

POLICY PAPER

No. 3

Political and security relations Mapping strategies of Russia, USA and China towards Central Asia

September 2018



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This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 770256.

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Executive Summary

Geography and history matter when it comes to the political and security relationship between Central Asian countries and the world powers – China, Russia and the United States. In terms of strategic partnership, there are certain national priorities among the Chinese, Russian and American political establishment when dealing with Central Asia. Whereas the Kremlin has managed to preserve its institutions and political influence in Central Asia, in particular in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, the White House episodically addresses the region with its own Afghanistan-driven security agenda. Yet, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan remain the U.S. strategic allies in the region. Beijing is strengthening its political and security ties with Central Asian countries by providing all of them with Strategic Partner Status.

There is no single regional security organization covering all five Central Asian states. However, the world powers offer their agenda both bilaterally and multilaterally within CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization), SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization) and PfP/NATO (Partnership for Peace). The United States are trying to preserve their C5+1 initiative that brings them together with all Central Asian countries. As for political dialogue, Russia remains the leader in quantitative terms (numbers of visits and meetings).

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to outline the political and security relationship between Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan) and the World Powers, which are the People's Republic of China, the Russian Federation and the United States.

The mapping of this relationship has been undertaken in a variety of categories: the place of these countries in one another's strategy papers; formal bilateral political agreements and dialogue; high-level meetings and visits; cooperation in international and regional organizations; embassies/consulates and visa regimes; common security threats and challenges; formal and informal alliances between Central Asian states and the world powers; existing disputes and conflicts; military sales and assistance; joint exercises and training; and the world powers' military bases in the region.

Information collected for this mapping paper was found through open sources, largely online. Desk-based research was conducted primarily in English, Russian and Chinese. The period examined for this paper is 2007-2017, so as to capture the most recent developments in the region and bilateral political and security relations.

This paper presents the current state of political and security affairs among Central Asian countries and Russia, China and the United States. It also identifies over-arching trends between Central Asian countries and the world powers in the political and security sphere. As a result, this mapping paper will provide a comprehensive basis for the following analysis of security challenges and political dialogue, as well as policy recommendations for future priorities for European policy-making vis-à-vis Central Asia to be elaborated in the course of the H2020 project "SEnECA – Strengthening and Energizing EU-Central Asia Relations".

2. Mapping of political and security relationship

2.1. China and Central Asia

The countries of Central Asia are pivotal to China in safeguarding its Western border and ensuring stability in the adjacent regions, obtaining energy resources via the Turkmenistan-China natural gas pipeline and implementing the transcontinental connectivity initiative - the Belt and Road. Even though initially some disputes over the border demarcation remained, China and the partners would seem to have put them to rest by signing the border agreements. The political dialogue is maintained through the active bilateral exchanges, the summits of Shanghai Cooperation Organization, as well as through the Belt and Road channels.

Kazakhstan and China established their Strategic Partnership during the 2005 Hu Jintao visit to Astana, raising the status to Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2011.² Another Comprehensive Strategic Partner in the region, Tajikistan, obtained the status during the September 2017 Emomali Rahmon visit to Beijing.³ Kyrgyzstan,⁴ Turkmenistan,⁵ and Uzbekistan⁶ hold the Strategic Partner status with China since 2013. Among the most notable strategy papers are the 2006 Cooperation

² "Sovmestnaya deklaratsiya Kitaya i Kazakhstana ob ustanovlenii i razvitiu strategicheskogo partnerstva," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, last modified May 4, 2005, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/rus/wjdt/gb/t202659.shtml>

³ "Tadzhikistan i Kitay - otnosheniya vyhodyat na novyj uroven," russian.china.org.cn, last modified September 15, 2017, http://russian.china.org.cn/exclusive/txt/2017-09/15/content_41606049.htm

⁴ "China and Kyrgyzstan," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, last modified June 18, 2018, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjtb_663304/zzjg_663340/dozys_664276/gjlb_664280/3185_664332/

⁵ "Gazovoe sotrudnechestvo Kitaya i Turmenistana ukrepyaet dvustoronnie otnosheniya," China Radio International, last modified August 29, 2014, <http://russian.cri.cn/881/2014/08/29/1s522676.htm>

⁶ "Uzbekistan - Kitay: noviy etap sotrudnichestva - vsestoronnee strategicheskoe partnerstvo," Uzbekistan National News Agency, last modified June 22, 2016, <http://uza.uz/ru/politics/uzbekistan-kitay-novyy-etap-sotrudnichestva-vsestoronnee-str-22-06-2016>

Strategy between China and Kazakhstan for the 21st Century (2006), and the Development Plans for the China-Turkmenistan Strategic Partnership for 2014-2018 (2014).

As China neighbours Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan, has energy cooperation with Turkmenistan, and is *en route* towards a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership with Uzbekistan, the scope of the agreements is extensive. All countries have signed a good-neighbourliness treaty with China in the 2000s, followed by the joint statements on establishing strategic partnerships, deepening cooperation within the strategic partnerships and establishing comprehensive strategic partnerships in the 2010s (Kazakhstan, Tajikistan).

After becoming the Head of State in 2013, Xi Jinping visited Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. Cooperation is also being sustained via the SCO meetings and intergovernmental Cooperation Committees. In 2015, Xi Jinping welcomed the visit of the Central Asian leaders (apart from Turkmenistan, as it adheres to neutrality) in Beijing.⁷ Xi Jinping holds meetings with the Kazakh president Nursultan Nazarbayev three to five times a year, major agenda points including infrastructural and logistic cooperation in the Eurasian space, the role of SCO, security and ecology, as well as investment.⁸ Xi Jinping meets with his Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Tajik and Turkmen counterparts once or twice a year, and the agenda includes Chinese investment, the Belt and Road Initiative, agriculture, anti-terrorism, drug control, cyber-security and combating cross-border organized crime, as well as export of natural resources.

The Central Asian nations interact with China within the UN framework, acknowledging the importance of the UN in combatting international terrorism and building resiliency towards new challenges, yet stating the need for improvement the UN Security Council procedures.⁹ The originally Kazakhstan-proposed Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) is also stated as an important dialogue tool within the partnership agreements between China and the Central Asian countries.

SCO is a significant regional platform for China-Central Asia interaction. The 2017 Astana SCO summit marks China's presidency of the bloc, and China is using it to promote BRI by bringing economic, infrastructure and cross-continental cooperation to the forefront of the SCO agenda¹⁰ - a railroad project is to be signed between Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 2018 with the goal "to ensure the access to international markets for the SCO countries".¹¹ Turkmenistan has been represented by the President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov at multiple summits in a guest status.¹²

None of the Central Asian countries enjoys a visa free regime with the PRC. PRC national passport holders require a visa to enter all respective countries; however, a 72-hour visa-free policy for Air Astana passengers in transit to a third country through Astana and Almaty airports is to be declared from December 2018.¹³ Aside from the embassy in Beijing, Kazakhstan has also established general

⁷ "49 国确认出席中国抗战纪念活动," Sina News, last modified August 25, 2015, <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2015-08-25/101832234672.shtml>

⁸ "国家主席习近平对哈萨克斯坦共和国进行国事访问并出席上海合作组织成员国元首理事会第十七次会议和阿斯塔纳专项世博会开幕式纪实," Xinhua News Portal, last modified June 10, 2017, http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/2017-06/10/c_1121121667.htm

⁹ See, e.g. "Sovmestnaya deklaratsiya KNR i Kazakhstana o razviti v sestoronnego strategicheskogo partnerstva," People's Daily Online, last modified June 14, 2011, <http://russian.people.com.cn/31519/7408894.html>

¹⁰ "Spotlight: Xi's Kazakhstan visit to boost bilateral cooperation, chart course for SCO development," Xinhua News Portal, last modified June 6, 2017, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-06/07/c_136346463.htm

¹¹ "Soglashenie po Zh/D Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan_KNR mogut podpisat' v 2018 godu," Stanradar, last modified December 8, 2017, <http://www.stanradar.com/news/full/27557-soglashenie-po-zhd-uzbekistan-kyrgyzstan-knr-mogut-podpisat-v-2018-godu.html>

¹² "Turkmenistan speaks for expansion of capacity building of world economic relations," Turkmenistan Portal, last modified June 24, 2016, <http://turkmenistan.gov.tm/eng/?id=6051>

¹³ "哈萨克斯坦对中国公民重启“72小时免签政策”. <https://airastana.com/chn/zh-cn/Information/Travel-to-Kazakhstan/Enjoy-Visa-Free-Kazakhstan>

consulates in Hongkong and Shanghai, as well as a visa issuing consulate in Urumqi, Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region. PRC has its embassy in Astana and a general consulate in Almaty.¹⁴ The Embassy of Uzbekistan to the PRC is located in Beijing. PRC Embassy is located in Tashkent. PRC Embassy to the Kyrgyz Republic is located in Bishkek. The Embassy of the Kyrgyz Republic to China is located in Beijing, there is also a visa issuing consulate in Urumqi. Tajikistan and Turkmenistan also have their Embassies and consulates in Beijing, with the Chinese Embassies in the respective capitals Dushanbe and Ashgabat.

According to the Kyrgyz diplomats, the migration of the Uighur ethnicity from Xinjiang to Turkic-speaking countries in Central Asia is a challenge to regional stability. From the Chinese perspective, the individuals, involved in pan-Turkic ideology, are considered responsible for channelling fundamentalist Islam back into Xinjiang. It has to be noted, that experts on Xinjiang stipulate that the “Uighur threat” is grossly exaggerated by the Chinese authorities to justify the repressions that have taken the form of “counter-terrorism measures” in Xinjiang.¹⁵

Also, even though currently the territorial dispute between Kyrgyzstan and the PRC is considered to be solved since the 1996 and 1999 agreement signings, still, there is a sentiment among nationalist Kyrgyz circles that the Kyrgyz Republic lost its historical land to China. In terms of Sino-Turkmen relations, the political situation in Afghanistan can create a spillover effect and destabilize the region. As Turkmenistan is a major gas exporter to China, the situation is described as one with “energy crisis potential” by China watchers. Also, the reports that China is considering to establish a military base in Wakhan, Afghanistan, across the border from the ethnically distinct Pamir region of Tajikistan, even though denied by the PRC, demonstrate China’s will to tackle the circulation of extremist militants (e.g. East Turkistan Islamic Movement) between Afghanistan, Central Asia and Xinjiang.¹⁶

The biggest receiver of the Chinese preferential loans and aid to Central Asian countries 1991-2017 has been Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan coming in second with an amount three times lower, Uzbekistan following closely and Tajikistan receiving the least.¹⁷ In case of China, it is difficult to distinguish between pure development aid and self-serving projects.

The Shanghai Convention on Combatting Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism, which involves Kazakhstan, China, the Kyrgyz Republic, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, speaks of joint police training, possible counter-terrorism operations and technical and financial aid.¹⁸ Multiparty exercises have already taken place, the first in 2003.¹⁹ The Cooperation Agreement Between the People’s Republic of China and the Republic of Kazakhstan on Combatting Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism was signed in 2002, resulting in the “Tianshan-1” joint exercise for public security forces in 2006.²⁰ Kyrgyzstan and China have been active partners in anti-terrorism exercises along the 858 km long shared national border. The 2017 exercise “Tianshan-3”, under the SCO framework, took

¹⁴ “Bilateral relations,” Embassy of the Republic of Kazkhstan in the People’s Republic of China, last modified June 18, 2018, <http://www.mfa.kz/en/beijing/content-view/ha-zhong-he-zuo>

¹⁵ Expert interview with Dr. Ondrej Klimes, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Oriental Institute, Faculty Member in Xinjiang Studies, recorded March 12, 2018.

¹⁶ Nicole Bauke, “Now China’s helping to build a military base in Afghanistan,” Military Times, last modified February 2, 2018, <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/2018/02/02/now-chinas-helping-to-build-a-military-base-in-afghanistan/>

¹⁷ Project Search, “China.AidData.org, accessed June 1, 2018, <http://china.aiddata.org>

¹⁸ 打击恐怖主义、分裂主义和极端主义上海公约,” National Planning Commission, last modified December 12, 2001, http://www.npc.gov.cn/wxzl/wxzl/2001-12/12/content_281315.htm

¹⁹ “Antiterroristicheskie ucheniya ShOS,” CNTV, last modified September 01, 2010, http://russian.cntv.cn/program/news_ru/20100901/103991.shtml

²⁰ “Soglashenie mezhdu Respublikoy Kazakhstan i Kitayskoy Narodnoy Respublikoy o sotrudnichestve v bor’be s terrorizmom, separatizmom i ekstremizmom,” Tengri News – Laws of Kazakhstan, entered into force June 2, 2003, <https://tengrinews.kz/zakon/prezident-respubliki-kazahstan/mejdunapodnyie-otnosheniya-respubliki-kazahstan/id-U030001098/>

place in Xinjiang, was conducted by the Chinese and the Kyrgyz border patrol forces with the presence of observers, delegated by other SCO partners.²¹

2.2. Russia and Central Asia

For the past ten years, Russia and Central Asian states have established constant political and security dialogue, extensive bilateral and multilateral relations, through Moscow-initiated and Russia-led institutions and organizations in the post-Soviet region.

Both Russian national security strategies of 2009 and 2015 outline Central Asia as a zone of strategic interests and priority for Russian foreign policy.²² The Kazakh national security strategy of 2011 and 2017 also mention Russia as a priority of the country's multi-vector foreign policy. Turkmenistan has good relations with Russia, although Turkmenistan has emerged in recent years as a point of contention between China and Russia for access to Turkmenistan's gas fields. While most Central Asia countries have broadly positive diplomatic relations with Russia, many Central Asia countries such as Kazakhstan are very cautious of Russia's dominance of initiatives such as the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) – an integrated free market designed to facilitate trade between Russia and Central Asia. While the EEU is mainly an economic organization, Kazakhstan in particular is concerned that Russia may use the union to promote its political influence among the member states – Russia is certainly the dominant economy in the EEU and the market has failed to have a significant economic impact on the other Central Asian members. Russia is also actively involved in the Caspian summits to resolve the status of the Caspian Sea, provide maritime and energy security.

Russia has established a security framework for post-Soviet states, including Central Asia, both bilateral and multilateral military agreements, within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are not members of the CSTO. The latter are also missing in the SCO, where China, Russia, India and Pakistan are participating. Central Asian countries and Russia belong to a number of the same international organizations, including the United Nations, the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the NATO's Partnership for Peace program.

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have a 90-day visa free regime with Russia. Whereas the Kazakh and Kyrgyz citizens can travel to Russia, holding their domestic ID cards, the Tajiks have to travel with their national passports. Russia and Turkmenistan have a visa regime; however, prior to 2015 they had an agreement on dual citizenship.

Defence interaction between Kazakhstan and Russia lies within military education, specialized training, joint exercises and training, and military-technical cooperation. The most recent agreements between Kazakhstan and Russia are on interregional and cross-border cooperation (September 7, 2010) and Good-Neighbourhood Alliance in the 21st Century (November 11, 2013). Annually the heads of the two Ministries of Defense develop and sign a Plan of bilateral cooperation. This helps to have joint operations and combat training, to purchase, repair, and modernize weapons and military equipment, on preferential terms, and train the Kazakh servicemen in the Russian military institutions, including the CSTO military personnel.

There are over 40 agreements between Kyrgyzstan and Russia at the interstate, intergovernmental and interdepartmental levels in various areas of military cooperation. Among those is an agreement on strengthening the Russian/CSTO Kant base, which aims to increase flight contingent, as well as supply the air base with unmanned aircraft. On June 20, 2017, the Kyrgyz Parliament ratified the Treaty between the Kyrgyz Republic and the Russian Federation on military-technical cooperation.

²¹ "Kitay i Kyrgyzstan proveli sovместnye antiterroristicheskie ucheniya "Tyanshan' -3," *Kabar*, last modified June 27, 2017, <http://kabar.kg/news/kitai-i-kyrgyzstan-proveli-sovместnye-antiterroristicheskie-ucheniia-tian-shan-3/>

²² "Ukaz Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii ot 31 dekabrya 2015 goda N 683 'O Strategii natsional'noy bezopasnosti Rossiyskoy Federatsii'," *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, last modified December 31, 2015, <https://rg.ru/2015/12/31/nac-bezopasnost-site-dok.html>

This agreement will improve the mechanism to supply military products in the interests of the national armed forces of the states, providing the Armed Forces, military and special services with highly effective prospective weapons systems, and form the technical component for the collective security system.²³ In addition, the Declaration on Strengthening the Alliance and Strategic Partnership between Russia and Kyrgyzstan was signed in 2017.

Bilateral security and military relations have been a cornerstone of the Russian-Tajik cooperation. One of the most important aspects here lies within the cooperation in the field of migration, where the two countries agreed to review decisions on the deportation and prohibition of entry for the Tajik citizens with minor administrative offenses to Russia and apply an amnesty to these citizens.²⁴ Among other things, Russia plans to increase military training, strengthen the units and divisions of the Tajik Armed Forces. The border with Afghanistan is another major field of military cooperation between Russia and Tajikistan, including countering terrorism, transnational crime and drug trafficking. Since 2005, Russian military has been providing assistance to the Tajik Armed Forces to protect their border with Afghanistan.²⁵

Whereas Turkmenistan adheres to the principle of neutrality, the Turkmen troops do not participate even in the peacekeeping missions. However, since January 25, 2016, when President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov adopted a new military doctrine, the country has made steps forward in conducting domestic military exercises. However, no liable information regarding recent Russian-Turkmen military relations can be traced.

There is an agreement on military-technical cooperation, signed in 2017, between Uzbekistan and Russia.²⁶ It helps Uzbekistan to repair, modernize and purchase Russian military equipment and weapons under special conditions.

There are regular meetings at the presidential and ministerial levels between Russia and Central Asian states, including contacts within the CIS, CSTO, SCO and the Caspian Sea summits. Presidents of Kazakhstan and Russia have a practice of regular phone calls.²⁷ In 2017, President Putin paid official visits to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Earlier in 2015, Putin paid a state visit to Astana. In 2015, the presidents of Kyrgyzstan and Russia met six times, all these meetings took place outside Bishkek.²⁸ In October 2012, President Putin visited Dushanbe. In 2012 Tajik President Emomali Rahmon paid a working visit to Moscow.²⁹ In 2007, Russian President Vladimir Putin visited Ashgabat. In 2009-2010, more than seven state and working visits happened between the Russian and Turkmen leadership. In 2009, the Russian President Dmitry Medvedev visited Tashkent. In 2007, President Vladimir Putin and President Islam Karimov met in a bilateral format during the informal CIS summit in St. Petersburg. In 2013 and 2016, President Islam Karimov paid two official

²³ "IAC 'Kabar': Kyrgyzstan i Rossiya: voenno-tehnicheskoe sotrudnichestvo," *Kabar*, last modified February 7, 2018, <http://kabar.kg/news/iac-kabar-kyrgyzstan-i-rossiia-voenno-tehnicheskoe-sotrudnichestvo/>

²⁴ "Tadzhikso-rossiyskie vstrechi i peregovory na vysshem urovne," President of the Republic of Tadjikistan, last modified February 27, 2017, <http://www.president.tj/ru/node/14650>

²⁵ "Voennye rossiyskie bazy budut okhranyat' tadzhiko-afghanskuyu granitsu," Margarita Gyrylova, last modified February 27, 2017, <https://mir24.tv/news/15760966/voennye-rossiiskoi-bazy-budut-okhranyat-tadzhiko-afganskuyu-granicu>

²⁶ "Voennye ucheniya Rossii i Uzbekistana: kak strany shli k sotrudnichestvu," *Sputnik News*, last modified September 15, 2017, <https://ru.sputniknews-uz.com/infographics/20170915/6314837/voennoe-sotrudnichestvo-rossii-uzbekistana.html>

²⁷ "Russia-Kazakhstan Relations - Official Visits," The Embassy of the Russian Embassy to the Republic of *Kazakhstan*, accessed June 18, 2018, http://www.rfembassy.kz/eng/lm/dvustoronnie_otnosheniya/vizity_i_vstrechi/?cid=0&page=4

²⁸ "Mezhgosudarstvennye otnosheniya Kyrgyzstana i Rossii," *Sputnik News*, last modified September 14, 2017, <https://ru.sputnik.kg/spravka/20170914/1035207691/mezhgosudarstvennye-otnosheniya-kyrgyzstana-i-rossii.html>

²⁹ Avaz Yuldoshev, "Rahmon Pays Working Visit to Moscow," *Media Group Tadjikistan Asia-Plus*, last modified July 13, 2013, <http://news.tj/en/news/rahmon-pays-working-visit-moscow>

visits to Russia.³⁰ Later in April 2017, a newly elected Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev visited Moscow.³¹

Drug trafficking from Afghanistan, the threat of territorial integrity and sovereignty, violent extremism and terrorism, including ISIS, can be seen as common security threats. Another major issue is radicalization, as Central Asian migrants are radicalized in Russia and then organize and/or commit terrorist attacks in Russia and outside. Even though there are no disputes and conflicts between Russia and Central Asian states, there was a phobia in Kazakhstan regarding the potential of the Ukrainian scenario and Russian aggression in the country after Crimea annexation in 2014.

When it comes to the military assistance to the region, the Kremlin prefers bilateral interaction, yet tries to consolidate all Central Asian countries. Most prominent military assistance is seen with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. Military-technical cooperation is carried out in accordance with the Treaty between the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation on military-technical cooperation of December 24, 2013. One of the main instruments for such interaction is the Sub commission on Military-Technical Cooperation of the Intergovernmental Commission on Cooperation between the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation. In 2016, the trade turnover between the Kazakhstan and Russia in terms of weapons and military equipment amounted to more than KZT 11 billion.

Russia provides assistance to equip the Kazakh army with modern models of frontline and army aviation of Russian production. The Kazakh Ministry of Defense buys Su-30 SM aircraft of “generation 4+”, transport-combat helicopters Mi-171Sh, as well as modern multipurpose transport and combat helicopters Mi-35M. In 2017, Kazakhstan bought a mine-sweep vessel of project 10750E, produced at the shipyards of the Russian United Shipbuilding Corporation. Russia and Kazakhstan have been deeply involved in space projects, in particular Baikonur.

In 2009, Russian Rosoboronexport signed a contract to supply 10 T-90S tanks worth USD 16 million to Ashgabat. At the same time, Turkmenistan purchased at least eight BMP-3 infantry fighting vehicles, more than a thousand KamAZ trucks worth USD 100 million, six Smerch mini-turrets with a caliber of 300 mm for USD 70 million. In addition, a contract was signed in 2010 for the delivery of two Mi-17-1B helicopters at a cost of USD 22 million. For the Turkmen Navy, the Sredne-Nevisky Shipbuilding Company manufactured two 12418 Molniya missile boats worth USD 170 million, transferred to Turkmenistan in 2011.³² Turkmenistan signed contracts in 2016 with Russia Techmash concern on the reception of signal fireworks and shotguns and the grenade launchers.³³

For the past ten years, more than 4,000 Kazakhstani servicemen completed training at the institutions of higher education of the Russian Ministry of Defense. Currently, 386 Kazakhstani military

³⁰ “Mezhgosudarstvennyye otnosheniya Rossii i Uzbekistana,” RIA Novosti, last modified April 4, 2017, <https://ria.ru/spravka/20170404/1491394017.html>

³¹ “Shavkat Mirziyoyev has arrived in Moscow,” The Tashkent Times, last modified May 4, 2017, <http://tashkenttimes.uz/national/729-shavkat-mirziyoyev-has-arrived-in-moscow>

³² “Turkmenistan: Vooruzhennyye sily i razvitie voenno-tehnicheskogo sotrudnichestva kak osnovy obespecheniya boevogo potentsiala armii,” RSE ‘KAZSPECEXPOT’ – the Ministry of Defence and Aerospace Industry of the Republic of Kazakhstan, last modified September 7, 2017, <http://kaspex.kz/ru/news/118-turkmenistan-vooruzhennyye-sily-i-razvitie-voenno-tehnicheskogo-sotrudnichestva-kak-osnovy-obespecheniya-boevogo-potentsiala-armii.html?template=mobiletemplate>

³³ “Turkmenistan: Armed Forces and development of military-technical cooperation as the basis for ensuring the army’s combat potential,” Ministry of Defense and Aerospace Industry of the Republic of Kazakhstan, accessed August 30, 2018, <http://kaspex.kz/en/news/120-turkmenistan-armed-forces-and-development-of-military-technical-cooperation-as-the-basis-for-ensuring-the-army-s-combat-potential.html>

personnel are trained in 28 military educational institutions and training centers of the Russian Ministry of Defence.³⁴ More than 55 military exercises were held between the Kazakh and the Russian Armed Forces for the past 20 years:³⁵

- More than 28 exercises were held within the CSTO (“Interaction” – 2009-2017, “Rubezh” – 2004-2016, “Unbreakable fraternity” peacekeeping exercise – 2012-2017, joint exercise of the forces and intelligence “Search” – 2016-2018).
- Five exercises within the SCO (“Peace Mission” – 2007-2016).
- Nine bilateral Kazakh-Russian exercises, including Navy.
- 13 exercises within unified air defence system of the CIS countries (1995-2017). Since 2016, Central Asian countries participate in International Army Games, Russia-led military competition. In October 2017, Russian-Uzbek bilateral military exercises took place in mountain range Forish (the last were in 2005).³⁶

Russia has also a great number of bases and military objects/infrastructure in Central Asia. All military bases in Kazakhstan are functioning based on a rent payment, whereas almost all military objects in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan operate on compensation or free of charge principle.³⁷

Russia has the Balkhash Radar Station (near Lake Balkhash), the Sary Shagan anti-ballistic missile testing range (a separate radio engineering unit in Priozersk) and the Baikonur Cosmodrome space launch facility in Kazakhstan.³⁸ In addition, there is a separate regiment of transport aviation in Kostanay, the Northern part of Kazakhstan. The 20th separate measuring station of the Strategic Missile Forces (Novaya Kazanka settlement in the West Kazakhstan region) was closed on April 15, 2010. The Emba landfill was closed in 2017.

In 2012, Kyrgyzstan and Russia concluded an agreement to establish the United Russian military base in Kyrgyzstan - Kant Air Base. There is also a torpedo testing facility near Lake Issyk-Kul, a seismographic station at Mailuu-Suu for Russia’s Strategic Missile Forces and A the 338th naval communication site near Chaldovar.^{39, 40} Russia’s military base in Tajikistan is the largest Russian land military base outside the country, with more than 7,500 personnel. There is also a Russian space surveillance station Okno in Nurak, run by the Russian space forces and is a part of the Center for Outer Space Monitoring in Tajikistan.⁴¹

2.3. The United States of America and Central Asia

The U.S. National Security strategies of 2010, 2015 and 2017 (both Obama and Trump administrations) put Central Asia together with South Asia. Usually there is an abstract, devoted to the goals of the United States in the region. They include stability and security (countering terrorism and extremism), economic development and democratization. The United States government initiated the

³⁴ “Kazakhstan i Rossiya: 25 let dobrososedstva i soyuznichestva,” *Sarbaz*, last modified November 21, 2017, <https://sarbaz.kz/ru/analytics/kazakhstan-i-rossiya-25-let-dobrososedstva-i-soyuznichestva-173241751/>

³⁵ Liliya Mukhitova, “Staryi drug luchshe novukh dvukh. Voenno-tehnicheskie kontakty s Rossiey budut rashiryatsa,” *zakon.kz*, last modified June 18, 2017, http://online.zakon.kz/m/Document/?doc_id=30723257

³⁶ “Uzbekistan i Rossiya ukrepilyut voyennoye sotrudnichestvo,” *Regnum*, last modified October 5, 2017, <https://regnum.ru/news/2330614.html>

³⁷ Arman Mussin, “Russia’s Military Bases in Central Asia,” *Nazarbayev University Political Science Review*, last modified January 11, 2017, <https://nupsreview.wordpress.com/2017/01/11/russias-military-bases-in-central-asia/>

³⁸ Sean O’Connor, “Russian/Soviet Anti-Ballistic Missile Systems, Technical Report APA-TR-2009-1203,” *Air power Australia*, last modified April, 2012, <http://www.ausairpower.net/APA-Rus-ABM-Systems.html#mozTocId371125>

³⁹ “Russian military base presence in Kyrgyzstan extended till 2032,” *Fergana international information agency*, last modified February 1, 2017, <http://enews.fergananews.com/news.php?id=3244&mode=snews>

⁴⁰ John Daly, “Kyrgyzstan reveals more Russian Military Facilities”, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 2008, Volume 5 Issue 59, accessed September 2018, <https://jamestown.org/program/kyrgyzstan-reveals-more-russian-military-facilities/>

⁴¹ “Sourcebook on the Okno (B/4 52168), Okno-S, Krona (B/4 20096) and Krona-N (B/4 20776), Space Surveillance Sites,” *Federation of American Scientists*, last modified November 19, 2014, <https://fas.org/spp/military/program/track/okno.pdf>

“Greater Central Asia” concept (under F. Starr), which later turned into the “New Silk Road” (H. Clinton).

Afghanistan has been seen as a key factor of the U.S. strategy in Central Asia. Security threats, such as violent extremism, terrorism and drug trafficking are among most important security concerns. Episodically, the United States have been criticizing Central Asian states for human rights violations and poor political reforms. Central Asian countries and the United States belong to a number of the same international organizations, including the United Nations, the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

The C5+1 Initiative is a dialogue platform for Central Asian countries and the United States to deal with regional security concerns and developments. The Partnership for Peace programme (PfP) is a tool to deepen military capabilities and research within NATO. Current regional cooperation between the United States and the Central Asia countries lies within the C5+1 dialogue platform, in particular the Counter-Terrorism project.⁴²

Since 2010, the Strategic Partnership Dialogue is a regular bilateral dialogue between Kazakhstan and the United States. Another strategic component is the Nunn-Lugar Comprehensive Threat Reduction (CTR) assistance to Kazakhstan. In 2015, the U.S. government concluded an agreement with the IAEA to host a LEU bank in Kazakhstan. During the Nuclear Security Summit 2016, Kazakhstan and the United States adopted a joint statement on cooperation in the sphere of non-proliferation and nuclear security. Later in 2017, the Nuclear Security Training Centre was developed with the support of the U.S. National Nuclear Security Administration. The U.S.-Kazakhstan cooperation in the field of security and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons is the cornerstone of bilateral relations.

Kyrgyzstan opened the “Ganci” airbase in support of U.S. military in missions in Afghanistan at the Manas airport based on the 2001 agreement, which was denounced in 2009. Then a new agreement between Kyrgyzstan and the United States on Manas Transit Center was signed (valid until July 2014). Permanent political dialogue between Kyrgyzstan and the United States is supported through the Annual Bilateral Consultations.⁴³

In 2009, Tajikistan and the United States signed an Amendment to the existing Agreement on Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (from January 2003) and a Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation in reforming local self-governance bodies. In 2011, the United States opened a training centre for the Armed Forces of Tajikistan in Tursunzade. The two countries have been holding the Annual Bilateral Consultations once a year since 2010.

The United States classified Turkmenistan as a Country of Particular Concern for its poor record on religious freedom, authoritarianism and poor human rights record in 2014.

The United States has been using the Karshi-Khanabad Air Base since 2001 to support its military operations in Afghanistan. In March 2002, the Secretary of State Colin Powell and the Uzbek Foreign Minister Abdul-Aziz Kamilov signed the United States-Uzbekistan Declaration on the Strategic Partnership and Cooperation Framework. “By mid-2008, some sixty percent of aviation fuel necessary for Coalition operations in Afghanistan passed by rail through Uzbekistan. Ninety-nine percent of all of the fuel that Afghanistan's aviation forces used, and tons of bottled water for troops in Afghanistan each month, also transited Uzbekistan's territory. Uzbekistan was a vital and relatively secure logistical pipeline in support of the operations in Afghanistan and offered the potential of becoming even

⁴² “Press Release - C5+1 Factsheet”, U.S. Department of State, last modified September 22, 2017, <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2017/09/274386.htm>

⁴³ “Kyrgyzstan & USA”, “The Embassy of the Kyrgyz Republic to the USA & Canada, accessed August 30, 2018, <https://www.kgem-bassy.org/en/kyrgyzstan-uscanada/cooperation-between-the-kyrgyz-republic-and-the-usa/>

more important given its favourable geographic position and transportation infrastructure and given continued instability in Pakistan.”⁴⁴

No U.S. President has ever visited Central Asia. The U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in 2010-2011. John Kerry has become the first U.S. Secretary of State, who visited all Central Asian countries in 2015. The Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Robert O. Blake Jr. visited Central Asia in 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013. The Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs Nisha Desai Biswal visited Central Asia in 2014. Deputy Assistant Secretary for Central Asia, Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, the U.S. Department of State David Rosenblum visited Tajikistan in April 2017.

In 2010, during the OSCE Summit in Almaty the U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton came to Kazakhstan. Later in 2015 the U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry visited Astana and emphasized the President Nazarbayev’s leadership in countering violent extremism and nuclear proliferation. The Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev paid an official visit to the U.S. President Donald Trump on January 15-18, 2018. They signed an Enhanced Strategic Partnership for the 21st Century that will guide the U.S.-Kazakh relations.⁴⁵

In 2008, President Bakiyev met with the U.S. President George Bush Jr. during the official reception on behalf of the Chinese President Hu Jintao. The Kyrgyz President Roza Otunbayeva met Barack Obama twice. The first time, they met in September 2010 in New York, during the 65th session of the UN General Assembly. The second meeting took place in March 2011 at the initiative of Barack Obama. Almazbek Atambaev met the U.S. President Donald Trump during an official reception in honour of the heads of delegations, participating in the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly in 2017. This was the first personal meeting between Atambaev and any U.S. president; he did not meet Barack Obama. During 2011-2015, U.S. congressmen visited Kyrgyzstan four times, while deputies of the Jogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic paid eleven visits to the United States.

In 2008, the U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs George Krol visited Dushanbe. In 2009, the commander of the U.S. Central Command General David Petraeus, the Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia Richard Boucher and Robert Blake visited Tajikistan. Since 2010, Tajikistan and the United States have had regular bilateral political consultations. In 2014, the First Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia Richard Hoagland met the Tajik President Emomali Rahmon. In 2015, the U.S. Central Command - General Lloyd J. Austin III met with the Tajik President Emomali Rahmon and leaders of the law enforcement agencies.⁴⁶

In April, 2008, Turkmenistan President Gurbanguly Berymukhamedov met the U.S. President George Bush during the NATO Summit in Bucharest. Except for the State Secretaries’ visits, President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev met with the U.S. President Donald Trump in the framework of the Arab-Muslim and the United States Summit in Riyadh in 2017. He also paid the first historic visit to the White House on May 16, 2018.⁴⁷

The United States has embassies in all Central Asian states and opened a Consulate General in Almaty in 2009. Kazakhstan has an Embassy in Washington D.C. and a Consulate General in New York since 2010. Since 2013, the United States and Kazakhstan have been issuing five-year visas. In December 2016 an agreement on mutual provision of tourist and business visas up to ten years

⁴⁴ “Military: Uzbekistan – US Relations,” Globalsecurity.org, last modified June 18, 2018, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/centralasia/uzbek-forrel-us.htm>

⁴⁵ “Press Release - The United States and Kazakhstan - An Economic Partnership for the 21st Century, U.S. Department of State”, last modified January 16, 2018, <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2018/01/277475.htm>

⁴⁶ “Bilateral relations of Tajikistan with United States of America,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan, last modified December 22, 2016, <http://mfa.tj/?l=en&cat=92&art=191>

⁴⁷ “Statement from the Press Secretary on the Visit of President Mirziyoyev of Uzbekistan,” The White House, last modified May 10, 2018, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/statement-press-secretary-visit-president-mirziyoyev-uzbekistan/>

came into force. In 2017, Kazakhstan established a visa-free regime for up to 30 days to American citizens (previously, 15 days). The United States is among visa waiver countries that does not require a visa when visiting Kyrgyzstan up to 60 days. Visa regime for Kyrgyzstan is in place – the U.S. Embassy in Bishkek began to issue five-year visas. Tajikistan has a single and multiple entry e-visa that can be used at any border crossing and is granted for tourism and business for a maximum stay of 45 days within 90 days. Tajik citizens require visas to enter the United States. Turkmenistan has a visa regime with the United States. Uzbekistan has a Consulate General in New York. There is a simplified visa regime between Uzbekistan and the United States. Visa is not required for the U.S. military and the U.S. Department of Defence civilian staff, holding a military and/or government ID and a copy of their orders when visit Uzbekistan.

Since the withdrawal from Afghanistan, the United States is focusing less on providing military and police aid to Central Asian security forces. For instance, in 2014 fiscal year, the State Department allocated USD 33.3 million in security assistance to the sub-region. The 2016 fiscal year request for the security assistance included USD 24.7 million. Washington plans to prioritize assistance to tackle counterterrorism, border security and stabilization operations, as well as a security sector reform – counter-narcotics and transnational crime efforts – in Central Asia.⁴⁸

The United States have provided support and assistance to the Central Asian states in the framework of the U.S. Foreign Military Financing program, International Military Education and Training program, Combating Terrorism Fellowship program, Countering narcotics, Global Peace Operations Initiative, NATO's Partnership for Peace and many others.^{49, 50, 51, 52}

These aid programs assisted the U.S. military in gaining needed access to the facilities in the region, upgrading Central Asian security infrastructure, and improving the preparedness of the regional security forces. In Tajikistan, the programs contributed greatly to developing counterterrorism and counter-narcotics tactical and technical capabilities and enhancing the central government's coercive capabilities vis-à-vis the regions.⁵³ In Kyrgyzstan, "they managed to build a broader security capacity and facilitating engagement with international organizations. Tajikistan received record amounts of U.S. security assistance – USD 34,7 in 2014 and USD 22,5 in 2015 million".⁵⁴

The United States support the Kazakh peacekeeping brigade Kazbat and the annual international military exercise "Steppe Eagle". Kazbat and Kazbrig military units are formed on a permanent basis in cooperation with the U.S. and NATO forces. These units participate in both military operations and civilian exercises to combat riots, both in Kazakhstan and abroad. Joint exercises and trainings are usually parts of the defence plans that the United States and each Central Asian state have signed (the latest until 2022 with Kazakhstan). The Kazakh Military Institute of Land Forces has an exchange program with West Point Military Academy. Fahrabad, Tajikistan, hosted multi-national Exercise Regional Co-operation 2017, where forces from Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Pakistan

⁴⁸ "U.S. Security Assistance to Central Asia: A Post-Afghanistan Shift in Strategy," Security Assistance Monitor, last modified July 22, 2015, https://securityassistance.org/fact_sheet/us-security-assistance-central-asia.

⁴⁹ "Foreign Operations Assistance: Kazakhstan," U.S. State Department Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, last modified August 31, 2016, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/p/eur/rls/fs/2016/261453.htm>.

⁵⁰ "Foreign Operations Assistance: Tajikistan," U.S. State Department Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, last modified August 31, 2016, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/p/eur/rls/fs/2016/261455.htm>.

⁵¹ "Foreign Operations Assistance: Turkmenistan," U.S. State Department Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, last modified August 31, 2016, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/p/eur/rls/fs/2016/261456.htm>.

⁵² "Foreign Operations Assistance: Uzbekistan," U.S. State Department Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, last modified August 31, 2016, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/p/eur/rls/fs/2016/261463.htm>.

⁵³ "U.S. Security Assistance to Central Asia: Examining Limits, Exploring Opportunities," Ponars Eurasia, accessed August 30, 2018, <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/ru/node/9431>

⁵⁴ Mariya Omelicheva, "U.S. Security Assistance to Central Asia: Examining Limits, Exploring Opportunities," Ponars Eurasia, published October 2017, <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/us-security-assistance-central-asia>.

and the United States plus two observers from Kazakhstan jointly learnt to fight terrorism and protect the border.⁵⁵

The United States have been using Central Asia's infrastructure for transit to and from Afghanistan since 2001. The U.S. has managed to have two airbases and transit routes for the past 17 years. However, after July 2014 Manas airbase in Kyrgyzstan has become a Russian military base, used for CSTO trainings. Currently, the transit route to Afghanistan goes from the territory of Azerbaijan through the Caspian Sea to the Kuryk and Aktau ports of Kazakhstan and then by rail through Sar-yagash-Keles or Beineu-Karakalpakia stations to Uzbekistan and further to Afghanistan.

3. Conclusions

The relationships between the world powers and Central Asian states have been extensively developing for the past 10 years. The logic of these relations usually reflects the world powers' interests in the region, dealing with their need for a stable and secure Central Asia. This approach guides the Chinese, American, and Russian policy in Central Asia. All three major powers consider Central Asian violent extremism and terrorism as the region's main security challenges, besides drug trafficking, along with illegal migration and radicalization. All these security threats have been addressed differently by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Collective Security Treaty Organization and the NATO's Partnership for Peace Program.

Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have become strategic partners of the world powers' regional policy in Central Asia. Bilateral relations of Astana and Tashkent with Beijing, Moscow and Washington D.C. have been significantly increased in terms of official meetings and visits, personal contacts and military cooperation. Other Central Asian countries, such as Tajikistan and Turkmenistan seem to be of less importance. However, both Russia and the United States have been providing support to Dushanbe and Tashkent to push forward Afghanistan reconstruction and development.

Whereas the United States prioritize a regional approach and link Afghanistan to Central Asia, Russia increases its military capabilities through its CSTO partners, namely Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. When it comes to China, the logic and motivation for its political and security agenda in the region is still unclear, with the exception of promoting the Belt and Road Initiative.

⁵⁵ Nadim Bahrom, "Joint military exercise underscores common challenges to Central Asia," Caravanserai, last modified July 21, 2017, http://central.asia-news.com/en_GB/articles/cnmi_ca/features/2017/07/21/feature-01.

Document metadata

Title of Deliverable	Policy Paper No. 3 – Political and security relations – Mapping strategies of Russia, USA and China towards Central Asia	
Deliverable No.	D2.1	
Work Package	WP2	
Dissemination level	Public	
Nature	Report	
Target Group	European Commission / General public (public)	
Contractual Delivery Date	30.06.2018	
Actual Delivery Date	07.09.2018	
Version	1.0	
Responsible editor	A. Gussarova (CAISS) and M. Andžāns (LIIA)	22.06.2018
Contributors	M. Andžāns and U.A. Bērziņa-Čerenkova (LIIA), A. Gussarova and D. Larionova (CAISS)	22.06.2018
Internal Reviewer	K. Böttger (IEP), B. Schlierkamp (UDE)	05.07.2018
Approved by	A.-K. Binot / B. Schlierkamp / M. Gies (UDE)	04.09.2018
	K. Böttger (IEP), NPAC	05.09.2018
	A. Gussarova (CAISS) & M. Andžāns (LIIA), WP Leader	06.09.2018
	M. Kaeding (UDE), Project Coordinator	06.09.2018

Version history

Version	Date	Description
0.1	22.06.2018	First Outline by the WP Leaders A. Gussarova (CAISS) and M. Andžāns (LIIA)
0.2	05.07.2018	Content review by K. Böttger (IEP), formal review by B. Schlierkamp (UDE)
0.3	09.08.2018	Revision by A. Gussarova (CAISS)
0.4	23.08.2018	Internal content review by K. Böttger (IEP) and B. Schlierkamp (UDE)
0.5	25.08.2018	Revision by WP lead A Gussarova (CAISS) and M. Andžāns (LIIA), final review by K. Böttger (IEP) and plagiarism check
0.6	05.09.2018	Final approval on last comments by K. Böttger (IEP)
0.7	06.09.2018	Final formal review by UDE, final approval by WP leaders and coordinator
1.0	07.09.2018	Final version submitted to EC

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