

KAZAKHSTAN AND NATO: EVALUATION OF COOPERATION PROSPECTS

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Introduction

For eighteen years now, relations between the Republic of Kazakhstan and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization have been steadily progressing and are characterized by positive

dynamics. Kazakhstan views strategic partnership with NATO as an opportunity to integrate into the international security systems in order to reinforce national security by making use of the enormous

military, technical, and economic potential that this organization and its members possess. In its cooperation with NATO, Kazakhstan is mainly looking to establish mutually advantageous and equal partnership that meets the republic's present-day priorities in the military and defense sphere, in transforming and modernizing its armed forces, in counteracting the threats posed by terrorism and drug trafficking, in border security, science, and the environment.

Bilateral Kazakhstan-NATO cooperation is characterized by developed institutional mechanisms of partnership and a broad contractual-legal cooperation base. Kazakhstan is rendering NATO comprehensive assistance in carrying out the peace-keeping operation in Afghanistan, and subdivisions of the Kazakhstan armed forces are also participating in the post-conflict restoration of Iraq. Joint operational-tactical military exercises are held every year. In addition, Kazakhstan's official policy regarding the development of cooperation with the North Atlantic Alliance has always been consistent: membership in the Alliance is not an officially declared goal of Kazakh foreign policy. And, as domestic politicians point out, Kazakhstan does not have any plans to join NATO in the

future.¹ Nor does the republic have any intentions of deploying the Alliance countries' military facilities or armed forces in its territory, as certain other countries of the region have done.

On the other hand, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, NATO diplomacy has been keeping its sights on Kazakhstan, and the Organization is making insistent attempts to draw the republic into the orbit of Western influence by enlarging the format of partner programs. As we know, in the 1990s, NATO placed the main emphasis of its Central Asian strategy on partnership with Uzbekistan, but in so doing it did not downplay Kazakhstan's role in any way. The thing is that Western strategists have always regarded Uzbekistan as an important element in the regional dimension, while Kazakhstan plays a principal role in implementing the Eurasian strategy as a whole.²

¹ See: M.M. Tazhin, "Natsional'naya bezopasnost'—eto bezopasnost' cheloveka," *Ekonomicheskie strategii—Tsentral'naya Azia*, No. 1, 2007, pp. 6-10.

² See: M.T. Laumulin, "Interesy Zapada v Tsentral'noi Azii v novykh geopoliticheskikh usloviakh," in: *Sotrudnichestvo stran Tsentral'noi Azii i SShA po obespecheniiu bezopasnosti v regione: materialy mezhdunarodnoi konferentsii*, ed. by M. Ashimbaev, J. Mennuti, Almaty, 2005, p. 69.

NATO and Kazakhstan: Cooperation Stimuli

There are many reasons for NATO's interest in Kazakhstan.

- *First*, Kazakhstan, as a country in the center of Eurasia, is in a favorable geographical location between Russia, China, and the Islamic world, which is also important from the viewpoint of developing transnational transportation routes and military-strategic activity.
- *Second*, Kazakhstan has immense natural resource potential, including large supplies of fuel and energy resources, in which the world community is extremely interested.
- *Third*, Kazakhstan is the most economically and politically developed state in Central Asia and so acts as an axis of sustainable development of the entire region.
- *Fourth*, Kazakhstan conducts an active and stable foreign policy, while its multivectoral policy is aimed at diverse integration initiatives.
- *Fifth*, Kazakhstan, being an enterprising partner state in the CSTO and SCO and developing close partnership with NATO, is helping to enhance regional security.

After the Andijan events, cooperation between NATO and Uzbekistan abruptly declined, and the Alliance placed its main focus on Kazakhstan as a key partner. Of course, this step in Western

geopolitics was not only of demonstrative significance for the Uzbek partners, it also showed an increase in the Alliance countries' regional ambitions aimed at fortifying their positions throughout Eurasia. Kazakhstan is the only state in Central Asia that actively strives to have an impact on transformation of the post-Soviet expanse through its competent participation in various regional organizations. There is a general consensus that if Kazakhstan participates in a particular regional undertaking the success of the latter is guaranteed. So NATO is carrying out a whole set of political-diplomatic measures aimed at fortifying its position in Central Asia and intensifying bilateral partnership with Kazakhstan, transferring it to a strategic level and enlarging its format as much as possible.

Today Kazakhstan occupies a central place in the Alliance's regional strategy as a key Central Asian partner. The Organization's leadership highly evaluates the country's efforts to ensure regional security and Astana's support in fighting terrorism in Afghanistan. It also appreciates Kazakhstan's consistent initiatives to develop a contractual-legal basis of cooperation with the Alliance and build constructive relations. But partnership potential can only go so far: by intensifying cooperation with the West, Kazakhstan is not casting aspersions on its military-political obligations to Russia and the CSTO, nor is it downplaying the role of its relations with other states. Experts from the Institute for War and Peace Reporting think that "Kazakhstan is skillfully maneuvering between the interests of Russia and NATO in the region."³ Some experts think that "Kazakhstan could well play the role of a bridge between the Alliance and Russia with respect to smoothing out relations between them. For instance, it could find a positive solution to possible cooperation between NATO and the CSTO. Whatever the case, cooperation with the North Atlantic Alliance will provide Kazakhstan with greater opportunities to raise the level of its influence on international relations."⁴

However, despite all the available opportunities, visible advantages, and obvious achievements, there are also certain nuances in Kazakhstan's relations with the Alliance that require a more pragmatic approach on the part of official Astana. Based on national security interests and the current international reality, in the foreseeable future "Kazakhstan has the very important foreign political task of drawing up a sufficiently flexible policy that will be conducive to expanding cooperation with NATO and to fully performing its obligations within the SCO and CSTO, as well as its bilateral relations with Russia."⁵

This results from the fact that close military-political cooperation between Kazakhstan and NATO, despite all of its obvious advantages, also gives rise to many problems that are not only geopolitical and ideological, but also affect such issues as goals, combat proficiency, and military-technical equipping of the Kazakh armed forces. It also entails the possibility of being drawn into various conflicts through participation in peacekeeping operations under the Alliance's auspices. On the other hand, there is also a high likelihood of NATO's image, which, as world political practice shows, is severely criticized, being projected onto Kazakhstan's foreign policy prestige, which is undesirable for the republic's international policy, particularly in its Islamic dimension. Today, these problems are progressing latently, but they have already been designated and, for external reasons that Astana has no control over, could well become a serious destabilizing factor in Kazakhstan's security and geopolitical situation.

Nor does the Republic of Kazakhstan's current Military Doctrine provide answers to this foreign policy dilemma. Indeed, it seems to be aggravating the problems associated with the multivectoral nature of military relations and obligations. This can largely be seen in a comparative analysis of the changes in the perception of NATO as Kazakhstan's international military partner and its role in

³ "Perspektivy sotrudnichestva Kazakhkstana s NATO," *IWPR*, 19 March, 2007.

⁴ A. Chebotarev, "Shire krug. K itogam rizhskogo sammita NATO," *Ekspert Kazakhstan*, 18 December, 2006.

⁵ M.T. Laumulin, *Tsentrāl'naia Azia v sarubezhnoi politologii i mirovoi geopolitike*, Vol. II: *Vneshniaia politika i strategia SShA na sovremennom etape i Tsentrāl'naia Azia*, Kazakhstan Institute of Strategic Studies under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Almaty, 2006, p. 178.

the country's defense-building reflected in the contents of the RK's Military Doctrines of 2000 and 2007. In particular, in the 2000 document, cooperation with the Alliance is designated as "expanding cooperation with NATO in the military sphere under the Partnership for Peace program" in the subsection International Military and Military-Technical Cooperation of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Strengthening bilateral cooperation with the U.S., the Turkish Republic, and the FRG, which are active members of the North Atlantic Alliance, can be identified as an indirect aspect of Kazakhstan's interest in cooperation with NATO. Whereby partnership with NATO is designated rather vaguely and, on the whole, technically proceeds from the multivectoral nature of foreign policy.

The 2007 document significantly raises NATO's role in military-defense policy and designates clear outlines for cooperation and tasks aimed at expanding interaction with the Alliance in specific areas. In particular, whereas NATO was essentially mentioned only once in the previous version of the doctrine, in the current doctrine, relations with the Alliance are noted in six specific paragraphs and tasks relating to three sections of the document, in particular, The Military-Political Foundations of the Republic of Kazakhstan's Security, The Military-Economic and Military-Technical Foundations for Ensuring the Republic of Kazakhstan's Security, and International-Military Cooperation of the Republic of Kazakhstan.⁶

As we know, the current doctrine was prepared with the active involvement of experts from Russia and the NATO countries, which, in fact, is not difficult to see from the text of the document itself, since the military policy of Russia and NATO is ideologically different. NATO's strong ideological and conceptual influence on the approach to ensuring Kazakhstan's military security is also obvious, which is confirmed in particular by the appearance of the term "institution of partnership" in the text of the military doctrine, whereby in sections that discuss relations not only with the Alliance, but also with Russia and China.

An analysis of the history of the development of Kazakhstan-NATO cooperation will make it possible to identify the reasons for such a significant change in perception of the Alliance and enlargement of its role not only in international military cooperation, but also in the country's defense-building as a whole.

A retrospective view of the establishment of interrelations between the Republic of Kazakhstan and NATO identifies several specific stages of progressive and logical development. Each of the stages has its own features and significance:

- **from 1991 to 1994**—beginning of bilateral cooperation and definition of its goals;
- **from 1994 to 2001**—identification of interests, expansion of contacts, and a search for optimal forms of partnership;
- **from 2001 to 2006**—significant activation, intensification, and expansion of military-political cooperation;
- **from 2006 to the present**—development of a special format of strategic partnership and enforcement of Kazakhstan's special role in NATO's regional strategy.

At the time the Military Doctrine of 2000 was drawn up, relations between Kazakhstan and NATO were at the second stage of their development, which was characterized by identification of interests, expansion of contacts, and a search for optimal forms of partnership. It stands to reason that despite the preliminary work that had been carried out by 2000 in bilateral cooperation, NATO was not regarded as a priority military-political partner and was only mentioned in the doctrine for multivectoral pragmatic considerations. Between 2001 and 2006, for reasons we are already familiar with, mil-

⁶ See: "Voennaia doktrina Respubliki Kazakhstan. Utverzhdena Ukazom Prezidenta Respubliki Kazakhstan ot 21 marta 2007 goda No. 299," *Kazhstanskaia pravda*, 7 April, 2007.

itary-political cooperation between Kazakhstan and NATO underwent a significant boost, intensification, and expansion, and the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) signed in 2006 underpinned the special format of strategic partnership. This fact was also reflected in the Republic of Kazakhstan's Military Doctrine of 2007.

As the main military document noted, Kazakhstan, under the Individual Partnership Action Plan and Partnership for Peace program, is cooperating with NATO to prevent military conflicts and strengthen international security and stability. One of the main tasks in ensuring military security in peace times is equipping the Armed Forces and other forces and military formations with the latest types of weapons and military and special hardware, whereby in keeping with NATO standards. A gradual transfer of certain components of the military-defense system to high-tech types of weapons and military hardware that meet the world's best analogues and NATO standards is one of the main vectors of ensuring Kazakhstan's military security in both the military-economic and military-technical respects. International military and military-technical cooperation presumes "intensifying cooperation with the United States with respect to the technical modernization of the Armed Forces, transfers of military technology, personnel training, and improvement of the military infrastructure in the interests of ensuring military security in the region, participation in joint exercises, and exchange of experience in planning, holding, and comprehensive support of antiterrorist operations and peacekeeping operations under NATO's supervision, as well as in establishing regional centers within the framework of the Partnership for Peace program and training liaison officers."⁷

Main Cooperation Vectors between NATO and Kazakhstan

In keeping with the role NATO is designated in the doctrine, Kazakhstan's cooperation with the North Atlantic Alliance is multilevel in nature and implemented in different formats and within the framework of different programs. Kazakhstan cooperates with NATO under the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program (1994), the Planning and Review Process (2002), the Operational Capabilities Concept (2004), and the Individual Partnership Action Plan (2006). Military-defense issues and a whole series of political, humanitarian, educational, and other areas are part of the cooperation vector. Both a general and a detailed program of practical cooperation between Kazakhstan and NATO have been envisaged in the Individual Partnership Action Plan, whereby the country is the fourth CIS country after Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia, and the first in Central Asia to take part in this cooperation format.

Kazakhstan defines its participation in the PfP program through an annual Partnership Work Program, choosing measures that help to achieve the goals designated in the IPAP, which, in turn, is clarified and signed by the sides for two years. Today the Council of Euro-Atlantic Partnership (CEAP) and the PfP are giving Kazakhstan the opportunity to hold a political dialog and coordinate cooperation in a large number of areas, both military and humanitarian-scientific, including security and cooperation issues, peacekeeping operations, military reform, fighting terrorism, arms control, destroying antipersonnel mine supplies and other ammunition, small arms and other types of weapons, prevention of emergencies, cooperation in science and environmental protection, education, and much more.

⁷ Ibidem.

The Planning and Review Process (PARP) forms the basis of Kazakhstan-NATO cooperation in areas relating to the military-defense complex. The main areas of cooperation include raising the country's defense capacity, military reform, and reform of the security sector as a whole. Within the framework of military reform, there are plans to raise the Kazakhstan armed forces to a new qualitative level and turn them into a reliable tool for ensuring the country's military security. The reform is also aimed at creating a compact and mobile army with a high level of combat proficiency, developed rapid reaction forces, and special forces trained in anti-partisan, mountain, and desert warfare tactics.

In addition to military-defense aspects, cooperation between Kazakhstan and NATO also includes political tasks, such as participation in NATO's corresponding measures to discuss stabilization of the situation in Central Asia and exchange opinions on arms control and on informing the Alliance and PfP program participating states about Kazakhstan's stance on various international issues and regional security problems, including the implementation of its own international initiatives under the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA).⁸ Kazakhstan is actively supporting a political dialog with the Alliance, which includes regular visits to the republic of expert groups and senior officials in different areas of the PfP program. Kazakhstan was one of the initiators of the establishment of a CEAP subdivision, within the framework of which the leaders of antiterrorist departments could meet on a regular basis to exchange information and experience and engage in joint decision-making to coordinate activity in areas that are of common interest.

At present, important areas of bilateral military cooperation are training Kazakhstan commanding and staff officers (courses, seminars, exercises within the framework of NATO/CEAP) aimed at ensuring the proper level of interaction with colleagues from the NATO partner states when carrying out joint peacekeeping and other operations; study and comparative analysis of the latest Western types of military hardware, especially means of communication and command and control, as well as airspace control complexes; and the possibility of rendering Kazakhstan direct military-technical assistance, both using NATO's consolidated resources and the resources of the Alliance partner states.

Kazakhstan's participation in the CEAP and PfP offers a good opportunity to become integrated into the global security system and participate directly, without intermediaries, in international military-political cooperation. In this respect, joint work is continuing to establish a peacekeeping battalion capable of functioning in joint operations with NATO partner states. Peacekeeping is very important for advancing Kazakhstan's military-political position and interests in international affairs, and it also boosts the country's prestige on the international arena. In particular, Kazakhstan has provided a special battalion from the airborne forces capable at short notice of joining peacekeeping operations under NATO's aegis and based on the U.N. Security Council's special mandate. At present, the subdivisions of the Kazakhstan peacekeeping contingent have already participated in several military-tactical exercises along with the forces of the Alliance states.

The U.S. greatly assisted in creating and promoting the professional development of Kazbrig's peacekeeping capabilities. This is confirmed in particular by the fact that the battalion occupied a key place in the agreement on military cooperation and further support of this subdivision signed by the U.S. and Kazakhstan in September 2003. Washington regards these contacts as one of its priority foreign policy tasks in the region. Undeniable support of the U.S.-led participation in the region's affairs is Kazakhstan's bilateral programs with Turkey and Great Britain. Despite the obvious success of Kazbrig, further systemic support and international assistance are required in order to achieve this sub-

⁸ [www.s-cica.org].

division's interoperability with the NATO forces. The range of this assistance could be expanded to include France and Germany: the former has signed a bilateral agreement with Kazakhstan on military cooperation; the latter believes that relations should be developed with the republic in the security field. The establishment of a new regional peacekeeping subdivision based on Kazbrig using Kazakhstan's capabilities and experience was one of the mechanisms that helped the Alliance to participate in reinforcing security in Central Asia. That is, Kazbrig has shown how successful military cooperation between the Central Asian countries and the NATO military machinery can be. There were essentially plans to use Kazbrig and, on a broader basis, Kazakhstan to attach the region as extensively as possible to the North Atlantic Alliance and the West as a whole.⁹ In turn, Kazakhstan regards peacekeeping activity as an important component of its policy to strengthen collective and national security and as one of the main tools of early identification and prevention by political means of military crises and conflicts that arise.

Kazakhstan carries out training and exercises on its territory under PfP, and also takes active part in any measures conducted by other states. Kazakhstan and the NATO partner states are taking steps to organize a regional PfP learning center and the republic is continuing to interact with NATO countries in improving the military training method. Participation in the Partnership Action Plan against Terrorism (PAP-T) presumes an exchange of intelligence and analytical preliminary work with NATO and improvement of national capabilities necessary for engaging in antiterrorist activity along the entire perimeter of the state borders.

In 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, and 2009, Kazakhstan held Steppe Eagle antiterrorist exercises on its territory, which have become a sort of tradition in bilateral relations and promoted an increase in the interoperability of Kazbrig and the NATO country forces. At the end of the exercises, the Kazakh subdivisions were certified by NATO for possible peacekeeping deployment. On the whole, military cooperation with NATO is oriented toward forming new types of armed forces that function proficiently and use the latest types of weapons and combat operation tactics in Kazakhstan, as well as those capable of rapidly solving various tasks in national and international security.

By offering their experience in military operations, the NATO countries are helping to relay the results of the democratic and institutional reforms going on in Kazakhstan to the defense and security sector through consultations with the Kazakhstan defense department. Based on its partnership with NATO, Kazakhstan is continuing to develop conceptual frameworks for reform of the security and defense sector and advance the main reform projects in the RK Ministry of Defense. In particular, Kazakhstan has accepted the goals of the Partnership Action Plan on the building of defense institutions, which is helping, in particular, to create a system of efficient judicial supervision and corresponding administration mechanisms for different state structures in defense and security.

The republic's participation in the PfP Planning and Review Process has been helping to incorporate the Alliance's military standards into Kazakhstan's military sphere since 2002, as well as raise the interoperability of the Kazakhstan armed forces when interacting with the forces of the NATO countries. At present, the main accent of this initiative is placed on raising the capabilities of the air-mobile and naval forces. Cooperation is progressing steadily on a large military project aimed at developing Kazakhstan's naval fleet in the Caspian Sea to raise it to the latest standards and make it defense proficient. Strategic documents are also being drawn up for the naval forces and, at the same time, questions regarding the training of Kazakhstan naval servicemen in keeping with standards of the Alliance countries are being discussed.

⁹ See: M. Laumulin, "Strategicheskie aspekty otnosheniy Kazakhstana s Zapadom: SSha, NATO," in: *Kazakhstan v sovremennoy mire: realii i perspektivy*, ed. by B. Sultanov, Kazakhstan Institute of Strategic Studies under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Almaty, 2008, p. 156.

Cooperation in NATO information programs is being actively developed. In so doing, the ideological and propaganda sector, in particular increasing access to information and raising the awareness of Kazakhstan society about NATO as an organization and about the advantages of Kazakhstan-NATO partnership, is one of the key areas in the Alliance's strategy toward Kazakhstan. With NATO's participation, seminars, conferences, and fact-finding missions to the organization's headquarters in Brussels are being systematically held. In 2007, NATO and Kazakhstan held a joint seminar for training Kazakhstan employees in the media and public awareness. In order to raise its influence in the republic's information sphere, the Alliance has opened a NATO Center of Information and Documentation and PfP Regional Center in the republic, and several NATO depository libraries are being created in Almaty and Astana. The Security Forum of the Council of Euro-Atlantic Partnership held in Astana in the summer of 2009 can also be regarded as another attempt to intensify the political dialog with Kazakhstan. This forum was the first to be held in the post-Soviet expanse and the fact that it was held in Kazakhstan confirms that NATO views Astana as a serious partner in resolving regional security problems, which almost all the Alliance's speakers talked about at the forum. For the same purpose, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly also held a Rose-Roth seminar, an interparliamentary dialog on urgent issues of Euro-Atlantic security. On the other hand, the increase in political contacts is very logical if we keep in mind that Kazakhstan is the only country in Central Asia with which NATO is establishing relations under the Individual Partnership Action Plan.

On the whole, interaction with NATO within the framework of the partnership programs has made it possible for Kazakhstan:

- *First, to institutionally consolidate its mechanisms of international cooperation in the military-defense sphere.* The only NATO Information and Documentation Center in the region has been created in Kazakhstan (2004), a NATO Representative Office has been opened (2005), and international Steppe Eagle exercises are held every year. More than 10 officers are serving at NATO headquarters. An agreement has been reached with the defense ministries of the U.S., Great Britain, and other NATO states on the establishment of several regional centers: peacekeeping with a strong engineering component; language training; and training of liaison officers. Instructors from the U.S. and Great Britain have already trained 24 Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Tajik liaison officers.
- *Second, to ensure, for the first time, Kazakhstan's participation in international peacekeeping operations.* Training of Kazbrig servicemen in compliance with the Operational Capabilities Concept has made it possible to reach a good level of interoperability with the Alliance's subdivisions and obtain practical results in Iraq where Kazbrig was the only subdivision from Central Asia that successfully carried out the combat mission. The contingent destroyed more than four million units of explosives, military medics treated more than 500 Iraqi civilians injured in terrorist acts, and bomb technicians trained more than 200 Iraqis and servicemen of the international coalition.¹⁰

An analysis of NATO's activity in the region and level of interaction with a particular Central Asian country makes it possible to single out Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan as the active nucleus of the Alliance's strategy in the region, while Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are "spare players" for NATO. It can be seen from the table that NATO has managed to achieve more significant results in political and non-military activity than in the military-defense sphere. And although the Alliance is making every effort to draw Central Asia into the orbit of its active military influence, the military-defense sphere, despite all the achievements, is the most limited for NATO in cooperation

¹⁰ According to the data of the RK Ministry of Defense, available at [www.mod.kz].

Comparative Analysis of the Levels and Mechanisms of NATO's Current Partnership with Kazakhstan and the Central Asian States

Programs, initiatives, and spheres of bilateral cooperation	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan	Turkmenistan	Uzbekistan
Council of Euro-Atlantic Partnership (CEAP)	+	+	+	+	+
Partnership for Peace (PfP)	+	+	+	+	+
Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP)	+	-	-	-	-
Individual Partnership Plan (IPP)	+	+	+	+	+
Planning and Review Process (PARP)	+	+	-	-	-
Partnership Action Plan against Terrorism (PAP-T)	+	-	-	-	-
Reform of the defense sector	+	+	+	-	+
Military education	+	+	+	-	+
Joint military-tactical exercises	+	?	?	-	-
Formation of peacekeeping forces interoperable with the NATO forces	+*	+	+	-	-
Participation in NATO operations	+**	-	-	-	-
Deployment of NATO countries' armed forces in the state's territory	-	+	+	-	-***
Emergency civilian planning	+	+	+	+	+
Science in the name of peace	+	+	+	+	+
Virtual Silk Road	+	+	+	+	+
Political dialog and democratic reforms	+	+	-	-	?
Public awareness	+	+	+	-	-
Membership in NATO as the state's officially declared goal	-	-	-	-	-
Invitation to begin talks on membership in NATO	-	-	-	-	-

* Kazakhstan is the only state in the region that has created a permanent peacekeeping sub-division Kazbrig that is entirely interoperable with the armed forces of the NATO countries.

** Until the fall of 2008, Kazakhstan participated in operations on post-conflict settlement in Iraq.

*** Until 2005, armed forces of the Alliance countries were located in the territory of Uzbekistan.

with the region's countries. This is primarily dictated by the interests of the Central Asian countries themselves, as well as by the active efforts of other regional power centers, particularly Russia. All of this again shows the differences and similarities in NATO's relations with Kazakhstan and the Central Asian states. It is obvious that the difference in formats of bilateral relations is generated by the difference in the role of each of the Central Asian states in NATO's regional strategy and, correspondingly, by the different goals and interests the Alliance is pursuing in each of these countries.

As a key partner of the Alliance in the region, but mainly following its own interests, Kazakhstan is rendering comprehensive assistance in carrying out both the antiterrorist operation of the U.S. and Alliance countries in Afghanistan, and the peacekeeping activity of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) under NATO's aegis and settlement of the post-conflict situation. In 2001, Kazakhstan consented to the Alliance countries transporting cargo by aircraft over its territory for rear support of the Afghan operation, and gave its permission for this aircraft to land at the Shymkent aerodrome in emergencies. Now Kazakhstan and NATO are still cooperating in land transit of non-military cargo for the ISAF active in Afghanistan.

The efficiency of Kazakhstan-NATO cooperation can be evaluated in the context of the statements by the Alliance's leaders to the effect that the Republic of Kazakhstan is a key NATO partner in Central Asia. In so doing, NATO recognizes the country's leader status in the region, as well as the results the republic has achieved in enhancing democracy and the economy. In this respect, Kazakhstan's role in the Alliance's Central Asian strategy cannot be overestimated, since today it is NATO's only stable bastion in Central Asia. By taking into account Kazakhstan's national interests in modernizing the military complex and our republic's balanced policy aimed at drawing closer to the Alliance, NATO is able to retain its position, albeit limited, in the region.

In so doing, at present it is obvious that the sides are striving to continue productive military cooperation in which both of them are pursuing their own specific interests: the U.S. and NATO—geopolitical and military reinforcement in Central Asia and access to the region's energy resources, and Kazakhstan—access to advanced military technology and the possibility of taking active part in the regional geopolitical processes, as well as establishing a certain balance of power in the region. The results of the events of recent years show that Kazakhstan is Washington's and Brussels' only stable strategic partner in Central Asia, which indicates the rise in the republic's role in Western geopolitics. But drawing hasty conclusions about a possible sharp turn in the republic's foreign policy toward the West appear to be premature. 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."¹¹

Cooperation between NATO and Kazakhstan in Ensuring Security of the Central Asian Region

It is clear that the diplomatic war going on between the U.S. and NATO and Russia and China to establish special relations with Kazakhstan is continuing and each side is trying to take the lead by

¹¹ See: M. Nurgaliev, "Kazakh-U.S. Military-Political Cooperation in the Context of U.S. Geopolitical Interests in Central Asia," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 2 (44), 2007, p. 61.

drawing the republic into the activity of the CSTO, SCO, and NATO. All the same, even with the positive official rhetoric and all manner of diplomatic curtsies in Kazakhstan's direction, *Central Asia's main problem, which is the existence of an efficient and balanced regional security system, has still not been resolved.*

President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbaev notes that "consolidation and expansion of international cooperation in meeting the challenges and threats to security presume a multilateral approach. In this respect, Kazakhstan is continuing and will continue to reinforce cooperation with the Central Asian states to oppose these challenges of the present day, including by participating in joint exercises within the framework of the CSTO and SCO, as well as joint antiterrorist initiatives and operations with NATO."¹² Kazakhstan's official documents and the statements of its head of state clearly place the emphasis on developing the republic's military-political cooperation. In so doing, the republic also wants to show a good example for the other countries of the region.

It appears that Kazakhstan's active participation in the CSTO and NATO programs will make it possible to create the necessary system of checks and balances in regional geopolitics, which, on the whole, is in keeping with the interests of all the Central Asian countries. On the other hand, the SCO's active policy, in particular its Chinese component, prevents bipolar confrontation from being established along the lines of the CSTO-NATO and forces the players to look for constructive ways to resolve the cooperation problems in Central Asia.

And it is obvious that *balanced cooperation between the Central Asian republics and the CSTO and SCO, on the one hand, and NATO, on the other, is a strategically optimal and rational way to ensure stability at both the national and regional levels.* Tough competition among the CSTO, SCO, and NATO could have an extremely negative effect on the region's states, which might give rise to the following: decreased control; aggravated challenges and threats to the region's security; acute imbalance of geopolitical forces and increased contradictions among the Central Asian countries; lower rates of their economic development and investment appeal; and disorientation and crisis in the foreign policy of the region's states.

In so doing, *in order to maintain stability in Kazakhstan and the other Central Asian states, the above-mentioned structures need to form a clear strategy of action in cooperation, as well as ensure that tough competition does not arise among them.* For example, *Kazakhstan, as a state that rationally maintains an equal balance in international military cooperation, can act as an initiator for creating a constructive dialog platform of consultations and cooperation among these structures, which will make it possible to avoid a crisis in the region.* Further development of the situation will most likely be aimed at finding a balance between the level of integration of the Central Asian states into the international and regional security structures and preservation of their independence in decision-making on international issues keeping in mind national interests.

Scenarios for the Development of Bilateral Cooperation

In order to carry out a comprehensive and detailed study of Kazakhstan's partnership with NATO, it is expedient to compile a SWOT analysis for examining the strengths and weaknesses of Kazakhstan-

¹² N. Nazarbaev, *Strategiia vkhozhdenia Kazakhstana v chislo 50-ti naibolee konkurentosposobnykh stran mira. Kazakhstan na poroge novogo ryvka vpered v svoem razviti: poslanie Prezidenta narodu Kazakhstana*, 1 March, 2006, available at [<http://www.akorda.kz>].

NATO cooperation, as well as identify the latent opportunities and challenges in the current format of bilateral cooperation. The results of the SWOT analysis can be presented as follows.

Strengths:

- Observing multivectoral principles in Kazakhstan's international military cooperation.
- Lowering dependence on politics and possible pressure from natural neighbors and the large regional power centers, Russia and China.
- Ensuring efficient implementation of Kazakhstan's national security strategy through cooperation with NATO.
- Improving the armed forces command and control system and creating new types of forces, for example, the country's naval forces.
- Modernizing the armed forces, creating a modern and proficient army, and equipping it with the latest high-tech types of military hardware.
- Acquiring and enhancing experience of carrying out combat action in present-day conditions by participating in international military programs and holding joint military-tactical exercises.
- Improving Kazakhstan's image and perception in the NATO countries as a potential cooperation partner in the non-military sphere.

Weaknesses:

- Cooperation between Kazakhstan and NATO is largely curbed by contractual obligations to the Russian Federation and CSTO.
- Kazakhstan belongs to the infrastructure of the CSTO security system, which includes protection of the entire air and information expanse.
- Intensification of military cooperation between Kazakhstan and NATO is limited by the military presence of the armed forces of the Russian Federation on Kazakh territory (Saryshagan, Baikonur).
- Transfer of the armed forces of the Republic of Kazakhstan to armaments and hardware of NATO standards requires large financial investments and bringing personnel up to the necessary skill level.
- The dearth of available information about cooperation between the Republic of Kazakhstan and NATO, which creates a host of incorrect information, suspicions, and doubts in the political establishment and expert communities in neighboring countries, including in Russia.

Opportunities:

- Forming a balanced architecture of regional security in Central Asia based on the geopolitical system of checks and balances.
- Elaborating certain levers of influence in the regional and bilateral format on the policy of Russia, the PRC, and Uzbekistan in favor of the interests of the Republic of Kazakhstan.
- Developing an alternative international mechanism for guaranteeing the state's military security, as well as creating new conditions for supporting the entire national security complex.
- Raising the country's military-defense potential in keeping with world standards, as well as effecting a certain drop in dependence on the Russian military-industrial complex.
- Fortifying Kazakhstan's foreign policy position, as well as consolidating the democratic and institutional reforms in the country.

- Reinforcing Kazakhstan's international image as a stable state with sustainable development, which will reflect on the country's investment climate and inflow of foreign investments.
- Reaching a new level of development of bilateral contacts in non-military spheres of cooperation with NATO partner states.

Challenges and threats:

- Intensification of cooperation with NATO may entail the risk of a worsening in relations between the Russian Federation and PRC, or a reduction in possibilities in the CSTO and SCO.
- Incorporation of armaments and hardware of NATO standards into the armed forces of the Republic of Kazakhstan may create a situation in which the Kazakhstan army will use both Russian and NATO standards in its activity and this will have an effect on the integrity and interoperability of the armed forces.
- Projection of the negative atmosphere around NATO's strategic activity in the world onto Kazakhstan's foreign policy image, which, in turn, may generate certain threats to the country's security.
- Participation in international peacekeeping operations under the U.N.'s or NATO's aegis may draw Kazakhstan into prolonged, difficult-to-resolve, and complicated conflicts in different regions of the world.
- Reduction in cooperation with the Russian military-industrial complex and emergence of a certain dependence on arms deliveries from the NATO countries.
- Worsening of relations between Russia and the West could very likely have a strong impact on Kazakhstan's security.
- Cooling off in relations with the Central Asian countries, primarily Uzbekistan, as well as clear defragmentation of the entire regional cooperation and security system in conditions of the Alliance's active demonstrative establishment of special partnership relations with Kazakhstan.
- A simultaneous crisis in relations with Russia and Uzbekistan, or other countries of the region, in the event of an increase in China's suspicions could be a factor that, at least, restricts Kazakhstan's diplomatic opportunities within the CSTO and SCO and, at most, disorganizes and leads to the ideological polarization of these security structures, which, on the whole, will have a negative effect on the entire Central Asian expanse.

On the whole, the SWOT analysis presented revealed both a whole set of opportunities for Kazakhstan, and a whole set of problems that are largely geopolitical in nature and if not given careful attention could threaten Central Asia's security with far-reaching consequences for the entire Eurasian geopolitical area. The analysis demonstrates that the NATO factor has a high obvious or latent impact on the whole of the regional environment, which seems to be very sensitive to any extremes in the geopolitical references of the Central Asian countries, in particular Kazakhstan's, as well as to any incautious actions in the development of close partnership with one or another of the sides.

Based on all the aforesaid and on the data presented of the SWOT analysis, we suggest taking a look at a few alternative scenarios of how cooperation might develop between Kazakhstan and NATO. These scenarios differ in degree of intensity and profundity of the republic's cooperation with the Alliance. In so doing, we would like to emphasize that the forecasts offered on the basis of the study carried out and the authors' views are hypothetical.

- **First scenario.** *Kazakhstan's active incorporation into NATO's collective security system and Kazakhstan's transformation into the Alliance's Central Asian outpost with the special sta-*

tus of a NATO non-participating state. It appears that the following possible factors might have an effect on the likelihood of this scenario becoming a reality:

- (1) Kazakhstan's inclination toward a pro-Western international policy in order to give a boost to the entire complex of bilateral relations with the Western states and obtain from them greater financial assistance, joining Western industrial-technological cooperation programs;
- (2) Kazakhstan's striving to become less dependent on Russia's influence and geopolitics, as well as distancing itself as much as possible from the contradictions appearing in the Russia-West vector that are having an influence on the republic's geopolitical situation and its sustainable economic development;
- (3) Kazakhstan's striving to maintain a key position in the regional processes, including by means of NATO resources, to increase its competitive advantages over regional competitors, in particular Uzbekistan;
- (4) Kazakhstan's need to reinforce its national security in the event of hypothetical geopolitical, military, economic, and other pressure on the republic in the future from Russia and China;
- (5) raising the country's military-defense capabilities to meet world standards, as well as ensuring a certain decrease in dependence on the Russian military-industrial complex;
- (6) improving the armed forces' command and control system, as well as establishing new types of forces, for example, the country's naval forces;
- (7) Kazakhstan's striving to consolidate its foreign policy position, as well as reinforce the democratic and institutional reforms within the country.

Development of the situation in this scenario presumes maximum, to the extent possible, expansion of partnership relations with the Alliance without officially becoming a member of the organization and a diametrical decrease in activity in the CSTO and SCO with a progressive cooling off in military cooperation with Russia. In so doing, relations with Russia, China, and the Central Asian countries could be based on trade and economic cooperation, with respect to which Kazakhstan has no alternative. But if political and military relations with these countries wane, their economic contacts with the republic will also automatically deteriorate. Relations with the Central Asian states, primarily Uzbekistan, may cool off, and clear defragmentation of the entire regional cooperation and security system may occur against the background of the Alliance's active and demonstrative development of special partnership relations with Kazakhstan. But this will mean a sharp rise in financial and economic assistance from the West, as well as an invitation for Kazakhstan to participate in the trade and economic initiatives of the NATO and EU countries. Whatever the case, if Astana makes a sharp keel toward the West, Kazakhstan's room for diplomatic maneuvers in the region will significantly shrink, which will also have an effect on the country's international position as a whole. And a simultaneous crisis in relations with Russia and Uzbekistan, or other countries of the region, along with an increase in China's suspicions, could, as mentioned above, be a factor that, at least, restricts Kazakhstan's diplomatic opportunities within the CSTO and SCO and, at most, disorganizes and leads to the ideological polarization of these security structures, which, on the whole, will have a negative effect on the entire Central Asian expanse. If this scenario is developed, the U.S. and NATO will have an objective advantage, and given the current situation and using Kazakhstan as a key to Eurasian geopolitics may be able to greatly reinforce their regional positions and draw other Central Asian countries into their sphere of influence.

■ **Second scenario.** *A balanced policy of Kazakhstan's participation in military-political organizations and its careful maneuvering among relations with NATO, CSTO, and SCO and the interests being realized in these structures by the U.S., European Union, Russia, and China.* It appears that the following factors might have an effect on the likelihood of this scenario becoming a reality:

- (1) Kazakhstan's striving to preserve and reinforce the status quo in the regional architecture of Central Asia in order to ensure geopolitical stability along the perimeter of its borders;
- (2) Kazakhstan's pragmatic approach aimed at maintaining an equal distance from all the power centers and raising its independence in conducting its foreign policy;
- (3) Kazakhstan's striving to create and maintain a geopolitical system of checks and balances in Central Asia in order to prevent the domination of one of the geopolitical forces, as well as find certain levers of influence in the regional and bilateral format on the policy of Russia, the PRC, and Uzbekistan in favor of Kazakhstan's interests;
- (4) Kazakhstan's interest in not assuming additional obligations to Russia, the CSTO, SCO, U.S., and NATO, particularly in the military-political sphere;
- (5) developing an alternative international mechanism for guaranteeing the state's military security, as well as creating new conditions for ensuring the enhancement of entire national security complex;
- (6) Kazakhstan's striving to form an efficient, multilevel, and balanced system of collective security in Central Asia involving many international participants;
- (7) Kazakhstan's need to maintain a belt of stability around the country in order to ensure sustainable economic and political development and retain its leading position in Central Asia.

Should this scenario be implemented, the situation will continue to develop in the same way it is today. If Kazakhstan takes a careful and balanced approach to multivectoral participation in collective security systems that have different ideological platforms and geopolitical strategies, the republic may be able to retain parity and balance in the region's geopolitics. In so doing, Kazakhstan, as the most active and developed Central Asian state, is capable not only of helping to form a balanced and efficient multilevel collective security system in Central Asia, but also of solving the entire set of its state tasks, among which an important place is occupied by national security and modernization of the military-defense complex, as well as retaining its leading position in the regional hierarchy. In this respect, the active participation of NATO and the CSTO with the SCO in Central Asia and their attempts to establish as wide and close format of partnership with Astana will give Kazakhstan an additional resource for implementing its goals. Retaining a stable situation in the region, as well as the equal activity of NATO, the CSTO, and the SCO will make it possible for Central Asia to develop along constructive lines. If this scenario is developed, there will be no objective advantage for any of the sides, but Kazakhstan and the Central Asian countries will still have the opportunity to maneuver relatively freely and retain their positions in the region, while NATO, the CSTO, and the SCO will also be able to take further active strategic part in conditions of non-intensive competition.

■ **Third scenario.** *A drop in Kazakhstan's active participation in developing cooperation with NATO aimed at progressive minimization of its participation in the Alliance's regional initiatives and taking a restrained and distanced position in relations with NATO.* It appears

that the following possible factors might have an effect on the likelihood of this scenario becoming a reality:

- (1) Russia's uncompromising demand of Kazakhstan, as an ally, to specify its geopolitical position, military-political policy, and technical refurbishing of its capabilities;
- (2) a change in Kazakhstan's foreign policy strategy and drop in its active participation in the global security system, since intensification of cooperation with NATO might entail the risk of a worsening in relations with the Russian Federation and China or a reduction in opportunities in the CSTO and SCO;
- (3) incorporating armaments and hardware of NATO standards into the armed forces of the Republic of Kazakhstan may create a situation in which the Kazakhstan army will use both Russian and NATO standards in its activity and this will have an effect on the integrity and interoperability of the armed forces;
- (4) NATO's attempts to use Kazakhstan as a tool for changing the configuration of regional geopolitics in Central Asia. For example, active stimulation of competition with Uzbekistan through Kazakhstan's demonstrative support in order to put pressure on the Uzbek regime and draw it into its orbit of influence;
- (5) intensive pressure on Kazakhstan by the West in order to advance different interests and initiatives or effect extreme acceleration of the domestic reforms;
- (6) projection of the negative atmosphere around NATO's strategic activity in the world onto Kazakhstan's foreign policy image, which, in turn, may generate certain threats to the country's security;
- (7) participation in international peacekeeping operations under the U.N.'s or NATO's aegis may draw Kazakhstan into prolonged, difficult-to-resolve, and complicated conflicts in different regions of the world;
- (8) reduction in cooperation with the Russian military-industrial complex and emergence of a certain dependence on arms deliveries from the NATO countries.

A motivated reduction in cooperation with NATO will in all likelihood entail a cooling off in relations with the West as a whole throughout the entire spectrum of relations. In so doing, the financial-economic aspect will become particularly sensitive, which will undergo a major cutback in order to put pressure on Kazakhstan. Automatic activation of relations with Russia will mean that Kazakhstan diplomacy becomes closely tied to Russia's policy, which, correspondingly, will have a restraining effect on Astana's ability to engage in independent foreign political maneuvering. On the other hand, Kazakhstan is a vital element of the West's strategy, which, in turn, will continue making attempts to return the country to its orbit of influence at all costs, including both by applying pressure and by means of persuasion. Both NATO and the OSCE, EU, and several world financial institutions will be instrumental in this. In this event, it is highly likely that Kazakhstan will cease to be a linking bridge but turn into a boundary delimiting the ideological contradictions between the pro-Western and anti-Western groups of countries. In this respect, we can expect most of Kazakhstan's international initiatives, such as the CICA or the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, to break down under the West's pressure. So based on all of this, we should anticipate a drop in security level in the region and a decrease in the efficiency of all the regional collective security systems as a result of the increase in competitive struggle among them. If this scenario comes to fruition, Russia (and the security structures developing under its aegis) will

have an objective advantage, and in the current situation, using Kazakhstan as a key to Eurasian geopolitics, could significantly fortify its regional position.

Conclusion

It is obvious that the hypothetical scenarios that envisage active involvement of Kazakhstan in NATO's partnership system or a drop in the country's active cooperation with the Alliance could entail serious shifts in the geopolitical situation around Kazakhstan and greatly change the vector of its state development. Therefore they can be described as undesirable turns in the development of the regional situation for Kazakhstan. In so doing, it is very unlikely that they will come to practical fruition. It is also obvious that Kazakhstan's only option is to engage in a balanced policy, careful maneuvering, and equidistant participation in relations both with NATO and with the CSTO and the SCO. As a member of the CSTO and one of the important players in the SCO, Kazakhstan will have to pursue the only possible and rational policy of maintaining smooth relations within the framework of these two structures and at the same time intensifying and expanding its relations with NATO. And as domestic experts note, "even if there is no efficient cooperation among NATO, the CSTO, and the SCO, Kazakhstan can still cooperate more actively with NATO as a member of the two above-mentioned organizations, if nothing else because Russia and China are already used to Astana's foreign policy maneuvering. After all, this creates fewer problems for Moscow and Beijing than abrupt changes in Uzbekistan's foreign policy orientation caused by a change in mood in the country's leadership."¹³

The value of the hypothetical scenarios examined lies in the fact that they have designated a whole range of problems that Kazakhstan must either resolve in its policy, or prevent from developing in regional geopolitics and cooperation. On the other hand, the hypothetical forecasts again confirm Kazakhstan's importance in the geopolitical system of Central Asian coordinates, the stable or radical position of which could either retain the status quo or give rise to an entire set of unpredictable but serious shifts in the regional architecture. This has again shown the justification of NATO's high interest in Kazakhstan as a key partner in Central Asia. Based on Kazakhstan's example, it can also be concluded that the effectiveness of a particular collective security system in Central Asia largely depends on the position and potential of the region's countries themselves. The external factor, although it is important, is very limited here and may flare up in emergency situations, for example, during conflicts or a sharp rise in regional tension. To sum up the existing problems and achievements of Kazakhstan-NATO cooperation, it is obvious that at present there are many more advantages and opportunities than problems and likely challenges. Whatever the case, when elaborating an optimal model of partnership, not only can the status quo be retained and the likelihood of a crisis in the region's geopolitics reduced to naught, but the entire set of relations with the Alliance can also be raised to a new mutually advantageous level.

¹³ D. Satpaev, "NATO i Kazakhstan khotiat bolshei blizosti," available at [www.liter.kz].