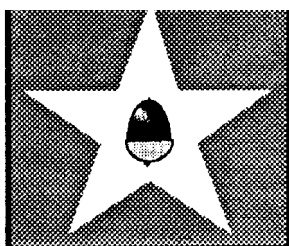


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**Kazakhstan's Armed Forces:  
Reform or Decay?**

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# Kazakhstan's Armed Forces: Reform or Decay?

Roger N McDermott

*Military reform in Kazakhstan is making slow progress. International activities have been prioritised at the expense of larger scale but more mundane improvements in basic standards and equipment.*

Military reform has been discussed, even hailed as a success, over the past decade in Kazakhstan. Yet, in practical terms, there has been little progress towards resolving the key issues afflicting the Armed Forces. A glimmer of hope has emerged, in recent months, in the form of military cooperation with the US, though this does not provide a basis for resolving the long-term problems associated with military reform. Kazakhstan has a proud military past, contributing valiant soldiers to the Soviet Armed Forces during the Great Patriotic War, and continuing to actively and willingly participate in the Red Army even in the twilight years of the USSR. Kazakhstan, since gaining its independence, has struggled with problems common to many post-Soviet Central Asian States, particularly as its Armed Forces have tangibly declined. In order to arrest that process, Astana has embarked upon a form of military reform, though it will take more concerted and systemic reform to achieve real success. The symptoms of decay will be considered in this paper, as well as such questions as: what is the nature of Kazakh military reform? Will international cooperative ventures help to secure real progress in improving its levels of training and combat readiness?

The total length of the Kazakh border is estimated at around 14,000km. Its border with Russia is 7,200km; Uzbekistan 2,150km; China 1,740km; Kyrgyzstan 1,050km and Turkmenistan 400km. In many cases the Soviet border failed to reflect the historical settlement of specific ethnic groups. Consequently, the final delimitation of Kazakhstan's border may take several more years to complete.

Delimitation of its border has proceeded without major obstacles, except in the case of the Kazakh-Uzbek border, which continues to be a source of bilateral friction. In 1999 and 2000 Tashkent undertook a series of unilateral measures on border demarcation, resulting in increased tension between Astana and Tashkent. In May and June 1999, an airborne battalion from Uzbekistan was redeployed to Nazarbek in the Turkestan District of the Tashkent Region. It deployed 70 paratroopers to the Kazakh settlements of Khuman and Tabaksay (Bostandyk District) and began installing border posts. The following year, in early 2000, the Uzbek Interior Ministry and Border Service entered the Kazakh State farm of Bagys (Saryagash District) and without any consultations with Astana, installed border poles. In each case Astana formally protested to the Uzbek government.

Between February 2000-October 2001, the Uzbek-Kazakh Delimitation Commission succeeded in finalizing around 90% of the border. Outstanding areas of dispute may yet take some time to settle: the Bostandyk District of Shymkent Region, the settlements of Bagys, Turkestanets and Arnasay, as well as the border passing through the Aral Sea.<sup>1</sup> Though these are not likely to provoke a military

confrontation between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, it denotes the on-going friction and latent conflict between the states. The Kazakh Border Troops, which are controlled by the National Security Committee (KNB, the Kazakh Security Services), require a high degree of discipline and professionalism to carry out their duties in such tense circumstances.

Kazakhstan's relations with China have benefited from the recent demarcation of the border. In May 2002, Kasymzhomart Tokayev, Kazakh Foreign Minister, signed a protocol demarcating the border between Kazakhstan and China, completing a series of negotiations about delimiting and demarcating the border. It is the first CIS State sharing a border with China to conclude such an agreement. China has made recent land gains at the expense of Tajikistan (1,000 sq. km) and Kyrgyzstan (95,000 hectares).<sup>2</sup> However, Kazakhstan does not face a large-scale military threat from any of its regional neighbours, raising the questions of what precisely its military forces are needed for, and whether its military can be adequately reformed to meet future threats, which are more likely to be low-intensity in nature.

President Nursultan Nazarbayev has commented on the absence of large-scale threats to the national security of Kazakhstan:

*"We understand only too well that all possible potential troubles threatening [the] national security of Kazakhstan at present, and in the nearest future do not imply and will never imply a direct military invasion or a threat to the territorial integrity of the state. It is perfectly clear that neither Russia, nor China, nor the West, nor any other Moslem country has any impelling motive to attack us."*<sup>3</sup>

Indeed the key to its security is the maintenance of good bilateral relations with both Russia and China. Military reform in Kazakhstan should be understood keeping in mind Nazarbayev's conviction that Kazakhstan will *never* face a direct military invasion.

## **The Prospects for Military Reform**

Central Asian militaries are generally in poor condition. Uzbekistan possesses the most capable military, by reputation, amongst the Central Asian Republics with 59,100 servicemen (Paramilitary Forces: 18-20,000). The Kazakh Armed Forces, by comparison, are numerically strong, at around 64,000 servicemen (Paramilitary Forces: 34,500). Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan maintain relatively small militaries.<sup>4</sup>

Young Kazakh men served in the Armed Forces of the Soviet Union, even when the popularity of conscript service was in decline elsewhere amongst the Soviet Republics. Recruiting from the Central Asian Soviet Republics proved a stable source of conscripts for the USSR in the 1980s. During that period the proportion of conscripts from the Southern Republics steadily increased. That willingness to serve in the Soviet Armed forces is shown below.

**The Soviet military draft by Republic in spring 1989 & 1990<sup>5</sup>**

<b>Republic</b>	<b>Spring 1989 (%)</b>	<b>Spring 1990 (%)</b>
Azerbaijan	97.8	100
Moldavia	100	100
Ukraine	97.6	99.4
Kazakhstan	100	99.2
Belarussia	100	98.9
RSFSR	100	98.6
Tajikistan	100	92.7
Turkmenistan	100	90.2
Kyrgyzstan	100	89.5
Uzbekistan	100	87.4
Latvia	90.7	54.2
Estonia	79.5	40.2
Lithuania	91.6	33.6
Georgia	94	27.5
Armenia	100	7.5

In early January 2001 Major-General Malik Saparov, Chief of the Kazakh General Staff, stated: 'We began real reforms of the Armed Forces last year.'<sup>6</sup> This was a remarkable statement given claims made more than three years earlier, that other armies were examining the experience of military reform in Kazakhstan. It can, perhaps, draw attention to the fact that truth emerges slowly and intermittently in official statements in Kazakhstan, particularly regarding the state of the Armed Forces. Nonetheless, there has been tangible progress, albeit rather minuscule, in the area of military reform; though it has revealed many more problems than it has solved.

President Nursultan Nazarbayev, whilst proving himself to be no friend of democratic reform, has associated himself directly with military reform in Kazakhstan. In a comparatively short period, some progress has been made. A law on contract service has been passed, and one on alternative service is 'under consideration'. A legislative basis for further military reform has been drawn up for the period up to 2005, with provisions for various sub-programmes. A military doctrine has been written and the Organisation of the armed forces in Kazakhstan has been divided into four Military Districts (MDs): Southern, Western, Eastern and Central. Mobile forces have been formed, currently stationed in Almaty, and the number of contract servicemen has increased to around 12,000. The armed forces are outfitted with S-75, S-200 and S-300 air defence missile systems, as well as Su-25, Su-27, and MiG-29 aircraft. Financing for the armed forces has also increased and military schools are active in Almaty, Shymkent and Karaganda. The groundwork has been laid for the creation of naval forces, with assistance from Russia, Turkey and the US, helping to protect the country's energy interests in the Caspian Sea. Furthermore, Nazarbayev has directed the MOD to take measures designed to improve the social condition of servicemen and markedly enhance the prestige of military service. "Yelim Menin" (My Motherland), an open-ended campaign seeking to promote Kazakh patriotism, began on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the formation of the armed forces. These measures seem positive, suggesting that the government does intend to conduct military reforms.<sup>7</sup>

However, the formation of the Military Districts is largely an administrative reform that does little in practice to address the key problems facing the Kazakh military, whilst most of the military hardware is a residue of its Soviet past. Furthermore, the military schools may indeed be 'active', but the state wishes to avoid the risk of militarizing its youth whilst promoting the usefulness of such schools. Their roles are rather overestimated as a means of resolving the obvious decline in the social prestige of military service in Kazakhstan. Equally, Nazarbayev's aim of improving the living conditions of servicemen may be noble, but there are no clear plans on how this might be achieved. The MDs are also at a formative stage; it is far from clear how successful their infrastructures will be in practice. Attention to the western area of the country was demanded as a result of the importance of the Caspian Sea to the various regional powers; and the south also necessitated further attention, owing to the crisis in Afghanistan and the awareness of the dangers of Islamic militancy.

### **Defence Spending**

During the 1990s, defence spending was a low priority, and this was only addressed in 2001, as a result of the country's improved economic performance. The 2001 military budget was 25 billion tenge (\$172 million), representing an increase of around 8 billion tenge on the previous year. Chief of the General Staff Saparov has stated that the budget for 2002 will be 35 billion tenge (\$226 million). This may be viewed in perspective when read alongside the national budget plans for 2002, including 42 billion tenge on building and reconstructing roads.<sup>8</sup> Despite these increases in defence spending, now representing 1% of GDP, the Armed Forces of Kazakhstan remain markedly under-financed. Rearmament is urgently needed, but this is practically ruled out on the basis of current levels of defence spending.

In 2001 there were six key priorities for defence spending:

1. Support for combat operations and combat readiness.
2. Combat Training.
3. Maintenance of Servicemen.
4. Maintenance of military infrastructure.
5. Repair of weapons.
6. Repair of equipment.<sup>9</sup>

Salaries receive a significant place on the agenda, and although the MOD has struggled in the past decade to tackle this issue, progress has been made. According to Abdai Tasbulatov, Deputy Defence Minister, captains and company commanders receive \$156 and \$82 respectively per month. As officers appear to receive separate rank and function pay, a salary of \$238 is comparatively high. It is little wonder that Tasbulatov wishes to highlight this achievement.<sup>10</sup>

The priorities of supporting combat readiness and improving combat training have moved into the ascendancy, even though there are no clear plans on how to achieve reform within the restrictions imposed upon the military by an inadequate defence budget. There is not enough money for the repair of weapons and equipment and the maintenance of the military infrastructure conceals the truth of derelict buildings, poor storage facilities and the expense that is involved in redressing such problems.

### **Southern Military District**

Major-General Malik Saparov has prioritised the development of the strategically important Southern Military District (SMD), reacting sensibly to the perceived

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increase in the threat from the south. In 2002 he will seek to form additional military units and formations in the south and Zhambyl regions. In fact, the SMD is central to the whole process of military reform, since it is upheld as a model for the rest of the Kazakh military; unfortunately, for the time being, the familiar signs of decay characterise it. Implementing its reform successfully will be restricted by the levels of defence spending, since the General Staff expect no more than 272 million tenge (\$1.8 million) to carry out their plans for the south, placing the emphasis upon cost saving and efficient spending.<sup>11</sup> Major-General Uali Yelamanov, Commander of the SMD, will find it difficult to deliver improved combat readiness of his troops without serious state investment. This is a constant factor in Kazakh military reform: squaring the circle in making defence requirements fit into limited budgets. Despite this, Nazarbayev is reportedly paying great attention to the formation and development of the SMD as a battleworthy grouping of forces. However, as they currently stand, their 'battleworthy' state is certainly open to question. Redeployment of forces, such as artillery officers from the 54<sup>th</sup> brigade and forming additional units, depends on the condition of existing facilities. Saparov has recognised the nature of the financial restrictions placed upon these reforms, and in the absence of sufficient funds, he has sought alternative solutions. Consultations with local governors have examined using existing buildings to be transferred to the MOD free of charge, as a means of reducing expenditure.<sup>12</sup>

Saparov believes that the Kazakh armed forces should be reduced numerically to a sufficient level that allow them to properly defend against either domestic or international 'bandit formations'. Achieving this will require a shift in the emphasis of defence spending and a reassessment of threats and priorities.<sup>13</sup> Despite Saparov's concerns about the current levels of combat readiness, it is of course extremely unlikely that Kazakhstan will face a regular war in the future. Much more plausible, however, is the prospect of low-intensity conflict in which the Kazakh military face bandit formations. Since such operations can prove difficult in comparison with facing regular forces, a higher level of professionalism will be required amongst servicemen in order to meet that threat adequately. Indeed, Saparov gave a rather pessimistic assessment as to the capability of the Kazakh Armed Forces to cope with an invasion. During an interview with *Panorama* in Almaty in 2001 he intimated that the matter was unclear, saying: "We are as ready as we can be."<sup>14</sup> Statements such as these hardly inspire confidence in the combat readiness or effectiveness of the Kazakh military.

### **Reform by Legislation?**

The legislative basis for military reform, as laid out in the programme to 2005, seems to lack vision for the future of the Kazakh Armed Forces. It fails to specify clear goals for the reform process, as well as providing little overarching guidance. In contrast, Kyrgyzstan has at least drawn up a document that delineates the targets of military reform. The 'Comprehensive Basis of Development of Kyrgyzstan Programme until 2010' envisages the development of a small, mobile army capable of meeting the country's defence needs, both from existing and predicted threats. Colonel-General Esen Topoyev, Defence Minister, argues from the country's economic potential, linking the kind of military required with its economic potential, whilst recognising that reform will occur in several stages.<sup>15</sup> The uniformed Armed Forces of Kyrgyzstan are modest in comparison with those of Kazakhstan: consisting of 12,500 troops, predominantly conscripts.<sup>16</sup> By no means an ideal state of affairs exists in the military of Kyrgyzstan, but at least there are general goals towards which they aim, and against which success can be measured. Kazakh reform is denoted by nebulous statements concerning the desire to enhance 'combat effectiveness' and develop 'mobile forces' whilst saying nothing about how

this might be achieved. There is of course, nothing new in these statements. Indeed, Defence Minister Alтынbayev has promised, since 1999, that military service would be reduced from two years to one, as a stage 'in the transition to a numerically small, technically well equipped, mobile and professional army'.<sup>17</sup>

Military reform in Kazakhstan resembles, in part, the slow and ponderous manoeuvring that takes place in chess; the pieces move, and a plan unfolds as part of a grand strategy. Our simile points towards certain critical issues in analysing the Kazakh military: each move entails risk and can expose weaknesses capable of being probed. Each move in Kazakh military reform highlights the inherent weaknesses in the military and the reform process itself, since it lacks an overall 'grand strategy'. Serious problems are not difficult to find, such as the lack of discipline and the growing rates of crime, including desertion amongst the military, which is an on-going concern. Saparov has promised robust measures within the law aimed at curbing both crime and lack of discipline in the military, and the General Staff are also willing to recognise how deeply the problems run, blaming commanders for their 'irresponsibility'. Indeed, according to Major-General Aitmuhamed Tuleukhanov, Military Prosecutor General, there were 3,589 recorded crimes by servicemen in 2001, representing an increase of 14.2% on the previous year. Absence without leave accounted for 88% of those crimes, whilst there were many instances of crime in relations between servicemen.<sup>18</sup>

Minister of Defence Colonel-General Mukhtar Alтынbayev admits publicly to the existence of problems in the management structure of the Kazakh MOD. The structure during the first decade of independence was denoted by the absence of an intermediary post between the Chief of the General Staff and district commanders. Alтынbayev believes this can be blamed for the many 'shortcomings' in the military structure, and proposes as a solution the creation of the post of commander of the ground troops; an idea not unfamiliar in the Soviet military structure. The commander of the ground troops would join those of the Air Defence Forces, Mobile Forces and Missile and Artillery Forces; thus raising the profile of the Kazakh ground forces.<sup>19</sup> Alтынbayev considers that it would address the problems of vertical management of the Armed Forces and alleviate the burden on Saparov; its ultimate goal, however, is the improvement of the combat readiness of the Kazakh ground forces, which will require much more than structural management changes to resolve their chronic and persistent problems. The recent formation of the military districts, whilst perfectly sensible as a military structure, highlights the slow progress of reform, as well as the historical weakness of the Turkestan and Central Asian MDs, for decades considered to be a Soviet backwater.

The individuals at the forefront of military reform are also a significant part of the problem. Entrenched views on the nature of the military, its role and precisely how it should be reformed are bound up with two key persons: Nazarbayev and Alтынbayev. Neither of these is particularly keen to risk public debate on military reform, and the re-appointment of the latter as Minister of Defence, after his resignation in 1999 over controversial arms sales to North Korea, is confirmation that belonging to the same *zhuz* as the president remains a significant factor in the choice of leaders.<sup>20</sup>

### **New Weapons or Better Training?**

The country's anti-aircraft defence system has allegedly been in need of re-equipping for some time, a fact that is occasionally commented on by the MOD. Such systems as the S-300 are appealing to Astana, despite the absence of a credible threat. There is little progress towards actually implementing any plan to

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purchase military hardware. Indeed, Alтынbayev has stated that it is possible that Kazakhstan may look to France, Germany or the UK for such equipment, evidently hoping that these countries will wish to subsidise such purchases.<sup>21</sup> Procurement and modernisation of equipment are evidently not minor matters, given the importance of the Caspian oil deposits, as well as the need to adequately protect the southern and central regions of the country and the southern CIS borders. Alтынbayev wishes to procure western hardware, but given the restrictions imposed by the current defence budget, it is clearly beyond reach. Astana itself is protected by 'a modern system' ensuring the security of territory in a radius of 100km and airspace 25km high: it is a perfectly reliable system capable of providing sufficient protection. It is entirely unclear, however, as to the source of the threat, against which the purchase of improved systems is designed to protect.

In close proximity to Astana there is also an air base at Sary-Arka containing 36 MiG-31 aircraft,<sup>22</sup> on the face of it, an apparently impressive indicator of military readiness. Nonetheless, given the chronic lack of flight training undertaken by Kazakh air force pilots, it may be symptomatic of the whole Kazakh military: afflicted by 'paper reform'. Despite apparent high standards, lower levels are easily detectable within a military severely affected by more than a decade of under-financing.

In 1991, the former USSR transferred 2,680 T-72 and T-64s, 2,428 APCs and 6,900 artillery pieces to storage bases in Kazakhstan, which have remained under Kazakh control, though rapidly deteriorating. The Ground Forces have around 630 T-72s (300 stored), 1,000 APCs (1,000 stored) and 550 towed artillery pieces.<sup>23</sup> The Ground Forces, owing to persistent under-financing, have been largely unable to procure new weapons and equipment during the 1990s. Given Russia's continued interests in Central Asia, particularly in its treaty obligations to the CIS states in the region, Astana will look towards Moscow for cheap weapons procurement. Nonetheless, resolving the problems associated with deteriorating equipment is one amongst a plethora of problems facing the Kazakh military.<sup>24</sup>

The Kazakh military have reportedly experienced cuts in electric power, shortages of water and severe shortages in fuel. Military privileges have been abolished and often officers will go for several months without salaries. Against that background, waves of officers are quitting the Kazakh army.<sup>25</sup> Stemming the flow may prove impossible, unless the concerns of such officers are listened to by the MOD, and these concerns form the basis of a systemic and well thought out remedy. The success of the call-up has fluctuated in recent years, without any credible progress. The draft takes place twice annually in the spring and autumn, mirroring the pattern in Russia, and witnesses numerous problems. Increased levels of bullying amongst conscripts and poor conditions contributed to draft evasion becoming an endemic problem in the 1990s. In 1999, 12,000 were called up in northern Kazakhstan, though only about 1,000 were actually enlisted; such weaknesses in recruitment were a product of decline in the standards of health amongst potential conscripts.<sup>26</sup> Yet, conscript service has been in decline. 33% of servicemen conscripted in 2002 received a deferment for health reasons and a further 12% could not serve in the army on health grounds. Amongst officers the picture seems equally bleak: according to Gosmin Amrin, Deputy Defence Minister, around half of the officers serving the Kazakh Armed Forces need their health improving.<sup>27</sup> Far from confronting these important concerns, the government has preferred to speak generally about attempting to improve conditions and raise the social prestige of the military in the absence of specific policies on its fulfilment.



As a means of remedying the problems of manning, a plan to professionalize the military has been in place since 1999, though its success is limited.<sup>28</sup> Whilst the number of contract servicemen has risen to between 10,000-12,000, complaints abound concerning low pay. Crucially, even if the Armed Forces were entirely contract based, there is little infrastructure to supply adequate training to support a professional military. According to the Kazakh MOD, it is hoped that by 2010 the component of contract servicemen in the army will reach 50%. Supporting the claim that contract service is growing in popularity, the MOD cite the number serving in the air defence forces as 70%. Nonetheless, the figures in the SMD are less encouraging, at just 17%, emphasising both the formative nature of the SMD and the difficulties in increasing the levels of contract manning. Conflicting official statements are made regarding the timescale for professionalizing the military, varying from several years to several decades.<sup>29</sup>

Problems associated with training are never far from the surface, though rarely publicly acknowledged. Creating 'mobile forces', particularly in formations in the Western MD gives a semblance of actual progress in reform. Nothing is known about how these forces are trained, nor is the issue of the overhaul of the training apparatus openly discussed. Specialist training is, however, mentioned by the MOD in the context of those sent to China, Russia, Turkey and the US. In Kazakhstan itself it is planned to base specialists at the Aktyubinsk Higher Military Institute, Defence Ministry Cadet School and the Zhas Ulan School, as well as providing specialists for the Radioelectronics and Communications Institute and the Naval Academy.<sup>30</sup> However, specialist training levels, more promised than implemented in practice, conceal the chronically poor levels of non-specialist military training in the Kazakh Armed Forces.

There have been moves towards ensuring that more military exercises are held, in order to develop command structures and improve levels of coordination. Large-scale military exercises took place in the Saryshagan military range, Karaganda region, in May 2002, involving all branches of the Armed Forces and all four MDs.<sup>31</sup> The exercises, marking the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Kazakh Armed Forces, are far from a common occurrence for the Kazakh military. In fact, these are the first such exercises to be held in Kazakhstan, by Altynbayev's admission 'for two or three years'. The exercises included a demonstration of the high precision *Tochka U* (SS21 'Scarab') and *Smelchak* missiles (tactical cruise missile system) and rehearsed an air attack on an enemy. President Nazarbayev believes that, despite the costs involved, Kazakhstan needs to conduct such exercises in future to ensure improvement in combat training. By his own admission, this has been under-financed over the past eight years.<sup>32</sup> The common absence of military exercises, confirmed by the Minister of Defence, serves to highlight the poor standard of training and military preparedness that currently exists.

The deployment of a Kazakh peacekeeping force in Afghanistan and the specialist anti-terrorist training received from US forces, whilst very public in their nature, involve relatively small numbers of Kazakh servicemen. The specialist units are hardly representative of the current condition of the entire Kazakh Armed Forces. Poor standards of training, even in basic military knowledge and competence, observed by the US soldiers are undoubtedly more accurate. In the words of one anonymous US soldier, "Most of them are very young conscripts. It is not any kind of army. But that is why we are here, I guess."<sup>33</sup> The US cooperation revealed the following points concerning the condition of the military in Kazakhstan:

- A weak military displays the signs of decay, common in post-Soviet militaries.

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- Poor standards of basic training are evident amongst most soldiers, even in the specialist units.
- The Armed forces are poorly organized.
- Military airbases are in a state of disrepair.<sup>34</sup>

The Kazakh military has been exposed to serious under-financing during the first decade of the country's independence, and during that time the gap between the kind of military required and what it actually possesses has widened considerably. Consequently, low morale and poor standards of military discipline are commonplace amongst its conscripts and contract servicemen.

## **The International Influences on the Development of the Kazakh Armed Forces**

The US has had significant opportunities to aid regional stability in Central Asia, though its activities until recently have been limited. Since 27 May 1994 Kazakhstan has been a member of the NATO Partnership for Peace programme.<sup>35</sup> In 1997 Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan participated in the US led Centrasbat exercises. On 14 September 1997 500 US troops were joined by 40 Centrasbat troops, flying from North Carolina directly to Kazakhstan, refuelling twice in the air, and parachuting into Shymkent, Kazakhstan. The purpose of the exercise, held in the spirit of PfP, was to assist in attempts by the Central Asian republics to participate in multi-national peacekeeping and humanitarian operations. A total of 1,400 troops took part, joined by Russia, Turkey Latvia and Georgia.<sup>36</sup>

Centrasbat 2000, held in its fourth year, included personnel from the US 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division and 5<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group, which converged North of Almaty. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan also took part in the exercise, covering key aspects of peacekeeping missions, including refugee control, checkpoints, patrolling and security operations.<sup>37</sup> These three Central Asian Republics also participated in peacekeeping exercises held under the NATO PfP programme: Cooperative Nugget, conducted at Fort Polk, Louisiana between June-July 1997 and in Germany and the US in March and May 2000. Cooperative Osprey exercises, aimed at improving the interoperability of participating nations and providing training for peacekeeping operations, held in the US in August 1996 and Canada in March 2001, witnessed the active participation of Kazakhstan.<sup>38</sup>

US involvement in military cooperation with the Kazakh Armed Forces has markedly increased, however, since the US campaign against international terrorism began in Afghanistan in October 2001. This new US assistance remains in its early stages, though it principally entails providing advice and training in antiterrorist techniques. Twelve US specialist soldiers arrived in Kazakhstan in February 2002 to supply training to the Alpine and Chasseur battalion, consisting of around 200 Kazakh soldiers.<sup>39</sup> The US intends to deliver such instruction as part of its strategy in its War against Terrorism, encouraging Central Asian governments to take responsibility for defending against their own indigenous or particular terrorist threats.

It is likely that anti-terrorist training took place within the context of the *Zhardem* 2002 (Assistance 2002) military exercises conducted jointly with the US Army in the

SMD. The Kazakh MOD confirmed the participation of the Alpine Chasseur battalion, and that priority was given to search and rescue, mountain and medical training. These were envisaged as part of the planned US-Kazakh military cooperation, running over several weeks and ending in late March 2002.<sup>40</sup> Although such exercises had been conducted annually, with US involvement, since 1998, Kazakhstan failed to properly train an anti-terrorist force for active duty in Afghanistan, a plan mooted by Nazarbayev that was evidently unrealisable in practice.

Washington has also promised increased expenditure on joint US-Kazakh cooperation in matters of regional security, aimed at countering regional terrorism and preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction. In addition, the US is expected to provide \$5 million in 2002 for the further development of the infantry and improvements in its military infrastructure, particularly in the Caspian region. The total figure for US assistance to Kazakhstan is expected to reach \$81.6 million by 2002,<sup>41</sup> whilst the military component has increased on spending in previous years. As a participant in the US international military education and training programme (IMET), Kazakhstan has already received almost \$3.5 million.<sup>42</sup>

#### **US foreign military financing in Central Asia in 1999 & 2000 (\$'000)<sup>43</sup>**

<b>Republic</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001 (est)</b>	<b>2002 (requested)</b>
Kazakhstan	1,800	1,500	1,891	2,750
Kyrgyzstan	1,550	1,000	1,841	2,000
Turkmenistan	600	600	697	700
Uzbekistan	1,650	1,750	2,438	2,950

The involvement of US forces, however useful in the short term, cannot replace a sound structure within the Armed Forces whose role is to train soldiers. Turkey has also offered assistance in the training of a special-forces battalion, sending instructors to Kazakhstan since December 2001.<sup>44</sup> Ankara, clearly concerned at the potential risk of Islamic terrorism spreading through Turkey, has promised to assist the Kazakh military in combating international terrorism. However, despite committing itself to providing military aid in 2002 worth over \$1 million, this has so far related only to office equipment and communications systems.

China also intends to increase its military cooperation and aid to Kazakhstan. Beijing opposes the continued US presence in the region, and will strengthen its ties with Astana accordingly. In March 2002, China promised \$3 million in military aid to Kazakhstan. The Chinese military aid consists of office and communications equipment and hardware for specialist sub-divisions.<sup>45</sup>

Russia, however, remains the principal source of Kazakhstan's military aid. Since 1994 Russia has operated the Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan within the terms of a lease for 20 years at an agreed rent of \$115 million.<sup>46</sup> Russia pays large parts of that sum by supplying military equipment and weapons. In addition, Kazakhstan sends personnel to Russian military academies at no charge. It is also interesting to note the absence of a northern MD in Kazakhstan, confirming its close relations with Russia. International military aid, though growing in recent years, should be considered in the context of Russia's continued assistance to its neighbour and ally, which still constitutes the bulk of foreign aid to the Kazakh military.<sup>47</sup>

### **Peacekeeping**

Nazarbayev has expressed support for the US War against Terrorism since an early stage and has offered practical assistance in that regard. The political consequences are continuing to unfold, but the readiness of Kazakhstan to participate in the international peacekeeping in Afghanistan has succeeded in raising its military profile. In late March 2002 the UN Security Council approved the request of the Kazakh government to send a peacekeeping battalion to Afghanistan; *Kazbat* was duly stationed in Kabul as part the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), carrying out engineering and technical work, and helping with humanitarian relief.<sup>48</sup> This was quite an achievement, since fears were aroused against the idea of Kazakh Armed Forces operating outside the borders of the country. Constitutionally, the President gained the right to deploy the armed forces abroad in November 2000, formerly requiring approval by the *Majilis* (parliament), though it was granted in the context of the CIS Collective Security Treaty (CST). Nazarbayev has stretched its original scope, extending beyond deploying forces in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.<sup>49</sup>

*Kazbat* was rapidly formed and trained after the US military campaign commenced in Afghanistan in October 2001, for the purpose of serving abroad as a peacekeeping battalion. The difficulties experienced in assembling a peacekeeping battalion call into question the practical results of the US led *Centrasbat* exercises. *Kazbat* was based upon the MOD assault-landing brigade and equipped with relatively modern specialist equipment that meets international standards. It also includes a platoon of engineers, as well as medical and communications platoons. During the last two weeks of May 2002, a total of 72 members of *Kazbat* were sacked whilst on active duty in Afghanistan. Of the 541 members of the battalion, 322 serve on a contract basis; all of those dismissed were contract servicemen. Saparov explained that they were sacked because they lacked professional skills, and their moral and psychological condition was also taken into consideration.<sup>50</sup> Contract service in the Kazakh armed forces appears to be attracting individuals on the basis of the high salary offered. The political desire to participate as part of ISAF was undoubtedly a critical factor in the effort required to form and pull together the necessary resources, whilst the presence of specialists in the battalion helped to portray the Kazakh Armed Forces positively for the benefit of foreign media, though its success is questionable. Moreover, the decision to enhance the level of international cooperation in the military sphere brought more attention to the Kazakh military. A joint US-Kazakh Commission, held in January 2002, discussed how military cooperation between the two countries might be developed.<sup>51</sup> This seemed entirely consistent with the multifaceted approach in the conduct of Kazakh foreign policy, and its participation in regional security structures within the context of the CIS.

### **CIS & Regional Security Organisations**

Moreover, Kazakhstan continues to play an active role within the CIS security structures. The Collective Security Council (Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) agreed in October 2000 to set up rapid deployment forces, operationally subdivided into three zones; the Western Zone (Russia and Belarus), Caucasus (Russia and Armenia) and the Central Asian Zone (Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan). The Collective Rapid Deployment Force (CRDF), with its headquarters in Bishkek, consists of a battalion each supplied by Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to form a total of 1,300 servicemen. It has a Russian Commander, Major General Sergey Chernomordin, and a peacetime officer staff of 8, its only permanent element, increasing to 60 during war.

Problems relating to its financing and how to properly train the participating military components have beset it. The security structure appears good in theory, but lacks substance. Valery Nikolayenko, General Secretary of the Collective Security Council, believes it may be necessary to form a CIS international military command, overseeing the work of the regional directorates.<sup>52</sup> It is perhaps an admission of the problems that have been experienced in the area of military cooperation that have emerged within the Collective Security Treaty (CST).

Concerns about the effectiveness of the CST have been raised on numerous occasions, encouraging its member states to transform the body into a military-political bloc. At a meeting of the CST Council in Moscow on 14 May 2002, it was decided to turn the CST into a regional international Organisation: renamed as the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO). Russian President Vladimir Putin stated that the CSTO would work with other international Organisations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and NATO, and rather than uniting against anyone, it will seek to cooperate against common threats.<sup>53</sup>

The revised legal basis for the CSTO is to be drafted by November 2002. It is evidently at a formative stage, though the Central Asian states hope to benefit from the formation of a military-political bloc, not least in receiving Russian armaments and military hardware at reduced (internal) prices. The Belarus' President Alexander Lukashenko suggested that the Organisation might counterbalance NATO, believing that NATO will have to 'reckon with the CSTO and cooperate with it'. Nazarbayev assessed its significance somewhat more realistically, preferring to regard the CSTO as an 'insurance policy'.<sup>54</sup>

The CIS Antiterrorist Centre, the result of an initiative by President Vladimir Putin in 2000, has more widespread support within the CIS, though it has also seemed stronger on paper than in reality. Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Ukraine supported its creation. Its headquarters were duly established in Moscow, and Russia supplied its commander, Lieutenant-General Boris Mylnikov, as well as promising 50% of its annual budget. That budget was R12.7 million in 2001, expected to reach R30 million in 2002, which goes some way toward explaining the apparent reluctance of Russia's allies to contribute financially. It compiles intelligence on international terrorist groups operating within the CIS, in accordance with its mandate.<sup>55</sup>

Kazakhstan has commitments to the regional security apparatus that is emerging under the influence of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO): China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. At its founding summit held in Shanghai in June 2001 (it replaced the Shanghai Five, formed in 1996), a declaration was agreed aimed at strengthening regional antiterrorist cooperation and creating another antiterrorist centre. Nevertheless, the SCO principally exists to resolve the problems of inter-state borders, as well as reducing regional tension and strengthening military cooperation. President Nazarbayev has slightly changed priorities in his approach to regional security, since he first suggested in 1992 creating a Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA). (Astana has failed to transform CICA, currently containing 15 member states, into an Organisation analogous to the OSCE.) At the SCO summit in St Petersburg in June 2002, a charter was signed by the member states providing a legal foundation for its future development and enhanced security cooperation. A strongly worded declaration was adopted against terrorism and agreement was reached on a legal basis for the SCO anti-terrorist centre. Its

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permanent structures should be financed by an SCO budget, though Nazarbayev is keen to ascertain to the size of contribution required by each member state.<sup>56</sup>

Astana's participation in regional security structures including the CST, CRDF, SCO, and the CIS Antiterrorist Centres, as well as the recent entry of the US into Central Asia, serve to encourage the Kazakh political leadership to pay more attention to the military and its own counter-terrorism capabilities. Russia has its own security agenda for the region, seeking to maintain its interests in Central Asia and promote regional security structures as an alternative to a long-term US presence in the region, which could potentially damage Moscow's geopolitical interests. Astana, like its neighbours, will attempt to benefit from the West, whilst remaining open to Moscow's overtures. Nazarbayev wishes to promote a strong CIS, in which Kazakhstan may procure military hardware and weapons at preferential prices.<sup>57</sup>

### Counter-Terrorism as a Stimulus to Military Reform

In early 2002, Major-General Nartai Dutbayev, Chairman of the National Security Committee (KNB), warned of the growing threat from terrorist groups in Kazakhstan. The Kazakh government presented a package of bills to the *Majilis* aimed at increasing state control over the media and religious groups on the basis of the terrorist threat. The terrorist threat currently facing Kazakhstan is stated to be:

- International organized criminal groups, in domestic terms linked to financial industrial groups and corrupt state officials.
- Radical Islamic organisations, in particular the *Hizb ut-Tahrir* group.
- Uighur separatists, seeking separation for the autonomous Xinjiang-Uighur region of China.
- Russian national patriots seeking separation for the northern and northeastern regions of Kazakhstan.<sup>58</sup>

In October 2000, the KNB arrested 4 alleged members of the *Hizb ut-Tahrir* group. A small number of Uighur members were 'liquidated' by a special sub-division of the Interior ministry in Almaty in September 2000, while a small group of Russian and Kazakh citizens were arrested by the KNB in Ust-Kamenogorsk in Eastern Kazakhstan in November 1999, after allegedly plotting a coup d'état.<sup>59</sup> The newspaper *Respublika-2000* questioned how serious the threat of increased terrorism is for Kazakhstan; suggesting an ulterior motive on the part of the government in seeking to implement this legislation. The threat, it seems, comes mainly from small radical groups and the evidence for its growth in Kazakhstan is sporadic, restricted to isolated incidents.

True, the *Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami* (Islamic Liberation Party) terrorist group, with its headquarters thought to be in either Jordan or Saudi Arabia, is active in at least 7 CIS States, particularly in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. However, apart from the ongoing prosecution of 4 members arrested in October 2000, there is flimsy evidence for its growth in Kazakhstan, based mostly on the appearance of the group's literature in some parts of the country.<sup>60</sup> A small radical anti-Chinese group has reportedly increased its activities in Kazakhstan. Yusupbek Mukhlisov, the leader of the 'Eastern Turkestan United National Revolutionary Front,' has capitalised upon fears that the Chinese authorities might use the international war on terrorism as an excuse to crack down on Uighurs.<sup>61</sup>

Nazarbayev, keen to participate in the regional anti-terrorist bodies under the framework of the CIS, has been supportive of the US anti-terrorist operations. In that context, the threat is perhaps more theoretical than real. In any case, it necessitates an invigorated anti-terrorist emphasis within the Kazakh military.

### **Meeting the Threat?**

Operational-tactical exercises took place in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan between 13-19 April 2002. 'South Antiterror 2002' was designed to test the effectiveness of the CIS Collective Rapid Deployment Forces (CRDF) working in close cooperation with the CIS Antiterrorist Centre. These exercises, particularly emphasising the antiterrorist element, were perhaps held partly for their political effect to show that CIS security structures could present a viable long term alternative to US led counter-terrorism. Sponsored and planned by Russia on a CIS scale, the scenario revealed how heavily reliant upon Russia the indigenous militaries remain: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan repelled an invasion force consisting of 600 terrorists. The Interior Ministry required the assistance of Border Guards and the armed forces, resulting in a sustained air and ground attack on the terrorists. In the first phase of the exercise, forces from Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan practised cooperation and the operational application of their forces against invading terrorists. The second phase envisaged the terrorists targeting Tajikistan, perhaps attempting to reach US transport planes landing in Kulyab. It was held under the command of Major-General Abdulnazar Abdulhasanov, Commander of the Tajik Ground Forces and Col Viktor Sidorov, Deputy Commander of the Russian 201<sup>st</sup> Motor Rifle Division (MRD). Special squads from Armenia and Moldova also participated in the second phase. Crucially, the terrorists were 'finished off' by a battalion from the 201<sup>st</sup> MRD based in Tajikistan. Antiterrorist operations in Central Asia, held within the context of the CIS, require the full support and financial backing of Moscow, as well as the use of the Russian military stationed in the region.<sup>62</sup>

Although the exercises were conducted jointly between the participating militaries, the direction was under the control of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB). Nikolai Patrushev, Director of the FSB, arrived in Bishkek to oversee the conduct of the exercise. In Chechnya, the FSB have controlled the various security structures during the course of the 'counter-terrorist' campaign within the republic; this model will be replicated in Central Asia. It is the FSB's job to deal with threats to internal security, as well as coordinating such efforts with other CIS countries. Russia's contribution to the CRDF consists of a battalion from the 201<sup>st</sup> Division, supported by tank and mortar platoons, a subunit of SAMs and small teams of Special Forces.<sup>63</sup>

In May 2002, joint exercises of the Armed Forces of member states in the CST were held in Nizhniy Novgorod. Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan took part in the exercises conducted at the Russian MOD's training ground at Gorokhovets between 12-15 May 2002; 900 servicemen participated in the largest exercises in the 10 year history of the CST. Such exercises are important to the CST member states, keen to promote regional stability and demonstrate publicly their desire to deal with future crisis: there is no direct evidence that the US campaign against international terrorism has diminished the importance attached to the CST by its members.<sup>64</sup>

Kazakhstan's participation in the CST and SCO are important factors that influence its political desire for military reform. The increased levels of US military aid and cooperation since the War on Terrorism began have joined these factors. Astana

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clearly wishes to take full advantage of these developments, enhancing its antiterrorist capabilities and securing new military hardware, regardless of its source. But its priorities are misdirected, since modern equipment and weapons will have little impact on the wider issue of the decay of its Armed Forces. In this environment US aid will only benefit the military for a short period, but it will fail to bring genuine reform. Meanwhile, key issues facing the Kazakh MOD are ignored. If Astana wants to play a greater and more public role in multi-national peacekeeping, participate in CST or SCO security structures, and significantly enhance its antiterrorist capabilities, then it must reassess its reform priorities. Professionalizing the Armed Forces would be a costly option, well beyond the scope of the present size of defence budget, whilst training a military capable of meeting future threats will demand more systemic reform.

The 11 September factor in regional politics has undoubtedly supplied a stimulus towards military cooperation, both at a regional level and in the involvement of the US. It remains, nonetheless, only a small part of the much broader issue and challenges presented by military reform. Saparov's aim of making the targeting of small-armed bands and terrorist groups the principal role for the Kazakh Armed Forces suggests that the military are a long way from meeting any larger-scale threats to the State.

## Conclusion

The development of specialist anti-terrorist capabilities within the Kazakh Armed Forces represents merely the tip of the iceberg, accounting for no more than 200 soldiers. It reveals nothing concerning the progress of military reform. Indeed, it cannot be reasonably viewed as constituting a credible advance in the wider military context. The majority of the Kazakh military has been in decline since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, and little has been done to rescue it from further decay. Indeed, the Kazakh military may have gained in quantity, since its formation in 1992, but it is undoubtedly lacking in quality.

Other factors, such as the desire to participate in the regional security bodies and respond if needed to a crisis caused by border disputes, have influenced the government in Astana to begin military reform. Astana is particularly sensitive about its border with Uzbekistan, though this may improve through the Shanghai forum. The government would like to carry out military reform with minimal cost, and find it easier in the short term to concentrate on high-profile international peacekeeping and anti-terrorist units. These may provide some marginal evidence of progress in military reform, though there are serious risks entailed in neglecting the condition of the majority of the military structures.

One of the many anomalies at the heart of the reform process in Kazakhstan is seen in the stark contrast between the military service by Kazakhs even in the last years of the Soviet Army, and the apparent lack of enthusiasm to serve in the modern Kazakh Armed Forces. Far from suggesting a decline in the ideal of an independent Kazakhstan, it points to the pronounced decline in the social prestige of the military. Moreover, Kazakh military reform is predicated upon the assumption that the armed forces it inherited after the disintegration of the Soviet Union are capable of reform. Not only was this neglected throughout the 1990s, but the Soviet hardware and military infrastructure inherited by Kazakhstan is now obsolete and displays signs of crumbling. The poor condition of the military within the Republic in 1992 was grossly underestimated by the authorities and the opportunity to carry



out reform was subordinated in importance to the issue of the nuclear arsenal and subsequent debates that led to its renunciation in 1995.<sup>65</sup> Paper reform is an all too easy option, especially in the absence of clear aims. But it does little to deflect attention from the lowly condition of the Kazakh Armed Forces.

There is an absence of public debate on what precisely should be reformed in the Kazakh Armed Forces. The government suggest that more modern weapons and equipment are needed, whilst ignoring the widening gap between high-tech weaponry and chronic standards in basic military training amongst its servicemen. The military's budget share is low.

The process of military reform has finally commenced in Kazakhstan, even if it is only in a small way, but it has a long way to go in order to achieve genuine reform. Military reform ought to begin by reassessing the nature of external and internal threats, in order that forces can be adequately trained and equipped to meet this in practice. In that context, it seems that external threats are minimal since Kazakhstan has no natural enemies, whilst internal threats are increasing, principally from nationalist or militant Islamic groups. Training and equipping armed forces that can cope with these threats will demand high standards of professionalism amongst servicemen. Unfortunately, current reform appears largely cosmetic, aimed at supplying peacekeeping or anti-terrorist specialists for international duties, without engaging in systemic reform underpinned by serious investment. That is the challenge confronting both political and military leaders: it will be ignored only at the expense of further military decline.

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