



MILITARY COOPERATION BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND KYRGYZSTAN: THE CASE OF THE MANAS AIRBASE

Since gaining independence in 1991 Kyrgyzstan has officially been globalized. The relations of the United States (U.S.) with Central Asia commenced in the early 1990s, entailing diplomatic recognition and opening of embassies. According to the agreement between the governments of the U.S. and Kyrgyzstan regarding cooperation to facilitate the provision of assistance signed in 1993, the U.S. has been providing financial and humanitarian aid and non-lethal military assistance to the country to elevate sovereignty and to achieve economic progress and democratic governance. By joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) Partnership for Peace in 1994 Kyrgyzstan has gained an opportunity to engage in a number of training exercises in the fields of defense, security and civil emergency planning cooperation. The purpose of the Partnership for Peace was to increase stability and to reduce the threats for peace in the region.

The stable relationship between the two states reached another level right after the September 11 terrorist attacks. It was a wakeup call which was considered as a life changing moment for the regional politics, as in 2001 the U.S. has changed its foreign policy of providing mainly humanitarian assistance through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to a security-oriented policy in Central Asia. At that point, under the Pentagon's Global Defense Posture Review (GDPR), the U.S. has offered Kyrgyzstan to host the U.S. International Airbase at the ex-Soviet civilian Manas International Airport. Kyrgyzstan was provided with a military aid for support of the Operation Enduring Freedom-Afghanistan (OEF), which was coordinated under the U.S. and the U.K. joint partnership and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) operation of the NATO nations, in the period of 2001-2014.

The Manas Airport, which was constructed in 1970, was the largest civilian international airport located 25 km northwest of Bishkek. It had a long (4,200 meters) exiting airstrip suitable for jet bombers and cargo planes. However, as the infrastructure was neglected after the collapse

of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) the airport was witnessing steady decline. In spite of being distant from Afghanistan, the Manas Airport was selected as the best option by the U.S. Military due to its technical and infrastructural specifications.

The Manas Airbase was opened as a center for deployment and transit of military forces during the U.S. military operation in Afghanistan on December 16, 2001. Yet, as the country was already coping with energy shortage, the worsening global economic crisis affected Kyrgyzstan in 2008. Under these circumstances, the Kyrgyz Government accepted Russia's offer to provide a \$2.15 billion credit which later caused a transformation in the country's foreign policy towards a Russian oriented one. Hence, the President of Kyrgyzstan, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, has announced intention to close the Manas Airbase in 2009. However, after long negotiations the U.S. Government has convinced the Kyrgyz Parliament to extend and to reform the base lease. This was a new step in formation of the new status of the Manas Airbase. The new official bilateral agreement on the U.S. Manas International Transit Center was ratified on June 25, 2009. The new function of the airport was to serve as a transportation hub. Through protracted negotiations on reforming the status of the Manas Airbase, the U.S. Military has significantly escalated annual fee for utilization of the airbase from \$17.4 million to \$60 million. That was not the first time when the U.S. officials had increased fee for exploitation of the airport. The first increase was made in 2005, when the President Kurmanbek Bakiyev demanded substantial increase of the yearly payment for leasing the airbase from to \$2 million to \$17.4 million.

In spite of the fact that the Kyrgyz Parliament was in favor of the U.S. investment into the Kyrgyz economy at the time of economic stagnation, the Manas case was becoming a questionable issue. However, Almazbek Atambayev, who won the presidential elections in 2011, finally brought the issue of the Manas Airbase to the conclusion.

The Kyrgyz Parliament refused to extend its military agreement with the U.S. in 2014 based on the desire to improve its relations with Russia and on Kyrgyzstan's plans to be accepted to the Eurasian Economic Union in 2015. After long negotiations on the U.S. military base in Central Asia, the U.S. Manas Airbase was decided to be closed in June 2014.

The new policy of Kyrgyzstan contradicted the plan of the U.S. military established in 2012 to withdraw its troops and equipment from Afghanistan. The problem was that closing the Manas Transit Center was scheduled ahead of the drawdown of the U.S. anti-terrorist operations in Afghanistan at the end of 2014. After the decision of the Kyrgyz authorities to cancel the Manas air lease agreement, it became even more difficult for the U.S. military to act according to the plan, as it had to withdraw more than 90,000 troops and a number of enormous depots of military gear. The Manas Airbase was a reverse transit point of the new Distribution Channel route which was established to avoid nonstable routes through Pakistan.

After closing the Manas Transit Center in 2014, the bilateral collaboration agreement between the two states was relevant until the denouncement of the treaty in July, 2015 prompted by the U.S. Government human rights defender award which was given to an activist who was involved in the revolution and ethnic clashes in Kyrgyzstan.

To conclude, it should be noted that during the 13 years of utilization of the Manas International Airport, the Airbase transported over 5.3 million military servicemen from 26 ISAF member states and more than 33,000 refueling missions on their way in and out of Afghanistan. The U.S. Military Forces had a huge impact on the Kyrgyz economy by investing more than \$318 million on the utilization of the airport. Therefore, even though the cooperation treaty was suspended in 2015 and the Manas Transit Center was closed in 2014, the U.S. still remains the major humanitarian partner of Kyrgyzstan.

Politics, Foreign Affairs and Security

- The President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, dissolved the lower chamber of the Kazakh parliament, the Mazhilis, and set the early parliamentary elections for March 20, 2016. Earlier the Mazhilis asked Nazarbayev for its early dissolution due to the aggravating economic situation in the country.
- The Parliament of Tajikistan has passed amendments to the Constitution allowing the current President of Tajikistan, Emomali Rahmon, to be elected unlimited number of times. The Council of Justice is also to be abolished. The Lower House of the Parliament submitted the adopted bill to the Constitutional Court. Afterwards, the date of the national referendum will be scheduled to adopt these changes.
- During the sixth round of the Uzbek-US political consultations held in Washington, the Foreign Minister of Uzbekistan, Abdulaziz Kamilov, met with the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia, Nisha Desai Biswal. The sides discussed the results of cooperation for period after the fifth round of political consultations held in Tashkent in December 2014, paying special attention to prospects for further cooperation in political and economic spheres, as well as the current situation in Afghanistan and the regional security issues.
- During the meeting of the Contact Group on resolving the conflict in Eastern Ukraine held in Minsk, the participants welcomed the beginning of mine clearance in the Donbass region. However, the sides stated problems associated with the implementation of the regime of silence in the military operation zone and an inability of the conflict participants to conduct the prisoner swap.
- According to the National Anti-Terrorism Committee of Russia, a regime of counter-terrorism operation was introduced in the Tabasaransky district of Russia's North Caucasus Republic of Dagestan.

Economy, Finance and Energy

- During the meeting between the Prime Minister of Georgia, Giorgi Kvirikashvili, and the Executive Director of the British Petroleum (BP), Robert Dudley, in Davos, the parties discussed the BP's suggestion to allocate \$150 million for modernization of the Baku-Supsa oil pipeline and for improvement of ecological standards in Georgia. According to

the Executive Director of the BP, the projects would be completed by 2018.

- According to the Statistics Committee of the National Ministry of Economy of Kazakhstan, in 2015 the country produced 79.5 million tons of oil, including gas condensate, which is 1.7% less than in 2014. Moreover, Kazakhstan increased gas production by 5.2% and reached 45.713 billion cubic meters (bcm) in 2015 compared to 45.462 bcm in 2014.
- According to the Chairman of Board of Directors of the Russian gas producer, Gazprom, Viktor Zubkov, the company expects the price of gas supplies to Europe to be \$184 per 1,000 cubic meters in the first quarter of 2016 versus \$284 in the same period of the last year. It was also stated that Gazprom is planning to supply 160 bcm of gas to Europe in 2016. In 2015 the company increased its gas export to the non-CIS countries by 8% compared to 2014 and reached 159.4 bcm.
- According to the Minister of Energy and Coal Industry of Ukraine, Vladimir Demchishin, due to the decision to replace the transit tariff with a transportation tariff the cost of gas transportation across Ukraine has risen by nearly 50%. The rate has increased from \$2.7 to \$4.5 for transportation of 1,000 cubic meters of gas for 100 km.
- Kazakhstan's national atomic company, Kazatomprom, reported that Kazakhstan had increased uranium production up to 23.8 million tons in 2015 compared to 22.8 million tons produced in 2014.
- The Ukrainian gas company, Naftogaz, has refused to pay the bill of \$2.59 billion received from Russian gas giant Gazprom for the Russian gas that Ukraine actually refused to buy in the third quarter of 2015. However, under the current contract signed between Gazprom and Naftogaz under the "take or pay" condition, the buyer is obliged to pay for a minimal annual volume of gas. The minimum gas volume in the third quarter of 2015 was 10.485 bcm and Gazprom claims that there was no agreement that "take or pay" rule was not applied in that period.
- According to the Director General of the Baku International Sea Trade Port, Taleh Ziyadov, Azerbaijani port plans to transship more than 5 million tons of cargo in 2016. Currently, the main transshipments are carried out in the port located in Baku. Shipment of goods, which are transported via railway, is carried out

from the Alat terminal. Therefore, the volume of transported goods will increase after construction of a new RO-RO (roll-on/roll-off) terminal in Alat enabling to transship heavy trucks.

- On the sidelines of the meeting between the Chinese President, Xi Jinping, and his Iranian counterpart, Hassan Rouhani, in Tehran, Iranian and Chinese officials signed 17 Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) for cooperation in various sectors including nuclear, economic, industrial, transportation, ICT, cultural, science and educational fields.
- According to the Statistics Agency under the President of Tajikistan, the foreign trade turnover of the country decreased by 18% or by \$950 million in 2015 compared to 2014 reaching \$4.3 billion. The export of goods fell by almost 9% reaching \$890 million in 2015 while the import of goods decreased by 20.1% exceeding \$3.4 billion.
- According to the report of the State Statistics Committee of Azerbaijan, the volume of the country's GDP amounted to 54.4 billion manat (\$33.5 billion) in 2015 or by 1.1% more than in 2014. The share of the non-oil sector of the economy in Azerbaijan's GDP hit 69.3%, which is a 1.1% increase compared to 2014. The share of the oil and gas extraction and processing hit 30.7% in GDP or by 1.2% more compared to 2014.
- According to the Central Bank of Russia, the country expanded its monetary gold stocks by 208.4 metric tons to 1,415 tons in 2015, which is a 17% increase compared to 2014. The value of Russia's gold reserves rose by 5.37% to almost \$48.6 billion, from \$46 billion in January 2015.

Society and Culture

- At least three people were killed and 23 others were injured in an explosion near Russia's embassy in Afghanistan's capital Kabul. The powerful explosion was caused by an explosive-laden car.
- The President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, has signed a decree to increase the amount of social benefits by 10% starting from February 1, 2016. The presidential measures concern healthcare employees, teachers, employees of scientific and research institutions, departments and organizations financed from the state budget, as well as employees of the Interior Ministry. The decision to raise wages was made in order to enhance the level of social protection of the population.