central Asia but also by joint actions of the two regional powers within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The U.S. regards this cooperation between Russia and China, as well as the involvement of the Central Asian countries in regional integration programs, as formation of an anti-Western "Eastern alliance" designed to offer effective collective resistance to the expansion of U.S. influence in Central Asia. In this context, the Partnership for Peace program, launched on U.S. initiative following the disintegration of the U.S.S.R., performs the function of a counterweight to Russian and Chinese influence that these two countries are attempting to expand both unilaterally and by enhancing the role of regional organizations in the security sphere.

Therefore, today the development of Kazakh-U.S. relations within the NATO framework is indicative in so far as Washington is attempting to strengthen its influence in Central Asia through various initiatives. A case in point is the intensification of Kazakh-U.S. contacts within NATO over the past few years.

Thus, in 2003 and 2004, a number of high ranking NATO officials visited Kazakhstan, in particular, Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs Mr. Günther Altenburg, NATO Assistant Secretary General for Public Diplomacy Jean Fournet, director of NATO Euro-Atlantic Integration & Partnership Directorate Jaroslaw Skonieczka, director of NATO Defense Policy and Force Planning Directorate Frank Boland, Assistant to the NATO International Staff Head Maj. Gen. Federico Janiz,

⁴ See: *NATO i Tsentral'naia Azia: regional'naia i natsional'naia bezopasnost' i strategicheskoe partnertsvo*, Almaty, 2003, p. 165.

and others. During these visits, prospects for Kazakhstan-NATO partnership were discussed and the results of cooperation assessed.

In October 2004, NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer met with Kazakhstan President N. Nazarbaev in Almaty. The two sides agreed to pool their efforts in fighting terrorism, extremism, drug trafficking, and arms smuggling, thus laying the foundation for joint activities in the future as part of the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) between NATO and Kazakhstan.

There are active inter-parliamentary contacts between Kazakhstan and NATO. Thus, in 2004, the Kazakhstan parliament received the status of a permanent observer at the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, which facilitates the development of Kazakhstan's political dialog with the NATO member countries. Kazakhstan parliamentary delegations regularly participate in NATO PA sessions. In March 2005, Kazakhstan was visited by a NATO PA delegation, led by Michael Clapham, chairman of the Committee on the Civil Dimension of Security.

There have been a number of bilateral meetings at the level of defense ministers and deputy defense ministers. In January 2005, Kazakhstan Deputy Defense Minister B. Sembinov visited the NATO headquarters in Brussels where he had meetings with NATO leadership, including Ambassador Robert Simmons, NATO Secretary General's Special Representative for the Caucasus and Central Asia, and heads of U.S. diplomatic missions. In the city of Oberammergau, the Kazakhstan official made a report on Kazakhstan's proposals and initiatives designed to improve the Partnership for Peace program at an annual partnership planning symposium at the NATO center, presenting Kazakhstan's view of prospects for NATO's cooperation with the Central Asian states. B. Sembinov also assessed the results of the work and set new tasks to the Kazakhstan Military Mission to NATO on further cooperation within the NATO+1 format.⁵ In September 2005, B. Sembinov made another visit to NATO headquarters.

Return visits by R. Simmons to Kazakhstan took place in March and October 2005. In the course of his October visit, R. Simmons met with Kazakhstan Defense Minister M. Altyntaev, discussing international and regional security, the status and prospects for Kazakhstan's cooperation with NATO in the defense sphere, and the outlook for reform and modernization of the Kazakhstan Armed Forces, among other things. The NATO delegation also visited a training center of the Kazakhstan Air-Mobile Forces in Iliysk, the base of Kazbat, the Kazakhstan peacekeeping battalion, an important element of the PARP program within the framework of the Partnership for Peace program.

In December 2005, K. Tokaev, former Kazakhstan foreign minister, visited NATO HQ in Brussels. During his visit, K. Tokaev participated in a session of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council at the level of foreign ministers where he spoke on behalf of the Central Asian states.

In January 2006, a Kazakhstan delegation, led by Kazakhstan Deputy Defense Minister B. Sembinov, visited NATO HQ in Brussels. During the visit, a session of the NATO-Kazakhstan steering committee took place under the chairmanship of R. Simmons. The main outcome of the visit was consideration and final preparation of the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP), which was adopted on 31 January, 2006. It is essential to note that the IPAP takes cooperation between Kazakhstan and NATO to a qualitatively new level. The main goal of this plan is cooperation in regional and international security. The document defines priority areas of Kazakhstan's interaction with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, such as strengthening regional and international security, reform and modernization of the Kazakhstan Armed Forces, improving interoperability between the Kazakhstan Armed Forces and the NATO forces, and advancement of partnership in military education and training, science, fighting international terror, and countering drug trafficking.

⁵ See the official website of the Republic of Kazakhstan Defense Ministry [www.mod.kz].

As can be seen, Kazakh-U.S. cooperation within the framework of various NATO programs is as dynamic as bilateral military-political cooperation. It is noteworthy that the trend toward intensification of such contacts is advantageous for both sides in so far as it steadily upgrades the level of mutual trust between Kazakhstan and the United States.

Cooperation in Military Education and Training

Within the framework of Kazakh-U.S. military-political cooperation, the sides also attach considerable attention to advancing their contacts in the sphere of military education and training. Today, Kazakh-U.S. cooperation in military education and training has the following key priorities: exchange of experience between training establishments in the two countries, training programs to improve the skills of military personnel, joint training exercises and methodological activities, and improving the qualifications of military faculty in the two countries.

To meet these priorities, a number of programs to train Kazakhstan military personnel at leading U.S. military colleges were launched.

Thus, since 2002, Kazakhstan military servicemen have been trained at such U.S. establishments as National Defense University, the Command and Staff College, the West Point Military Academy, and others. These training programs are funded by the U.S. under the International Military Education and Training program. By now, over 250 Kazakhstan servicemen have received training under the IMET program in the United States.

In 2005, with assistance from the U.S., the Military Institute of Foreign Languages was established in Almaty. The institute provides foreign language training not only to Kazakhstan military personnel, but also to personnel from other Central Asian states.

Joint Exercises

Joint exercises are a good indication of the level of military cooperation between Kazakhstan and the United States. It is important to note that such military exercises with the participation of Kazakhstan and U.S. military units are conducted on a regular basis.

Since 2003, Steppe Eagle military exercises have taken place in Kazakhstan every year. Their main goal is to achieve interoperability between Kazakhstan and NATO armed forces. Thus, in September 2005, an international military exercise, Steppe Eagle 2005, was conducted at the Iliysk training center with the participation of Kazakhstan Air-Mobile Forces and Kazbat, on the one hand, and NATO units from the U.K., on the other. The United States only participated in the exercise in observer capacity.

Last September, the Steppe Eagle 2006 exercise took place, in which U.S. military units participated for the first time, together with U.K. and Kazakhstan servicemen.

Alongside exercises within the NATO framework, there are also exercises solely with the participation of Kazakhstan and U.S. military units. For example, in March 2005, the Balance-Zhardem 2005 exercise was conducted in Kazakhstan. The main priority in such exercises is to enhance the quality of interaction between special Kazakhstan and U.S. units in countering the threat of international terrorism.

Generally, the principal tasks of such exercises are as follows:

- improving teamwork and coordination in performing specific missions and achieving interoperability;
- upgrading fieldcraft and language skills of multinational force personnel;
- improving the practical skills of commanders and staffs in exercising command and control of troops and in organizing interaction between units of the Kazakhstan Armed Forces and the armed forces of other states.⁶

To the U.S., the importance of military exercises with post-Soviet countries is based on the following assumptions. It is possible that in the future, should regional conflicts erupt in Central Asia or in the Caucasus, the United States plans to play an active role in resolving them with NATO mechanisms. These plans can be fulfilled by involving NATO partner countries in peacekeeping operations. By participating in such military exercises, the U.S. receives an opportunity to rehearse the conduct of joint military operations with Central Asian countries, thus competing with Russian initiatives within the CSTO framework, which in turn responds to Washington's interests in Central Asia.

Outlook for Kazakh-U.S. Military-Political Cooperation

During the recent period of military-political cooperation between Kazakhstan and the United States, a foundation was laid for furthering and expanding partnership in this area. In particular, the two sides, signed a number of bilateral treaties and a five-year military cooperation plan, subject to prolongation. In the past few years, there have been regular meetings between the Kazakhstan and U.S. defense ministers and deputy defense ministers. There is sufficient evidence to suggest that Kazakh-U.S. relations in this sphere have acquired new dynamism.

It is also important to underline that Kazakh-U.S. cooperation as a whole is picking up pace as the United States is showing an increasing interest in Kazakhstan as a regional leader. In the military-political aspect of relations, this manifests itself in that the U.S. side is attempting to give many of the bilateral cooperation projects a regional status. For example, it is planned in the future to grant the Military Institute of Foreign Languages the status of a regional institute. The Asia Hummer technical service center is also expected to receive such a status. Given that U.S. officials are increasingly referring to Kazakhstan as a regional leader,⁷ it can be assumed that such projects within the framework of Kazakh-U.S. cooperation are designed to expand the U.S.'s contacts also with other Central Asian countries via Kazakhstan.

Also, following Kazakhstan's abandonment of nuclear weapons and implementation of initiatives to create a nuclear-free area in Central Asia, the United States recognized Kazakhstan as a leader in nuclear nonproliferation. Thus, according to R. Gottemoeller, former deputy administrator, Office of Defense Nuclear Nonproliferation, Kazakhstan is a leader in WMD nonproliferation.⁸ Kazakhstan's nonproliferation initiatives were also highly appraised by former U.S. Secretary of Defense D. Rumsfeld. In the course of his visit to Kazakhstan in February 2006, he underlined the importance of Ka-

⁶ See the official website of the Republic of Kazakhstan Defense Ministry [www.mod.kz].

⁷ See: *U.S. Policy in Central Asia: Balancing Priorities. Statement of Richard A. Boucher, Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs to the House International Relations Committee*, Official website of the U.S. Department of State, available at [<http://www.state.gov/p/sca/rls/rm/2006/65292.htm>].

⁸ See: "Sovremennye kazakhstansko-amerikanskije otnoshenia: mnenie eksperta SShA," available at [<http://www.inform.kz/newsite/index.php?lang=rus&select=archive§ion=kazinform&y=2006&m=06&d=17#155031>].

zakhstan's negotiations with the Central Asian countries on the creation of a nuclear free zone and ensuring regional security.

As for problems of bilateral military-political cooperation, it is important to note that problems here are, rather, latent and indirect. For example, from every indication, the United States, by strengthening its military-political cooperation with Kazakhstan, is striving to weaken Russia's military presence in Central Asia since from a geopolitical perspective, Kazakhstan is a key state in ensuring regional security. In this context, it is important for Washington to develop relations with Astana to enhance its own political role in Central Asia, while at the same time weakening the positions of Russia and China. This U.S. striving has a negative impact on the development of both Russian-U.S. relations and U.S.-Chinese relations, which in turn aggravates the geopolitical situation in the Central Asian region.

Furthermore, Kazakhstan's excessive rapprochement with the United States in the sphere of military-political cooperation could provoke an undesirable reaction from Russia, which could in turn impair the development of relations between Astana and Moscow. For example, R. Cheney's visit to Kazakhstan in May 2006 could have produced a negative effect. The fact is that before coming to Astana, R. Cheney had visited Vilnius where he had made a number of critical comments with respect to Russia's democratic development and its human rights record. That statement clearly had a negative impact on Russian-U.S. bilateral relations. At the same time, the U.S. vice president's subsequent visit to Kazakhstan and the signing of a number of bilateral cooperation agreements in the energy and defense sphere could arouse Moscow's concerns that Astana is building a rapprochement with the United States at the expense of Russia. As for Kazakhstan, such negative trends, which can enhance the region's potential for conflict, are not in its political interests since Astana, in relations with its partners, follows a balanced policy without emphasizing rapprochement with one power at the expense of relations with other states. Thus, commenting on Kazakh-U.S. relations, Marat Tazhin, former secretary of the Security Council of the Republic of Kazakhstan and currently Kazakhstan foreign minister, stressed that "military-technical cooperation between Kazakhstan and U.S. special services does not eliminate our cooperation with Russia. Kazakhstan is a reliable strategic partner of the United States, Russia and China alike."⁹

Kazakhstan's commitment to a multi-vector policy, a policy of maintaining a balance of forces in Central Asia is also evident from a recent state of the nation address by Kazakhstan President N. Nazarbaev on the strategy of making Kazakhstan one of the 50 Most Competitive Countries of the World. The Kazakhstan head of state noted in part: "We should strengthen cooperation with the Central Asian states in standing up to these challenges, including through participation in joint exercises within the framework of the CSTO and the SCO, as well as in joint antiterrorist operations and initiatives with NATO."¹⁰ Therefore, it is clear that Kazakhstan applies the same principles with respect to security and military-political cooperation, including in its relations with the United States, Russia and China. It appears that this course is crucial to Kazakhstan's successes in upholding and advancing the regional security system.

Another problem that is mentioned by some experts is the sheer fact that Kazakhstan cooperates with the United States in the military-political sphere. In particular, there is a view that Kazakh-U.S. military-technical cooperation can lead to the deployment of U.S. military units in Kazakhstan.¹¹ It is difficult, however, to agree with this view for the following reasons:

⁹ "My ne sobiraemsia družhit' s kem-to protiv kogo-to," available at [<http://www.apn.kz/opinions/article6220.htm>].

¹⁰ *Poslanie Prezidenta RK N.A. Nazarbaeva "Strategia vkhozhdeniia Kazakhstana v chislo 50-ti naibolee konkurent-osposobnykh stran mira: priority i puti ikh realizatsii,"* Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Almaty, 2006, p. 29.

¹¹ See: O. Sidorov, "Oboronny Sovet vedomstv SShA i RK: komu chto vygodno," available at [<http://www.gazeta.kz/art.asp?aid=647561>].

- First, the deployment of U.S. military units or military bases (or those of any other state) in Kazakhstan is impossible because this does not correspond to Kazakhstan's interests or its multi-vector policy. As mentioned earlier, Kazakhstan is striving to cooperate in all spheres, including the military-political sphere, with all states to an equal degree, which enables it to maintain a geopolitical balance of forces in Central Asia, and facilitate the achievement of regional stability as a whole.
- Second, in the course of the July 2005 Summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, in Astana, the SCO member countries openly stated their position with respect to U.S. military presence in Central Asia, which was dictated by the common interests of the organization's members. The outcome of the SCO 2005 Summit showed the international community in general and the United States in particular that the Central Asian countries do not need U.S. military bases if they are not obviously necessary. Today, the only exception to that is Kyrgyzstan where a U.S. air base is deployed at Manas airport. Yet it seems that Kyrgyz-U.S. military cooperation is dominated—at least in so far as Bishkek is concerned—by financial rather than political considerations.

Summing up the existing problems and achievements of Kazakh-U.S. military cooperation, there is good reason to say that today the number of achievements far outweighs the number of problems. Military contacts between Washington and Astana are developing in a positive key, as is evident from statements made by the countries' leaders, among other things. Thus, during N. Nazarbaev's visit to Washington in late September 2006, the sides signed a joint Kazakh-U.S. statement highlighting the principal areas of bilateral cooperation between Kazakhstan and the United States, also reiterating their commitment to further advancing regional and global security. George W. Bush and N. Nazarbaev reaffirmed their adherence to their common vision of stability, prosperity and democratic reform in Central Asia and outside by increasing dynamic and diverse partnership and facilitating the achievement of common global and regional goals. In particular, the statement said that the two sides will strive to deepen their cooperation in strengthening regional security, economic integration, and the reconstruction of Afghanistan and Iraq.

Special priority is given to cooperation in fighting terrorism. In particular, the statement noted that Kazakhstan and the United States are reliable partners in the international war on terror; the United States is grateful to Kazakhstan for its immutable commitment to strengthening stability in Afghanistan and Iraq; [we] are committed to further strengthening the excellent level of cooperation that has already been achieved between our countries and reaffirm our resolve to strengthen our close cooperation in the fight against international terrorism and trafficking in drugs, human beings, and dangerous weapons.¹²

This document, therefore, clearly reflects the sides' striving to continue productive military cooperation in which both sides pursue their own interests—consolidation of geopolitical positions in Central Asia and access to the region's energy resources (United States) and access to advanced military technology and the possibility of actively participating in regional geopolitical processes (Kazakhstan). Kazakhstan is Washington's sole stable strategic partner in Central Asia as the republic's role in U.S. foreign policy strategy is steadily growing. Nevertheless, it seems premature and unjustified to make hasty conclusions about an abrupt tilt in the republic's foreign policy course toward the West. The specifics and dynamics of Central Asian geopolitics impose certain conditions on the countries in the region with respect to building their foreign policy, in which there is no room for any "biases" or "zigzags."

¹² See: *Kazakhstansko-amerikanskoe sovместnoe zaiavlenie, Washington, 29 sentiabria 2006*, available at [http://www.akorda.kz/page.php?page_id=91&lang=1&article_id=1614].