



## UZBEKISTAN AND NATO: UNEASY PARTNERSHIP

Uzbekistan has been developing bilateral relations with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) since 1992 through the North Atlantic Cooperation Council established in December 1991 and renamed as the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council in 1997. In July 1994, Uzbekistan signed a framework document of NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) program, and its PfP membership was activated in August 1995 when Tashkent signed a security agreement with NATO. Since 1996, security interaction between NATO and Uzbekistan has been implemented on the basis of the regularly updated individual partnership program, which sets out specific objectives and priorities of mutual practical cooperation.

In the early years of independence, Uzbekistan's partnership with NATO contributed to the young state's attempts to balance its relations with Russia and other major external powers and maintain a relative degree of autonomy in its foreign-policy and security decision-making. Under the PfP program, Uzbek troops took part in a number of the U.S. and NATO sponsored multinational military exercises, such as Cooperative Nugget, Cooperative Osprey and Balance Ultra, including as part of the Central Asian Peacekeeping Battalion, while Uzbek officers were sent to the NATO education institutions for training. The September 11, 2001 attacks and NATO's subsequent engagement in Afghanistan turned Uzbekistan into a key element of the alliance's anti-terrorism campaign in the region as Tashkent hosted the U.S. and German air bases in Karshi-Khanabad and Termez, respectively, which supported missions carried out by the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) against al-Qaeda and Taliban. Moreover, NATO and Uzbekistan strengthened defense-related cooperation after Tashkent began participating in the PfP Planning and Review Process in 2002 to improve interoperability between its armed forces and military units of the NATO member states. After the 2004 NATO Istanbul Summit's decision to place a special focus on the strategically important regions of the Caucasus and Central Asia, the alliance increased its support for domestic defense and security sector reforms in Uzbekistan.

However, relations between Uzbekistan and NATO significantly worsened following the controversy over the May 2005 events in Andijan. After the United States and NATO raised concerns about what they considered a disproportionate use of force and called for an independent international investigation into the violence in Andijan, Tashkent scaled down its participation in the PfP and demanded Washington to evict the Karshi-Khanabad base within six months, which it did by November 2005. While the alliance announced that it would keep its relationship with Uzbekistan "under close review", the Uzbek government did not cut all the ties, permitting Germany to continue its use of the Termez base. The participation of Uzbek President Karimov in the April 2008 NATO Summit in Bucharest, where he shared his vision on prospects for stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan, signified the parties' willingness to

gradually mend their relations and resume security cooperation. Indeed, NATO was interested in Uzbekistan's active involvement in the Northern Distribution Network (NDN) established to supplement the unreliable Pakistan route for non-military supplies to the ISAF, while Tashkent sought political and commercial gains from serving as a transit country. In addition, Washington and its NATO allies encouraged Uzbekistan to participate in infrastructure projects related to Afghanistan, including building railways, bridges, and power transmission lines.

In 2009, Uzbekistan joined the NDN by allowing NATO to use the Navoi airport for transporting non-lethal cargos into Afghanistan, while in 2011 the Hairatan-Mazar-i-Sharif railway line constructed by Uzbekistan Railways became an important NDN supply route. In the subsequent years, Uzbekistan's significance for NATO continued to grow as the alliance used the country's territory as an alternative transportation option for its phased withdrawal from Afghanistan based on a reverse transit agreement signed in June 2012. As the United States and other NATO states realized that the cost of shipping used military vehicles and equipment back to their home bases often exceeded their value, the Uzbek government offered to keep NATO's military surplus in exchange for transit rights. Eventually, despite the arms sales restrictions in place against Uzbekistan and concerns about its poor human rights record, Tashkent succeeded in persuading NATO to transfer parts of its excess military equipment used in Afghanistan to Uzbekistan, including unmanned aerial vehicles, armored vehicles, navigation equipment, mine detectors, and night-vision goggles. It was announced that this military aid would only be used for defensive purposes, helping Uzbekistan to improve its border security and capacity to carry out counterterrorism and counternarcotics operations.

With the revival of strategic ties between NATO and Uzbekistan, the alliance's Science for Peace and Security (SPS) program that offers funding, expert advice and technical support for result-oriented security-relevant joint projects involving scientists and officials has become one of the important conduits of bilateral cooperation. Under the SPS program, NATO assisted the country in disposing of 1,023 tons of mélange, a highly toxic substance used as a liquid rocket fuel oxidizer in Soviet small and medium range missiles. The "Uzbekistan Mélange" project was implemented following the request of the Uzbek government at the Oqtosh military base in the Samarkand region from November 2008 to October 2010. It involved safe neutralization of mélange that had posed a risk to the local population and environment due to deteriorating storage conditions by means of the NATO mobile conversion plant previously used in Azerbaijan. The SPS program covered the operational costs, while the NATO Maintenance and Supply Agency supervised the project and the Turkish MD2 company operated the plant with the help of locally trained experts. The Uzbek government provided an in-kind contribution in the form

of necessary chemicals, infrastructure and logistical support. In addition, as part of the SPS program, Uzbekistan has received grant awards for a number of scientific projects of social, economic and environmental importance covering various areas, including disaster prevention, transboundary water pollution, drinking water safety, food security, and internet access.

In May 2014, the Office of the NATO Liaison Officer for Central Asia previously based in Astana was officially opened in Tashkent (it functioned de facto since the summer of 2013) during a visit by James Appathurai, the NATO Secretary General's Special Representative for the Caucasus and Central Asia. Along with the regional office, Appathurai also inaugurated the NATO Depository Library at the University of World Economy and Diplomacy in Tashkent. Some observers, especially in Moscow, perceived the opening of the office as a geopolitical move by the alliance, as well as an evidence of Uzbekistan's further drift away from Russia, but, according to NATO officials, this decision was not politically motivated and was part of a regular regional rotation process. Small in size, the office served as NATO's diplomatic focal point on the ground and supported the alliance's engagement with the Central Asian governments strengthening bilateral relations across all partnership areas. The Liaison Officer was also responsible for coordinating NATO's activities in the region with other international actors, including the missions of the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the European Union, and the International Committee for the Red Cross, as well as the embassies of the NATO member states. However, in November 2016, as a result of the internal budgetary review, the NATO Secretary General cancelled the position of a NATO Liaison Officer for Central Asia, which led to the closure of the Tashkent office starting April 1, 2017.

Nevertheless, Uzbekistan and NATO continue to redevelop and enhance their political dialogue and practical relations through the NATO Headquarters and military structures. The parties cooperate in a broad range of areas, including the development of armed forces, defense policy and strategy, countering current security threats, civil emergency planning, and disaster-relief coordination. Since 2013, under its Defense Education Enhancement Program, the alliance contributes to the professionalization of the Uzbek officer corps, and mutual military education exchanges have intensified with the opening of the PfP Training Center at Uzbekistan's Ministry of Defense. While the new leadership in Tashkent keeps pursuing the policy of non-alignment with any military or political bloc, comprehensive and pragmatic cooperation with NATO appears to be in the country's interest to be able to maintain equidistance from the major centers of power. In its turn, NATO is expected to increase the level of cooperation with Uzbekistan assisting it in defense capacity building, given Tashkent's essential role in ensuring regional security and promoting integration among the Central Asian states.

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## Politics, Foreign Affairs and Security

- According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, for the first time the country assumed its month-long responsibility as the president of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Kazakhstan's Permanent Representative to the UN Kayrat Umarov stated that under the presented UNSC work program for January the attention would be given to the challenges facing the Central Asian countries on security and development issues. The priorities of Kazakhstan as a UNSC member in 2017-2018 were listed in President Nursultan Nazarbayev's policy address "Kazakhstan's Concept and Vision for Sustaining Global Partnership for a Secure, Just and Prosperous World." They include: 1) achieving a world free of nuclear weapons; 2) eliminating the threat of a global war and reaching the settlement of local conflicts; 3) promoting the interests of Central Asia while strengthening regional security and cooperation; 4) countering terrorism; 5) peace and security in Africa; 6) ensuring an inextricable link between security and sustainable development; 7) adapting the UNSC and the entire UN system to the threats and challenges of the 21st century.
- President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov made a number of new appointments in the Government. In accordance with the president's decisions, Jumageldi Garayev has been appointed Deputy Minister of Road Transport, Nurmyrat Rejebov has been appointed Deputy Minister of Communications, while Gurbanmyrat Annayev has been dismissed as Deputy Interior Minister in connection with his transfer to another job. Moreover, Hajymyrat Hajymyradov was appointed Executive Secretary of the Office of the President and the Cabinet of Ministers of Turkmenistan.
- President of Russia Vladimir Putin signed the law on the ratification of the agreement between Russia and Syria on expanding the naval facility near the port city of Tartus, making it a full-fledged naval base capable of deploying up to 11 warships. According to the document, Russia's vessels will be allowed to enter Syria's waters and ports. The Russian Navy will use the base infrastructure on a free-of-charge basis for 49 years.
- During the meeting between Ambassador of Tajikistan to Azerbaijan Rustam Soliev and Minister of Economy of Azerbaijan Shahin Mustafayev, the parties discussed the prospects for the expansion of economic cooperation between the two countries. The sides stressed the potential for developing relations in various spheres of economy, as well as the importance of cooperation in transportation of goods via the Caspian Sea.

- According to the Ministry of Defense of Russia, the Northern Fleet of the Russian Navy conducted 213 missile firing drills in 2017, including two with submarine-launched ballistic missiles. In 2017, the fleet held about 4,700 combat training events.

## Economy, Finance and Energy

- According to Alexei Miller, CEO of the Russian state-owned gas company Gazprom, the company boosted production by 12.4% to 472 billion cubic meters (bcm) and exports to Europe by 8.1% to 193.6 bcm in 2017.
- President of Russia Vladimir Putin signed the law on raising the minimum wage to the official subsistence level. According to the law, the minimum wage for 2018 is established in the amount of 9,489 rubles (\$165) per month. Starting January 2019 and further the minimum wage will be set in the amount of the subsistence minimum for the employable population of Russia for the second quarter of the previous year.
- According to the Statistics Committee of the Kazakh Ministry of National Economy, in December 2017 the inflation rate in Kazakhstan totaled 0.7%, while year-on year inflation in 2017 amounted to 7.1%. In 2017, the prices of food, non-food products, and services rose by 6.5%, 8.9%, and 5.9%, respectively.
- According to the State Statistics Committee of Uzbekistan, consumer prices of goods and services in Uzbekistan in December 2017 increased by an average of 2.7%. Consumer prices of food products rose by an average of 4.4%, while prices of non-food products and services increased by 1.8% and 0.8%, respectively.
- President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev issued a decree creating the Agency for Development of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SME) under the Ministry of Economy. According to the decree, the agency will support the development of small and medium-sized businesses in the country, providing a range of services to the SMEs.
- According to the Azerbaijani state-owned energy company Azerenergy, the country's power plants generated 21.9 billion kilowatt hours of electricity in 2017, as compared to 22.6 billion kilowatt hours in 2016. It was also noted that 1.9 billion kilowatt hours of electricity were generated by Azerenergy's power plants in December 2017.
- According to the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia, Azerbaijan will meet 99.65% of Georgia's natural gas demand in 2018. It was noted that in general 2.679 bcm out of 2.689 bcm of Georgia's natural gas demand will be received from Azerbaijan, including 1.866 bcm from the Azerbaijani state oil company SOCAR.

- According to Minister of Health of Uzbekistan Alisher Shadmanov, the state budget will allocate 9.6 trillion soums (\$1.15 billion) to healthcare in 2018 compared to 7.1 trillion soums (\$0.85 billion) in 2017. It was noted that under the Investment Program it is planned to allocate 803.6 billion soums (\$98.9 million) for construction, reconstruction and equipping of 290 medical facilities in 2018.
- According to Maxim Grishanin, the First Vice President of the Russian state-owned oil transportation company Transneft, about 450,000 tons of oil will be supplied to Kyrgyzstan via the Tuymazy-Omsk-Novosibirsk oil pipeline in 2018. In 2017 the company confirmed the technical possibility of transporting oil to Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan through Kazakhstan in the amount of up to 0.5 million tons.

## Society and Culture

- According to the Ministry of Investments and Development of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan launched a direct international bus service along the Tashkent-Shymkent-Tashkent route. The service is operated daily on comfortable buses, which have been given the priority right of passing through the border checkpoints.
- President of Russia Vladimir Putin signed a decree on resuming a regular air service to Cairo. Moscow suspended air service to Egypt in November 2015 after the terrorist attack against the Russian A321 jet, which had crashed over the Sinai Peninsula on October 31, 2015.
- According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, the country will provide \$650,000 of humanitarian aid to Antigua and Barbuda (\$50,000), the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) (\$100,000), as well as to Muslims of Rohingya in Myanmar (\$500,000). These funds were initially earmarked in the 2017 republican budget for responding to natural and man-made emergency situations on the territory of Kazakhstan and other countries.
- According to the Ministry of Health of Kyrgyzstan, the law on the payment of state allowance for the birth of a child (suyunchu) in the amount of 4,000 soums (\$58) came into force on January 1, 2018. Based on the calculation of 4,000 per child, the Ministry is supposed to pay more than 1.2 million soums (\$17.4 million) from the budget this year.
- According to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Azerbaijan, a record high number of tourists arrived in the country in 2017. The number of foreign citizens who visited Azerbaijan in 2017 increased by 449,215 or 20%, compared to 2016, and reached 2,691,998 people.