

# **NATO and Central Asia: Security, Interests and Values in a Strategic Region**

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At the end of the Cold War NATO faced a dilemma. In the new security environment, states were no longer the main threats to each other's security. To remain relevant, the Atlantic Alliance had to embark on a process of transformation, which involved moving away from the concept of territorial defence to enhance its capability to tackle threats when and where they arose. However, tackling such global threats and challenges in turn implied the need to reach out to new partners, some of whom did not necessarily share the values enshrined in NATO's founding Washington Treaty of 1949. Some of NATO's resulting Partnership policies, including its approach towards Central Asia, reflects this inherent tension between pursuing security imperatives and underlying interests, and defending and promoting core values.

Although most Central Asian states joined NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme in the mid-1990s, it was not until after 11 September 2001, and the ensuing operations in Afghanistan, that Central Asia emerged on the radar screens of NATO capitals as a region of strategic importance. Since then the Alliance has multiplied its efforts to engage these countries in closer and mutually beneficial co-operation. Little publicised and analysed, NATO's policies towards Central Asia — and the driving forces behind them — often suffer facile generalisations in media and policy circles. This article seeks to address this knowledge gap by providing an analytical overview of NATO's relations with, and policies towards, its Central Asian Partners. It argues that since 9/11, NATO's pursuit of deeper engagement with these governments has reflected the tension between pragmatism and idealism, or, in other words, between the dual requirements of pragmatic present-day realpolitik and of upholding the enduring democratic values upon which the Alliance was founded sixty years ago, and which are also enshrined in its PfP.

In analysing this tension, the article focuses on five main aspects. First, it points out why NATO's co-operation with Central Asia matters, with Afghanistan, drug trafficking, terrorism and energy topping the list of shared threats and interests. Second, it presents the tools assistance on offer to Central Asian Partners under the PfP programme and, the values underpinning it. Third, it highlights key areas of NATO's co-operation with Central Asian Partners, including on the crucial issue of Afghanistan. Fourth, it presents the case in point of NATO's relations with Kazakhstan, the Alliance's key Partner in the region and future holder of the OSCE Chairmanship. Fifth, it considers how NATO's engagement with Central Asia interrelates with the activities of the OSCE and other major players in the region, presenting ideas for closer NATO- OSCE co-operation in Central Asia on Afghanistan, especially in the crucial fields of counter-narcotics and border security. The conclusion argues that NATO's approach towards Central Asia reflects an inherent tension between pursuing security imperatives, underlying interests and core values. The result is a complex and somewhat uneasy policy, which seeks to reconcile these at times conflicting or contradictory elements.

## **1. Common Threats and Interests: Why NATO-Central Asia Co-operation Matters**

At their Summit in Istanbul in June 2004, NATO Heads of State and Government decided to strengthen links with Central Asia, as well as with the Caucasus – regions with which relations had previously been limited. Since the Istanbul decision, it has become increasingly clear that today NATO and its Central Asian Partners share common interests and face a number of common threats. Today, NATO doctrines describe the gravest security challenges as being terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and failed states – especially when these three are mixed. Other factors, such as violent religious extremism, ethnic strife and drug trafficking, underline the fact that such threats do not stop at state borders, and can only be addressed through concerted international co-operation. As a strategically situated region, Central Asia must be an important part of these efforts.

Most such common threats and interests shared by NATO and Central Asia emanate from, and are focused on, Afghanistan. Indeed, it was the 9/11 terrorist attack on the US — orchestrated by al-Qaeda from their safe haven in Afghanistan — that brought Central Asia to the fore of international attention. From NATO's side, Afghanistan has been at the very heart of its security agenda in recent years. Indeed, ever since it took command of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in August 2003 — gradually expanding its presence throughout the country — delivering security and stability to Afghanistan has been the Alliance's top priority. Indeed, the success of this United Nations-mandated operation is crucial for the security of not just this region, but of the world at large.

Beyond practical co-operation and logistical support to ISAF (which will be discussed below), an increasingly substantive political dialogue has developed between the Central Asian countries and NATO regarding Afghanistan. NATO has also been encouraging its Central Asian Partners to play a more active role in the reconstruction and development of Afghanistan. The stabilisation of Afghanistan is an interest all Central Asian countries share with NATO, as their governments are clearly concerned by the possible spread of insurgency and extremism-inspired instability to their own countries. They are also struggling to tackle the grave problems posed by drug trafficking through their respective territories, which lie on the 'northern route' onward to Russia and NATO territory. From NATO's perspective, heading off such threats before they land on its doorstep is an integral part of the Alliance's evolving post-Cold War approach to security.

Terrorism is another shared threat that requires common understandings and approaches; both NATO member states and Central Asian countries have suffered directly from the consequences of terrorist attacks, and there is scope for substantial co-operation in this field. Last but not least, an important issue that affects both Central Asia and the NATO Allies is that of energy security. Central Asia's vast oil and gas wealth is a major factor behind Western interest and investment, and could be the key to unlock the potential of the region's economic and social development. Promoting the security of energy supplies in this region is, therefore, in the interest of both energy-importing and energy-exporting countries. Since the 2006 Riga Summit NATO has been looking closely at what value it can add in the area of the protection of critical energy infrastructure, and has begun a dialogue on this with interested Partners, including those in Central Asia.

In contrast to some Partners in the Balkans, Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, no Central Asian country has expressed an interest in NATO membership. In pursuing Partnership with NATO, the Central Asian Partners are looking for the added value that this brings. NATO's Partnership structures and co-operation programmes offer a multilateral framework for security dialogue and opportunities for practical bilateral co-operation in a wide range of areas. The following section will outline the assistance on offer through the PfP programme, the values underpinning it, and how NATO actually provides such assistance to the various Central Asian Partners

## **2. Tools and Values: The Partnership for Peace**

Following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War, Allied leaders extended a 'hand of friendship' across the old East-West divide and proposed a new co-operative relationship to former Warsaw Pact members in Central and Eastern Europe, and the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union. The establishment of the PfP in 1994 constituted a significant milestone, adding practical bilateral co-operation to the Partnership spectrum.

Today the essence of NATO's engagement with Partners is an individual co-operation package tailored to

each Partner's needs, abilities and ambitions, and jointly implemented with its government. Unsurprisingly, therefore, each Central Asian Partner's individual programme of co-operation with NATO has evolved differently.

## **Tools**

All Partners develop a yearly list of activities under their Individual Partnership Programme (IPP) with NATO. This list is selected from a menu of around 1300 activities on offer, which touch on virtually every field of NATO activity, including defence reform, defence policy and planning, civil-military relations, education and training, military-to-military co-operation and exercises, civil emergency planning and disaster-preparedness, and co-operation on science and environmental issues.

Partners whose co-operation with NATO is more advanced participate in the Planning and Review Process (PARP), in which some of their security forces undergo defence review procedures similar to those of NATO Allies themselves, in order to prepare them for participation in international peace support operations. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have integrated into this process, while Tajikistan has expressed an interest in doing so in the future. After a two-year absence following the Andijan events, Uzbekistan re-joined the process in June 2008.

More advanced still is the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP), in which a Partner and NATO jointly agree on a detailed programme of security sector reform. The benefit to a Partner of participating in more advanced programmes is not only a more rapid rate of defence reform, but also greater access to NATO resources and expertise to help them conduct those reforms. Kazakhstan is the only Central Asian country to have agreed to an IPAP with the Alliance in early 2006, and has been making substantial progress in defence reform and interoperability since then.

The range of Turkmenistan's co-operation with NATO is more limited, as its status of 'permanent neutrality' means it does not participate in military activities. This does not, however, preclude co-operation in other key areas, such as civil emergency planning. Co-operation was initially promising with Uzbekistan, which joined PARP and at one stage even showed an interest in developing an IPAP with the Alliance. However, talks were suspended and progress halted after the 2005 events in Andijan.

## **Values**

This brings us to a more fundamental point about NATO's PfP – Partnership is about more than practical co-operation; it is also about values. Indeed, by signing the PfP Framework Document, Central Asian Partners took on a number of commitments. While these are not as far-ranging and detailed as the OSCE's values and commitments, PfP principles include respect for international law, the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Helsinki Final Act, and international disarmament and arms control agreements; respect for existing borders; and a commitment to the peaceful settlement of disputes.

After the Uzbek government's crackdown in Andijan in May 2005, the North Atlantic Council – NATO's highest decision-making body – issued a statement condemning 'the reported use of excessive and disproportionate force by the Uzbek security forces' and joined the UN, EU and OSCE in calling for an independent international inquiry. Shortly thereafter the NATO Secretary General announced the postponement of previously planned

PfP events in Tashkent, underlining that ‘this partnership [PfP] is not just ... about forms of political or other forms of cooperation but is very much about upholding human values and that’s the reason that I’m so deeply disturbed about what happen[ed]’ in Andijan.<sup>1</sup>

Following these developments, while NATO maintained working-level channels of communication with Tashkent, co-operation with Uzbekistan effectively ground to a halt. It was only after noting some positive developments, including the launch of Uzbekistan’s human rights dialogue with the EU, the easing of EU sanctions, and visits by the NATO Secretary General’s Special Representative for the Caucasus and Central Asia to Tashkent in December 2006 and November 2007, that relations and practical co-operation between NATO and Uzbekistan could begin to improve.

To be sure, in many areas Central Asian Partners still have some way to go to fully live up to PfP standards. NATO tends to take a pragmatic view of national specificities, and seeks to facilitate these processes by contributing its experience and expertise. By assisting Partners with a crucial stage in the democratisation process, e.g. defence reform (with particular focus on democratic control, transparency, and professionalism in their military institutions), these tools are effectively contributing to these countries’ wider reform effort. At the same time, the pragmatism of PfP has its limits, as was demonstrated by the repercussions of the Andijan events on NATO’s co-operation with Uzbekistan. The next section will highlight the key areas of NATO’s practical co-operation with Central Asian Partners: security co-operation on Afghanistan; defence and security sector reform; and other Partnership assistance.

### 3. Key Areas of Co-operation

The Alliance has pursued enhanced engagement with Central Asian Partners in the belief that through daily co-operation in key areas of NATO and/or common interest, some core democratic values would eventually find their way into these Partners’ security institutions, which in turn would help the long term process of their democratisation.

#### *Political dialogue*

Regular political dialogue is an important pre-requisite for enhancing practical co-operation, while also fostering better mutual understanding. Such dialogue is conducted through visits by high-level Central Asian officials to NATO Headquarters: the Heads of State or Foreign and Defence Ministers of all Central Asian countries have called on the NATO leadership in Brussels. At the 2004 Istanbul Summit, Allied leaders agreed on concrete measures to reinforce contacts with Central Asia, starting with the appointment of a Special Representative for the region. U.S. diplomat Robert Simmons was the first to be entrusted with this role by Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer in 2004. His primary mandate is to maintain regular high-level dialogue with regional leaders on regional security issues, and ensure that their countries are making the best possible use of the Partnership tools NATO has to offer. The Special Representative’s work in Central Asia is supported by a Liaison Officer, who ensures the working-level dialogue with local authorities.

In addition to bilateral political dialogue, the Partnership framework for co-operation has an important multilateral dimension which has proven valuable to the Central Asian Partners. This is embodied in the EAPC,

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<sup>1</sup> Press conference by NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer after the Plenary Meeting of the EAPC Security Forum, Åre, Sweden, 25 May 2005.

which brings together NATO's 26 members and its 24 Partners in a forum for dialogue and consultation, and meets monthly at Ambassadorial level at NATO Headquarters, and occasionally at Ministerial and Head of State levels.

### *Security co-operation: Afghanistan*

Central Asian states' bilateral relationships with Afghanistan are complex, their recent history scarred by the widespread involvement of Central Asian soldiers in the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan. Nevertheless, the stabilisation of Afghanistan is an interest all Central Asian countries share with NATO. The time when a Taliban-ruled Afghanistan posed an immediate danger to the entire region is still fresh in Central Asian leaders' minds. Indeed, as recently as in 1999 the Taliban openly threatened to spread their fundamentalist readings of Islam beyond Afghanistan's borders.

As mentioned earlier, all Central Asian Partners have provided various forms of support to the NATO-led ISAF operation in Afghanistan. Political support has been unwavering from the beginning; operational support has included over-flight rights and the leasing of military facilities to individual Allies. Kyrgyzstan hosts a U.S./Coalition base at Bishkek's Manas Airport; Tajikistan's Dushanbe Airport hosts French military aircraft; and Germany uses an airfield in Termez, Uzbekistan, which is also open for use by other ISAF contributors on a case-by-case basis. Until December 2005 the United States also had a base in Uzbekistan at Karshi-Khanabad, known as K2'. Turkmenistan allows Allies to use its airspace, while Tajikistan signed a transit agreement with NATO in 2004.

Following the Russian Federation's offer, finalised at the NATO Bucharest Summit in April 2008, to enable the transit of non-lethal ISAF cargo by rail through its territory, the Alliance has pursued negotiations with both Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan on similar surface transit arrangements to complete its so-called 'Northern Line of Communication' to Afghanistan. The importance of such a supply corridor (an alternative to the Southern Line of Communication through Pakistan) became increasingly clear to NATO commanders as the security situation in Pakistan deteriorated, and the frequency of attacks on ISAF supply convoys in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas and the North West Frontier Province increased. High-level political approval for the transit agreements with NATO was publicly announced by Uzbekistan's President Karimov at the Bucharest Summit, and by Kazakhstan's Defence Minister Akhmetov in September 2008. Teams of NATO experts were subsequently dispatched for detailed negotiations in Astana and Tashkent. Separate transit talks were also held with Turkmenistan.

Another example of successful co-operation on Afghanistan is the participation of all five Central Asian Partners in a project for Counter-Narcotics training of Afghan and Central Asian personnel, launched by the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) in December 2005. Central Asian states acknowledge, increasingly openly, that Afghan narcotics represent a grave threat to the security and stability of their own societies. Increased drug seizures by Central Asian states in recent years have mirrored the increases in production in Afghanistan reported by the UNODC. The infamous 'northern route' passes through their respective territories, leaving a deadly trail of crime, corruption, and drug addiction. Tajikistan, which shares a 1,425 km- long and highly permeable border with Afghanistan, is particularly affected (especially since the withdrawal of Russian border guards) as its territory is the major transit point for Afghan drugs on their way to Russia and onward to Western Europe. So far, over 200 officers from the region have been trained under the NATO-Russia initiative. The project aims to contribute to other international efforts seeking to combat narcotics traffic along the 'northern

route,' as well as at fostering a regional network of counter-narcotics professionals from Afghanistan and Central Asia.

Beyond practical co-operation and logistical support to ISAF, an increasingly substantive political dialogue has been developing between the Central Asian countries and NATO regarding Afghanistan. In September 2007 a forum bringing together the Allies, all Central Asian Partners, and Afghanistan (the so-called '26+5+1' format) was launched at NATO Headquarters to enhance political dialogue on Afghanistan. It has proven a unique forum, not least in enabling Afghanistan to interact with all its Central Asian neighbours. Kabul has put forward some interesting proposals in this context, including enhancing political contacts and intelligence exchange on security, border management, and drug trafficking, as well as encouraging Central Asian contributions to Provincial Reconstruction Teams.

NATO also encourages its Central Asian Partners to play a more active role in the reconstruction and development of Afghanistan. It does so in full knowledge of the potential, in the context of Afghanistan's diverse ethnic fabric, of the privileged ties several bordering Central Asian countries have with influential local communities and actors, which can positively impact the stabilisation of Afghanistan — ISAF's main objective. With regard to bilateral reconstruction and development assistance, the Kazakhstani government adopted its first bilateral assistance package for Afghanistan. Specialists from Uzbekistan have assisted with a number of infrastructure projects in Afghanistan. Tajikistan is supporting efforts to boost Afghanistan's economy through the construction of bridges across their shared border. Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan have assisted Afghanistan with subsidised gas and electricity exports, respectively.

The geographic proximity of the Central Asian countries to Afghanistan and internal problems with violent religious extremism have reinforced their interest in working with NATO Allies to better respond to the threat of terrorism. Some of the Central Asian Partners contribute to the fight against terrorism through their participation in the Partnership Action Plan against Terrorism (PAP-T), which was launched in the wake of 9/11. Co-operation in this area includes sharing intelligence and training and exercises to enhance counter-terrorist and border security capabilities, as well as improving preparedness for managing the consequences of a possible terrorist attack. It is important to note that NATO believes that tackling terrorism should never be used as a pretext for clamping down on civil society or restricting fundamental freedoms. A crucial part of this effort, therefore, addresses the need to protect and to promote democratic institutions, fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law. Hence all such co-operation is predicated on respect for relevant UN Security Council resolutions and international law, including humanitarian and human rights law. It is a further example of NATO's co-operation tools being used to promote core values.

### ***Defence and security sector reform***

Defence and security sector reform is an area where NATO and individual Allies have considerable expertise that Partners can draw on. A key objective of NATO's Partnership policy is 'to help [its] Partners with reforms leading to more effective defence institutions. This includes the difficult task of bringing security services and military forces under effective democratic control, and making sure that they are appropriately sized, structured and funded to meet the requirements that are made of them in the new security environment.'<sup>2</sup> Through the Partnership Action Plan on Defence Institution Building (PAP-DIB) launched in 2004, NATO

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2 Speech by NATO Secretary General De Hoop Scheffer during his visit to Kazakhstan, 19 October 2004

supports Partners in building more accountable, transparent and democratically responsible defence institutions. Another major objective is to enhance Partner militaries' interoperability with NATO, so as to ensure smooth co-operation in the context of a current or future NATO operation in which the Partner might wish to participate. Kazakhstan's efforts at achieving greater interoperability with NATO troops have led to the creation, assisted by NATO, of a Kazakh battalion (KAZBAT). Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have also declared a number of units available for possible participation in NATO/PfP operations and exercises.

### *Other Partnership Assistance Areas*

In addition to security co-operation and defence reform, there is much more assistance on offer, including in areas that many would not immediately associate with NATO. While beyond the scope of this article, Partnership projects range from disaster preparedness to scientific and technical co-operation. A good example of the latter is the 'Virtual Silk Highway', a NATO-sponsored project that has established Internet connectivity between the countries of Central Asia, the Caucasus and the rest of the world. Destruction projects have been permitted to destroy landmines in Tajikistan; a project on the destruction of small arms and light weapons should be launched in Kazakhstan soon; and NATO has just launched a project to help Uzbekistan with the destruction of its highly toxic melange rocket fuel.

All these areas of co-operation, in particular the focus on defence reform and achieving interoperability of armed forces, illustrates NATO's efforts to combine the pursuit of its operational interests and a 'learning by doing' approach to the promotion of core democratic values. In its attempt to reconcile these at times seemingly contradictory elements, NATO has opted for a broad policy of engagement towards Central Asia, despite some of these countries' questionable democracy and human rights records. The Alliance has done so in the belief that through daily co-operation in key areas of NATO and/or common interest, some core democratic values would eventually be incorporated into Partners' approach towards security, the role of the military, and international co-operation, thus benefiting the long term process of democratisation. Kazakhstan is a case in point in this regard.

### **4. A Case in Point: Kazakhstan**

Kazakhstan is NATO's most active Partner in Central Asia, and pursues the region's most advanced co-operation programme with the Alliance. NATO-Kazakhstan relations began in 1992, when Kazakhstan joined the North Atlantic Co-operation Council (NACC), which became the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) in 1997. Kazakhstan signed up to the Partnership for Peace programme in 1995. In 2002 Kazakhstan deepened military and defence-related co-operation by joining the PARP framework. In 2005 Kazakhstan made the strategic decision to develop an Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) with NATO. In January 2006 Kazakhstan became the first — and thus far only — Central Asian Partner to have agreed an IPAP with the Alliance. This programme facilitates NATO's support for political and defence reform in Kazakhstan, in areas that Kazakhstan chooses to prioritise, with a special focus on co-operation on Afghanistan, interoperability, defence reform, civil emergency planning, scientific co-operation, public diplomacy and — last but not least — political dialogue.

### *Afghanistan*

Kazakhstan has supported the Alliance's operations in Afghanistan from their early days through the provision

of overflight rights for ISAF aircraft. Negotiations on an agreement on railway transit for non-lethal ISAF cargoes are at an advanced stage. In a significant move, in September 2008 Kazakhstan's Defence Minister announced a contribution to the NATO-led ISAF operation. This would initially consist of two or three staff officers posted to ISAF HQ, followed by the possible deployment of a team of medical officers at a later stage.

With regard to the economic rehabilitation of Afghanistan, following President Nazarbayev's statement of intent to that effect during a visit to NATO in December 2006, the Kazakhstani government adopted, in September 2007, its first bilateral assistance package for Afghanistan. Under this package, totalling USD 3mn, Kazakhstan provides assistance for the construction of roads, a school in Samargan province, a hospital in Bamiyan province, and the development of chromium mining. A memorandum of intent has also been signed with the Afghan Ministry of Public Works regarding the construction of a railway from the Uzbek-Afghan border to the Afghan-Pakistani border.

### *Interoperability*

Among the success stories of practical NATO-Kazakhstan co-operation has been the development of an interoperable peacekeeping unit, the Kazakh Battalion (KAZBAT), subsequently expanded into the Kazakh Brigade (KAZBRIG). Its soldiers and officers are equipped and trained according to NATO standards, which should enable the unit to participate in a NATO peace support operation in the future. Though not as part of a NATO operation, a unit of KAZBAT military engineers were already successfully deployed for a demining mission, as part of the Polish-led multinational division in Iraq.

The annual Steppe Eagle military exercises conducted in Kazakhstan have benefited from the participation of Allied military forces and expert assessments, and Kazakhstan has expressed the aim of having the 2009 edition of the exercise accredited as a PfP exercise. Kazakhstan's MOD is setting up, with NATO assistance, a regional Partnership for Peace Education and Training Centre focusing on enhancing the foreign language capacity of Central Asian militaries. As President Nazarbayev observed, 'co-operation with NATO is necessary for the young army of Kazakhstan. We need the language training (...), management training for the officers for the army, and we plan to continue this collaboration'.<sup>4</sup> The appointment, by Kazakhstan, of a Military Representative to NATO Headquarters significantly facilitated and accelerated the development of military co-operation with the Alliance.

### *Other areas*

NATO has launched a Trust Fund for destroying surplus small arms and light weapons (SALW) as well as man-portable air defence systems (MANPADS) in Kazakhstan. Civil emergency planning is also an area where co-operation is expanding, with Kazakhstan scheduled to host an Alliance-approved disaster preparedness exercise near Almaty in 2009. In preparation for this, a liaison officer from the Ministry for Emergency Situations has been seconded to the Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response and Co-ordination Centre (EADRCC) at NATO Headquarters.

Such successes, however, do not always get the public visibility they deserve, and NATO's image continues to suffer from lingering Cold War-era misperceptions. To address these, NATO and the Kazakhstani government have continued to enhance joint public diplomacy activities. An Information Centre on NATO, based at Al-Farabi Kazakhstani National University in Almaty, has been opened, and the National Library in Astana was

made a NATO Depository Library in April 2008. Several 'NATO-Kazakhstan Partnership Weeks' have been organised around visits by senior NATO officials, and have attracted wide media and public interest.

Kazakhstan's offer of hosting a future edition of NATO's EAPC Security Forum was accepted by Allies in the summer of 2008. The next edition of this major event in NATO's calendar, which aims to bring together Minister-level representatives of up to fifty states, will be held in Kazakhstan on 24-25 June 2009. Afghanistan, regional security and energy security should feature prominently among the themes of the Forum. The event will be followed by the 2009 edition of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly's annual Rose-Roth seminar, also in Kazakhstan.

### *Political dialogue*

Regular and substantive political dialogue takes place at both working and high levels. Secretaries General Lord Robertson and De Hoop Scheffer both travelled to Astana (in 2000 and 2004, respectively), while President Nazarbayev visited NATO Headquarters in December 2006. More recently, Kazakhstan's Defence Minister Akhmetov attended the EAPC Bucharest Summit in April 2008, and the NATO Deputy Secretary General, Claudio Bisogniero, paid a highly visible visit to Kazakhstan on 11 September 2008, shortly after the Georgia crisis. Since 2004, the Secretary General's Special Representative for the Caucasus and Central Asia, Robert Simmons, has been a regular visitor to Kazakhstan, holding high-level consultations on a wide range of issues of common interest at a frequency of at least four visits a year. NATO's regional Liaison Officer for Central Asia has been hosted by the Ministry of Defence in Astana, which has facilitated day-to-day, working-level dialogue and the effective implementation of co-operation programmes.

The substantive nature of their political dialogue is another element that sets apart NATO's interaction with Kazakhstan from its relations with the other countries of the region. Indeed, the IPAP allows for in-depth discussion of potentially sensitive issues such as human rights, elections and electoral reforms, democratic and institutional reform, and rule of law. For example, following an in-depth exchange on electoral issues with a representative of Kazakhstan's Central Election Commission during the IPAP assessment discussions in April 2008, in its latest IPAP report NATO encouraged Kazakhstan to further address OSCE concerns with regard to electoral reform, media legislation and freedom of media, freedom of association, and civil society and NGO functioning.

## **5. NATO and Other International Actors in the Region**

### *The OSCE and Kazakhstan's upcoming Chairmanship*

In a speech delivered during his 2004 visit to Kazakhstan, Secretary General De Hoop Scheffer reminded his hosts that 'NATO, first and foremost, is an Alliance about values. NATO countries share values like democracy, fundamental freedoms, human rights and the rule of law. These are values not only for the Allies but also our Partners. The more we share these fundamental values, the stronger our Partnership will be. In turn, we will stand stronger together against the threats to our security'.<sup>3</sup>

In the same spirit, NATO has high hopes for Kazakhstan's tenure as Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE. The

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3 Speech by NATO Secretary General De Hoop Scheffer during his visit to Kazakhstan, 19 October 2004.

November 2007 decision by the 15th Ministerial Council in Madrid to nominate Kazakhstan to the 2010 Chairmanship was greeted by some as a major step forward for the cause of democratisation in Central Asia, and was criticised by others, including prominent human rights groups, for harming their efforts by legitimising what they consider repressive practices. De Hoop Scheffer (a former OSCE Chairman-in-Office himself) consequently treaded a fine line in his congratulatory message to President Nazarbayev. It expressed the hope that Kazakhstan would meet the expectations placed in it by OSCE participating States, by shouldering the great responsibilities that come with this position and continuing the country's process of democratic development, and reiterated NATO's commitment to assisting Kazakhstan with its further reforms.

NATO and the OSCE have an established working relationship at both headquarter and field level. As a member of the OSCE Troika from 1 January 2009, Kazakhstan is set to participate in the regular NATO-OSCE Staff Talks that are held three times a year, alternately in Brussels and Vienna. NATO has expressed the hope that during Kazakhstan's Chairmanship, relations between the Alliance and the Organization will further strengthen and enhance their complementarities, particularly in Central Asia.

Over the years there have been some joint projects implemented in this region (such as the flagship ENVSEC initiative the environmental security field), and the steady increase of information exchange and co-ordination between the OSCE's field missions and the NATO Liaison Officer has been encouraging. At the same time, almost inevitably, both security organisations have on occasion pursued similar or even overlapping activities, such as de-mining, destruction of SALW and MANPADS, mélange disposal, and border security. The OSCE's particular strength in Central Asia, of course, stems from its presence on the ground, and its human dimension, democratisation and monitoring mandate — a strength that is recognised and supported by NATO.

The Madrid OSCE Ministerial Council's decision to step up OSCE engagement with (and, possibly, even in) Afghanistan, and the upcoming Kazakhstani Chairmanship, present a valuable and timely opportunity for the two organisations to further enhance their co-operation in Central Asia, with a particular focus on the common cause of improving the situation in Afghanistan. Two areas where they could develop complementary activities are border security and counter-narcotics. The Madrid decision gave the OSCE a mandate to intensify action to help secure and manage borders between the Central Asian participating States and Afghanistan, and support the fight against drug trafficking. For their part, NATO Defence Ministers meeting in Budapest in October 2008 approved a counter-narcotics mandate for ISAF, in cases where a clear link between the production and trafficking of drugs and the insurgency could be established.

Enhancing border security is also identified in NATO's Afghan Co-operation Programme as an area for co-operation, although concrete activities are yet to be undertaken. Co-ordination is needed to ensure that activities in Afghanistan are complementary and avoid duplication. Central Asian states have repeatedly requested assistance from both NATO and the OSCE with border security and management. Again, co-operation could be developed in this field, while seeking to minimise 'forum shopping' by the Central Asians; More concretely, NATO and the OSCE could join forces in setting up mechanisms to encourage and facilitate information exchange between ISAF's Regional Command North, and the border services of neighbouring Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The OSCE's planned Border Management Staff College in Dushanbe could serve as a useful conduit for such co-operation.

In the area of counter-narcotics, NATO and the OSCE could consider co-ordinating training activities for Afghan and Central Asian counter-narcotics and law enforcement officials. Both organisations currently run similar

training programmes, which could be synchronised for greater impact. Another idea is to set up mechanisms to facilitate information and intelligence sharing between Afghanistan's and neighbouring Central Asian states' border agencies and counter-narcotics agencies – a priority raised by the Afghan authorities at NATO's 26+5+1 forum. Pooling information between ISAF/Allied counter-narcotics experts, Afghan, and Central Asian counter-narcotics agencies would also represent a significant advance. Looking further ahead, combating human trafficking (within the confines of NATO's and the OSCE's respective mandates in this area) could be another potential area for co-operation.

### **Other actors**

NATO and the OSCE are, of course, not the only organisations or actors working in Central Asia. Most of NATO's Central Asian Partners participate in other regional security organisations including the CIS, CSTO, and SCO. Major regional actors, such as Russia and China, also have important interests and roles to play in Central Asia. Yet regional and international media often automatically portray advances in NATO's co-operation with a Central Asian Partner as a setback for Russia or Moscow-led security organisations.

The Alliance's pursuit of deeper engagement with Central Asia does not, however, seek to come at the expense of these sovereign countries' relations with neighbouring states or regional organisations. As NATO officials have consistently emphasised to regional leaders, co-operation with the Alliance is not, and should not be, a 'zero-sum game'. Indeed, pursuing good relations with NATO and with other organisations, or with important players such as Russia and China, are not mutually exclusive policies. And while their respective methods may differ, all security organisations active in Central Asia are ultimately working towards the same goal of promoting stability and security. Like other international actors, the Alliance has also encouraged greater regional co-operation among its Central Asian Partners, essential to address a vast array of common challenges.

### **Conclusion**


NATO does not claim to have all the answers to the complex security challenges of a region in flux. However, NATO does have useful, 'learning by doing' tools for Partnership and reform that have proven themselves over the past decade, most spectacularly so in Central and Eastern Europe. As this article has sought to demonstrate, NATO has engaged in a determined effort to promote co-operation with its Partners in Central Asia, particularly since 9/11. It has done so in pragmatic pursuit of its multiple interests and objectives in response to the threats it is facing, especially in connection with Afghanistan. But beyond such realpolitik considerations and pragmatic co-operation, the Alliance's closer engagement with its Partners has also sought to promote and uphold the core values upon which it was founded sixty years ago. They include a commitment to the development of democratic, accountable institutions, a vibrant civil society and to the protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms – and are enshrined in the PfP. As the NATO Secretary General argued in the wake of the Andijan events, PfP is ultimately 'about upholding human values; it is about upholding human rights'.<sup>4</sup> Almost inevitably, NATO's policy reflects the inherent tensions of trying to reconcile security imperatives, underlying political, military and economic interests, and democratic values in the challenging historical, political and cultural context of Central Asia.

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4 Press conference by NATO Secretary General DeHoop Scheffer after the Plenary Meeting of the EAPC Security Forum, Åre, Sweden, 25 May 2005.

But to achieve significant results, it takes two to tango. NATO has therefore consistently encouraged its Central Asian Partners to demonstrate a clear commitment to co-operation and strong political will to tackle tough but essential political, democratic, economic, and defence reforms. Clearly, the process of democratisation in Central Asia has not been, and cannot be expected to be, flawless. The Alliance's exposure to the realities of Central Asia — in particular the cultural and historical legacy in which this process is taking root — has fostered a better understanding of what is and is not possible. But given the manifold stakes involved, NATO will seek to continue to provide assistance, promote reforms, uphold fundamental values, and contribute to security and stability in what is clearly a strategically crucial region.





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