



Military Professionalization Programs in Kazakhstan and the United States: How to Implement and What Will We Gain?

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Abstract: The U.S. should remain committed to Central Asian security cooperation, but must carefully evaluate each program for merit and value added to U.S. security goals in the region. Programs designed to increase Kazakhstan's military professionalization will have the most significant impact towards accomplishing these goals. U.S. security cooperation efforts to foster the development of a non-commissioned officer corps as part of Kazakhstan's military would serve as an excellent example of effective professionalization and a way to further our strategic relationships with non-NATO countries. Training programs that professionalize the Kazakh military can offer a cost-effective way for the United States to further a lasting partnership with Central Asia's most stable country.

Keywords: Kazakhstan, security cooperation, military professionalization, NCO development.

Introduction

U.S. policy in Kazakhstan is 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 because of the drawdown of the Global War on Terror in Afghanistan and cuts to the U.S. military budget since 2014. In light of other competing priorities across the globe, one could argue that security cooperation with Kazakhstan is an inefficient use of resources; however, Russia's aggression in Ukraine and the ever-present threat of Islamic extremism provide sufficient justification to stay engaged in Central Asia. Training programs that professionalize the Kazakh military can offer a cost-ef-

fective 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 to evaluate their value to both U.S. goals for the country and to 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 providing "U.S. forces with peacetime and contingency access to host nations."¹ This access need not be actual physical space in the form of a base or a joint training exercise. Access could also 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 that face many challenges to security cooperation, SCOs must use different techniques, often subtler than those used with western countries. In these countries, SCOs employ tools like foreign military financing (FMF), joint exchanges, and international military education and training (IMET) or expanded IMET (E-IMET) programs. Through these and similar programs, 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) programs. They arrange for U.S. military experts to conduct training of our partners' military personnel or send representatives of a foreign army to be trained in the U.S. There, training participants observe first-hand the 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, the U.S. relies on security cooperation to keep open essential lines of communication.

Other specific U.S. security interests in Kazakhstan include stability and a goal of the country providing 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.² Support to Kazakhstan as a credible security partner is in the interest of the United States, especially should future regional

¹ 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.

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

operations in Afghanistan or elsewhere necessitate a renewal and expansion of direct military cooperation with Kazakhstan.

Detractors' Arguments against Investment in Kazakhstan

Detractors of U.S. investment in the Kazakhstan military argue that we have already squandered millions in the country without adding to regional security or furthering our goals in the region. With ongoing conflicts in Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan, along with increased focus on Russian aggression, increasing military aid to a currently peaceful and stable Kazakhstan seems to make little sense. Moreover, the U.S. National Security Strategy makes no reference to Kazakhstan at all and only mentions Central Asia once in reference to safeguarding their natural resources.³

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan has spent relatively little on modernizing its armed forces, relying instead on the huge quantity of leftover Soviet equipment and systems.⁴ Three separate defense doctrines took military spending in different directions. It was not until 2011 that Kazakhstan finally settled on a strategy for their military.⁵ During this tumultuous time, the limited amount of U.S. aid designated for the country was largely wasted as a result of corruption and a poor defense system that was incapable of targeting programs with appropriate funding. Aside from the notable success of safeguarding materials formerly in Kazakhstan's weapons of mass destruction (WMD) complex, no significant defense reforms took place in Kazakhstan in the early years after the collapse of the Soviet Union.⁶

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), which was vital to U.S. logistics.⁷ 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 mili-

³ The United States National Security Strategy, *The White House*, February 2015, https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015_national_security_strategy.pdf, 1.

⁴ Eugene Rumer, Richard Sokolsky, and Paul Stronski, "US Policy Toward Central Asia 3.0," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* (25 January 2016): 2, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2016/01/25/u.s.-policy-toward-central-asia-3.0-pub-62556>, accessed July 30, 2017.

⁵ Roger McDermott, *Kazakhstan's Defense Policy: An Assessment of the Trends* (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College Press, 2009), 3.

⁶ Timur Shaymergenov and Marat Biekenov, "Kazakhstan and NATO: Evaluation of Cooperation Prospects," *Central Asia and the Caucasus* 11, no. 1 (2010): 35-41, quote on p. 39.

⁷ Rumer, Sokolsky, and Stronski, "US Policy Toward Central Asia 3.0," 7.

tary reforms and began work on an Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) with NATO. By 2010, aid totaled \$649 million.⁸

By 2014, with a large drawdown in U.S. forces and lessening importance of the NDN, security aid dropped to \$148 million.⁹ Additionally, as the U.S. pulled forces from the region, Russia and China began to slowly reassert their dominance. With a decreased need for Kazakhstan's 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 that we will soon have any sort of long-term deployment of troops in the country.

Critics of U.S. defense spending in Kazakhstan claim that the country is too closely 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.¹⁰ Russia also remains Kazakhstan's largest source of military equipment and training; over 500 cadets and officers from Kazakhstan train each year in Russian schools. Russia also maintains military establishments in Kazakhstan, including missile testing sites and the Baikonur *Cosmodrome*, the site of space launches.¹¹ Moreover, Kazakhstan is integral to Russia's air defense network and recently received new S-300 missile defense systems from Russia.¹² 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, it is very unlikely that he can or will pull his country away from their closest ally. Kazakhstan will likely never join NATO, preferring to keep its IPAP, and will instead remain firmly within Russia's sphere of influence.

Why Professionalize Kazakhstan's Armed Forces?

Based on the political and military limitations outlined above and limited financial resources on the U.S. side, the U.S. should focus its security cooperation efforts in this country on what is both affordable and able to be achieved: professionalization of Kazakhstan's armed forces. Kazakhstan remains our closest partner in Central Asia. We should strive to foster this partnership, but we cannot waste resources on ineffective or costly programs and—accepting the fact that China and Russia are the dominant powers in the region—concentrate on

⁸ Rumer, Sokolsky, and Stronski, "US Policy Toward Central Asia 3.0," 7.

⁹ Rumer, Sokolsky, and Stronski, "US Policy Toward Central Asia 3.0," 7.

¹⁰ Mariya Y. Omelicheva, "Russia's 'Checks and Balances' on Kazakhstan's Quest for Military Independence," *Russian Analytical Digest* 188 (2016): 5-8.

¹¹ Omelicheva, "Russia's 'Checks and Balances' on Kazakhstan's Quest," 6.

¹² Catherine Putz, "Kazakhstan Takes Delivery of Free Russian S-300 Missile Defense Systems," *The Diplomat*, 9 June 2016, <http://thediplomat.com/2016/06/kazakhstan-takes-delivery-of-free-russian-s-300-missile-defense-systems>, accessed July 30, 2017.

improving exploitable gaps in security cooperation, like military professionalization, to further our goals.

Military professionalization¹³ accomplishes numerous shared goals more cheaply than other programs. First, Kazakhstan's military will improve its capabilities and become better able to conduct 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 Peacekeeping 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.¹⁴

Second, civil society and good governance in 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 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.¹⁵

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 advance U.S. interests. Kazakhstan yearns for diversification in its armed forces and independence from Russia.¹⁶ Despite Kazakhstan's current need of Russian support, the country aspires to improve aspects of its military that are beyond Russia's capability, like developing a modern non-commissioned officer (NCO) corps, and improving their logistics, training management, and human resources (HR) systems. The U.S., boasting the most capable NCOs of any military, along with decades of our own professionalization efforts, could play a critical role in assisting to advance these goals.

¹³ Samuel Huntington and Marybeth Ulrich, experts on civil-military relations, include career development models; emphasis on training and professional military education; compatibility of military and societal values; and support and infrastructure for soldiers and families in their definitions of military professionalization. See Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1957) and Marybeth Peterson Ulrich, *Democratizing Communist Militaries: The Cases of the Czech and Russian Armed Forces* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1999), 24-25.

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

¹⁵ 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.

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

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 better U.S. understanding of the potential threats to Kazakhstan. By embedding ourselves in their institutions and academies, we will have a foundational understanding of their mindset on defense and be more able to influence their understanding of and perhaps even attitudes towards Western policy positions.¹⁷ Attacks in Ak-tobe 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 may give the U.S. opportunities to influence Kazakh decision-making during 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 a common challenge in the region, like Islamic extremism, and avoid the situation of limited cooperation currently seen in Syria. The U.S. would also gain an advocate at future negotiating tables with a country sharing cultural and historical ties with Russia.

U.S. Professionalization Strategy for Kazakhstan

The U.S. must carefully select approaches to assist in the professionalization of Kazakhstan's armed forces, adhering to the following tenets:

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. The Office of Military Cooperation (OMC) must be the clearing house for all professionalization programs.

In a statement on Central Asia in 2014, General Lloyd J. Austin III, then Commander of U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) noted, "Going forward, initiatives will be tailored to transform our current limited transactional-based relationships into more constructive cooperative exchanges based on common interests and focused training."¹⁸ He later added that the U.S. has an important role in Central Asian security and that we must empower these countries to

¹⁷ Atkinson, "The Role of US Elite Military Schools," pp. 20-27.

¹⁸ 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.

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.¹⁹

The current OMC in Astana's five 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.²⁰ Included in these efforts is the development of a PME program as well as specific calls to improve the NCO corps. As the plan makes clear, all efforts are to be based on requests from the host nation and focus on Kazakhstan's military as a whole, rather than on an individual unit or training center. The task of NCO development has the most established organization and the strongest support from both the embassy and Ministry of Defense (MoD) of Kazakhstan.²¹

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.²² By 2010, NCOs were incorporated into 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.²³ Commanders at the highest levels now have a senior enlisted advisor at their sides. An institution for decades within the U.S. military, these well-placed senior NCOs have immense power to influence decisions and increase the effectiveness of their

¹⁹ 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/>.

²⁰ Author's interviews of personnel working in the U.S. Office of Military Cooperation in Kazakhstan, Astana, June-September 2016.

²¹ Author's interviews with OMC personnel.

²² McDermott, *Kazakhstan's Defense Policy*, 6.

²³ The Office of Military Cooperation in Astana, "OMC NCO Initiatives," August 2016, Astana, Kazakhstan.

forces. These steps to empower NCOs demonstrate Kazakhstan's own desire for NCO development.

Financial commitment by the U.S. to Kazakhstan began to decline in 2013, as the surge forces in Afghanistan started to withdraw and funding for Central Asia decreased, resulting in a shift in OMC priorities and moves away from overly ambitious objectives that had been goals of both Astana and Washington. These changes included a reduction in emphasis on the peacekeeping units, KAZBAT and KAZBRIG, that both states had once hoped would eventually participate in international operations, but which never deployed.²⁴ The team also decided to reduce efforts to equip Kazakhstan's military,²⁵ as equipping efforts in Central Asia did not always accomplish the stated goals and were at times plagued with problems.

The OMC drafted another five year plan in 2013, focusing on Kazakhstan's requests for NCO training. Unlike other, more controversial programs like Special Forces training or increasing Kazakhstan's intelligence network, NCO development did not trigger Russian objections about U.S. ambitions for the country. Kazakhstan was able to fully commit to the program without upsetting its careful balance between the two main regional powers, Russia and China. NCO development followed the second tenet of military professionalization, mentioned above, in that it derived directly from specific Kazakh requests that were backed by their own funding and supported by President Nazarbayev.²⁶

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 Kazakhstan's 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 embodies a stated IMET goal, furthering "the understanding and defense cooperation between the United States and foreign countries."²⁷

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 endeav-

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

²⁵ Author's interviews with OMC personnel.

²⁶ 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.

²⁷ U.S. Department of Defense and U.S. Department of State, "Foreign Military Training, Fiscal Years 2012 and 2013," II-1, II-2.

ors.²⁸ 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 fifteen events in fiscal year 2016, all advancing the cooperation between the NCO corps of the U.S. and Kazakhstan.²⁹ 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 the third tenet: partnerships need to develop with the right people and organizations. Rather than a one-time meeting, the two formed a lasting partnership.³⁰ 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 was the only foreign dignitary at the event.³¹ Prompted by this partnership, and those developed between the OMC and MoD, Kazakhstan requested more training.

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

In April 2016, the SATMO team began a month-long training course at the Non-Commissioned Officer Academy (NCOA) in Shchuchinsk. This course focused on fundamental knowledge and skills taught to all incoming soldiers in the U.S. Army.³⁵ Initially, SATMO members instructed Kazakhs NCOs on the POI,

²⁸ Author's interviews with OMC personnel.

²⁹ Author's interviews with OMC personnel.

³⁰ Assel Satubaldina, "Kazakhstan and US Need to Strengthen Military Cooperation: US Army Central Command Sergeant Major," *Tengrinews*, 17 June 2015, <http://en.tengrinews.kz/military/Kazakhstan-and-US-need-to-strengthen-military-cooperation-US-260820>, accessed July 30, 2017.

³¹ Office of Military Cooperation in Astana, "After Action Review – Kazakhstan NCO Symposium," 2 July 2015, Astana.

³² Master Sgt. Gary Qualls, "Kazakhstan Army Visits US Army Central," *US Army*: 6 January 2016, www.army.mil/article/160580/Kazakhstan_army_visits_US_Army_Central, accessed July 30, 2017.

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

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

³⁵ Ministry of Defense of Kazakhstan, "US specialists conduct advanced training of Drill Sergeants from the Armed Forces of the Republic of Kazakhstan," 13 July 2016, <http://mod.gov.kz/rus/press-centr/novosti/?cid=0&rid=3022>, accessed July 30, 2017.

but after the Kazakh NCOs completed their own training plans, they instructed their peers. SATMO personnel mentored these NCOs and provided feedback on their courses, but Kazakh NCOs chose the materials and decided how the course should be executed.

Equally noteworthy was the support given by Kazakhstan's MoD. A public affairs team visited the training event and subsequently published several stories on the MoD's website, highlighting the partnership between SATMO and the NCOA.³⁶ 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, the Kazakh NCOs 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. Alumni of the drill sergeant course will be in the lead for all training, with 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, improving the expertise of Kazakhstan's NCOs.

In August 2016, Kazakhstan held its second NCO Symposium, hosting 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.³⁷ CSM Dostie, who coincidentally had 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.³⁸

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 NCOs to achieve their goals ... The development of our NCO corps foundation was modeled after the U.S. with input and

³⁶ Ministry of Defense of Kazakhstan.

³⁷ Author's interviews with OMC Personnel.

³⁸ SGT Aaron Ellerman, "Building Partnerships Abroad," US Army, 2 September 2016, <https://www.army.mil/article/174536>, accessed July 30, 2017.

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.³⁹

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. General Austin put special emphasis on NCO development in his plan for the country; Kazakhstan's military professionalization still remains a focus. The OMC is likewise committed to the improvement of NCOs, with the full backing of the country team.⁴⁰

Importantly, NCO development in Kazakhstan did not originate in a U.S. decision. As early as 1996, Kazakhstan began its own efforts to create a professional NCO corps. They funded and developed their own NCO Academy, graduating over 200 NCOs yearly, and revamped recruitment to attract skilled candidates.⁴¹ They introduced NCOs into high staff positions and integrated them into their National Defense University. It is important to note that U.S. involvement in the programs originated in MoD requests in their five year cooperation plans. In other words, the Kazakhs requested and invested in the program. With this investment, the risk of them squandering support given by the U.S. was greatly reduced. Once involved, the U.S. side constantly communicated with the Kazakh leadership, 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 facilitated 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 needs of a program and, because of the long-term relationships in play, received true feedback from participants on its effectiveness and relevance. If a program was deemed ineffective, the OMC either worked with the provider to adjust it or cancelled the activity.

As has been demonstrated by the relationship between CSM Kelley and MSG Khalykov and the partnership formed between USA SATMO and the NCOA, security cooperation is personality based. Leaders who partnered with foreign militaries needed cultural sensitivity, charisma, and sophisticated knowledge of their partner. Having foreign military experts, like the Foreign

³⁹ Ellerman, "Building Partnerships Abroad."

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

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

Area Officers in the OMC, available to guide and assist in the early stages of co-operation greatly contributed to the successful partnership.

Professionalization Problems

Other professionalization programs have not fared as well in Kazakhstan. Some of these programs followed some of the tenets outlined above, but neglected one or more and have ultimately failed. As mentioned above, human resources (HR) and logistics development are two examples. Both of these programs were requested by the MoD, but they 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.”⁴² 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 Kazakh representatives revealed that they were actually interested in learning how the U.S. resupplies at the tactical level in Afghanistan.⁴³ As is the case with their HR system, Kazakh logistics are tied to Russia and large changes will not happen soon.

At some point, communication broke down between the participants of these programs; the proposed reforms were not formulated with sensitivity to this specific region. Unlike programs in the Baltics or Georgia, Kazakhstan was not asking for a complete overhaul of their systems. In HR and logistics, for instance, they want to institute minor reforms. They are interested, for instance, in U.S. recruitment practices and our Morale Welfare and Recreation (MWR) facilities. Likewise, in the area of logistics, they want to understand our tactical level resupply practices.⁴⁴

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, which desperately seeks membership, Kazakhstan only maintains an IPAP with NATO and will likely never seek full membership. This reduces the motivation to change.⁴⁵ Even 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

⁴² Author’s interviews with U.S. Embassy personnel, Astana, July-September 2016.

⁴³ Author’s interviews with U.S. Embassy personnel.

⁴⁴ Author’s interviews with U.S. Embassy personnel.

⁴⁵ Shaymergenov and Biekenov, “Kazakhstan and NATO,” 39.

what was accomplished by USA SATMO and others.⁴⁶ 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.⁴⁷ The chiefs derided these “summer employment programs,” claiming they can be a nuisance and, at worst, detrimental to security cooperation. Interestingly, the problem is 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 effective stewards of U.S. taxpayers’ dollars, the OMC must determine whether a provider’s program adheres to all four tenets, provides sufficient benefit to the U.S., and improves the capabilities of the host nation.

Conclusion

A well-designed and efficiently executed military professionalization programs is the instrument that is most likely to make a significant impact on the successful accomplishment of improved Kazakh military capabilities and the achievement of U.S. goals in Kazakhstan and the region. As demonstrated by the OMC’s advances in NCO development, appropriate techniques and procedures need to be followed. The right people and organizations from both sides need to cooperate, work together to build a fruitful relationship, and continually and jointly assess their endeavors. These efforts should originate in the expressed needs of our partner country and stem from the greater U.S. strategies, with the acknowledgement that the U.S. must carefully target its security cooperation. A true economy of force mission, security cooperation with Kazakhstan 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; we will influence the Kazakh military at a foundational level towards adopting western ideals while frugally enhancing a strategic partnership in Central Asia. Finally, those who serve in the professionalized armed forces of Kazakhstan, along with U.S.-trained leaders in key positions, will inspire their nation to continue its democratic advancement.

⁴⁶ Another great example of successful partnership and adherence to the tenets outlined earlier in the text 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 Kazakhstan’s NCO Academy.

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

About the author

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