



KYRGYZSTAN-NATO COOPERATION: CONSTRUCTIVE BUT LIMITED

Kyrgyzstan began developing cooperation with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), along with other Central Asian states, in 1992 after joining the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC), which was established by the alliance in December 1991 as a forum to discuss and coordinate security issues with its emerging partners. Bishkek's practical cooperation with NATO started in June 1994 when Kyrgyzstan signed a framework document of the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program launched in January 1994 to boost interaction between NATO and non-member states in the Euro-Atlantic area. Consequently, in 1997 the NACC was renamed the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, which has become a multilateral political platform for mutual security dialogue. At the bilateral level, cooperation between Kyrgyzstan and NATO is maintained via the Kyrgyz diplomatic mission at the NATO Headquarters in Brussels and the Turkish embassy in Bishkek serving as NATO's contact point. In addition, a liaison officer from the State Committee for Defense Affairs (former Ministry of Defense) of Kyrgyzstan is represented in the Military Partnership Division at NATO's Allied Command Operations based in Mons, Belgium, to facilitate the country's participation in military training and exercises. Since 1996, Kyrgyzstan-NATO relations have been promoted on the basis of the regularly updated individual partnership and cooperation program, which sets out specific objectives and priorities of bilateral interaction.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Kyrgyzstan favored ensuring its security through collective security mechanisms, but after Russia's May 1992 decision to establish its own army Bishkek was confronted with a challenging task of creating independent armed forces. Having inherited several military units armed with outdated weapons and equipment, the country lacked trained military personnel and faced tough financial constraints, which made it dependent on external assistance, with Russian troops, for instance, being responsible for guarding Kyrgyz borders until 1999. Under such conditions, Kyrgyzstan looked at NATO as one of its potential partners for developing military cooperation and addressing new security challenges. Thus, starting in 1995, the Kyrgyz units participated in a series of U.S. and NATO sponsored multinational military exercises conducted under the PfP program, such as Cooperative Nugget, Cooperative Osprey, and Cooperative Zenith, including as part of the Central Asian Peacekeeping Battalion formed together by Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. During these exercises, Kyrgyz servicemen improved their skills applicable in realistic war situations, focusing on peace support, humanitarian relief, and search and rescue operations. However, the 1999-2000 armed incursions of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan in the country's Batken Oblast clearly exposed fundamental weaknesses of the nascent Kyrgyz army and demonstrated that Kyrgyzstan had a long way to go to develop a strong national defense capability, including military command and control structures.

Kyrgyzstan-NATO cooperation culminated following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks as Kyrgyzstan, with Russia's approval, gave its consent to the opening of a U.S. air base at the Manas Interna-

tional Airport, located 25 km from Bishkek, to support the U.S. Operation Enduring Freedom and subsequent military campaign of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. Leased by the United States since December 2001, the Manas air base served as a transportation and logistics hub for U.S. and NATO military personnel transiting to/from Afghanistan. In February 2009, the Kyrgyz Parliament voted to close the base citing economic considerations and negative public attitude inside the country, as well as reacting to external pressure from Moscow and Beijing. However, in June 2009 the U.S. and Kyrgyz governments concluded a new lease agreement, which increased the annual payment for the continued use of the airport more than three-fold to \$60 million and renamed the air base to a transit center. In November 2011, newly elected Kyrgyz President Almazbek Atambayev promised to permanently shut down the Manas transit center, and, indeed, by July 2014 the United States handed it over to the Kyrgyz authorities. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Manas played an important role during NATO's Afghan mission as a major regional transit facility, especially after the eviction of U.S. forces from Uzbekistan's Karshi-Khanabad air base in 2005. The transit center moved more than 5.3 million servicemen in and out of Afghanistan, handled about 700 thousand tons of cargo and completed 33,000 refueling missions. Despite the controversy over Manas, at the NATO Summit in Chicago in May 2012, Kyrgyzstan signed a reverse transit agreement with NATO allowing the use of overland transport routes for the transportation of non-lethal cargo as part of the ISAF drawdown from Afghanistan.

As early as in 2007, Kyrgyzstan made a decision to join the PfP Planning and Review Process (PARP), which envisages NATO assistance in preparing and implementing military reforms, as well as in enhancing the interoperability of the Kyrgyz armed forces with NATO units, including in peacekeeping missions. The inability of the Kyrgyz army and security services to cope with the ethnic clashes in the country's south in June 2010 showcased an urgent need for military reforms. Currently, the Kyrgyz government still needs foreign financial, technical and expert assistance to succeed in efforts to modernize its armed forces. Therefore, Kyrgyzstan continues to participate in NATO exercises and experience sharing, including in the PfP Peace Shield, Combined Endeavor, and Steppe Eagle exercises, while military education remains an important area of mutual cooperation. Kyrgyz officers are educated at NATO military schools and participate in numerous training events on a wide variety of topics ranging from language training, human rights, and the law of armed conflicts to mountain search and rescue, border security and control, counter-narcotics, and counterterrorism. For instance, from February 2015 to April 2016, at the request of the Kyrgyz authorities, the Center for Continuing Education of the Bishkek-based American University of Central Asia (AUCA) conducted the first NATO-funded English language course for serving military personnel. Kyrgyz officers who successfully completed this course can now choose from more than 1,400 training opportunities offered by NATO to upgrade their professional capacity, as well as attend

other international military cooperation events. In addition, to raise public awareness of the alliance in Kyrgyzstan, NATO's depository library was inaugurated at the Diplomatic Academy in Bishkek in February 2009, while in November 2014 the NATO Multimedia Corner was opened at the AUCA. Since 2009, NATO has also been running the resettlement and retraining program for released Kyrgyz military personnel, which provides retraining opportunities to former and active officers who are due to be discharged to learn English, IT and business skills, thus helping them find civilian jobs in any region of the country. By mitigating the socio-economic consequences of the army's restructuring, the program contributes to Kyrgyzstan's ongoing military reforms.

Kyrgyzstan has been an active participant of the NATO Science for Peace and Security (SPS) program since 1993, focusing on disaster prevention and environmental security as the leading areas for cooperation. In June 2008, under the SPS program's Project on Uranium Legacy and Environmental Security in Central Asia, NATO initiated a remediation project to assist Kyrgyzstan with the removal of about 100 kg of radioactive waste from the Minkush settlement in the Naryn Region. Since late 1960s, local residents had unknowingly been using radioactive filtration cloths taken from a former uranium mill plant in their homes, thus exposing themselves and their family members to high doses of ionizing radiation. As part of the project, Slovenian and Kyrgyz experts cooperated with the Ministry of Ecology and Emergencies, the Ministry of Health and the Chu Ecological Laboratory to collect and transfer radioactive materials from Minkush to the central radioactive waste depository near Bishkek. Other relevant joint projects implemented under the SPS program included the development of prevention and mitigation measures in relation to rockslide dam hazards in the Tien Shan mountains, the evaluation of seismic risks for the Toktogul hydropower plant, and the study of transboundary water pollution in Central Asia. Another key area of Kyrgyzstan's cooperation with NATO is civil emergency planning and disaster response. Apart from capacity building activities, the country received assistance from the alliance's Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Center on several occasions – following the June 2005 heavy floods, the January-February 2006 heavy snowfalls, and the October 2008 earthquake, all occurring in southern Kyrgyzstan, as well as during the crisis situation that the Kyrgyz interim government faced after the April 2010 ousting of President Bakiyev.

In conclusion, it is important to note that NATO has never been Kyrgyzstan's main security provider since Bishkek was and remains politically, economically and militarily dependent on Moscow – the situation that Kyrgyzstan has not attempted to change, unlike other Central Asian states. Being the weakest country of the region in terms of military power, Kyrgyzstan continues to rely on Russia's protection against possible external threats, and newly elected President Sooronbay Jeenbekov is unlikely to reduce ties with Russia or seek closer relations with other major powers or blocks. Nevertheless, Kyrgyzstan values its partnership with NATO, especially the latter's assistance in the country's military reform efforts, and will try to at least maintain the existing level of cooperation with the alliance.

Politics, Foreign Affairs and Security

- Armenia's parliament elected Armen Sarkissian, a former prime minister who once served as the country's ambassador to Britain, as the country's new president for a seven-year term. Under the terms of the constitution approved in 2015 in a referendum that effectively abolished direct presidential elections, the parliament can elect a president with a three-quarters majority.
- During his official visit to Ashgabat, Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade of Iran Mohammad Shariatmadari met with President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov to exchange opinions on prospects of Turkmen-Iranian trade and economic cooperation. In addition, the parties discussed the energy and transport sectors noting that these areas are seen as the priority areas of cooperation between the two countries.
- During the 50th meeting of the Special Working Group on the development of the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea held in Moscow, the deputy foreign ministers of the Caspian littoral states successfully verified the text of a draft convention in Russian, Farsi and English in order to prepare it for signing during the forthcoming Fifth Caspian Summit in Astana.
- During the trilateral meeting of the foreign relations committees of the parliaments of Azerbaijan, Turkey and Georgia held in Ankara, the participants discussed a number of issues of regional importance and signed the protocol on cooperation at the end of the event.
- During his official visit to Ashgabat, National Coordinator at the National Counter Terrorism Authority of Pakistan Ihsan Ghani met with Interior Minister of Tajikistan Ramazon Rahimzoda to discuss cooperation between the two countries in the fight against terrorism, extremism, and drug trafficking, as well as other threats and challenges of the modern world.
- During his official visit to Kiev, Foreign Trade Minister of Uzbekistan Sohob Saifnazarov met with Deputy Minister of Economic Development and Trade of Ukraine Natalia Mikolska to discuss specific measures aimed at substantially increasing the mutual trade volumes. The sides agreed to organize the next

meeting of the Uzbek-Ukrainian intergovernmental commission on trade, economic, science and technical cooperation in the third quarter of 2018.

Economy, Finance and Energy

- According to the decision of the Stockholm arbitration court, Ukraine's Naftogaz won its claim against Gazprom for damages related to under-delivery of gas. Naftogaz was awarded a compensation of \$4.63 billion for Gazprom's failure to deliver the agreed transit gas volumes. Since the Ukrainian side has a \$2 billion debt to Gazprom, the Russian company will have to pay the difference.
- According to Aleksei Bogdanov, Head of the Central Office for Foreign Economic Activities of the Agriculture and Food Ministry of Belarus, in 2017 the country exported \$431 million worth of crop products. It is also noted that the share of crop products in total exports of Belarusian agricultural products stands at 8.8%.
- The National Bank of Ukraine announced its decision to increase its key policy rate to 17% per annum starting in March 2018. The increase is aimed at lowering headline inflation, which accelerated to 14.1% year-on-year in January 2018.
- According to the government of Turkmenistan, in January-February 2018 the country's state budget revenues amounted to 2 billion manats (\$571 million), while the expenditures totaled 1.9 billion manats (\$543 million).
- According to the State Statistics Committee of Uzbekistan, in February 2018 the prices of food and non-food products in the consumer market of the country grew by 1.1% and 1.3%, respectively, while the prices of services increased by 0.7%.
- According to Industry and New Technologies Minister of Tajikistan Shavkat Bobozoda, in 2017 the gold production in the country grew by 11.2%, or 500 kilograms, as compared with 2016, totaling 5.5 tons. It was noted that the produced gold was purchased by the National Bank. It is expected that gold production will increase by 20% to 6.6 tons in 2018.
- In the beginning of March 2018, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan opened 10 new border crossing points, which include one for trains, eight for both automobiles and people on foot and an-

other just for foot passengers. Previously, only two crossings were available to the local population.

Society and Culture

- On March 2, 2018, the day of the 26th anniversary of Kazakhstan's accession to the United Nations (UN), an official ceremony of signing the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons by Kazakhstan took place in New York. The agreement was signed by Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan to the UN Kairat Umarov.
- Ambassador of Kazakhstan to Uzbekistan Yerik Utembayev announced that the two countries would create a joint working group tasked with issues of saving the Aral Sea. It is also reported that the parties already reached an agreement on relevant joint actions.
- President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev signed a decree to increase the salaries of employees of state-funded scientific institutions and organizations. According to the document, monthly salaries of employees working in scientific institutions and organizations will be increased by an average of 10% from March 1, 2018.
- According to the Association of Turkish Travel Agencies, a number of Azerbaijani tourists who visited Turkey in the last three years exceeded 1.974 million. In 2015, 602,488 Azerbaijani tourists visited Turkey with a further increase to 606,223 tourists in 2016 and 765,514 visitors in 2017. The share of Azerbaijani visitors in the total number of tourists in Turkey increased from 1.66% in 2015 to 2.36% in 2017.
- According to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), in 2017 the agency facilitated more than \$6 million in exports for local Kyrgyz businesses in the garment industry and agricultural sectors. As a result, these partnerships mobilized more than \$25 million of local capital investments. USAID works in partnership with more than 60 Kyrgyzstani businesses to actualize the potential of the private sector.
- According to the Russian Mission Control Center, the Soyuz MS-06 space capsule carrying three space travelers returning from the International Space Station landed in Kazakhstan 146 kilometers southeast of the city of Zhezkazgan. The crew members are Russian cosmonaut Alexander Misurkin and two NASA astronauts – Joseph Acaba and Mark Vande Hei.