

## Building Partnerships

The Steppe Eagle 2013 exercise highlights teamwork among Central Asian and NATO soldiers

By *per Concordiam* Staff  
Photos by Sgt. Lauren DeVita/U.S. Army Central

The young soldiers line up to form a human barricade with metal shields firmly planted on the ground between them and the rioters. On the other side of the shields, the rioters become more rowdy. They pick up plastic bottles and sticks from the ground, which they bang together to make noise.

As the rioters begin to press into the wall of Kazakh and Tajik soldiers, a Tajik squad leader, maintaining a calm demeanor as instructed by his trainers at the Steppe Eagle exercise, makes a peace offering that defuses the situation without violence.



U.S. Brig. Gen. Kenneth Roberts, U.S. Army Central Command director of operations, right, is greeted by General-Lieutenant Saken Zhasuzakov, the Kazakh chief of defense, during the opening ceremony for Steppe Eagle 2013.

One of the trainers who had been observing can't suppress his enthusiasm. "That's how you do it!" he shouts to the multinational riot squad. The training session ends with a group huddle and congratulatory backslapping.

More than 1,600 personnel from nine countries participated in the 11th annual Steppe Eagle exercise August 5-23, 2013, at the Iliskiy Training Center in Kazakhstan. Hailing from Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Italy, Lithuania, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States, participants focused on peacekeeping and peace-support operations. Observers attended from Belarus, Germany, Spain and Ukraine.

During the event, Kazakhstan's peacekeeping infantry battalion, known as KAZBAT, was evaluated by NATO officials with the goal of gaining certification that would ultimately allow it to operate seamlessly with partner nations. The country's goal is to deploy a full brigade in NATO-led peace operations by 2015, further deepening the relationship between the Central Asian country and NATO under the auspices of the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program.

"Exercise Steppe Eagle 13 was a significant milestone in cooperation between NATO and Kazakhstan within the framework of PfP," said Col. Bardhyl Kollcaku, director of Kazakhstan's Military Partnership Directorate Coordination and Integration Division. "I was very pleased with the levels of cooperation, enthusiasm and information exchange



A Kazakh soldier provides fire support during Steppe Eagle 2013, an annual multilateral exercise designed to train participants in peace support operations.

Kazakh soldiers help extract mock terrorists from a village during Steppe Eagle.







displayed throughout, underpinning KAZBAT's capability to conduct peacekeeping operations."

Each year, the Steppe Eagle exercise consists of battalion and brigade command operations, as well as tactical instruction designed to help Kazakh soldiers comply with United Nations standards. In line with the multinational peacekeeping focus, training includes defusing riots and maintaining security in camps for displaced people.

Until 2008, elements of KAZBAT served in Iraq to help dispose of unexploded ordnance, supply fresh water and provide medical care for Iraqis.

"I've been involved in quite a few of these exercises over the years, and I can honestly say that the Kazakhs have made strides from a tactical level to a soldier level, all the way up to brigade level," said Capt. Christopher Kent, one of the mentor/trainers supplied by the U.S. Arizona Army National Guard. "I have watched them take on the world stage in a remarkable way, with great government and societal support as a whole, and open up to other countries and accept transition from Soviet Union to former Soviet Union."

Steppe Eagle attracts increasing numbers of

participants each year, a fact noted by Kyrgyz Maj. Baiysh Kalchaev. "The exercise was aimed at improving the skills of commanders and staffs in the organization of the decision-making and communication between departments during the peacekeeping operation," Kalchaev said.

The exercise also stresses multinational communication as different countries learn to work together as a unit. To cement relationships even further, exercise organizers stressed the use of the English language for much of their communication.

"NATO-backed programs have focused on strengthening Kazakhstan's capabilities for peacekeeping, Caspian Sea maritime defenses, and interoperability with the alliance. For example, NATO has been promoting Western-language training of Kazakh officers and helping to develop a professional noncommissioned officer class based on Western NCO standards," wrote Richard Weitz of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Silk Road Studies Program. □

*U.S. Army Sgt. Lauren DeVita contributed to this article.*

Kyrgyz Lt. Col. Mamytiv Kenjebek, center, talks with a U.S. soldier about combat medic tactics during Steppe Eagle 2013 at the Iliyskiy Training Center in Almaty, Kazakhstan.