

reserves of cunning and opportunism to compensate for the long-term loss of political and economic support from Russia. Deals cut with Venezuela, China or the Gulf states have yet to come anywhere near to filling the gap. As Belarus loses its traditional leverage as a transit route, Lukashenko may instead play the geopolitical card, threatening Moscow with withdrawal from the CSTO or the Single Economic Space in the hope of extracting concessions. The thaw in relations with the EU since 2008 has in reality been limited, and Brussels is not going to offer economic and financial support to Minsk simply because Lukashenko promises to turn his back on Russia and partially open up the economy to Western investment. Brussels will want to see more democratization, which would weaken Lukashenko's hold on power. However, agreeing to Moscow's economic demands would equally undermine Lukash

enko's ability to rule. Russia may be hoping that even if Lukashenko is successfully re-elected, over the next few years he is no longer seen as a guarantor of stability in Belarus, and so there may be a palace coup and a successor from within the regime will oust the president. However, at present there is no obvious potential Kremlin candidate within the administration. Other commentators suggest a scenario in which Lukashenko steps down early on his own terms and hands over to a handpicked successor, possibly even his eldest son, Viktor, who could hit the reset button on relations with Russia and the West. Developments in Belarusian-Russian relations over the coming months and years will be a delicate balancing act, with risks for both sides and the potential for profound changes in the Lukashenko regime and the economic landscape of Belarus.

About the Author

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Further Reading

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ANALYSIS

Developments And Trends in the Russian-Kazakh Strategic Partnership

By Fatima Kukeyeva, Almaty

Abstract

The strategic partnership between Kazakhstan and Russia illustrates the multifaceted and mutually beneficial nature of relations between two countries. However, this strategic partnership does not mean the two share a complete identity of common interests. Some issues remain contested and Astana and Moscow should seek to address these and resolve them mutually.

Kazakhstan and Russia both refer to their bilateral relationship as a strategic partnership, illustrating the multifaceted and mutually beneficial nature of relations between the two. There is significant potential for cooperation between the two states in various fields, because Kazakhstan and Russia are important actors in all regional processes within Central Asia. Indeed, both Kazakhstani and Russian policymakers recognize the necessity of collaboration with one another, in order to advance their respective national interests in the cur-

rent global and regional situation. At the present time and for the foreseeable future, Russian-Kazakh bilateral relations will be influenced by the global economic crisis, the consequences of the South Ossetia conflict (2008), the security situation in Afghanistan, energy issues, international terrorism, and creation of a Customs Union between Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus.

Due to the changed geopolitical situation in the former Soviet Union and in the world in general, the definition of a strategic partnership requires new approaches

from both Russia and Kazakhstan. Firstly, it is no longer enough for Russian and Kazakhstani policymakers to simply label their relationship as a strategic partnership. It is necessary to develop the appropriate content for such a strategic partnership. Both states should consolidate their position in the international arena, and the two states must not avoid discussion of “awkward questions” in their relationship.

Secondly, a strategic partnership no longer means the creation of a joint set of national interests. Russia's new foreign policy conception outlines that Russia is working toward a greater realization of the potential of the CIS as a regional organization, in order to create a forum for multilateral political dialogue and a mechanism for cooperation focused on the economy, humanitarian issues and addressing traditional and new security threats. Furthermore, Russia's active involvement in the framework of the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) has led to the creation of a Customs Union between Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus.

Currently, Moscow's perspective on regional cooperation is that the CIS framework is in systemic crisis, as are most of the other integration structures within the post-Soviet space as a whole. At the same time, the Russian leadership views the preservation of the CIS as strategically important, because it is considered that certain Western actors are seeking to undermine the CIS as an effective regional organization. Against this background, Russian strategists have come to the conclusion that its CIS partners should abandon their multi-vector foreign policy approaches. This conclusion was prompted by the events in the Caucasus in August 2008. Following the South Ossetian conflict, Moscow was angered by the reaction of its closest allies, especially Bishkek, Minsk, and to a lesser extent Astana, because they did not abandon their multi-vector foreign policy principle in order to support Russia's actions more strongly.

According to Kazakhstani analysts, Russia expects special treatment from Astana, with the Russian leadership considering a number of promising economic proposals between the two as sufficient for ensuring Russia's special status within Kazakh foreign policy. As far as Moscow is concerned, Kazakhstan's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states would have demonstrated the special relationship between Russia and Kazakhstan.

However, Russia regularly declares its desire to build its relations with the former Soviet states on the basis of equality, mutual benefit, respect and mutual interest. Hence, Russia should accept the fact that Kazakhstan has its own national interests, and that it is not possible to demand that Kazakhstan reject its multi-vector foreign policy in favor of a so-called “geopolitical choice”.

For Kazakhstan, its strategic partnerships with the European Union, under the “Path to Europe” program, and a constructive relationship with NATO have equal importance to its relations with Russia. As part of its multivector foreign policy, Kazakhstan actively seeks to avoid involvement in any conflicts. Instead, it hopes to play a role as a solid bridge between countries, regions, civilizations, and cultures. To this end, Astana has repeatedly officially articulated that it aims to develop relations with the OSCE, NATO, EU and the United States, but not at the expense of relations with Russia.

Thirdly, a strategic partnership should consist of economic cooperation between two equal partners on the basis of market principles. In this respect, a very relevant issue in the Russia-Kazakh strategic partnership is the problem of “export route diversification” in the energy sector. For regional states, it would be beneficial if energy transportation routes did not all go through Russian territory, because this would allow these states to improve their access to world markets, leading to a rise in foreign investment and advanced technology.

However, disputes over the direction of oil and gas pipelines have led some Kazakhstani experts to consider Russia and Kazakhstan as competitors in the energy market. Moscow and Astana both consider Europe as the primary consumer market for their energy exports. At the same time, the growing Asian markets are increasingly attractive to the national oil companies in both countries. Hence, the aims of Russia and Kazakhstan for energy exports coincide. Yet, a clash of interests between the two could be avoided if they agree to diversify their markets and transportation routes. Indeed, the Kazakh side has proposed that the Russians focus on Western routes and leave the Eastern ones to Kazakhstan. However, there has not been a clear response from the Russian side to this proposal thus far.

Nonetheless, Kazakhstan has begun working according to this division, creating a system of pipeline routes in accordance with Kazakhstani interests and needs. The Kazakh-Chinese Atasu-Alashankou pipeline project has been launched. Also, Kazakhstan joined the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline via the Aktau-Baku segment. In addition, new projects are being developed. However, Nursultan Nazarbayev has promised Russia that Kazakhstan will transport a significant amount of its oil through Russian territory. This will help to fully exploit new routes, such as Burgas-Aleksandropolis.

Another debate within the relationship is centered on whether Russia and Kazakhstan should jointly promote their common economic interests in the global economy. Kazakhstan and Russia are both dependent on the situation in the world energy market and the unstable price of hydrocarbons. Given these unpredictable

able circumstances, coordination between Russia and Kazakhstan in these areas would be mutually beneficial. In addition to energy resources, Kazakhstan and Russia are major exporters of grain. Therefore, the establishment of a joint food cartel (especially in grain production) should be a strategic goal for both countries.

Fourthly, a strategic partnership cannot be limited to inter-governmental or inter-parliamentary relations. At the present time, increasingly emphasis is being given to more active cooperation between the civil societies of Russia and Kazakhstan. An important issue in this regard is the maintenance of a common information and cultural space. Indeed, the preservation and development of this space is very important not only for bilateral Russian-Kazakh relations, but also for multilateral regional integration.

The influence of the Russian-speaking population in Kazakhstan fosters bilateral cooperation between Russia and Kazakhstan. According to the latest census, 30 percent of the Kazakh population is ethnically Russian. Russia's foreign policy concept contains a special section on the provision of support for compatriots in CIS states, through special agreements on the protection of educational, linguistic, social, labor rights, and freedoms. Unfortunately, there is no clear equivalent strategy in Kazakhstan aimed at fostering relations with Kazakh compatriots in Russia. This is due to the peculiarities of Kazakhstan's policy with regard to its own diaspora. The essence of this policy is the gradual return of ethnic Kazakhs to their homeland. Moreover, Kazakhs abroad are not regarded as an independent factor contributing to the promotion of Kazakhstan's interests.

In terms of the influence of Russia in providing news and information, approximately 80 percent of the Kazakhstanian information space is covered by Russian media. However, in the course of 19 years of independence a new generation of Kazakhs has emerged, for whom Russia is as distant as the US or Japan. Gradually, the scale of the use of Russian language in Kazakhstan is declining.

Fifthly, both Kazakhstan and Russia are interested in the creation of favorable external conditions for the implementation of their respective plans for political and economic modernization. This favorable external environment is primarily related to security issues. There are no longer any doubts that the CSTO members, including the Central Asian states, will be affected by relations between Russia and the West, both in economic and in military-political respects. Moscow seeks to consolidate its influence over its "near abroad" through ensuring interdependence between Russia and the CSTO member states. Russia will also continue to promote the CSTO's consolidation as a military-political alliance, strengthen

the Organization's peacekeeping potential, improve military-technical cooperation among the member states, and enhance coordination of their actions in the international arena. Further improvement of the CSTO's international prestige and development of its contacts with other regional organizations, including the SCO, are urgent tasks. Intensifying coordination between the CSTO and EurAsEC is acquiring increasing practical significance.

According to Russian politicians, the Afghan knot poses the greatest and most realistic danger to the CSTO member states. The activity of other international organizations, operating from within the CSTO's zone of action, cannot help but have an impact on the military-political situation in the post-Soviet space. The military activity of the US and NATO on the external borders of all the CSTO's member states is being stepped up, while the US and NATO are restoring or creating new military infrastructure in Eastern Europe, the Southern Caucasus, and Central Asia. Russian specialists believe that the aims of the CSTO should be adjusted in accordance with this changing geopolitical situation, whereby practical measures should be taken to create a comprehensive system of supplementary structures and corresponding collective forces, including multilateral mechanisms for coordinating antiterrorist and anti-drug activity, and illegal migration. Moscow considers that the CSTO has opened a new stage in the fight against international terrorism with the creation of its Collective Operational Response Force for counteracting terrorism and extremism. Furthermore, efforts are being made in the military sphere to form a Joint (Coalition) Force Group in the Central Asian region.

Conclusion

At the present time it seems that Russia is returning to its old foreign policy approach in the post-Soviet space, including the formation of a new strategy in Central Asia in response to changes in the region and in Russia's international position. Central Asia is of significant strategic importance to Russia, with its Central Asian policy impacting on many of its primary interests. At the same time, Russia finds itself facing significant challenges in both the post-Soviet space and the wider international system, which influence Moscow's focus and capacity to carry out its Central Asian policies. Taking into account the importance of Central Asia to Russia, Moscow considers relations with Kazakhstan a priority. Kazakhstan remains Russia's main ally in the region, and relations between the two countries are central to Russia's aims of integrating the post-Soviet space.

At present, Russia's primary interests in its relations with Kazakhstan are:

Ensuring Kazakhstan remains its closest partner and ally in Central Asia and the post-Soviet space; Developing large-scale integration projects with Kazakhstan, in particular the Customs Union; Maximizing integration between the Russian and Kazakh economies; Creating an energy pool with Astana: joint production and transportation of hydrocarbons and development of nuclear energy;

Creating a food cartel with Astana (primarily in grain production); Limiting Kazakhstan's capacity to pursue an independent, multi-vector policy in areas that are seen as of vital importance by Moscow (energy and transportation); Limiting cooperation between Kazakhstan and the West; Monitoring Kazakhstan's relations with China.

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ANALYSIS

Russian-Kazakh Security Relations Revisited

By Aigerim Shilibekova, Astana

Abstract

Since the early 1990s Russian-Kazakh relations have been strengthening. In the present day, the security relationship between Russia and Kazakhstan is accurately described as a strategic partnership, even though Moscow and Astana have different perceptions of the relationship. This article revisits security relations between Russia and Kazakhstan on the bilateral level, as well as within the framework of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

Why Russia and Kazakhstan Matter to Each Other

A careful analysis of the basic security documents of the Russian Federation—Foreign Policy Concept (2008), National Security Concept (2009) and the Military Doctrine (2010)—clearly reveals an emphasis on relations with the so-called "Near Abroad". Russia's primary security concerns remain focused on the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, the existing or potential conflicts near its borders and the rights of Russian minorities in the "Near Abroad".

Although the Russian-Kazakh relationship is mainly considered within the context of Russia's approach toward the Central Asian region in general, increasingly there is also a tendency to view Kazakhstan as a partner distinct from the rest of Central Asia. Russia is aware of Kazakhstan's significance as its neighbor and partner, and recognizes that without the cooperation of Kazakhstan, its wider Central Asian strategies will not succeed. In turn, Kazakhstan understands that cooperation with Russia is vital to its national security, as well as development.

The nature of Russia's relations with Kazakhstan is shaped by several basic factors. Firstly, Russia is an immediate neighbor of Kazakhstan, and the two countries share the longest land border in the world. Secondly, Kazakhstan is Russia's natural gateway to Central Asia. Thirdly, Kazakhstan, with its rich reserves of natural resources, is a major economic player in the region, whose participation is vital to the Customs Union (Russia, Kazakhstan, and Belarus), which came into force in July 2010. Fourthly, Russia is involved in many integration processes at a regional level, and acknowledges Kazakhstan's significance to the success of these projects. Fifthly, both countries are Eurasian, or in other words are both influenced by European as well as Asian cultures and values. Last but not least, the Russian community in Kazakhstan is the largest Russian diaspora living in Central Asia.

When Demographics Matter

The Russian diaspora in Kazakhstan predominately live in large numbers in the northern parts of the country. After Kazakhstan became independent, many of the