

THE POWER BALANCE IN CENTRAL ASIA: THE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP OF RUSSIAN FEDERATION WITH REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN (2010-2014)

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Abstrak

Keadaan strategis di kawasan Asia Tengah menarik perhatian Rusia, Amerika dan Cina untuk mendekatkan diri ke wilayah tersebut. Sumber energi yang berlimpah dan letak kawasan yang strategis untuk menyebarkan pengaruh militer membuat kawasan Asia Tengah menjadi kawasan strategis. Melihat kompetisi pihak-pihak luar terhadap kawasan Asia Tengah, membuat kesadaran Rusia akan keadaan ini meningkat, sebagai negara dengan kekuatan utama yang juga sebagai aktor dominan di kawasan tersebut sejak runtuhnya Uni Soviet dan sebagai saudara negara pecahan Soviet, Rusia merasa kestabilan kawasan tersebut adalah tanggungjawabnya. Yaitu sekaligus untuk mempertahankan pengaruhnya di kawasan tersebut. Fokus dari tesis ini adalah membahas implementasi penyebaran pengaruh militer Rusia di kawasan tersebut. Untuk itu Rusia telah menyeting strategi militernya dengan memanfaatkan kerjasama strategisnya dengan negara Kazakstan yang digunakan sebagai jalan pintas untuk menyukseskan implementasi dari strategi-strategi militer tersebut.

Kata Kunci: *Federasi Rusia, Republik Kazakstan, Asia Tengah, Strategi Militer, Kerjasama Strategis, Pengaruh Militer*

Abstract

The strategic value of the Central Asia region attracts Russia, United States (U.S.) and China to try to get closer with the region. The abundant energy reserves and strategic location to spread military influence leads Central Asia becoming a strategic arena. Seeing the competition of external interested parties in Central Asia, it increases the awareness of Russian Federation as the major power which has already become a dominant actor on that region since the collapse of Soviet Union; as the big brother of former Soviet Union, Russia feels the stabilization of the region becomes Russian responsibility. To prevent the spreading of external major powers on the region and to manage the power balance in Central Asia, Russia sets its military strategy to keep its military influence in the region. The main focus of this article is presenting the implementation of Russian military strategies by utilize its strategic partnership with Kazakhstan as the shortcut to succeed the implementation of those military strategies.

Keywords : Russian Federation, Republic of Kazakhstan, Central Asia, Military Strategy, Strategic Partnership, Military Influence.

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Introduction

In this self-help world, power is everything. Power is very significant in the eyes of a Realist (Morgenthau, 1978). The belief that the international system is anarchic and uncertainties of other countries expressed intention drive in constant pursuit of power to ensure their safety. Although technically all countries are in the same level, but in the end those who are dominant will win. There is great strength, medium strength, and the edges or small power. It is important to know to have an advanced level of state power to predict the pattern of interaction between countries, whether they will compete or cooperate, which in turn, will lead to the main question: these countries will fight each other or be peace maintained between them?

States are the actors of international system which each of them moving towards their own national interest and creating dynamic in the international system – means there is no any other particular actor could regulate the structure, interaction, or relations among the states, neither supreme world government nor states regulator. States set the foreign policy as media to implement its interest above the international structure. International relations created from the implementation activities of foreign policy of each state.

One of the world's great powers, Russian Federation, has significant interests in the Central Asia region since most of the Russians elites still believe on the concept of Greater Russia and the importance to build a forever strong relation among former Soviet Union states; on the Russian Military Doctrine 1993 mentioned that the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) area as one of Russian crucial regions of interest², then furthermore keep mentioning that importance of CIS member states area, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) member states, and Central Asia as the region of Russian interests on their current Foreign Policy Concept (FPC) and military doctrine. This article discusses the importance of Central Asia for Russia and more specifically the need of Russia to manage its power balance in the region by establishing a strategic partnership with Kazakhstan as the main key state actor in Central Asia.

Central Asia: The New Theatre of Power Balance among The Great Powers

² Nation, Craig. (2007). U.S. Interest in the New Eurasia. *Russian Security Strategy under Putin: U.S. and Russian Perspectives*, 1-34.

Seeing the competition situation, balance of power reactions, and clash of interest among the actors happened in Central Asia means that the New Great Game has just started. The term ‘New Great Game’ reflects of the current political situation in Central Asia which is starting by three global powers: Russia, China and U.S. – who are compete each other to be an influential actor in the region of Central Asia.

Central Asia consists of five states which all of them were former Soviet Union states. There are Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan. As the brother of former Soviet Union states, Russia has tight relations with all of the Central Asia states in politics, economic, military, and socio-culture sectors.³ From those five states, Kazakhstan emerged as a dominant state in Central Asia region. Kazakhstan stands as the biggest state-land in Central Asia which also play important role as the initiator of Central Asian integration in 1994. Since its independence in 1991, the policies of the Republic of Kazakhstan have been shown the potential dominant among the Central Asian states, intense efforts to increase influence and leadership among Central Asian states.

To keep the military influence in the Central Asia region, it is important for Russia to maintain good relations with Kazakhstan as its strategic partner. From Russian’s point of view, what have been stressed on the Russian Foreign Policy Doctrine 2008 (the “Medvedev Doctrine”) are relevant with the activities of strengthening and maintaining the military cooperation between Russia and Kazakhstan – which “*places increased emphasis on the recovery of Russia’s privileged sphere of influence in the post-Soviet space and consolidating its role as a Eurasian power*”.⁴

The aims of the integration on the military concern in Central Asia become Russia’s shortcut to implement its military strategy and power ambition. Russia is continuously and intensively increase its interaction with Kazakhstan by renewal the bilateral agreements and also on multilateral sector with the CSTO, SCO, and CIS. Regarding to the multi-vector policy of Kazakhstan, Kazakhstan is capable to preserve the balancing act towards the major

³ Oliphant, Craig. (2013). *Russia's Role and Interest in Central Asia*. Safeworld.

⁴ Rousseau, R. (2011, July 20). *Kazakhstan’s Strategic and Military Relations with Russia*. Retrieved October 4, 2015, from Diplomatic Corier: <http://www.diplomaticcourier.com/kazakhstan-s-strategic-and-military-relations-with-russia/>

powers (Russia, U.S., and China), even in the terms of security and military. As Deputy Defense Minister of Republic of Kazakhstan argued:

“Kazakhstan is a key regional player and an active participant in global security issues and it must be fully involved in international organizations in order to help it respond adequately to current threats. The UN, the CSTO, NATO are among an incomplete list of international institutions that we work with in building regional security.” (Diplomatic Courier, 2011).⁵

Kazakhstan and Russia should work simultaneously to achieve both objectives by seeing the historical background of both states and geographical neighborhood and the needs of both sides, especially in the defense and security sectors. Thusly, strength and security of the area are in both obligation and open the opportunities to work as an inseparable unit in keeping the stabilization of the region. Special relation between Kazakhstan – Russia is decisively based on both states’ own national interests; the changes of the international system in IR seem hard to be avoided, it will be difficult to see the unpredicted cooperation wind changes by any parties on near future. Kazakhstan has long been one of Russia’s closest partners and has soured to a greater extent since the Soviet Union’s collapse in any aspects

The Importance of Central Asia towards Russia

The principal of Russian approach towards Central Asia basically have been stressed since long time ago. Russian aggressive approach in collaboration with Central Asian states in the economic, socio-culture, politics, and military strategy implemented by the foreign policy of Russian through this region. Russia pays attentions to keep the stabilization and also play significant concern and roles through the modernization of the Central Asia. Any destabilization in the states (Central Asia region) will have immediate repercussions in Russia. It becomes a key security statement and believes of Russia to Central Asia region. There are two others essential points of the endless relation Russia and Central Asian states which are Russia – Central Asia military collaboration (include provision of military equipment) and the cooperation between military industrial complexes.⁶

⁵ Rousseau, R. (2011, July 20). *Kazakhstan’s Strategic and Military Relations with Russia*. Retrieved October 4, 2015, from Diplomatic Corier: <http://www.diplomaticcourier.com/kazakhstan-s-strategic-and-military-relations-with-russia/>

⁶ Akbar, Zehra. (2012, October). *Central Asia: The New Great Game*. Retrieved September 4, 2015, from “The Washington Review of Turkish & Eaurasian Affairs”: <http://www.thewashingtonreview.org/articles/central-asia-the-new-great-game.html>

Russia has its bilateral relations with each Central Asian member states; and in the regional level Russia also conducting several multilateral cooperation which include the all of Central Asian member states within SCO, CSTO, CIS, and others multilateral cooperation (in economic or political issue). The historical background is the basic of the relations of these states; the pride of Soviet legacy, culture, military, and political treasure make Russia considers the importance of the stabilization of this region. That is why, Russia is ambitious to spread its influence and take the direction to lead the region also; and increase the tense of balancing power through the external interested parties to the Central Asia. As Zehra Akbar argued, Russia has several important ambitions in the region, such as:

“by building firm bilateral relations with countries which were more amicable towards Russia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan), thawing relations with those which were previously bent on resisting what was seen as Russian interference (Uzbekistan and Tajikistan); containing U.S. influence in the region in the context of worsen relations between the U.S. and the Central Asia states; acknowledging competition in the Central Asia states with countries such as China and U.S. and also India and Iran which has also allowed the ceding of political space and most importantly by not tying political conditions to support of the Central Asia states has allowed Russia to once again enter the fray and tailor the political dynamic in its favor”.⁷

The Russian Military Focus towards Central Asia

In the foreign policy of Russia, Central Asia becomes the one of the highest priority regions. Central Asia remained under Russian rule for many decades. Twenty years afterward the break-up of Soviet Union, maintaining a presence in Central Asia is still a priority for the Russian Federation. In spite of the increasing interest in the area on the part of many actors, Russia retains its position of a key player in the ongoing rivalry there.⁸

The issues discussed above determine Russian policy objectives and interest in Central Asia. Their implementation corresponds to the set of directives governing Russian activities in the post-Soviet territories and beyond. In the documents of the Russian foreign policy, the tenets of security strategy in Central Asia constitute a priority together with Russian policy

⁷ Akbar, Zehra. (2012, October). *Central Asia: The New Great Game*. Retrieved September 4, 2015, from “The Washington Review of Turkish & Eurasian Affairs”: <http://www.thewashingtonreview.org/articles/central-asia-the-new-great-game.html>

⁸ Began, Wlodkowska. (2012). *Russian Foreign Policy towards Central Asia*. Retrieved December 30, 2015, from Academia: https://www.academia.edu/6450718/Russian_Foreign_Policy_towards_Central_Asia

objectives towards the Community of Independent States (CIS) members – as stated on official web portal of President of Russian Federation in an overview one can conclude that is the interests of the Russian interest is in the military and security term is to⁹:

- “Ensure military presence in the countries of the region (Central Asia)”;
- “Ensure stability on the region (which has immediate implications for raw materials steady supplies as well as Russian security in general)”;
- “Sustain leaders who are open to cooperation with Moscow”.

To achieve its military interests to Central Asia and achieve the goals from what Russia mention on its Russia Foreign Policy Concept (2008), Russia is applying several strategies¹⁰:

- “Promote the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) as a key instrument to maintain stability in Central Asia”;
- “Ensure security in the Central Asia area focusing on adapting the CSTO as a multifunctional integration body to increase the stabilization of the region”;
- “Ensure capability of the CSTO Member States to take prompt and effective joint actions”;
- “Transform the CSTO into a central institution ensuring security in its area of responsibility”;
- “Engage real contribution as Russia’s attitude into ensuring good neighborly relations and stability”;
- “Eager to take into account Russia’s legitimate interest in practice and to duly respect existing cooperation mechanisms, such as the CIS, CSTO, and SCO.”

To maintain a dominant position in Central Asia, Russia almost from the very beginning, tried to maintain its military presence in the states of the region. In the 90-ties Russian border security units were deployed in Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan. In the context of the permanent instability in the neighboring Afghanistan, the war in Tajikistan and activities of the regional Taliban-linked groups, sealing the border proves the crucial for security of Russia as well as the whole post-Soviet territory.

⁹ Official Website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russian Federation. (2013, February 12). “*Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation 2013*”. Retrieved December 30, 2015, from Министерство иностранных дел Российской Федерации (Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossiyskoy Federatsii): <http://archive.mid.ru//bdomp/ns-osndoc.nsf/e2f289bea62097f9c325787a0034c255/0f474e63a426b7c344257b2e003c945f!OpenDocument>

¹⁰ Official Web Portal of President of Russian Federation. (2008, July 12). “*The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*”. Retrieved December 19, 2015, from archive.kremlin.ru: <http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/text/docs/2008/07/204750.shtml>

Russia is still becoming the main state actor for most Central Asian states in military and security assistance. Its ultimate goal in the region is to manage Russian sphere of influence in most Central Asian states and to make sure that United States and its military alliance in NATO keep away from the region. Russian military supports to Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, the weaker states in the region, can be described as “*a quid pro quo*” arrangement to manage its power balance in the region which is part of Russian foreign policy main interests in the region.

Despite the fact that Russian military presence help to Central Asian member states is moderately restricted in scale, a minim beginning abilities of the Central Asian military and security strengths imply that even generally constrained help can sizably affect security and dependability in the area. This effect is prone to be blended later on. From one perspective, endeavors to make a unite air-resistance framework and to enhance counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency capacities are liable to offer nearby military some assistance with protecting their nations from the risk of infiltration by radical, extremism, and separatism.

Russia – Kazakhstan Strategic Military Partnership

The significant benefits which offered by the relation of Russia and Kazakhstan are absolute, since both states also hand in hand together on several military-organizations such as: CIS (established since 8th December 1991), SCO (established on 15th June 2001), and CSTO, and also declaring that they are forever friends. The Russian Foreign Policy Concept holds a significant role as the basic of all Russian foreign policies in the future. As mentioned on the Foreign Policy Concept which signed in 2008 by the President of Russia at that time, Russia puts the Central Asia along with all of the former Soviet Union states as the important Russian big brothers. Most of Russian elites and thinkers still believe to defend the concept of the ‘Greater Russia’ by using the military influence towards those former Soviet Union states. From the FPC of Russian Federation we can see the Russian strategies to enhance its military interest in Central Asia as follows:

- Russia as one of the initiator of this military organization concern to “*promote CSTO as key security instrument in Central Asia*”; means that Russia use the strategic of CSTO to spread Russian (and Soviet atmosphere) influence towards the member states;

- In using the strategic values of CSTO, Russia also *“ensure security in the Central Asia area focusing on adapting the CSTO as a multifunctional integration body to increase the stabilization of the region”*;
- In making collaboration with the CSTO member states, especially Central Asian states, Russia also *“ensure capability of the CSTO Member States to take prompt and effective joint actions”* and *“engage real contribution as Russia’s attitude into ensuring good neighborly relations and stability”* by conducting bilateral and multilateral military cooperation (for examples are conducting joint actions, having arms trade, *et cetera*).
- Russia also support the idea of *“transform the CSTO into a central institution ensuring security in its area of responsibility”* by supporting the organizations and regional activities (for example is by supplying military goods);

Russia also *“eager to take into account Russia’s legitimate interest in practice and to duly respect existing cooperation mechanisms, such as the CIS, CSTO, and SCO”* as the real action to spread its influence towards the region. *“Russia’s armed forces are the main strategic ally of the Kazakh armed forces”* (Daniyal Akhmetov, former Defense Minister of Russian Federation, 2012). As seen on the Foreign Policy Concept, Russia has set the military interests to the region of Central Asia, and sets the strategies as well to be implemented. Kazakhstan as the closest ally of Russia in the region plays a very crucial in supporting the implementation of Russian military strategies in the Central Asian. Both states are consequently in their military cooperation by having joint actions, military treaties, military diplomatic meetings, and other agendas that support the idea of this cooperation.

Military Organizations, Joint Actions, Defense Diplomacy, and Arms Trade

Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) is an intergovernmental military alliance founded by Russian Federation, the Republic of Kazakhstan, and other three Commonwealth of Independent States (Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan) in 1992, May 15. As a collective security organization, it creates not only cooperation among the signatories but it comes to a form of alliance – means, if one of the signatory (state) got any threat from other state (non-alliance), it would be perceived as a threat against all (signatories/states in alliance).

While SCO is a Eurasian military, political, and economic organization. It founded by Russian Federation, the Republic of Kazakhstan, People's Republic of China, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan leaders in Shanghai, 2001. This organization also signed an agreement with CSTO in order to collaborate on security, crime, and drug trafficking issues. In military activities, SCO member states have organized series of joint military exercises. One of the joint military exercises named 'Peace Mission 2010'; it was conducted in Kazakhstan during 9th up to 25th September 2010 at Matybulak training area in Kazakhstan. That military exercises includes over 5.000 personnel of the member states (Kazakhstan, Russia, China, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan).

Russia and Kazakhstan also involved into a same joint actions. This one is under the flag of Commonwealth Independent of States (CIS). Joint CIS Air Defense System or JADS functions are as the protection for CIS member states' air boundaries, as the joint control of CIS airspace, it also act as monitor of the aerospace posture in the region, and missile strike early warning which direct to the further coordinator to response any air threat in the region. By this joint actions, Russia became the largest party which involved on the Kazakhstan's Air Defense modernization; by this joint action Kazakhstan receives free of charge of the armament for five divisions with S-300PS anti-missile and anti-ballistic air defense system from Russia. This transfer of S-300 by Russian for free to the Kazakh becoming a strategic infestation in keeping Russian military influence and also Russia's defense space on the same time (Wilk, 2014).

On May 2014, Moscow has approved and ratified the agreement on collaboration with Kazakhstan to unite their air defense capabilities, which before the agreement has been signed on January 2013. This idea is the form of implementation to strengthen the defense network among them and in the regional level (Central Asia). Russia and Kazakhstan planned this Russian – Kazakhstani Joint Air Defense Shield to be used only in times of war. This Joint Air Defense Shield is planned to be located in Kazakhstan (Almaty) and the commander of it will be the representative from Kazakhstan.

Another joint military activity is Center-2011, the joint military exercise held by Russian military and was participated by more than 12.000 soldiers from Russia and several Central Asian states include Kazakhstan, 1.000 units weapons, military and special equipment including 100 tanks and 50 planes, and 10 combat vehicles are planned to be

involved in the exercises from the CSTO member-states.¹¹ Russian military expertise, Gorenburg Dmitry, mention merely about Center-2011 exercise's scenario focused more about fighting rebels and terrorist; the other concern was about the instability of Central Asia either because of internal Central Asian states conflicts or influence from the external conflict (e.g. Afghanistan).

On the defense-diplomacy activities, the foundations of Russia – Kazakhstan bilateral relations framework are the following documents Treaty on Friendship, Co-operation and Mutual Assistance of May 25, 1992. In 6 July 1998 Russia and Kazakhstan declared on the Eternal Friendship and Alliance aimed for the 21st Century.¹²

Conclusion

Central Asia has a strategic value of region, with the treasure of Soviet and abundant energy reserves, Central Asia has just becoming a strategic vacuum arena – means the geopolitics of the region has succeed attract any external interested parties to implement their geostrategy in order to achieve their interest to the region. Russia was not playing alone, China and United States have been attracted by the geopolitics of Central Asia.

However, Russian-- which is currently focusing its foreign and defence policy on spreading its influence through their nearest neighbors, Central Asia has to adjust its policies due to the tight competition with the other major powers in the region. Thus, Russia needs to increase its military influence in the region based on the Russian Military Doctrine and the Russian Foreign Policy Concept. Moscow sets its military strategy in order to keep the military influence and manage the power balalnce in the region.

The Russian Military Doctrine 2010 and 2014 clearly mentioned that the security of Russian important region (Central Asia) is absolute. It was supported by the Foreign Policy Concept of Russia which stated that Russia set these strategies in order to keep its military existence in the region of Central Asia. To implement those strategies, during 2010 – 2012 Russia together with its closest ally in Central Asia, the Republic of Kazakhstan, having a number of defense diplomacy with security and military issue as the agenda; from those defense diplomacy Russia and Kazakhstan come up with several military agreements that strengthen their ally toward each other. Russia also utilizes the condition that both Russia and Kazakhstan are in the same military organizations.

¹¹ Maratov, Trend. (2011, September 19). '*Center-2011' military exercises started*. Retrieved January 15, 2016, from Trend News Agency: <http://en.trend.az/casia/kazakhstan/1933615.html>

¹² Ibid.

The joint military actions and arms trade and supply also did by Russia and Kazakhstan as the implementation of Russian military strategy. Having Kazakhstan as the closest ally for Russia gives significant benefit, since Kazakhstan is the largest territory among Central Asian states, the most rapid economic growth and good military capability, and the great place for Russian diaspora, shows that the relations of both countries could stabilize the Russian military influence in Central Asia.

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