

## Russia and Kazakhstan: mutually different interests for regional leadership

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## Russia and Kazakhstan: Mutually Different Interests for Regional Leadership

*Dmitry Malyshev and Elnara Bainazarova*

This chapter concerns itself with the mutually different policies through which two countries that both pursue leadership in Central Asia, namely Russia and Kazakhstan, each respond to the security threats that they perceive as arising from Afghanistan. The first section, written by Dmitry Malyshev, discusses two dimensions in Russian policies: the re-establishment of bilateral relations with Kabul, and the specific emphases in policy in Russia's relations with its close allies amongst the Central Asian republics—Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. This examination shows how Russia is preparing itself to meet the security challenges in the region and the way in which the development of relations with Afghanistan is part of a wider belt of flexible security arrangements. The second section in the chapter, written by Elnara Bainazarova, deals with the development assistance through which Kazakhstan sharpens its policy profile and contributes to the solution of the security problems in Afghanistan and the more impoverished Central Asian countries. Kazakhstan is one of Russia's most important allies in the entire post-Soviet space, and although the interests of the two countries diverge on issues such as the future direction of Eurasian integration, they coincide on the threats that both perceive is presented for the entire Central Asian region due to the current condition of Afghanistan. However, the policies of the two countries arise from mutually different interests: Russia seeks to maintain its influence in the region for reasons related to its economy and the security of its own zonal borders; whereas Kazakhstan is in the process of building not only a regional but also a more globally oriented profile by spearheading policies that generate prestige for it within the international community. While for Russia Afghanistan is a threat that should bring Central Asia together under its security leadership, for Kazakhstan it is not only a direct security threat but also presents a crucial question mark in relation to its possibilities to expand economically and, consequently, to expand the space for its independent policies.

## Russia: Preparing to Contain the Threats from Afghanistan

Although the final move to completely withdraw the U.S. forces from Afghanistan has been postponed several times due to the deteriorating security situation in the country, the change that is being brought about in the years 2014–2016 is already drastic: For the first time since the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan in September 2001 and the establishment of the NATO-led international coalition by a UN Security Council resolution in December 2001, the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) will take full responsibility for fighting the Taliban and other militant insurgent groups within the country.<sup>1</sup> Simultaneously serious doubts persist about the effectiveness of the Afghan army and its ability to confront the Taliban, which insists on the unconditional withdrawal of all foreign forces and promises to continue the armed struggle “as long as the last foreign soldier does not leave Afghanistan.”<sup>2</sup> Casualties have risen dramatically since the handover of security responsibilities to Afghan forces.<sup>3</sup> Experts have argued that even if the Taliban loses in popularity among the population in Afghanistan, its military capability remains considerable with some 25,000–30,000 experienced insurgent combatants.<sup>4</sup> According to the information that was released by the Afghanistan Contact

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<sup>1</sup> The U.S.-led coalition ended its combat mission in Afghanistan in December 2014. Three months later, and following a request by Afghanistan’s President Ashraf Ghani, President Obama announced the suspension of the previous plan that had aimed to reduce the number of U.S. troops in Afghanistan to 5,500 by the end of 2015. Patrick Goodenough, “Obama Slows Down Drawdown After Afghan President Asks That U.S. Troops Stay Longer,” *CNS News*, March 24, 2015, <http://cnsnews.com/news/article/patrick-goodenough/obama-slows-down-drawdown-after-afghan-president-asks-us-troops-stay>; “Ashraf Ghani: U.S. Critical To Afghanistan’s Future,” *National Public Radio*, March 22, 2015, <http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2015/03/22/394660553/ashraf-ghani-u-s-critical-to-afghanistans-future>. Also Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, “The Importance of the U.S.-Afghanistan Alliance,” *Washington Post*, March 20, 2015, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-importance-of-the-us-afghanistan-alliance/2015/03/20/faecf0de-cf06-11e4-a2a7-9517a3a70506\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-importance-of-the-us-afghanistan-alliance/2015/03/20/faecf0de-cf06-11e4-a2a7-9517a3a70506_story.html).

<sup>2</sup> “NATO: 1 Svc Member Killed in Afghanistan ‘Enemy Attack,’” *Associated Press*, July 28, 2014, [http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/A/AS\\_AFGHANISTAN?SITE=AP&SECTION=HOME&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT&CTIME=2014-07-28-06-18-34](http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/A/AS_AFGHANISTAN?SITE=AP&SECTION=HOME&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT&CTIME=2014-07-28-06-18-34).

<sup>3</sup> “What Kind of Afghanistan Will Foreign Forces Leave?,” *BBC*, December 17, 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-25410582>.

<sup>4</sup> Farhod Tolipov, a researcher from Uzbekistan, assures that “the Taliban’s popularity among the population of the IRA today is only about 3%.” Russian International Affairs Council, “Tsentral’naia Aziia–Afganistan-2014: v zone povyshennoi otvetstvennosti,” April 21, 2014, [http://russiancouncil.ru/inner/?id\\_4=3553#top](http://russiancouncil.ru/inner/?id_4=3553#top).

Group of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in July 2014, about 40 percent of Afghanistan's territory is controlled by the Taliban and some of its leaders are closely cooperating with al-Qaeda.<sup>5</sup> One year later, various Taliban groups had pledged to associate with the Islamic State (IS) either openly or clandestinely, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) had announced its allegiance to the IS, and government officials in Afghanistan reported IS militant activity in the provinces of Ghazni, Kunduz and Faryab in central and northern Afghanistan.<sup>6</sup> The International Crisis Group reported that as the international military effort winds down "a resilient insurgency demonstrates its clout countrywide, particularly in rural areas."<sup>7</sup> These concerns also leave Russia and the Central Asian states facing new challenges: the possible collapse of the Kabul regime which the U.S. has helped to set up and the subsequent revenge meted out by the Taliban and radical Islamists—a new chaos followed by a new round of armed confrontations.

This section examines the emerging pattern of Russian policies as Moscow prepares for increased uncertainty over the political future of Afghanistan. The focus is, first, Russia's policies towards Afghanistan and, second, its policies in Central Asia, where three countries—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan—are Russia's close military and political allies in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the processes of economic integration within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). This discussion delves into how a multidimensional arrangement of practices with multiple paths of cooperation is being developed in order to contain the instability and violence in Afghanistan and to prevent its spillover into the Central Asian republics. Zones of fortified security are being created around Afghanistan, and especially on its northern border, by multilateral (CSTO, SCO) and bilateral security cooperation and also by the means provided through other international cooperation to counteract the multifaceted threats of terrorism, Islamic extremism, drug trafficking, organized crime, and uncontrolled migration. While Russia avoids direct military involvement in Af-

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<sup>5</sup> "Taliby zakhvatyvaiut vlast' v Afganistane," *Izvestiia*, July 17, 2014. The Afghanistan Contact Group of the SCO was established in Beijing on November 4, 2005.

<sup>6</sup> Jan Agha Iqbal, "IS Threatens Afghanistan Peace Hopes," *Asia Times*, March 5, 2015, [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South\\_Asia/SOU-01-050315.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/SOU-01-050315.html).

<sup>7</sup> International Crisis Group, "Afghanistan's Insurgency after the Transition," *Asia Report*, no. 256 (May 12, 2014): 1, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/256-afghanistan-s-insurgency-after-the-transition.aspx>.

ghanistan, it seeks to develop cooperation with the government in Kabul in security matters and supports the economic development of the country.

*Russian Policies on Afghanistan: Objectives for the Immediate Future*

Russia's concerns about Afghanistan are reflected in its official Foreign Policy Concept that was approved in 2013:

“The ongoing crisis in Afghanistan and the forthcoming withdrawal of international military contingents from the country pose a great security threat to Russia and other CIS members. The Russian Federation together with Afghanistan and concerned countries, the United Nations, the CIS, the CSTO, the SCO and other multilateral institutions including Russia-NATO projects, will make consistent efforts to find a just and lasting political solution to the problems faced by this country with due respect for the rights and interests of all its ethnic groups and achieve a post-conflict recovery of Afghanistan as a peace-loving sovereign neutral state with stable economy. Comprehensive measures to reduce terrorist threat from Afghanistan and eliminate or reduce illicit drug production and traffic in a significant and measurable manner will be an integral part of those efforts. Russia is committed to further intensifying international efforts under the auspices of the UN aimed at helping Afghanistan and its neighboring states to meet these challenges.”<sup>8</sup>

An inclusive government system (“due respect for the rights and interests of all its ethnic groups”) and neutrality are Russia's long-standing objectives in a number of post-Soviet conflicts which have become sites for the rival interests of Russia and the Western states, for example in Ukraine and Moldova. In relation to Afghanistan Russia has kept a low profile; the emphasis of its action lies on the other side of the Amu Darya and Panj Rivers—in the former Soviet republics where it seeks to contain the threats from Afghanistan and to also maintain a strategic balance towards the U.S. military influence in Afghanistan.

Simultaneously the present uncertainties about the future of Afghanistan are lowering the political borderline which was set upon the river in 1989

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<sup>8</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, “Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, approved by President of the Russian Federation V. Putin on 12 February 2013,” <http://mid.ru/bdomp/nsosndoc.nsf/e2f289bea62097f9c325787a0034c255/0f474e63a426b7c344257b2e003c945f?OpenDocument>.

when the Soviet Union pulled back to this line and ended its then almost one-decade-long effort to gain control of Afghanistan. Addressing a meeting of the Collective Security Treaty Organization in October 2014, President Vladimir Putin stressed that Afghanistan “can count on Russia’s support after the withdrawal of NATO troops from Afghanistan.” “We understand that the withdrawal of the international military contingent will not make the situation easier,” Putin said and expressed Russia’s commitment in yet undefined, metaphoric terms: “[...] in case of necessity, we will be ready to lend our friends in Afghanistan a shoulder to lean on in order to keep the situation in this country stable and with perspectives of development.”<sup>9</sup> From April 11, 2013, Afghanistan has been an observer state to the Parliamentary Assembly of the CSTO.

Russia’s immediate priority is to prevent Islamist militants from infiltrating the Central Asian republics and to terminate the colossal drug trade from Afghanistan via the Central Asian republics to Russia.<sup>10</sup> In this connection, the practical meaning of lending “a shoulder to lean on” seems clear: by strengthening defense in the proximity of the borders of Afghanistan, Russia helps to prevent the insurgents from seeking shelter in these regions where they could prepare new attacks on Afghan territory. While this is a task that Russia and its allies prepare for in all cases—irrespective of whether insurgents will cross borders because the government in Kabul remains in power or because it fails to do so—being ready to lend a shoulder tells about a new active approach to cooperation on these issues.

A few months later, in February 2015, Ambassador Alexander Mantyskiy in a meeting with the second Deputy Chief Executive Officer of Afghanistan Haji Mohammad Mohaqiq expressed the wish of Russia’s authorities to enhance interaction with Afghanistan in order to stabilize the situation in the region. Russia offered to conclude an agreement with Afghanistan on cooperation in the field of security. Deputy Chief Executive Officer Mohaqiq welcomed the idea that Moscow could take measures against the threat of the

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<sup>9</sup> Nasir Azizi, “Russia to Help Support Afghanistan Post-2014,” *TOLOnews*, November 7, 2014, <http://www.tolonews.com/en/afghanistan/17038-russia-to-help-support-afghanistan-post-2014>.

<sup>10</sup> According to Viktor Ivanov, the Director of the Federal Drug Control Service, “[...] the south, Central Asia, is the main direction [from which these drugs are coming].” “Afghan drugs inundate Russia—Federal Drug Control Service,” *Interfax*, September 13, 2013, [http://rbth.com/news/2013/09/13/afghan\\_drugs\\_inundate\\_russia\\_-\\_federal\\_drug\\_control\\_service\\_29790.html](http://rbth.com/news/2013/09/13/afghan_drugs_inundate_russia_-_federal_drug_control_service_29790.html).

expanding influence of the Islamic State in the region.<sup>11</sup> Even if Russia continues to reject ideas about being directly militarily involved in Afghanistan, such cooperation will open a new phase in its participation in the fight against international terrorism and extremism beyond the territories of the states that are its allies in Central Asia. In relations with Afghanistan, the Western withdrawal is giving a boost to the re-establishment of relations which has been taking place very slowly after a standstill of almost a quarter-century.

### *Leaving Behind the Burden of the Past*

Russia's approaches on Afghanistan have been heavily influenced by the negative experience of its own history: the Soviet-Afghan war (1979–1989) that resulted in the loss of 15,000 Soviet troops. The events of that war have not been forgotten by the Russian public, and Moscow's decision-makers have been firm on the point that Russia's military forces will not be involved in Afghanistan again. However, the fact that Moscow's policies towards Afghanistan have shown little willingness to take anything but a minimum of risks and to keep avoiding any direct intervention in Afghanistan's affairs has not prevented Russia from cooperating with ISAF under the Russia-NATO agreement ratified in May 2007. Most importantly, Russia has allowed the coalition forces—the “Western military bloc” in Russian parlance—to use Russian territory to transfer their troops and cargo including heavy weaponry and combat aircraft.<sup>12</sup> Russia has also directly assisted the government in Kabul by donating helicopters and other equipment for military uses. Nevertheless, the determination not to send troops has remained consistent over the past twenty-five years; hence any speculation that Russia could advocate the idea that the Western coalition should be replaced by the forces of the CSTO or the SCO member states is merely hypothetical.

The traumatic memory of the Soviet-Afghan war in Russian society and the lack of bilateral relations after the Soviet withdrawal has kept Moscow

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<sup>11</sup> “Rossiia gotova podpisat' soglasheniie s IRA o sotrudnichestve v sferie bezopasnosti,” *Afghanistan.ru*, February 23, 2015, <http://afghanistan.ru/doc/82594.html>.

<sup>12</sup> In 2011 the Coalition requested Russia's cooperation in the withdrawal of the troops and equipment from Afghanistan, and a logistic center was built near the city of Ulyanovsk. However, both Russia and NATO decided against making Ulyanovsk a hub for this purpose due to the excessive costs involved.

and Kabul at a distance from each other. Omar Nessar, Director of the Russian Center for the Study of Modern Afghanistan and editor-in-Chief of the web-site “Afghanistan.ru,” explains:

“Bilateral relations between Moscow and Kabul were under severe pressure from Russian domestic political factors. Over many years, the media and expert community produced a negative image of post-Communist Afghanistan, introducing it as an “American project” for Russian public opinion. Moreover, in Kabul anti-Russian elements had frozen Russia’s initiatives to establish economic and humanitarian ties with the country. The relevant government agencies of the Russian Federation clearly lacked the political will to develop bilateral relations. This was primarily because in Russia’s foreign policy direct bilateral relations with Afghanistan did not possess any kind of priority.”<sup>13</sup>

No signs of change could be seen until 2012, when a joint Russian-Afghan Commission on trade and economic cooperation was established that provided an institutional basis for the economic partnership of the two countries. As a result of this new opening, Russia has started a gradual “return to Afghanistan” and increased its economic cooperation and development assistance for infrastructural projects and humanitarian<sup>14</sup> cooperation. In Afghanistan the improved relationship has brought back memories about previous cooperation. Former President Hamid Karzai is amongst those who have commented positively on the Soviet model. “The Soviet money went to the right place and they were efficient in spending their resources through the Afghan government,” Karzai said in an interview to the *Washington Post* in March 2014.<sup>15</sup> During the International Conference on Afghanistan in London in 2010, where the participating states were requested to contribute with development assistance to help stabilize Afghanistan, the Russian delegation

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<sup>13</sup> Omar Nessar, “Evolutsiia Afganskoi politiki Moskvyy,” *Nezavisimaa Gazeta*, January 26, 2015, 9 (translation by Dmitry Malyshev).

<sup>14</sup> In Russian linguistic practice, “humanitarian” does not only refer to relief work; the word has the broader connotation of being focused on human beings instead of state structures and institutions.

<sup>15</sup> Office of the President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, “Full Transcript of President Karzai’s Interview with Washington Post,” March 5, 2014, <http://president.gov.af/en/news/full-transcript-of-president-karzais-interview-with-washington-post>; Kevin Sieff, “Interview: Karzai Says 12-year Afghanistan War Has Left him Angry at U.S. Government,” *Washington Post*, March 2, 2014, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/interview-karzai-says-12-year-afghanistan-war-has-left-him-angry-at-us-government/2014/03/02/b831671c-a21a-11e3-b865-38b254d92063\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/interview-karzai-says-12-year-afghanistan-war-has-left-him-angry-at-us-government/2014/03/02/b831671c-a21a-11e3-b865-38b254d92063_story.html).



proposed to reconstruct or modernize more than 140 facilities that had been built as part of the Soviet Union's development assistance and that had been destroyed in the civil war of the early 1990s.<sup>16</sup> The Kabul House-Building Factory is one of these Soviet-era projects; another is the Russian Center of Science and Culture in Kabul, which was originally built in 1982.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to such "goodwill" projects that are visible to the public and are meant to improve the popular image of the donating country, Russia has contributed to Afghanistan's economy by canceling more than \$11 billion of Afghanistan's sovereign debt during the decade that followed the ouster of the Taliban regime in autumn 2001.<sup>18</sup> The legacy of Soviet-era development assistance—from the time when Russia was the most important donor country for Afghanistan—also plays a positive role in Russia's readiness to participate in the international donor community to support Afghanistan's development. At the International Conference on Afghanistan in Bonn in 2011, foreign minister Sergey Lavrov emphasized that Russia was "ready to make large investments" in major infrastructure projects in the region, such as the Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India pipeline project (TAPI) and the Central Asia–South Asia transmission line project (CASA-1000).<sup>19</sup>

These two projects are the key elements in implementing the U.S.-initiated idea of "New Silk Roads" to enhance economic development in Afghanistan (see the contribution by Mika Aaltola and Juha Käpylä in this book). Beyond this there are several other plans for infrastructure development in South and Central Asia which specifically suit Russia's interests in developing rail and transportation networks in the wider region. One is the 1,340-kilometer-long road and rail line to connect Pakistan's Chitral with Dushanbe, which would bring into the twenty-first century the idea of the old trade routes connecting the Muslims and Hindus of the Indian subcontinent with the Tajiks. Another is a road and rail link between Islamabad and the

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<sup>16</sup> Dmitri Trenin and Alexei Malashenko, "Afghanistan: A View from Moscow," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 2010, 27, [http://carnegieendowment.org/files/trenin\\_afghan\\_final.pdf](http://carnegieendowment.org/files/trenin_afghan_final.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> The new building complex opened in fall 2014 at a reported cost of \$20 million; it includes auditoriums, a library of Russian literature, a concert hall, a multi-media center, and sports and leisure facilities.

<sup>18</sup> Nick Allen, "Russia, the USSR and Afghanistan, Yesterday and Today," *Russia Beyond the Headlines*, 2014, <http://rbth.com/longreads/afghanistan>.

<sup>19</sup> Andrei Dörr and Tobias Kraudzun, "Persistence and Change in Soviet and Russian Relations with Afghanistan," *Central Asian Survey* 31, no. 4 (December 2012): 425. The article provides an extensive analysis of Soviet-era development assistance to Afghanistan.

Ferghana Valley; this would provide Russia with access to Pakistani ports, and Pakistan with access to markets in Central Asia and Siberia. For Russia, just as for other major states, the international task of developing Afghanistan is intertwined with the interest for projects which are being developed independently of Afghanistan but gain significant normative legitimacy from it in international contexts. In bilateral relations with Afghanistan the gradual resumption of economic cooperation and Russia's support of the efforts of the Western international community to create stability in Afghanistan through infrastructure development has paved the way for a type of security cooperation with strategic significance for the capability of Russia and its allied countries to maintain stability to the north of Afghanistan.

### *Security Arrangements in Central Asia and Beyond*

Central Asia is a region which Russia, as phrased by Dmitri Trenin and Alexei Malashenko, "seeks to keep within its orbit."<sup>20</sup> However, the metaphor of the planet carving out its sphere of influence determined by the gravitational forces of power reveals very little about the ties that bind this space together. The argument frequently formulated in Russian policy-making circles is that if Russia were to withdraw its military presence from Central Asia and cease being interested in maintaining its economic influence in this region, such a course of action would inevitably affect Russia itself because of the economic interconnectedness and structural interdependence built during the Soviet decades. It is generally observed that over the past ten years the economic importance of Central Asia has in fact increased because the region provides ample opportunities for Russian business and its military-industrial complex. Central Asian supplies of uranium are needed to run Russia's nuclear power stations, and Russia is interested in building closer cooperation with the region's oil and gas exporters (Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan). In addition to energy, investment priorities include communications and traditional industries such as cotton.<sup>21</sup>

While maintaining influence in the region is seen to serve Russia's economic capacity and, hence, its status as a great power, it is also understood as

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<sup>20</sup> Trenin and Malashenko, "Afghanistan," 15.

<sup>21</sup> Gennadii Chufirin, *Rossia v Tsentral'noi Azii* (Almaty: Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2010), 75–99.

a necessity dictated by geography: due to Russia's very long land borders and the specific threats emerging from this region, the Russian Federation's national security depends crucially on stability in Central Asia. Decision-makers and politicians emphasize that because the traditional and non-traditional security threats stemming from Central Asia affect Russia much more directly and acutely than they do any other state beyond the region, Russia cannot ignore them. The drug problem with its pronounced marks in the population is an example. Russian officials and politicians have repeatedly expressed their concerns over the immense increase of narcotics production during the twelve years of ISAF's presence in Afghanistan.<sup>22</sup>

Because geography is seen to tie the Central Asian states to the "Afghan issue," these states are expected to cooperate in order to counter terrorism, extremism, organized crime and drug trafficking. Simultaneously it is recognized that these states do not have a sufficient capacity to accomplish such tasks alone. Russia sees itself to be in the position to provide such assistance; it recognizes its responsibility in Central Asia and tries to operate ahead of developments by using the variety of policy tools made possible by the multi-level structure of cooperation within the CSTO and the economic integration projects led by Russia in the region. It is emphasized that Russia's special position and responsibilities in relation to Central Asia follow from the fact that Russia, unlike the other resource-rich states providing external assistance in the region, has a vital interest to stop the drug traffic and fight against terrorism and religious extremism in the region. Russia's interests in the stability of Afghanistan are consequently interwoven with these regional interests; and this makes Russia's participation in the development of Afghanistan much more than the symbolic act of a responsible member of the international community led by the Western states.<sup>23</sup>

Russia's economic as well as security cooperation in Central Asia is a combination of bilateral and multilateral relations. Due to a combination of

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<sup>22</sup> Despite years of international efforts to restrain drug production in Afghanistan, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in its report in 2014 finds that opium production in Afghanistan "has increased dramatically." "Gripped by electoral crisis, Afghanistan needs 'statesmanship, not brinksmanship'—UN envoy," *UN News Centre*, June 25, 2014, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=48130#.U60vHbGtxX0>. During his visit to Kabul in December 2013 Sergey Naryshkin, Speaker of the Russian State Duma, underlined that: "Narcotics production [has] increased 44 times in the 12 years that ISAF has been present in Afghanistan." Allen, "Russia."

<sup>23</sup> President of Russia, "Meeting with members of political parties represented in the State Duma," August 14, 2014, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46451>.

historical, political-diplomatic and strategic reasons, it is considered rational to develop multidimensional economic cooperation with the Central Asian states. While bilateral relations continue to have their own dynamic, particular attention is being paid to strengthening integration processes within the frame of the CIS, i.e. the formation of a single economic space by following the two tracks of a free economic zone and the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU, another common abbreviation is EAEU).<sup>24</sup> Similarly, security cooperation is a combination of multilateral policies in the frame of the CSTO and bilateral relations with Russia's allies and partners. The result is a flexible system in which the two sets of relations can be mutually supportive; however, such a system also easily breeds controversies and generates confusion. This, in turn, highlights the importance of leadership and decision-making.

According to its 2013 foreign policy concept, Russia's major objectives in Asia include: "establishing itself as a key transit country between Europe and Asia," "participating in and shaping regional integration processes," and "improving the regional security environment."<sup>25</sup> It is easy to see that Kazakhstan's geographic position and active political role in the region make it a key partner for Russia as Moscow's decision-makers seek to realize these objectives. Among all former Soviet republics, Kazakhstan stands out as a "success story." In spite of its complex multiethnic composition it has preserved its political stability and become one of the leaders of economic growth. From a Russian perspective Kazakhstan's geographic position makes it both a "buffer" and a "gateway" between Russia and the other countries in Central Asia. The large landmass of the country separates the territory of the Russian Federation from the "troublesome South." In the geo-economic sense, this geographic position makes the country a nexus point for the transit of energy and mineral resources to both western and eastern markets. Moreover, Kazakhstan's resource potential is very large due to its access to the oil and gas deposits in the Caspian Sea. Additionally, it has large stockpiles of uranium; and in Russia, their import is considered a strategic interest.

In international political cooperation Kazakhstan is one of Russia's most important economic partners amongst the CIS member states, and in Russia President Nursultan Nazarbayev is recognized to have played a vital role in the advancement of Eurasian integration with landmark decisions on the

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<sup>24</sup> Gennadii Chufrin, *Ocherki evraziiskoi integratsii* (Moscow: Ves' mir, 2013), 128.

<sup>25</sup> Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Concept of the Foreign Policy."

EEU (2014) and, before this, on the Eurasian Customs Union (which has been established in several stages since 1995). Because Kazakhstan and Russia both are in the key position to stimulate this process, the effectiveness of policies requires that Russia increasingly coordinates initiatives with Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan is close to Russia also because it has the second largest number of ethnic Russians amongst all post-Soviet republics: 23.7 percent of the total population (Ukraine ranks first with about 40 percent). This connection no longer exists in the case of the other Central Asian states. For all these reasons the maintenance of the political stability that has become part of Kazakhstan's good reputation and diplomatic prestige among the Central Asian states is crucially important to Russia.

Because Kazakhstan possesses considerable military potential, the two states' cooperation in the efforts to secure Central Asia's southern borders has great burden-sharing importance for Russia. Much important materiel created by Soviet military and industrial structures was produced in Kazakhstan, and Russia has much at stake in maintaining the connections developed over decades between the enterprises of the two countries. Russia has a significant role in re-equipping Kazakhstan's national defense force, and both countries are actively participating in the creation of an integrated multi-level security system in Central Asia. Although Kazakhstan, which is rich in oil and other natural resources, does not need external assistance, cooperating with Russia gives it the opportunity to play a crucial role in maintaining security in the neighboring states and, as a consequence, around its own borders. However, although both countries have grave concerns about the growth of potential threats to Central Asian security arising from Afghanistan, it is Russia which bears the main burden in assisting the countries directly bordering Afghanistan—Tajikistan in the first place—to repel the threats.

Tajikistan's president, Emomali Rakhmon, has repeatedly emphasized the need to raise wide-based international support for the protection of the border towards Afghanistan. Russia's foreign minister Sergey Lavrov reconfirmed Russian policy in July 2014 by stressing that Tajikistan and Russia "are going to take these measures as bilateral within the framework of the full implementation of the relevant decisions of the CSTO."<sup>26</sup> In the next

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<sup>26</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, "Statement for the mass media by the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, during the joint press conference summaris-

spring Russia and Tajikistan carried out joint drills in the Badakhshan region, where the borderline runs through mountainous areas that greatly complicate border protection along Tajikistan's 1,340-kilometer-long borderline with Afghanistan.<sup>27</sup> Deputy Defense Minister Anatoly Antonov's decision was firm after he visited Dushanbe in January 2015: Russia would assist Tajikistan in modernizing and strengthening its armed forces and reinforce its 201<sup>st</sup> military base in the country.<sup>28</sup> While the Russian base already has branches near the Afghan border south of Dushanbe (in Khatlon and Qurghonteppa), the transborder Badakhshan region is the most under-populated and inhospitable region for enforcing border control; yet it is also a region in which Russia has long-term experience, unlike any other state contributing to border security in Tajikistan: in the Soviet period this was a border region not only with Afghanistan to the south but also with China to the east. In addition to military cooperation Russia has also assisted Tajikistan by re-equipping its border troops (on the issue of the return of Russian border guards to Tajikistan's southern border, see the contribution by Rytövuori-Apunen and Usmonov in this book).

Nevertheless, it is Kyrgyzstan which is the largest recipient of Russian loans and grants. During President Putin's visit to Bishkek in September 2012, Russia wrote off Kyrgyzstan's \$500 million debt. This was part of a comprehensive agreement on the terms of strengthening Russia's military presence in Kyrgyzstan. The deal includes the Kant airbase, the underwater weapons-testing site in Karakol, the military center in Kara-Balta, and the radio-seismic laboratory in Mailuu-Suu. Although Kyrgyzstan is not in the immediate geographic proximity of Afghanistan, Moscow's decision-makers emphasize that this small republic is not capable of confronting the security challenges emerging from Afghanistan on its own and that its geographic position leaves it with no other sustainable solutions but to rely on Russia.

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ing the results of the negotiations with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan, Sirodjidin Aslov, Dushanbe, 30 July 2014," July 30, 2014, [http://archive.mid.ru/brp\\_4.nsf/0/F803762237E567CB44257D2700203ECF](http://archive.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/F803762237E567CB44257D2700203ECF).

<sup>27</sup> "Na rossiiskoi 201-i baze v Tadzshikistane budut obuchat' mestnykh voennykh," *Lenta.ru*, January 21, 2015, [http://lenta.ru/news/2015/01/21/201\\_base](http://lenta.ru/news/2015/01/21/201_base). The military contingent of the base and their families have a status equal to the administrative staff of the Embassy of the Russian Federation. According to the agreements concluded during the official visit of Russian President Vladimir Putin in Tajikistan (October 5–6, 2012), the 201<sup>st</sup> Russian military base located in Tajikistan will be maintained until 2042.

<sup>28</sup> "Rossiia usilit voennuiu bazu v Tadzshikistane," *Lenta.ru*, January 27, 2015, <http://lenta.ru/news/2015/01/27/militarycamp/>.

Russia intensified its military and economic presence in the Kyrgyz Republic after major riots related to ethno-political conflict and power struggle once again (after the instability of the early 1990s) struck the country in spring 2010 and continued to simmer in the years that followed. Russia's economic presence is evident in the fact that Russian companies are the largest investors in the country's energy sector. Development assistance plays a very minor role in Russian policies on Central Asia and is mainly to be found in debt relief for the two countries with fewest resources, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. In addition, there is the general form of humanitarian cooperation consisting of scholarships for youth from all over the region to study in Russian institutions of higher education.<sup>29</sup>

The territory of the Kyrgyz Republic is a nodal point not only in the north-south axis—in relation to Afghanistan—but also towards the east, in order to control China's expansion in the energy economy of the region. Ever since Russian policies started their "turn" towards Asia the paramount importance of China has been steadily growing, both as a cooperation partner and as a rival in the infrastructure industry; and also India, Pakistan and Iran are becoming increasingly significant for the Russian economy and in terms of political cooperation. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization is the main regional frame for cooperating with China, and this organization is extending its geographic scope considerably with the membership of India and Pakistan (which both entered the formal membership process in July 2015) and also of Iran (once the UN sanctions relating to Iran's nuclear program cease to apply). While the military cooperation of the CSTO in Central Asia has shrunk to only three states (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan), the SCO is gaining in importance as the far wider regional frame for developing cooperation in non-traditional security threats—drug trafficking, terrorism and extremism. Although the backbone of Russia's defense arrangements in Central Asia is still formed by the CSTO with its Russian military bases in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan as well as Russia's aim to establish joint regional air defense systems with all three countries, the SCO offers a much wider arena for specific forms of cooperation between groups of countries.

In Afghanistan Russia, like the Soviet Union previously, has emphasized cooperation in the northern areas of the country, where the ethnic composi-

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<sup>29</sup> V. M. Sergeev, A. A. Kazantsev, and V. I. Bartenev, *Assisting Development in Central Asia: Strategic Horizons of Russian Engagement* (Moscow: Russian International Affairs Council, 2013), 37.

tion of the population is largely Tajik and Uzbek. Focusing on these northern areas means that Russia continues to build its future influence in Afghanistan on the close ties it developed with the Northern Alliance. These ties did not suddenly emerge from Russian opposition to the Taliban but have a history which goes back to the first decades of the Soviet Union (see the chapter by Rytövuori-Apunen and Usmonov in this book). In his aforementioned address to the CSTO meeting in October 2014, President Putin specifically referred to “our friends” in Afghanistan. This undoubtedly refers to those who are able to establish contacts for mutual interest, but this historical context also must be taken into account in order to grasp the full meaning of Putin’s words. If we interpret the “shoulder to lean on” against the backdrop of the historically much wider zonal border represented by the historical ethnic connections that exist across the Panj and Amu Darya Rivers, it also entails support for a type of political development that secures the position of the Tajik and Uzbek populations within Afghanistan’s system of government.

As a consequence, Russia’s present policy objectives to develop wider regional cooperation include not only the Central Asian states; they also envision India and Iran as allies in the efforts to support non-Pashtun ethnic groups to consolidate their representation in top-level power structures in Afghanistan and, thus, to contain the expansion of the Taliban in the north by political means. Relations with “friends” lead to the development of a zonal border extending across the formal border and help to solve security problems more effectively than could be accomplished by trying to create impermeable borderlines. Moreover, it is not only along Afghanistan’s border with Tajikistan that support provided to Tajiks and Uzbeks can be functional for Central Asian security. Currently Russia cannot envision the establishment of a military base in Uzbekistan, yet the security threats for which it must prepare include the possibility that insurgents from Afghanistan, and especially the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, may try to break into Uzbekistan and threaten also Tajikistan from the territory of neighboring Uzbekistan. Ever since the IMU swore allegiance to the leadership of the Islamic State in summer 2015, it has come to make much sense in Moscow to extend defenses across the Panj and the Amu Darya and to do so by means that do not involve military troops. Staying on this path requires sophisticated skills as well as well-functioning networks with other countries. Hence, it is no coincidence that Russia is also in the process of developing security cooperation with Pakistan, as Tahir Amin explains elsewhere in this book. The key ques-



tion for the success of these policies is how the conflicts between pairs of countries—starting with Afghanistan and Pakistan, Pakistan and India, and including also U.S.-Russia relations—can be managed or held in abeyance through the cooperation required by the emerging war front.

## **Kazakhstan: Policies for Regional Leadership in Development**

This section explores the ways in which Kazakhstan is building a policy profile of its own through its contributions to the international efforts to stabilize Afghanistan and to enhance development and cooperation in Central Asia. Kazakhstan is one of only two Central Asian countries classified as an “upper-middle-income” economy by the World Bank (the other is energy-rich and traditionally isolationist Turkmenistan), and it alone amongst the Central Asian states has been ranked by the UNDP as a country with “high human development” since 2013 (the four other Central Asian states are ranked as countries with “medium,” and Afghanistan with “low,” human development).<sup>30</sup> The positive image gained by investing not only in economic growth but also in the education and health of its people has prompted Kazakhstani policy-makers to sharpen foreign policy with a distinct emphasis on “soft” power, that is, a values-driven leadership in the region that serves Kazakhstan’s own interests of modernization and economic integration and also defines how it contributes to international efforts that seek to create political stability in Afghanistan. The leap that Kazakhstan has taken during the 2010s from being a recipient of international development aid to becoming a donor country establishes a new basis for its international policies.

In the Third Ministerial Conference of the Istanbul Process on Afghanistan held in Almaty in April 2013, President Nursultan Nazarbayev stressed that “... the key for solution of Afghanistan [sic] issues is in the hands of the Afghan people and the government as the official representative

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<sup>30</sup> The Kyrgyz Republic, Uzbekistan and Pakistan are “lower middle-income” economies. See the World Bank Data on Countries and Economies, <http://data.worldbank.org/country/>; United Nations Development Programme, “The Rise of the South: Human Progress in a Diverse World, Kazakhstan,” Human Development Report, 2013, <http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/Country-Profiles/KAZ.pdf>.

of the nation. The international community should foster development of the inter-Afghan dialogue. Those who demonstrate readiness for the establishment of peace and accord in Afghanistan must receive our support.”<sup>31</sup> Kazakhstan also emphasizes that the full development of any inter-Afghan dialogue will be possible only if there is multilateral cooperation between regional players. Afghanistan should bring the wider region together instead of deepening the involvement of powerful external states in its problems. Afghanistan’s instability and development problems were considered within the context of regional security in 2010 by the Astana OSCE Summit, which declared the concept of “Eurasian security,” and later also by the APEC Summit in Vladivostok 2012, where President Putin introduced the idea of the flexible involvement of Eurasia in the Asia-Pacific region.

Regional cooperation was further boosted after the U.S. shifted its policies to emphasize the Asia-Pacific region within its “New Silk Road” initiative and China came forward with its concept of the “Silk Road Economic Belt.” However, the “New Silk Roads” ideas and the support thereof with reference to the need to develop Afghanistan are by no means novel; for many years experts in the region have discussed the prospects of involving Afghanistan in transport and logistics networks in South and Central Asia. Kazakhstan is intent on making the most of these new developments, which, in essence, are perfectly matched with its interests: should these new networks accelerate economic development in the region as envisioned, it will be possible for Kazakhstan to fully develop its potential as a transport-logistics hub not only between East and West but also South and North. Even in the face of growing competition between external powers, Kazakhstan would thus gain leverage to continue in its pursuit of its “multivector” foreign policy, which aims to develop close relations with multiple states and to expand the political and diplomatic space for its independent policies. Consequently, the question of how Afghanistan’s future will turn out is much more than merely an issue of regional security and stability; it is closely connected with Kazakhstan’s economic prospects and the future of its foreign policy. If the security situation deteriorates

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<sup>31</sup> Central Communications Service under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, “President addressed Ministerial Conference of Istanbul Process for Afghanistan,” April 26, 2013, <http://ortcom.kz/en/news/president-addressed-ministerial-conference-of-istanbul-process-for-afghanistan.1223>.

drastically, Central Asia will be kept isolated and Kazakhstan will be prevented from gaining access to transport routes from the South. At the same time Kazakhstan will be spared from the more dire consequences of a process that is the inevitable consequence of the growth in trade cooperation: mass migration from Afghanistan, Pakistan and other populous South Asian states. However, as this challenge is not likely to diminish in the long term, Kazakhstan must prepare policies that ensure the stability of its borders. Its location at the heart of Central Asia makes it crucial that it not rely on fence-building policies but instead maintain close relations with neighboring states in a whole range of issues, from economic and political development to the maintenance of regional security and stability and countering non-conventional security threats. The frame for such policies has been prepared in the foreign policy concept defined for the years 2014–2020.

### *The Foreign Policy Concept and ODA Policy*

The presidential decree “On the Concept of foreign policy of Kazakhstan for 2014–2020” explains the strategy of what can be called Kazakhstan’s “soft” power. The foreign policy concept was developed in accordance with the instructions given in the Address of the President to the Nation “Kazakhstan-2050 Strategy: New Political Course of the Established State.”<sup>32</sup> It is a set of principles and approaches, goals and priorities as well as specific tasks of foreign activities.<sup>33</sup> The key strategic directions of Kazakhstan’s long-term development include investment in human development, improvement of the institutional environment, development of a science-driven economy, and accelerated development of infrastructure. In this context the core idea of “soft power” is about investment in human resources: a population with knowledge and skills as well as sustained health is considered the best means to generate prosperity, the promise of which, again, is needed in order to maintain the consensual fabric of society required for peace and stability in the geographically largest country in Central Asia and in a state that contains

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<sup>32</sup> “Address by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Leader of the Nation, N. Nazarbayev ‘Strategy Kazakhstan-2050: New Political Course of the Established State’,” *Official web site of the Prime Minister of Kazakhstan*, accessed September 28, 2015, <http://www.primeminister.kz/page/article-101?lang=en>.

<sup>33</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, “Foreign Policy Concept for 2014–2020,” April 25, 2014, <http://www.mfa.kz/index.php/en/foreign-policy/foreign-policy-concept-for-2014-2020-republic-of-kazakhstan>.

more than 130 different ethnic groups. Essentially, the foreign policy concept is designed to facilitate Kazakhstan's integration into the international community by defining the objective for policies and developing appropriate conditions. The positive image that Kazakhstan has gained beyond its borders due to its social stability, development record and active diplomacy is an asset in promoting this process, especially when expectations about increasing prosperity weaken and collective mobilization becomes more difficult to maintain.

Kazakhstani policy has shown itself skillful in combining that which is necessary from its own perspective with what is generally desirable and has normative value within the international community. It utilizes the good reputation which Kazakhstan has gained to increase the credibility of its economic capacity beyond its borders and to strengthen the diplomatic activity through which its regional leadership becomes manifest. The primary element of these policies is the official development assistance (ODA) policy established by a law in December 2014.<sup>34</sup> The legal basis of the new policy envisages a full development assistance program focusing on Central Asia and Afghanistan. While the Concept adopted to instruct the activities of foreign policy during 2014–2020 makes “near neighborhood” a strategic priority, the ODA policy is meant to foster bilateral socio-economic cooperation and enhance a more prosperous neighborhood along Kazakhstan's southern borders.<sup>35</sup> During the 8<sup>th</sup> Astana Economic Forum, President Nazarbayev reiterated Kazakhstan's intention to focus on regional security issues by addressing the socio-economic needs of countries. This profile-sharpening statement gave a boost to setting up the Kazakhstan Agency for International Development (KazAID) in order to implement the ODA policy. The ODA policy entails that the donor-country role under construction is in harmony with Kazakhstan's national interests: Kazakhstan contributes to the stabilization of the socio-economic and political situation in its partner countries. Joint action prevents illegal migration flows, drug

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<sup>34</sup> Zakon Respubliki Kazakhstan Ob ofitsial'noi pomoshchi razvitiuu [Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan On Official Development Assistance], December 10, 2014, published by *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda*, <http://www.kazpravda.kz/uploads/redactors/files/548a64437d4621418355779.pdf>.

<sup>35</sup> Ukaz Prezidenta Kazakhstana ot 9 aprelya 2013 goda no. 538 Ob utverzhdenii Kontseptsii Respubliki Kazakhstan v sphere ofitsial'noi pomoshchi razvitiuu [Presidential Decree no. 538 On Official Development Assistance Concept of the Republic of Kazakhstan], April 9, 2013, [http://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc\\_id=31374898](http://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=31374898).

trafficking and other forms of crime, and it also improves the options available in the fight against terrorism and extremism. The role assumed by Kazakhstan through its aid policies serves to maintain a “secure neighborhood belt” whilst simultaneously strengthening the state’s international position and its positive image.<sup>36</sup>

Kazakhstan’s vision for the reconstruction of Afghanistan and the policy tools by which the interethnic struggle for power and the radicalization of religious groups can be mitigated emphasize investment in infrastructure projects and social policies that improve the quality of life. Since 2009 the government of Kazakhstan has allocated more than \$52 million to the reconstruction of socially important facilities (schools, hospitals, roads and railway lines), the training of Afghan students, support for agricultural production, participation in the reconstruction and construction of new dams, and the modernization of power plants.<sup>37</sup> Economic and humanitarian cooperation with Afghanistan is promoted through the Kazakh-Afghan intergovernmental commission; and it is achieved by facilitating Kazakh production and investment in the Afghan market, and by training Afghan experts in Kazakhstan in fields such as economy, industry, finance, transport and education. In the frame of a \$50 million educational program, up to one thousand Afghans are being provided with higher education at Kazakh universities in the period of 2010–2020.<sup>38</sup> In addition to Afghanistan, aid is allocated to improving the border infrastructure at Kyrgyzstan’s border with Kazakhstan. Although Kazakhstan’s development assistance focuses on Central Asia and Afghanistan, it can also be directed to other regions as part of international development assistance in order to attain maximum impact of the policy. Examples include the Caucasus, Africa, Latin America, Small Island Developing States (SIDS), least developed countries, and landlocked countries.

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<sup>36</sup> Ukaz Prezidenta Kazakhstana ot 9 apreliia 2013 goda no. 538.

<sup>37</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, “Pozitsiia Respubliki Kazakhstan po Afganistanu,” December 4, 2014, <http://mfa.gov.kz/index.php/ru/vneshnyaya-politika/kazakhstan-i-voprosy-globalnoj-i-regionalnoj-bezopasnosti/uregulirovanie-situatsii-v-afganistane>.

<sup>38</sup> “Na obuchenie Afganskoi molodezhi v Kazakhstane vydeleno 50 millionov dollarov Ssha – K. Saudabaev,” *Zakon.kz*, July 20, 2010, <http://www.zakon.kz/178852-na-obuchenie-afganskoi-molodezhi-v.html>.

## *Towards the Smart Power of a Rising Economy*

The operating budget of the ODA technical assistance (that is, aid in tied-grant form, both bilateral and allocated through multilateral channels) is expected to be 0.01 percent of GDP (\$15–22 million) in 2012–2016. Kazakhstan has also announced the OECD target (which has been set at 0.7 percent of the GNI) as its long-term perspective and, thus, joined the large group of developed countries which, since 1970, have given similar statements.<sup>39</sup> For reasons relating to Kazakhstan’s own development needs and the fact that its ODA policy was formulated only in recent years, the contribution on a bilateral basis is still limited in terms of the volume, form and geographic scope of the aid. Kazakhstan’s experience of assistance on a multilateral basis conducted under the auspices of the UN is much more extensive and has included projects in the fields of environment, population, health, women’s rights, assistance for landlocked countries, measures to curtail the drug trade, etc. In 2012, the disbursements to international development assistance agencies amounted to almost \$2.8 million. According to UN statistics, during 2006–2011 Kazakhstan allocated \$53.7 million in humanitarian aid, of which \$30 million was to Central Asia. With this number Kazakhstan ranks third in providing humanitarian aid in Central Asia. The sum total of Kazakhstan’s humanitarian assistance during 2006–2011 is roughly \$100 million.<sup>40</sup> However, the absence of a systematic approach has resulted in low efficiency and poor project management and, therefore, has hardly served to lay a basis for the desired outcomes and donor image.

Kazakhstan’s foreign policy representatives and experts are aware that development assistance must avoid those mistakes that are commonly made when programs designed to improve public administration, build democracy, and create good governance are imposed on local populations in recipient countries whilst the needs and mentality of these people are left aside. At the same time as the operative principles of KazAID emphasize modern norms

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<sup>39</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, “Osnovnye napravleniia gosudarstvennoi politiki Respubliki Kazakhstan v sfere ofitsial’noi pomoshchi razvitiu na 2016–2020 gody,” September 2, 2015, <http://mfa.gov.kz/index.php/ru/informatsiya-o-ministretstve/proekty-npa-dlya-obshchestvennykh-obsuzhdenij/12-material-orys/4667-osnovnye-napravleniya-gosudarstvennoj-politiki-respubliki-kazakhstan-v-sfere-ofitsialnoj-pomoshchi-razvitiyu-na-2016-2020-gody>.

<sup>40</sup> Ukaz Prezidenta Kazakhstana ot 9 apreliia 2013 goda no. 538.

of transparency, accountability, and ecological and social impact assessment, relations with recipient countries are shaped by a traditional style of cooperation that present-day experts have gathered under the banner of “Asian regionalism.”<sup>41</sup> This means that the organization of cooperation is seen as a flexible network instead of being fixed by statutes and formal agreements; the process itself is of greater importance than are pre-defined results. Universal principles are locally applied with decisions made in mutual consent, and the style of negotiation is non-confrontational. Importance is attached to personal ties rather than to institutional rules, and mutual respect is shown in conduct. Unlike the institutional procedures typical of Western democracies, these guidelines are considered to allow for situational considerations—including the possibility to join or opt out of specific projects (which often happens in multilateral contexts where the non-formal ties are less binding than in the case of just two parties). In countries like Afghanistan which seek to make advances by combining modern constitutionalism with the traditions of a tribal society, cooperation guided by such flexible and mutually respectful principles is expected to have an appeal that extra-regional actors lack.

Following these guidelines the ODA policy conceptually entails that the activity must serve to sustain “good neighborhood” in the proximity of Kazakhstan’s borders. The key principles of this policy emphasize an individualized approach to each recipient state as well as horizontal cooperation models (that is, donor-recipient relations are conducted on an equal “win-win” basis). They prioritize technical assistance to transfer complex know-how in those areas in which Kazakhstan has a high level of competence and make it a requirement that the recipient country expresses its interest for a progressive development of such bilateral cooperation. However, from a long-term perspective Kazakhstan’s interests lie in region-wide transport and logistics. In relation to Afghanistan, Astana’s proposal for arrangements to enable freight from Afghanistan to use the port of the city of Aktau on the Caspian Sea is a notable political gesture to help invigorate Afghanistan’s economy. Kazakhstan also has a strategic interest in the development of the TAPI pipeline, which provides South Asia with Turkmenistan’s natural gas and runs from Turkmenistan to Afghanistan and

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<sup>41</sup> Amitav Acharya, “Asia is Not One: Regionalism and the Ideas of Asia,” *Institute of South East Asian Studies Working Papers on International Politics and Security Issues*, no. 1 (2011), <http://www.asia-studies.com/asia/ISEAS/Asia-is-Not-One1.pdf>.

Pakistan and farther to India. The economic network in the region is envisioned to engage the countries of Central and South Asia and connect them in cooperation with all major economic powers on the Eurasian continent—Russia, China, India and Kazakhstan. The Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran railway under construction in Kazakhstan since 2009 is designed to increase trade from Central Asia to the south tenfold and connect southwest Kazakhstan to the Persian Gulf.<sup>42</sup> As these commercial interests grow stronger, the ODA policy, which in its initial period (2012–2016) emphasizes assistance in form of grants, is under pressure to become more business-oriented. Consequently, the next ODA period (2017–2020) may well emphasize concessional rather than grant aid and raise the share of loans (in form of tied credits at favorable conditions) from the 50 percent set for the initial period. The pressures for such changes indicate a gradual transition from the interpretation of ODA as a tool of “soft” power to seeing it as a tool of “smart” power that uses credit for tying together developmental, economic and political networks.

Development assistance thus connects with more than merely the security of Kazakhstan’s borders (which is the kind of reasoning that the U.S. “Silk Roads” initiative entails); far beyond the monetary contribution made in its name, the concept is a vehicle for opening up ways for economic integration that strengthens Kazakhstan’s international position. The government in Kazakhstan considers soft-power tools such as the ODA policy to be efficient foreign policy approaches; and efficiency, again, is a way to evaluate and legitimize policies as a means to achieve pre-defined ends. Kazakhstan’s development assistance is “soft” power in the sense that it is categorically different from the “hard” power of the military cooperation that allies Kazakhstan with Russia. However, although such soft-power policies are meant to make Kazakhstan attractive in international connections, the main characteristic of these policies is not the kind of soft power that Joseph S. Nye has in mind when he speaks about a power that does not use coercion or payment to induce others to want the same things

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<sup>42</sup> President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, “Sovmestnaia press-konferentsiia Prezidenta Kazakhstana Nursultana Nazarbaeva i Prezidenta Irana Khasana Rukhani,” September 9, 2014, [http://www.akorda.kz/ru/events/akorda\\_news/press\\_conferences/page\\_217849\\_sovmestnay\\_a-press-konferentsiya-prezidenta-kazakhstana-nursultana-nazarbaeva-i-prezidenta-irana-khasan](http://www.akorda.kz/ru/events/akorda_news/press_conferences/page_217849_sovmestnay_a-press-konferentsiya-prezidenta-kazakhstana-nursultana-nazarbaeva-i-prezidenta-irana-khasan).



that the soft-power user wants<sup>43</sup>; instead, it is power to consolidate Kazakhstan itself, both internally as well as in its external policies. Thus, the ODA concept is not only greater than the monetary contribution which it legitimates but is also, in the context of foreign policy, greater than the field of activity that it specifically denotes. Policy concepts are important in Kazakhstani political context because they authoritatively instruct policies and action; and in the post-Soviet situation, where the presence and influence of the former power remains a problem, they are relevant in relation to especially Russia. At the same time as Kazakhstan is militarily allied with Russia in the CSTO and one of its strategic partners in initiating Eurasian economic integration, the question of the future direction that the EEU, which has been in force since January 2015, keeps it alert about Russia's intentions. While Kazakhstan cannot stay out of the union that gives it considerable influence within the entire CIS area and facilitates its cooperation with the former Soviet subjects in its own neighborhood, it also resists seeing the EEU as a tool in geopolitical and geo-economical competition against the U.S. or China.

### *Asian Principles of Cooperation and European of Modernization*

In the years following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the “Eurasian” identity of the wider region became an issue debated not only in Russia but also in Kazakhstan. The Kazakhstani discussions focused on the historical nomadic features of the region and therefore took a direction different from Russia's “Neo-Eurasian” discourses, which are focused on promoting a political identity that is opposed to Western liberal values. This background is essential in understanding the difference between Nazarbayev's “open regionalism” and the perspectives on the region as mainly a geographic space for exclusive national-cultural projects or great-power aspirations. In particular in relation to the EEU, open regionalism envisions a liberal economic union that strengthens cooperation and thereby increases mutual benefits and also leaves space for developing partnerships and integration with other customs unions and organizations of economic cooperation.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 7.

<sup>44</sup> Vladimir Fedorenko, “Eurasian Integration: Effects on Central Asia,” *Rethink Paper 23* (September 2015), <http://www.rethinkinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/>

Instead of aligning itself with any one party, Kazakhstan's interest lies in opening its territory for transport routes in the spirit of its "multivectoral" external relations. Any other policy is considered to jeopardize a future that prognosticates the Asia-Pacific region as becoming a driving force for global economic growth. In order to be able to pursue this policy line Kazakhstan has repeatedly emphasized that it considers the Eurasian Union as a purely economic integration model.<sup>45</sup>

Kazakhstan's approach to political cooperation on security issues similarly emphasizes openness and connectedness to counteract bloc-formation. An important conclusion that it has drawn from its chairmanship of the OSCE in 2010 is that the participants in this organization recognize that eleven of its 57 members are in Asia and that, as a consequence, the "Euro-Asian" security dimension must complement the "Euro-Atlantic" dimension within the organization's programs and activities. The idea of wide "continental" security had already motivated President Nazarbayev's initiative in 1992 in convening the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA). This initiative was inspired by the "confidence-building" approach that had been elaborated to facilitate East-West cooperation in European political and arms control contexts during the 1970s and 1980s. The specific rationality of the approach then had been that the build-up of tensions could be proactively prevented by increasing transparency and communication through regular institutional interaction, and that this process would gain in momentum and become self-sustaining. When Kazakhstan started its ambitious programs of social and economic modernization in the 2010s, the idea that tasks could be accomplished by generating processes through a set of rules was elaborated as a policy tool to define planned steps for implementing the programs. The top-down management tool drew its inspiration from the exact sciences and was termed "algorithm." The basic idea has been to design ordered sets of steps by means of which Kazakhstan would become able to meet global challenges with the limited time and resources that are available.

The idea of improving the accomplishment of tasks also inspires Kazakhstan's views on multilateral organizations in the region. According to

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Fedorenko-Eurasian-Integration-and-Central-Asia.pdf.

<sup>45</sup> "Glava MID Kazakhstana: EAES-eto ne sekretnyi plan Putina," *Tengri News*, June 2, 2014, <http://tengrinews.kz/other/glava-mid-kazakhstan-aeas-eto-ne-sekretniy-plan-putina-256335/>.

President Nazarbayev, the efficiency of the activities of these organizations can be increased by implementing “the best international practices, both Asian and European.”<sup>46</sup> The effectiveness of this “algorithm” is envisioned to show itself in the advances made in the mega-projects initiated in the areas of transport infrastructure and energy in a number of regional organizations and, especially, in the SCO advised by its “Shanghai Spirit.” The specific “Asian” principles of cooperation—that is, universally applicable principles of cooperation and a flexibility of organization that allows optional participation in specific areas of cooperation—are envisioned to enable working towards a cultural convergence of Europe and Asia in the frame of mutually beneficial projects. In the Eurasian identity project that is considered to unify “the country of the great steppe”<sup>47</sup> nomadic historical culture entails a European background and represents the kind of mobility that modern connectivity requires. Because the steppe constitutes a large part of the Eurasian landmass it is seen as the natural interface of its two parts, Europe and Asia. Kazakhstan’s aspirations for development make it a cultural space for a normatively-oriented regional leadership, and these policies are sharpened with development assistance. As a consequence, Afghanistan plays a rather more significant role in Kazakhstani policies than might be expected if we consider only the more obvious concerns over security and instability in its geographic proximity: it is the best example of how Kazakhstan’s policies in the regional context are globally oriented. This practice, as we have already explained, is helpful in expanding the political space for pursuing Kazakhstan’s interests. In Central Asia, specifically, it enables Astana to develop its own profile of policies.

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<sup>46</sup> Nursultan Nazarbayev, *Strategiia nezavisimosti* (Almaty: Zhibek Zholy, 2010), 295.

<sup>47</sup> President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, “Uchastie v torzhestvennom sobranii, posviashchennom 550-letiiu Kazakhskogo khanstva,” September 11, 2015, [http://www.akorda.kz/ru/events/astana\\_kazakhstan/participation\\_in\\_events/uchastie-v-torzhestvennom-sobranii-posviashchennom-550-letiyu-kazahskogo-hanstva](http://www.akorda.kz/ru/events/astana_kazakhstan/participation_in_events/uchastie-v-torzhestvennom-sobranii-posviashchennom-550-letiyu-kazahskogo-hanstva); Michel Casey, “Take Note, Putin: Kazakhstan Celebrates 550 Years of Statehood,” *The Diplomat*, September 14, 2015, <http://thediplomat.com/2015/09/take-note-putin-kazakhstan-celebrates-550-years-of-statehood/>.

## **Conclusion: Collaboration to Achieve Mutually Complementary Goals**

Since the early 1990s Kazakhstan has assumed an active role in presenting initiatives for regional cooperation and settling violent conflicts among the former Soviet subjects (examples include Tajikistan's civil war and Nagorno-Karabakh), and the war that was ignited in Ukraine in spring 2014 later extended this role also to Europe. Instead of being merely formal in nature with an emphasis on good services in the traditional mode of diplomatic mediation, this role seeks to advance international practices that realize Kazakhstan's interests. Thus, for example, when President Nazarbayev emphasizes to European audiences that politics must be separated from economics, his message is not merely that the EU should lift the economic sanctions it has imposed on Russia because of Russia's involvement in eastern Ukraine. More fundamentally, it is to promote such practices that do not obstruct economic interaction for political reasons relating to either external alignment or specific policies.<sup>48</sup> In fact, Astana's determination to develop economic cooperation both within the EEU and with the EU is, in principle, the path that Moscow had recommended for Ukraine when that country's free trade area and the political association agreement in the frame of the EU's Eastern Partnership were being prepared between Kiev and Brussels in an accelerated time schedule in late autumn 2013 and early spring 2014.

But whereas Ukraine was initially too divided to become an economic interface between Russia and Europe, Kazakhstan's future vision is to make its Eurasian space a bridge between the economically rising Far East and the West. The role in relation to Russia is merely the current context for promoting these general objectives; moreover, it is a context that gives Kazakhstan a diplomatic role in Europe. From Moscow's perspective, the active role assumed by Astana signals to the West that Moscow is supported by its allies; in addition, Kazakhstan's diplomatic activity is clearing the way for the type of non-exclusive policies of economic cooperation which are

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<sup>48</sup> "Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev Friday Urged the European Countries to Lift Sanctions Imposed on Russia over the Ukrainian Crisis," *Sputnik International*, October 9, 2015, <http://sputniknews.com/europe/20151009/1028248618/nazarbayev-calls-eu-to-lift-sanctions-against-russia.html>.

also in Russia's interest—especially when its relations with the West have been gridlocked through its emphatically military responses (and the borders that have been raised through them) and it is itself unable to gain credibility for similar policies in the West. This symbiosis in specific issues requires that Russia supports stability in Kazakhstan and that issues regarding the Russian minority or the northern borders are not brought forth. Any threats to Kazakhstan's stability would spell disaster for Russia not only in Central Asia but also for its prospect of improving relations with the Western states.

Both countries regard the SCO as the main organizational frame for expanding their influence in global politics. The repeated mention of the organization's resources as indicated by its vast landmass and the total number of the organization's members and observers—covering about 50 percent of the world's population—reveals just how much this organization represents a potentiality.<sup>49</sup> Although the expanded SCO will be very heterogeneous with its Chinese, Russian, Turkic, Persian, Hindu and Muslim cultural influences, it does provide a political space for developing economic relations and specific forms of security cooperation in order to maintain regional stability. In autumn 2015 Afghanistan joined Iran in applying for full membership, and the organization's Secretary-General Dmitry Mezentsev has revealed that the country has a special place in the agenda due to its importance for regional stability: "Cooperation with Afghanistan must be built not only on combating terrorism or drug trafficking but also in the economic, cultural and humanitarian spheres."<sup>50</sup> The aim is to help Afghanistan raise itself to the status of being a respectable state after two decades of chaos and to include it in the organization's cooperation. This, in turn, will counteract Western political influence in the region even if Western military support remains necessary.

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<sup>49</sup> The six full members of the SCO (Russia, Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) account for about 60 percent of the land mass of Eurasia and its population is a quarter of the world's population. With observer states included (India, Pakistan, Iran, Mongolia, Afghanistan and Belarus) the organization covers about half of the world's population. The accession process for India and Pakistan to join the SCO as full members was started at the organization's summit in July 2015.

<sup>50</sup> "Afghanistan Seeks Full Membership in the SCO," *Asia-Plus*, Dushanbe, October 9, 2015, <http://www.news.tj/en/news/afghanistan-seeks-full-membership-sco>.