



# COOPERATION BETWEEN KAZAKHSTAN AND THE UNITED STATES IN MILITARY PROFESSIONALIZATION PROGRAMS

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## OCCASIONAL PAPER SERIES

NO 30 | March 2018 | ISSN 1863-6020 V

## **Cooperation Between Kazakhstan and the United States in Military Professionalization Programs**

By Sebastian Engels

### ***Introduction***

U.S. policy in Kazakhstan represents one of the strongest examples of successful defense cooperation with a non-NATO country. In recent years, however, the country's importance to U.S. strategy has diminished due to the drawdown of the Global War on Terror in Afghanistan and a universal cut to U.S. military financing since 2014. In light of other competing priorities across the globe, it could be argued that security cooperation with Kazakhstan may be an inefficient use of resources, however, Russia's aggression in Ukraine and the ever-present threat of Islamic extremism provide sufficient reason to stay engaged in Central Asia. Training programs that professionalize Kazakhstan's military can offer a cost-effective way for the United States to further a lasting partnership with Central Asia's most stable country. These efforts must be nested within higher-level strategies, thoughtfully planned in coordination with the host nation, carefully executed by appropriate personnel, and continually scrutinized for value added to the U.S. goals for the country and Kazakhstan's military.

### **Goals and desired outcomes of Security Cooperation**

The goals of Security Cooperation, as defined by the Defense Security Cooperation Agency's "Green Book," include building defense and security relationships that promote U.S. goals in partner nations and provide "U.S. forces with peacetime and contingency access to host nations."<sup>1</sup> This access need not be actual physical space, in the form of a base or a joint training exercise. Access could come from potential future cooperation or sharing of intelligence. To gain this access, Offices of Military Cooperation (OMC) use varying techniques. In like-minded, liberal democracies, security cooperation comes easily. Security Cooperation Officers (SCOs) facilitate Foreign Military Sales (FMS) or Direct Commercial Sales (DCS) of equipment or training contracts.

In countries like Kazakhstan, where many challenges to security cooperation exist, SCOs must use different techniques, often subtler than those used with western countries. SCOs employ tools like Foreign Military Financing (FMF), joint exchanges, International Military Education and Training (IMET), or E-IMET (expanded IMET) programs. Through these programs and many others, SCOs embed scholars and U.S. security experts in military institutions, develop western-styled military education programs, and increase the capabilities of a country's Professional Military Education (PME). They arrange U.S. military trainers to conduct training of military personnel or send representatives of a foreign army to be trained in the U.S. There, they observe first-hand our liberal, democratic values that are instilled in our military. In Kazakhstan, where the U.S. must compete for influence with regional powers and does not maintain continuous military presence, it relies on security cooperation to keep lines of communication open.

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<sup>1</sup> Ernest B. McCallister, ed., *The Management of Security Cooperation: Green Book*, Edition 37.1 (Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, OH: The Defense Security Cooperation Agency, 2017), 1-1.

Other specific security interests in Kazakhstan are less tangible. The U.S. desires stability and a bulwark against Islamic extremism. Foreign fighters from Central Asia returning to their homelands after being expelled from Syria and Iraq could prove dangerous to not only the regions' governments, but also to U.S. interests.<sup>2</sup> Having a credible security partner in a country like Kazakhstan relieves some of the pressure off of the U.S. Furthermore, future regional operations in Afghanistan or elsewhere could necessitate a renewal and expansion of direct military cooperation with Kazakhstan.

### ***Detractors' Arguments against Professionalization***<sup>3</sup>

Detractors of U.S. investment in Kazakhstan's military argue that we have already squandered millions without adding to regional security or furthering our goals in the region. With conflicts ongoing in Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan, along with increased focus on Russian aggression, increasing military aid for a currently peaceful and stable Kazakhstan seems to make little sense. Moreover, The National Security Strategy makes no reference to Kazakhstan and only mentions Central Asia once in reference to safeguarding their natural resources.<sup>4</sup>

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan has spent relatively little to modernize its armed forces, relying instead on the huge quantity of leftover Soviet equipment and systems.<sup>5</sup> Three separate defense doctrines took military spending in different directions and it was not until 2011 that Kazakhstan finally settled on a strategy for their military.<sup>6</sup> During this tumultuous time, the limited U.S. aid was largely wasted by corruption and a poor defense system incapable of targeting programs with appropriate funding. Aside from the notable success of safeguarding Kazakhstan's WMD material, no significant defense reforms took place in Kazakhstan.<sup>7</sup> This changed after 9/11. As NATO and U.S. forces poured into Afghanistan, the U.S. needed to secure its supply lines. Kazakhstan agreed to allow NATO use of its airspace, part of the Northern Distribution Network (NDN), vital to U.S. logistics.<sup>8</sup> By 2010, a surge in Afghanistan by U.S. forces coincided with a surge of military aid to Central Asia, with a sizeable amount going to Kazakhstan. With increased aid, Kazakhstan instituted many of the promised military reforms and received an Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) from NATO. Aid totaled \$649 million in 2010.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Gregory Gleason and Roger Kangas, "Foreign Fighters and Regional Security in Central Asia," *Security Insights* 17 (2017): 1-3.

<sup>3</sup> Samuel Huntington and Marybeth Ulrich, experts on civil-military relations, include in their definitions of military professionalization, career development models, emphasis on training and professional military education, compatibility of military and societal values, support and infrastructure for soldiers and families, etc. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1957); Marybeth Peterson Ulrich, *Democratizing Communist Militaries: The Cases of the Czech and Russian Armed Forces* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1999), pp. 24-25.

<sup>4</sup> The United States National Security Strategy, *The White House*, February 2015, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/02/06/fact-sheet-2015-national-security-strategy>, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Eugene Rumer, Richard Sokolsky, and Paul Stronski, "US Policy Toward Central Asia 3.0," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, (2016): 2, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2016/01/25/u.s.-policy-toward-central-asia-3.0-pub-62556>.

<sup>6</sup> Roger McDermott, "Kazakhstan's Defense Policy: An Assessment of the Trends," *U.S. Army War College Press*, (2009): 3.

<sup>7</sup> Timur Shaymergenov and Marat Biekenov, "Kazakhstan and NATO: Evaluation of Cooperation Prospects," *Central Asia and the Caucasus* 11, no. 1 (2010): 39.

<sup>8</sup> Rumer et al., "US Policy Toward Central Asia 3.0," 7.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

By 2014, with a large drawdown in U.S. forces and lessening importance of the NDN, security aid dropped to \$148 million.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, as the U.S. pulled forces from the region, Russia and China began to slowly reassert their dominance. With a decreased need for Kazakh airspace and the NDN, the strategic logistical importance of the country diminished. Today, Kazakhstan does not facilitate any U.S. military actions and Chinese and Russian proximity make it unlikely for a long-term deployment of troops in the country.

Furthermore, critics of U.S. defense spending in Kazakhstan claim that the country is too tied militarily to Russia to ever be an effective partner with the U.S. Kazakhstan's military link with Russia remains intact and that will not change soon.<sup>11</sup> Russia also remains Kazakhstan's largest source of military equipment and training; over 500 Kazakh cadets and officers train yearly in Russian schools and Russia maintains military establishments on Kazakh soil, including missile testing sites and the Baikonur *Cosmodrome*, the site of space launches.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, Kazakhstan is integral to Russia's air defense network and recently received new S-300 missile defense systems from Russia.<sup>13</sup> Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev was the only foreign leader at Russia's Victory Day parade in 2016 and, despite a cooling period after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, he cannot pull his country away from their closest ally. Kazakhstan will likely never join NATO, preferring to keep its IPAP, but remain firmly within Russia's sphere of influence.

### ***Why Professionalize the Armed Forces in Kazakhstan?***

Based on the above and U.S. budget-controlled, limited resources, the U.S. should focus its security cooperation efforts on what is both affordable and capable of accomplishment, namely, professionalizing the Kazakh armed forces. Kazakhstan remains our closest partner in Central Asia and we should strive to increase this partnership, but we cannot waste resources on ineffective or costly programs. We should accept the fact that China and Russia are the dominant powers in the region and concentrate on exploitable gaps in security cooperation, like military professionalization, to further our goals.

Military professionalization accomplishes numerous shared goals more cheaply than other programs. First, Kazakhstan's military will improve and become more capable of conducting its own independent actions domestically and abroad. Training with the U.S. will strengthen interoperability with NATO, increasing the chances of Kazakhstan participating in United Nations operations with its Peace-Keeping Brigade (KAZBRIG), a long-term goal of Kazakhstan's IPAP and, prior to 2014, the primary goal of the U.S.<sup>14</sup>

Second, the country of Kazakhstan will improve. Liberal, democratic values will be introduced either directly in western-themed classes developed by the Partnership for Peace Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Studies Institutes (PfPC), or osmotically

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Mariya Y. Omelicheva, "Russia's 'Checks and Balances' on Kazakhstan's Quest for Military Independence," *Russian Analytical Digest* 188 (2016): 5-8.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> Catherine Putz, "Kazakhstan Takes Delivery of (Free) Russian S-300 Missile Defense Systems," *The Diplomat*, June 09, 2016, <http://thediplomat.com/2016/06/kazakhstan-takes-delivery-of-free-russian-s-300-missile-defense-systems>.

<sup>14</sup> Dmitry Gorenburg, "External Support for Central Asian Military and Security Forces," *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute and Open Society Foundations*, (2014): 59-61.

through interactions with U.S. soldiers and civilians during exchanges or in U.S. military institutions. Evidence proves that countries that send military leaders to IMET programs in the U.S. are far more likely to advance their democratic reforms, a direct goal of IMET.<sup>15</sup>

Third, lasting and meaningful relationships will develop. From the ability to get to the heart of any matter with a trusted counterpart, to being able to make a personal request for support, these relationships count and advance U.S. interests. Kazakhstan yearns for diversification in its armed forces and independence from Russia.<sup>16</sup> Despite Kazakhstan's current need of Russian support, there are aspects of military improvement beyond Russia's capability, like non-commissioned officer (NCO) Development, logistics, training management, and human resources (HR). The U.S., boasting the most capable NCOs of any military, along with decades of our own professionalization efforts, is most capable of completing this mission.

Kazakhstan's military professionalization efforts with the U.S. ensure that it will have an opportunity to expand its geopolitical environment by having bilateral access with the West. Cooperation also means a furthered understanding of the potential threats to Kazakhstan. By embedding ourselves into their institutions and academies, we will have a foundational understanding of their mindset on defense and be more able to influence their attitudes towards Western positions.<sup>17</sup> Attacks in Aktobe in June and Almaty in July 2016 by Kazakh citizens exemplify the internal threat most feared by the government. Having embedded experts in key positions will allow the U.S. to influence Kazakh decision-making during these times of crisis.

Finally, as tensions between Russia and the U.S. reach levels not seen since the Cold War, a capable, mutual partner could serve as an intermediary in a rapprochement. Barring this, Kazakhstan could at least help facilitate cooperation in the event Russia and the U.S. find themselves pitted against another common enemy in the region, like Islamic extremism, and avoid the situation of limited cooperation currently seen in Syria. The U.S. will gain an advocate at future negotiating tables with a country sharing cultural, historical, and lingual similarities with Russia.

### ***U.S. Professionalization Strategy for Kazakhstan***

Efforts to professionalize the Kazakh armed forces need to be carefully selected. The U.S. must adhere to the following tenets to execute professionalization programs:

- 1). Professionalization programs must nest with U.S. National Security, Combatant Command, and Embassy Country Team strategies
- 2). All professionalization programs must derive from host-nation requests. The host-nation must invest in the program.
- 3). Partnerships need to develop with the right people and organizations
- 4). Office of military cooperation (OMC) must be the clearing house for all professionalization programs.

General Lloyd J. Austin III, then Commander of U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM), in 2014 stated in reference to Central Asia that, "Going forward, initiatives will be tailored to transform our current limited transactional-based relationships into more

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<sup>15</sup> Carol Atkinson, "The Role of US Elite Military Schools in Promoting Intercultural Understanding and Democratic Governance," *All Azimuth* 4, no. 2 (2015): 19-29, quote on p. 27.

<sup>16</sup> Omelicheva, "Russia's 'Checks and Balances' on Kazakhstan's Quest for Military Independence," 7.

<sup>17</sup> Atkinson, "U.S. Elite Military Schools," 20-27.



constructive cooperative exchanges based on common interests and focused training.”<sup>18</sup> He later added that the U.S. has an important role in Central Asian security and that we must empower the countries to combat their own regional threats. Specifically dealing with Kazakhstan, his strategy states:

The U.S. relationship with Kazakhstan remains the most well-developed among the Central Asian states. The Kazakhs seek U.S. assistance in modernizing their military forces, and we are taking advantage of the opportunity to further strengthen our bilateral relationship. Specifically, we are helping the Kazakhs to professionalize their non-commissioned officer corps, modernize their military education program, and improve training and personnel management.<sup>19</sup>

The current OMC in Astana’s 5-Year Plan of Cooperation with Kazakhstan envisions the formation of combat training programs, development of a training command for Kazakhstan, human resource development, logistics training, and other efforts to professionalize the armed forces.<sup>20</sup> Included in these efforts is the development of Professional Military Education (PME) and specific calls to improve NCOs. As the plan makes clear, all efforts are to be based on requests from the host nation and focus on the Kazakh military as a whole, rather than for an individual unit or training center. NCO development has the most established organization and the strongest support from both the embassy and Ministry of Defense (MoD) of Kazakhstan.<sup>21</sup>

### ***NCO Development in Kazakhstan: Exemplifying Successful Military Professionalization***

In 2003, Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev deemed it necessary to professionalize Kazakhstan’s military and introduce professional sergeants into the armed forces.<sup>22</sup> By 2010, NCOs were incorporated in the military institutions, the National Defense University and the Military Institute of Land Forces (ADI). Between 2013-2014, the Kazakh MoD created senior sergeant positions within its own headquarters and in its subordinate commands.<sup>23</sup> Commanders at the highest levels now have a senior enlisted advisor at their sides. Known for decades within the U.S. military, these NCOs have immense power to influence decisions and increase the effectiveness of their forces. These steps to empower NCOs demonstrate Kazakhstan’s own desire for NCO development.

Diminished financial commitment by the U.S. to Kazakhstan began in 2013, as the surge forces in Afghanistan began to withdraw and funding for Central Asia diminished. Out of this situation, the OMC shifted its priorities. They chose to move away from the overly ambitious

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<sup>18</sup> U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Armed Services, Hearing on Fiscal Year 2015 National Defense Authorization Budget Requests from the U.S. Pacific Command, U.S. Central Command, and U.S. Africa Command, Statement of General Lloyd J. Austin, CDR U.S. CENTCOM, on the Posture of U.S. CENTCOM, March 5, 2014, <http://docs.house.gov/meetings/AS/AS00/20140305/101826/HHRG-113-AS00-Wstate-AustinIIIUSAL-20140305.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> Lloyd J. Austin III, “Statement of General Lloyd J. Austin III on the Posture of U.S. Central Command,” *US Central Command: 2016*, <http://www.centcom.mil/ABOUT-US/POSTURE-STATEMENT/POSTURE-STATEMENT-CONTINUED/>.

<sup>20</sup> Author’s interviews of U.S. Office of Military Cooperation in Kazakhstan Personnel, Astana, June-September 2016.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> McDermott, “Kazakhstan Defense Policy,” pg. 6.

<sup>23</sup> The Office of Military Cooperation in Astana, “OMC NCO Initiatives,” August 2016, Astana, Kazakhstan.

objectives, formerly desired by both Astana and U.S. policy. These included reducing the emphasis on the peace keeping units, KAZBAT and KAZBRIG, once hoped to participate in international operations, but never deploying.<sup>24</sup> The team also decided to reduce efforts to equip Kazakhstan's military.<sup>25</sup> Equipping efforts in Central Asia did not always accomplish the stated goals and were at times, plagued with problems, including previous cases with Kazakhstan.

The OMC drafted another 5-year plan in 2013, focusing on Kazakh requests for NCO training. Unlike other controversial programs like Special Forces training or increasing Kazakhstan's intelligence network, NCO Development did not trigger Russian interrogations into the U.S. ambitions for the country. Kazakhstan fully committed to the program without upsetting its careful balance between the regional powers, Russia and China. NCO development followed Tenet two of military professionalization, deriving from specific Kazakh requests that were backed by their own funding and supported by President Nazarbayev.<sup>26</sup>

### ***Relationships as a Tool in Professionalization Efforts***

The OMC concentrated on training NCOs and found a great partner to advance this effort – the current Command Sergeant Major of the Kazakh Armed Forces, Temyrbek Myrzakhanovich Khalykov. A two-time recipient of IMET funding and a U.S. Sergeants Major Academy international hall of fame student, Master Sergeant (MSG) Khalykov represents a stated IMET goal, furthering “the understanding and defense cooperation between the United States and foreign countries.”<sup>27</sup>

In November 2014, MSG Khalykov first met with the Command Sergeant Major (CSM) of Army Central Command (ARCENT), CSM Ronnie Kelley, during a visit by the latter to Kazakhstan to discuss future NCO Development endeavors.<sup>28</sup> CSM Kelley and MSG Khalykov met again in the U.S. at an ARCENT funded exchange of NCOs in Fort Bliss, Texas. There, the two jointly planned a series of future professionalization exchanges in the U.S. and Kazakhstan, leading to over 15 events in Fiscal Year 2016, all advancing the cooperation between the U.S. and Kazakh NCO Corps.<sup>29</sup> Between the end of 2014 and early 2016, CSM Kelley and MSG Khalykov collaborated face-to-face over ten times.

Kelley and Khalykov's relationship underlines Tenet three. Rather than a one-time meeting, the two formed a lasting partnership.<sup>30</sup> In June 2015, CSM Kelley cancelled previous engagements and chose instead to attend Kazakhstan's first NCO Symposium. Though other nations' leaders were invited, Kelley's appearance marked the only international presence at the event.<sup>31</sup> Prompted by this partnership, and those developed between the OMC and MoD, Kazakhstan requested more training.

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<sup>24</sup> KAZBAT (battalion) and KAZBRIG (Brigade) never wholly deployed. A small contingent of Kazakh peace keepers deployed to Iraq in 2003, but not as a unit and not independently.

<sup>25</sup> Author's interview with OMC personnel.

<sup>26</sup> President Nazarbayev visited the NCO Academy in Shchuchinsk on several occasions in full military uniform and often publicly praises the Academy; author's interview, MoD senior leader, Shchuchinsk, Kazakhstan, July 2016.

<sup>27</sup> US Department of Defense and US Department of State, “Foreign Military Training, Fiscal Years 2012 and 2013,” pp. II-1, II-2.

<sup>28</sup> Author's interview with OMC personnel.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Assel Satubaldina, “Kazakhstan and US Need to Strengthen Military Cooperation: US Army Central Command Sergeant Major,” *Tengrinews*, June 17, 2015, <http://en.tengrinews.kz/military/Kazakhstan-and-US-need-to-strengthen-military-cooperation-US-260820>.

<sup>31</sup> Office of Military Cooperation in Astana, “After Action Review – Kazakhstan NCO Symposium,” 2 July 2015, Astana.

One such request came after Kazakh leaders saw a U.S. Army basic training course at Fort Jackson, South Carolina.<sup>32</sup> Following that exchange, a team of U.S. NCOs from the USA Security Assistance Training and Management Organization (USA SATMO) started developing the curriculum for a drill sergeant course at Kazakhstan's NCO Academy.<sup>33</sup> The OMC prepared for the engagement; they gathered the right representatives together before a Joint Senior NCO Consultation to allow SATMO NCOs and their Kazakh counterparts to plan and decide the program of instruction (POI).<sup>34</sup>

In April 2016, the SATMO team began a month-long training course in Shchuchinsk, at the Non-Commissioned Officer Academy (NCOA) on fundamental aspects taught to all incoming soldiers in the U.S. Army.<sup>35</sup> Initially, SATMO members instructed Kazakh NCOs on the POI. Then, Kazakh NCOs completed their own training plans and instructed their peers. SATMO personnel mentored these NCOs and provided feedback on their courses, but notably Kazakh NCOs decided the material and execution.

Equally noteworthy was the support given by Kazakhstan's MoD. A public affairs team visited the training event and several stories appeared on the MoD's website, highlighting the partnership between SATMO and the NCOA.<sup>36</sup> The men from both countries worked, trained, ate, and slept under the same conditions for many weeks. Rather than a cut and paste POI handed to them by the U.S. NCOs, they executed their own training plans, backed up with the support of the SATMO team.

The next phase of this operation includes plans to send Kazakh training teams to regional units, to focus on training NCOs at the small unit level. The previous graduates of the Drill Sergeant course will be in the lead for all training and the SATMO team again in an advise and assist role. This train-the-trainer model, proven to work in the U.S. Army, creates subject matter experts among the land forces furthering the expertise of Kazakhstan's NCOs.

In August 2016, Kazakhstan hosted at its second NCO Symposium ARCENT's new Senior Non-Commissioned Officer, CSM Eric C. Dostie, along with representatives of the U.S. Air Force Central and the Arizona Army and Air National Guard. Participants observed all the previous NCO development efforts and collaborated on future endeavors.<sup>37</sup> CSM Dostie, who interestingly attended the USA Sergeants Major Course with MSG Khalykov, remarked,

The significance of this being an NCO driven event is to show the relevance of the NCOs in today's armed forces...It's amazing how they've [Kazakhstan] established an NCO corps and come so far in such a short time. The backing [by] the president and Minister of Defense shows how important this is to them.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Master Sgt. Gary Qualls, "Kazakhstan Army Visits US Army Central," *US Army*, January 6, 2016, [https://www.army.mil/article/160580/Kazakhstan\\_army\\_visits\\_US\\_Army\\_Central](https://www.army.mil/article/160580/Kazakhstan_army_visits_US_Army_Central).

<sup>33</sup> Author's interviews, USA Security Assistance Training and Management Organization members, July 2016, Shchuchinsk, Kazakhstan.

<sup>34</sup> Office of Military Cooperation in Astana, "After Action Review, Joint Senior NCO Consultation," National Defense University, Astana, 26-29 January 2015.

<sup>35</sup> Ministry of Defense of Kazakhstan, "US specialists conduct advanced training of Drill Sergeants from the Armed Forces of the Republic of Kazakhstan," July 13, 2016, <http://mod.gov.kz/rus/press-centr/novosti/?cid=0&rid=3022>.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Author's interviews with OMC Personnel.

<sup>38</sup> SGT Aaron Ellerman, "Building Partnerships Abroad," *US Army*, September 2, 2016, <https://www.army.mil/article/174536>.



Command Sergeant Major Pavel Shishkin, the Ministry of Defense NCO Directorate Chief of Training and a 2009 graduate of the U.S. Sergeants Major Academy, also attended the event and underscored the success of NCO development.

During the past few years alone, we have completed more than 60 joint engagements with the U.S. forces and have shown to our commanders the necessity of the NCO corps. We have built trust by reassuring them that they can rely on our NCO's to achieve their goals...The development of our NCO corps foundation was modeled after the U.S. with input and ideas from other nations. This process made it unique and original, tailored to fit our needs. We still are constantly improving our NCO corps and gaining insight from current models.<sup>39</sup>

### ***Why U.S. Efforts toward NCO Development Work in Kazakhstan***

All NCO professionalization efforts derived from the U.S. National Security, Combatant Command, and embassy country team strategies. As outlined by General Austin, Kazakhstan's professionalization remains a focus and he put special emphasis on NCO development in his plan for the country. The OMC likewise committed to the improvement of NCOs, with the full backing of the country team.<sup>40</sup>

Importantly, NCO development in Kazakhstan did not originate from a U.S. initiative. As early as 1996, Kazakhstan began its own efforts to create a professional corps of NCOs. They funded and developed their own NCO Academy, graduating over 200 NCOs yearly and revamped recruitment to attract skilled candidates.<sup>41</sup> They implemented NCOs into high staff positions and integrated them into the National Defense University. U.S. involvement in the programs derived from MoD requests in the 5-year cooperation plans. In other words, the Kazakhs invested into the program. With this investment, the risk of them squandering support given by the U.S. largely diminished. Once involved, the U.S. side constantly communicated with the Kazakhs, MSGs Khalykov and Shishkin in particular, to ensure the accuracy of all programs.

The OMC screened all training, as the most knowledgeable on the needs of the host-nation and the goals of the U.S. In some cases the OMC enabled a meeting, by briefing U.S. personnel on key cultural sensitivities and garnering from the host-nation their actual desires. Furthermore, the OMC judged the need of a program and, because of the long-term relationships in play, received true feedback from participants on its effectiveness and relevancy. If a program was deemed ineffective the OMC either worked with the provider to adjust it or cancelled it.

Finally, as highlighted by CSM Kelley and MSG Khalykov's relationship and the partnership formed by USA SATMO and the NCOA, security cooperation is personality based. Leaders who partnered with foreign militaries needed cultural sensitivity, charisma, and advanced knowledge of their partner. Having foreign military experts, like the Foreign Area Officers in the OMC, available to guide and assist in the early stages of cooperation greatly contributed to the successful partnership.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> The U.S. Ambassador has stated repeatedly that NCO Development is one of the most successful programs of security cooperation with Kazakhstan.

<sup>41</sup> Author's interviews with OMC personnel: Kazakhstan still minimally relies on conscription, but has repeatedly pledged to end the practice.

### ***Professionalization Problems***

Other professionalization programs have not fared well in Kazakhstan. Some of these programs follow some of the Tenets outlined above, but neglected one or more and have ultimately failed. Human resource (HR) and logistics development are two examples. Both of these programs were requested by the MoD, but the agendas have not succeeded.

Two anecdotes describe the situation. In 2015, a group of U.S. experts traveled to Kazakhstan with the goal of revamping their HR system. For a two-day period, totaling over fifteen hours, U.S. contractors lectured two Kazakh lieutenant colonels on HR reforms. One participant described the briefings as “pure torture.”<sup>42</sup> The Kazakh officers were not decision makers, only representatives tasked to attend the briefings. In another series of U.S. lectures to MoD personnel, the intricacies of high-level logistics were spelled out in detail. Unfortunately, after the briefings, the Kazakhs revealed that they were actually interested in learning how the U.S. resupplies at the tactical level in Afghanistan.<sup>43</sup> Like HR, Kazakh logistics are tied to Russia and large changes will not happen soon. Communication broke down at some point between the participants of these programs; the reforms called for lacked regional sensitivity. Unlike programs in the Baltics or Georgia, Kazakhstan was not asking for a complete overhaul of their systems.

In HR and logistics, they want to institute minor reforms. For example, they are interested in American recruitment practices and our Morale Welfare and Recreation (MWR) facilities. Likewise, with logistics, they want to understand our tactical level resupply.<sup>44</sup> Defense transformation is not an option. Their ties to Russia, fiscal constraints, and political realities make it impossible. There are no impending external threats, nor any crises calling for a new system of government. Unlike the Baltic States, who are NATO members, or Georgia, who desperately seeks membership, Kazakhstan only maintains an IPAP with NATO and will likely never seek full membership. This reduces the onus to change.<sup>45</sup>

HR and logistics development programs have largely stalled. These endeavors in Kazakhstan can work, but the goals of each should originate from specific requests by the MoD, followed by joint planning to determine the POI, much like what was accomplished by USA SATMO and others.<sup>46</sup> Programs that are too broad or beyond the political capacity for change will falter.

The OMC must be the clearing house for all of these programs. In a recent panel discussion with former and current Office of Defense Cooperation and OMC Chiefs, concerns were raised about U.S. providers working within their countries, at times devoid of OMC oversight.<sup>47</sup> The chiefs derided these “summer employment programs” claiming they can be a nuisance and, at worst, detrimental to security cooperation. Interestingly, the problem is

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<sup>42</sup> Author’s interviews with U.S. Embassy Personnel, Astana, July-September 2016.

<sup>43</sup> Author’s interviews with OMC personnel.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Shaymergenov and Biekenov, “Kazakhstan and NATO,” 39.

<sup>46</sup> Another great example of successful partnership and adherence to the outlined Tenets came from Partnership for Peace Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Studies Institutes (PfPC). Through a Defense Education Enhancement Program (DEEP) partnership, PfPC uses NATO’s NCO Reference Curriculum to develop the faculty and material in the Kazakh NCO Academy.

<sup>47</sup> Chiefs of Offices of Defense and Military Cooperation, “OMC and ODC Panel Discussion,” The George C. Marshall Center, Garmisch, Germany, September 2016.

pervasive enough that the chiefs each had different methods to mollify these individuals including creating scheduling conflicts, or more decisively, gaining the support of the ambassador to cancel a program.

Working at odds with U.S. personnel, who undoubtedly have good intentions, should not be a first resort to solve these issues. However, to be the stewards of the U.S. dollar effectively, the OMC must decide if a provider's program passes all four Tenets, provides sufficient benefit to the U.S, and improves the host nation.

### ***Conclusion***

Military professionalization in Kazakhstan will not only help Kazakhstan to foster a more capable military force, but will also have significant impact in assisting the United States with achieving its goals in the region. As demonstrated by the OMC's advances in NCO Development, the right people and organizations from both sides need to cooperate, work towards building a relationship, and continually and jointly assess their endeavors. These efforts should stem from the greater U.S. strategies and acknowledgment that the U.S. must carefully target the use of security cooperation funds, using them where they will have the most impact. Security cooperation with Kazakhstan, a true economy of force mission, should be fiscally responsible and specifically tailored to achievable goals. If all Tenets of professionalizing a force are followed, the U.S. is apt to gain much. Such a cooperation program can influence partner military organizations at the foundational level and increase the likelihood of participants to adopt western ideals while at the same time frugally enhancing a key strategic partnership in Central Asia. Finally, professionalized armed forces in Kazakhstan, experienced in working with the United States, with U. S.-trained leaders in key positions, will inspire their nation to continue its democratic advancement.

### ***About the Author***

Captain Sebastian Engels is a U.S. Army Foreign Area Officer with a Eurasia regional focus. He studied Russian at the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, CA and then spent a year conducting In-Region Training, working in U.S. embassies and multi-national organizations, in former Soviet states. Presently, he is a M.A. Candidate at Harvard's Davis Center in its Russia, Eastern Europe, Central Asia (REECA) program.

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