



DIIS REPORT

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**CENTRAL ASIAN SECURITY
POST-2014**

PERSPECTIVES IN KAZAKHSTAN
AND UZBEKISTAN

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About the Author

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I. Introduction

Central Asia has always played a vital role in Western defence planning policy in relation to Afghanistan ever since Operation Enduring Freedom commenced in 2001 in the aftermath of the meta-terrorist attacks on New York and Washington. The Western military deployment into Afghanistan was supported at an early stage by agreeing access to military facilities within Central Asia, notably the US military base at Kharshi-Khanabad (K2) in Uzbekistan and the airbase at Manas near Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. The Central Asian states have also stepped up their participation in bilateral security assistance programmes and the NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP).

NATO's subsequent involvement in the efforts to stabilize Afghanistan meant that the Central Asian contribution to support such operations, albeit indirectly, served to solidify new partnerships in the region itself. The closure of K2 in 2005 did not mitigate the need for continued access to Central Asian military facilities, and the later revamping of the original basing agreement with Bishkek witnessed the transition of the Manas airbase into a 'transit centre' through which supplies and troops could be moved into the theatre of operations in Afghanistan. Central Asia again became the subject of increased attention due to the pressure on the Ground Lines of Communication (GLOC) taking supplies to the International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) in Afghanistan from Pakistan. The search for durable and cost-effective alternative GLOCs to ease the pressure on the Pakistan GLOC resulted in the creation of the Northern Distribution Network (NDN) to take supplies from the Baltic Sea ports overland through Russia and Central Asia.

The NDN and the cooperation of the Central Asian governments was again the focus of Western planning staffs' attention as a result of the declared intention to draw down the deployed combat forces in Afghanistan by 2014. NATO and its members were faced with the problem of how to remove military hardware from Afghanistan in a comparatively short timeframe that had taken over a decade to build up in the country; the so-called 'reverse transit' options using the NDN brought Central Asian capitals deeper into the planning process.¹

However, as the drawdown of military forces from Afghanistan approaches in 2014, western capitals are also considering the potential implications for the wider security of Central Asia. The following study examines the perspectives and planning options

in two of the leading states in Central Asia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Among the policy issues explored that are linked to the 2014 drawdown are the extent to which there may be potential to encourage a regional approach to security, or whether the NATO exit from Afghanistan may result in common policy positions or shared interests among the Central Asian states.²

These themes are explored using open sources, making comparisons where possible with the national security documents of each state in order to highlight differences or the various themes in their defence and security policies. Additionally, extensive use was made of research interviews with the expert communities in each country, conducted on an off-the-record basis in order to facilitate a free exchange of ideas and move beyond the predictable responses of experts who often work or research in their fields with close governmental links.

The results demonstrate a varied and often directly opposite interpretation of the implications of the drawdown between Astana and Tashkent, and even the issue the level of potential threat stemming from post-2014 Afghanistan is widely different in each capital.³ Moreover, the following analysis also seeks to explore the inherent weaknesses in the national threat assessments in these countries, and questions the extent to which either may fully know or have the capacity to formulate an accurate threat assessment linked to the risks connected to the post-2014 security environment.⁴ Despite this, each country remains confident that it can deal with any negative downturn in the security of Central Asia linked to post-2014 Afghanistan, although this is demonstrated in diverse ways.

Policy planners will also be interested to know how these capitals view the various multilateral routes to bolster security through the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) or the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Each country possesses different views on these organizations and their potential to contribute to longer-term regional security.

The main conclusion of this work is that there is simply no such thing as a 'Central Asian' perspective on the drawdown from Afghanistan, but in fact a quite divergent and often contradictory set of views depending on the capital in question. Kazakhstan sees little reason to change its defence and security policy as a result of the NATO exit from Afghanistan and does not place a high priority on an Afghanistan-linked security threat post-2014. Uzbekistan, on the other hand, continues to consider that Afghanistan represents the main source of national security threat to the country,

and it is taking steps to prepare for a negative result to the end of NATO combat operations in Afghanistan in 2014.

2. Background: National Capacities in Threat Assessment

Forming a deeper policy-oriented understanding of governmental perspectives in Central Asia's capitals on the complex process of withdrawing NATO forces from Afghanistan and ceasing combat operations in the country by 2014 demands an awareness of the limits of national threat assessment.⁵ How does each of these states conduct its national threat assessments? What levels of professional standard exist among the national intelligence agencies, and how does this feed into or mitigate accurate reporting to government concerning often very spontaneous or elusive threats and targets?

Moreover, to what extent do the countries in Central Asia possess the capacity to conduct threat assessment, and where might they place Afghanistan-linked threats or the possible consequences of the NATO drawdown of forces in their scales of priority threats? These questions also lead us to consider how the key states in Central Asia – Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan – perceive threats originating from Kyrgyzstan or Tajikistan, as well as how they both regard national security capacity in these neighbouring states.⁶ Understanding some of the underlying institutional and analytical weaknesses in these capitals and their capacity to produce independent threat assessments also offers insight into their potential to trace and disrupt potential militant activity in their countries, and indeed to tackle security issues more generally.

This approach also demands, where possible, some comparison of security documents or at least some indication of how high an Afghanistan-related threat perception might be in the national security priorities of these countries, especially in Astana and Tashkent. It also highlights the continued importance of Russia in terms of assistance in producing threat assessments. Paradoxically, in countries such as Kyrgyzstan or Tajikistan, the national capacity to produce and plan for threat assessment and its implications for policy-making, or longer term security strategy, is the weakest in the region.⁷

Sources of weakness in threat assessment and actionable intelligence

In general terms, the production of threat assessments in Central Asian states involves a process of coordination between the various ministries within their national security

structures.⁸ All countries in the region share the Soviet legacy within the civil service bureaucracy and intelligence agencies, the latter being the successors to the Soviet KGB. Some additional general observations should be noted concerning these bodies and power ministries in order to contextualize the problem of producing accurate threat assessments.⁹

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan share broad similarities, though with some key differences, in the area of threat assessment capacities. Under the president in each state, the security structures involved in protecting the state and formulating threat assessments are the interior ministry, defence ministry and national security committee (the latter in each state is the KGB successor and is tasked with the lead role in intelligence). In addition there is the border service, which, except in Kyrgyzstan, is subordinate to the National Security Committee or the emergencies ministry (MchS). Finally there is the Security Council, which usually plays a coordinating role.¹⁰ However, none of these countries is particularly known for its capacity to facilitate what is commonly referred to as ‘joined up government,’ which means that the security bodies may not fully share relevant information in inter-agency terms; inter-agency rivalry and bureaucratic issues can only fester within such systems.¹¹

The lead role in detecting threats to the state within each country therefore belongs to the KGB successor intelligence service. A critical point must be noted, based not only on the Soviet legacy and the fact that many of these agencies are staffed at senior levels by former KGB officers, but related to the political systems within which they operate. Their fundamental role is not to protect the state, but the regime and power of oligarchs, the president being the chief among these. This means that, unlike intelligence officers functioning within liberal democracies, a significant portion of man hours is spent by Central Asian intelligence services spying on the domestic political opposition, or even on business figures and foreigners entering the country.¹² This is the basic flaw in their ability to conduct accurate and timely threat assessments, but there are a myriad of other failings, which may only be tested in the face of real security threats.¹³

Each Central Asian intelligence service suffers from inherent institutional and personnel weaknesses that reflect historical developments, the political culture, and fissures in their intelligence collection capacities. These agencies are mainly overly centralized, with only Kazakhstan possessing an independent foreign intelligence service, and they all have similar staffing issues. Central Asian intelligence officers

are not recruited on the basis of merit or educational background, but as in other areas of the economy they find posts through family and clan patronage networks. This, combined with the presence of former KGB officers in their senior ranks, limits the scope for these agencies to transform themselves to meet modern threats and challenges.¹⁴

Moreover, in addition to time spent monitoring the activities of the political opposition, these agencies are also engaged in activities linked to the shadow economy. It is not uncommon for their personnel to be involved in targeting business interests for bribes, or to be part of the activities they are allegedly tasked with assessing, such as drug trafficking. In addition, a weakness in signals intelligence affects all the intelligence agencies in Central Asia, leaving them heavily reliant on bilateral intelligence cooperation with their Russian counterparts. In open source intelligence (OSINT), the main sources are produced by the Russian media, contributing to the level of Russification contained in any assessments.¹⁵

Linked to this inherent challenge is the lack of a developed and established independent network of domestic think tanks and security analysis experts. Intelligence officers in these capitals searching for open source material in their collection cycle largely depend on Russian media sources or major Russian think-tank studies.¹⁶ This also stems from the under-developed network of think tanks, and within governmental circles often a disregard for domestic analytical expertise. An additional factor that serves to limit the utility of OSINT in Central Asian intelligence services is also common in Russia, namely under-estimating its importance. Unlike their counterparts in liberal democracies, these intelligence officers tend to place too much value on secret human intelligence (HUMINT) sources and underestimate the value of OSINT.¹⁷

Within the national intelligence structures in the region, there is also an underlying weakness in connection to strategic planning: they lack strategic-level intelligence analysis. These agencies also, much like their Russian colleagues, tend to depend on mirror images in their analysis of foreign states; in other words they perceive foreign states not as they are, but as a reflection of their own mind sets, prejudices and political cultures.¹⁸

As already noted, these weaknesses are most acute in the smaller Central Asian states, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, where any possible upsurge in militant activity linked to Afghanistan may most likely occur. These countries rely heavily on other actors, particularly Russia, for their security, especially in conducting threat assessments.¹⁹

Before looking at Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan more closely in this regard, it is worth noting that the ‘fear’ aroused by the local intelligence agencies among the populations in these countries pales into insignificance compared to the enduring fear of Russian intelligence.²⁰ What little fear or respect can be commanded in these states by the KGB successor agency relates to their ability to target business interests or selective individuals such as journalists and extract information or simply spread fear.²¹ Militants, extremists, drug traffickers and others posing a potential threat to these states are relatively free to conduct their businesses, and are often only discovered by accident or when it is too late.

As a consequence of these institutional weaknesses, the intelligence services in Central Asia struggle to locate, track and disrupt militant or terrorist activities due to capacity issues.²² Moreover, it is in this area that each state lacks sufficient developed apparatus and security capacities to assess and report accurately to government on the emergence of new threats or trends. How they assess militant activity linked to Afghanistan and the NATO drawdown of forces is certainly open to question in terms of both quality and capacity.²³

Although many of these features are present within Kazakhstan’s security and intelligence structures, it is the only regional power to have taken the step of separating domestic and foreign intelligence based on the National Security Committee (*Komitet Natsionalnoy Bezopasnosti*—KNB).²⁴ In February 2009, reportedly due to domestic political considerations, Kazakhstan’s President Nursultan Nazarbayev abolished the ‘Barlau’ department in the KNB, which was tasked with foreign intelligence, and created a new and separate foreign intelligence service, Syrbar. This may have stemmed from concern within the regime about the dispute with Rakhmat Aliiev, the exiled former son-in-law of the president, and a fear that the KNB may exercise too much power in domestic politics in the future.²⁵ However, this decision resulted in the creation of a new and still relatively inexperienced intelligence service in the country.

Although Syrbar has its own website, there is still little reporting on the new organization. It is not possible to glean from open sources how it was formed or what its staffing policies are.²⁶ At least initially, it is probable that Syrbar was reliant upon staffing from the KNB. Indeed, after only three years, the organization is still in its infancy, and given the lack of capacity already noted such as access to signals intelligence assets or reliance upon the Russian intelligence services, it is unlikely to be able to make genuinely independent threat assessments any time soon.²⁷

Kazakhstan has also made changes to its counter-terrorist structures in response to its experience of terrorism or terrorist incidents since 2011. These attacks, including suicide bombings and incidents close to KNB buildings in remote parts of the country, exposed how limited the existing intelligence apparatus is in offering the government any warning of impending security risks, or in being able to determine rapidly the origin or nature of this threat.²⁸ Astana has thus acted in a structural and organizational manner to demonstrate some level of response to these new threats and challenges, without actually addressing any of the deeper weaknesses within its intelligence apparatus.

Paradoxically an inadvertent outcome of the wave of terrorist incidents in Kazakhstan has been to stimulate counter-terrorist and intelligence cooperation at a bilateral level with Uzbekistan's security structures. Astana appears interested in drawing upon its neighbour's experience of terrorism, and up to a point the KNB is not only cooperating more actively with its counterparts in Uzbekistan, but arguably also learning about Tashkent's approaches to counter-terrorism.²⁹ Some analysts see such developments, rightly or wrongly, as representing the beginnings of a concerted effort by Astana and Tashkent to act as the driving forces in reforming the existing security architecture in Central Asia ahead of 2014. Nonetheless, this security cooperation seems much more narrowly targeted on terrorism, and it may not serve to overcome institutional and political barriers in the path of grander schemes.³⁰

Uzbekistan, on the other hand, unlike its neighbour, continues to unite domestic and foreign intelligence in the powerful hands of the National Security Service (*Sluzhba Natsionalnoy Bezopasnosti*—SNB). The SNB has witnessed little change in substance or structure since it was the Uzbek Republic's KGB department. It has three departments: foreign intelligence (2nd), counter-intelligence and signals intelligence (6th); the 2nd and 6th departments were transferred to the SNB from military intelligence in 1996. The SNB maintains its own paramilitary structures and controls the border service. It is considered the key to ensuring regime survivability and stability, and is widely regarded as the leading intelligence agency in Central Asia in terms of its overall capacity.³¹

Despite its reputation as the leading intelligence service in the region, the SNB also suffers from similar institutional weaknesses, though with some distinctions. Its tasking and requirements mean that it spends a great deal of time on non-security threats by monitoring opposition figures, civil society organizations and their family members, individuals out of favour with the regime, or in targeting elements of the

shadow economy; it is common knowledge, for instance, that its officers are involved in disrupting illegal money-changing services in the local bazaars. In terms of threat assessment the SNB may be more independent of Moscow in its ability to collect and analyse data, though some critics argue that it has the closest relationship with Russian intelligence of any other Central Asian state.³²

The limited capacity of intelligence agencies and officers in these countries to perform the core tasks of assessing and determining or disrupting threats to national security explains their weak ability to report accurately on the nature of these threats to their governments.³³ This represents the single greatest barrier in the path of any Central Asian capital in examining the potential implications to their security linked to the NATO drawdown in Afghanistan. Equally, the lack of, in some cases, or endemic institutional flaws concerning strategic-level intelligence suggests that not all capitals in the region are able to plan adequately for 2014.

Consequently, the broad range of views between each Central Asian state on Afghanistan and the security environment after 2014 lacks any consensus; this mainly results from the undulating nature of national intelligence capacities.³⁴ Analysis of public statements and security documents in Central Asia shows that in some countries the potential for any Afghanistan-linked threat to emerge as a domestic challenge after 2014 is not taken seriously, while in others it is viewed differently and seen as more pressing.

Threats to regional and national security seen from Astana and Tashkent

It is vitally important for Western policy-makers to grasp the disparity in Central Asia over the extent of threat perception on Afghanistan; each capital has its own distinctive views. Moreover, there is no agreement on whether 2014 will mark a turning point and lead to a deterioration in security within Central Asia, though in the view of some experts in Central Asia nothing will really change. In the smaller states, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, these views also differ sharply.

In Tajikistan's last published Military Doctrine in 2005, the security document outlines the main threats to the country and pays almost no attention to Afghanistan. Security thinking in Dushanbe therefore places very little emphasis on terrorism or inter-state conflict, and more on drug trafficking, organized crime or separatism – in other words the indirect impact of Afghanistan-related transnational threats. Section two states:

The key factors responsible for the sources of military threat are or could be:

- the uneven economic development of the region's states as they transition to market relations and the increasing socio-economic stratification into different social groups inside the states;
- the ongoing and escalating regional, ethnic and religious animosities, which destabilize both the domestic and regional situation;
- internal armed conflicts;
- the rise in drug trafficking, international terrorism, extremism and illegal migration;
- the effort of some countries to establish their exclusive military-political influence in Central Asia and their commitment to resolving conflicts through force;
- the formation of powerful armed groupings or military bases of coalition states in countries bordering Tajikistan;
- territorial claims against Tajikistan.

The factors escalating the direct military threat to Tajikistan are:

- higher level of combat readiness of strategic offensive forces in areas from which Tajikistan can be struck;
- build-up of force groupings on Tajikistan's border to a level that upsets the sides' existing balance of forces.³⁵

It is interesting to note that Afghanistan is not mentioned directly in the document, but only by reference to transnational threats stemming from the country; these are 'drug trafficking, international terrorism, extremism.' Yet, this is not assigned as high a threat priority as the 'uneven economic development' within the region. Also, the main potential military threats to Tajikistan's national security do not relate to Afghanistan at all.³⁶

In stark contrast, Kyrgyzstan stands out most clearly in Central Asia as assigning the highest degree of importance in its security documents to Afghanistan. It is explicit, and even goes as far as to make links to the NATO drawdown. In July 2012, Bishkek passed a new National Security Concept (NSC).³⁷ Section one of the 2012 NSC states:

The situation in Afghanistan continues to be a key threat to the stability of Central Asia since the country's leaders still face major challenges to resolve fundamental socio-economic, political and military problems.³⁸

This is the clearest statement of its kind in the security documents published in the region. It adds in section three:

A serious threat to security throughout the region is posed by the complex military-political situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan, where terrorism and religious extremism have concentrated their main ideological and combatant forces and the special training camps of al-Qaeda, the Taliban, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, the East Turkestan Islamic Movement, the Jihad Group or Islamic Jihad Union and others. In the contemporary context, especially following the 2014 US and NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan, this will create real conditions for emissaries and militants of these organizations to move in and fuel terrorist and extremist manifestations in Central Asia, including Kyrgyzstan.³⁹

Bishkek not only places Afghanistan at the top of the potential risks to its own security, but links this factor to a possible worsening of security in Central Asia after the US and NATO drawdown from Afghanistan is complete in 2014. The document is also less diplomatic concerning the Afghanistan factor and the transnational threats facing the region:

Afghanistan remains the epicentre of drug traffic expansion into Central Asia, from where there is an ever-increasing volume of illegal drugs into Russia and the East European markets along the so-called 'north route' through Central Asia, which is used as a transit corridor.⁴⁰

While there are differences between Dushanbe and Bishkek in threat perceptions regarding Afghanistan, each country recognizes that it must seek varied security partnerships to mitigate the impact of its own weak military and security forces. Each country is also very active in pursuing as much assistance as possible for their militaries and security bodies from US aid programmes, or with other countries bilaterally or even through multilateral donor sources.⁴¹

The level of disagreement among the Central Asian states on the potential security threat stemming from Afghanistan post-2014 is even more pronounced if we compare these documents from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to official views in Astana. Kazakhstan's 2011 Military Doctrine pays only scant attention to Afghanistan: in fact, of its four Military Doctrines issued since 1993, the 2011 Military Doctrine is the first even to name Afghanistan.⁴² Section 3.1 outlines the external and domestic threats to national security as follows:

External military security threats to the Republic of Kazakhstan include:

1. socio-political instability in the region and the likelihood of armed provocations;
2. military conflict flashpoints close to Kazakhstan's borders;
3. use by foreign nations or organizations of military-political pressure and advanced information-psychological warfare technologies to interfere in Kazakhstan's internal affairs to further their own interests;
4. increasing influence of military-political organizations and unions to the detriment of Kazakhstan's military security;
5. the activity of international terrorist and radical organizations and groups, including cyber terrorism and growing religious extremism in neighboring countries;
6. production by some countries of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery vehicles, and illegal proliferation of the technologies, equipment and components used to manufacture them, as well as of dual purpose technologies.

Domestic military security threats could include:

1. extremist, nationalist and separatist movements, organizations and structures seeking to destabilize the domestic situation and change the constitutional order through armed methods;
2. illegal armed groups;
3. illegal proliferation of weapons, munitions, explosives and other devices that could be used for sabotage, terrorist acts or other illegal actions.⁴³

Indeed, Kazakhstan's 2011 Military Doctrine places four threats to national security above terrorism: socio-political instability within Central Asia and possible conflicts, flashpoints on its periphery, state actors using information tools to pressure the state, and the potentially negative influence of political-military organizations.⁴⁴ In the preamble to the same section Afghanistan is mentioned, but only loosely and in a wider context:

At the same time, the uneven distribution of natural resources, the widening gap between developed and developing countries, different approaches to national socio-political systems, and other negative aspects of globalization could exacerbate antagonisms between nations, with military and other coercive means being used to resolve them. The situation in Central Asia could deteriorate due to the persistent instability in Afghanistan, socio-political tensions in the region, border-territorial and water problems, and economic,

religious and other antagonisms that are being resolved through less than ideal mechanisms. Drug trafficking and illegal migration have become transnational problems.⁴⁵

It is especially revealing to compare the statement in Kazakhstan's 2011 Military Doctrine, signed into law by President Nazarbayev in October 2011, with the language expressed in the Kyrgyz 2012 NSC. Kazakhstan's 2011 Military Doctrine downplays the potential for instability in Central Asia as a consequence of the drawdown in Afghanistan: 'The situation in Central Asia could deteriorate due to the persistent instability in Afghanistan': in other words, in the official view of Kazakhstan's security elite this represents at best a 'maybe'.⁴⁶

Not so in Bishkek, given the clarity in the 2012 NSC: 'In the contemporary context, especially following the 2014 US and NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan, this will create real conditions for emissaries and militants of these organizations to move in and fuel terrorist and extremist manifestations in Central Asia...' Bishkek represents the NATO drawdown as ensuring future instability in the region caused by militant-inspired activity emanating from Afghanistan.⁴⁷

Astana also issued a comprehensive insight into possible threats to national security in January 2012; the Law on National Security, replacing the earlier version in 1998, makes no mention of Afghanistan whatsoever. These official views of the potential threat to national security or regional stability emerging in 2014 also reflect expert opinions in Astana and Almaty that the transition period in Afghanistan is unlikely to impact on these countries' security or pose any significant risk to the region.⁴⁸

Finally, the contrast in how Afghanistan is perceived at official security levels in Central Asia could not be more marked than in contrasting the views of other Central Asian states with Uzbekistan. None of the country's security documents, including its defence doctrine, have been published. Uzbekistan is the only state in the region not to have done so; the military doctrines of, for example, all its Central Asian neighbors, including neutral Turkmenistan, are openly available to public scrutiny.⁴⁹

Tashkent's 'radio silence' on issues of security at this level means that the analysis of its possible position on Afghanistan must rely on sifting public statements or delving into the sparse literature published by its leading experts.⁵⁰ This results in Western policy-makers to some extent having to guess how Tashkent perceives 2014, or what it may be doing to prepare for the drawdown of US and NATO forces.

Conclusion

Policy planners must appreciate the diversity of views in Central Asia on Afghanistan post-2014, and this reflects at root the limited capacity of these states to produce independent threat assessments. In turn, national intelligence agencies in Central Asia are not necessarily as ‘threat-focused’ as many observers assume. Into this restricted picture of the threat environment, and particularly how it might change in response to external stimuli, are the purported threat assessments of other actors, especially Russia, which may not share its actual assessment of security threats in the region for its own political advantage. Moscow may seek to exaggerate the possible consequences of the NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan to foster a perceived need for greater reliance on Russia among Central Asian governments.⁵¹

The official statements and security documents of these states confirm a picture of confusion, or at least of differences of perspective, on the extent to which the threat environment may change in Central Asia after 2014. Some states consider it will make little difference, while others attach much greater emphasis upon this threat factor. In this context, there is little practical potential for encouraging regional initiatives to enhance security.⁵²

The two leading Central Asian security actors, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, see their neighbours, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, as possessing no credible options to enhance or provide for their security, thus rendering these states dependent on other actors. Yet, in Astana and Tashkent, while these capitals also differ in their interpretations of Afghanistan post-2014, there are also varied shades of self-reliance. This militates against pursuing genuine cooperative security arrangements, though there are likely to be intelligence-sharing mechanisms that function in detecting and possibly disrupting any future upsurge in terrorist activity.⁵³

Equally, both Astana and Tashkent are aware of the potential for other powers such as Russia to use the NATO drawdown from Afghanistan to accentuate the threat perception in order to bolster Russia’s security role in this strategically important region. Kazakhstan’s security elite is more anxious about socio-political instability in a neighbouring state. In its 2011 Military Doctrine, this possible threat to national security is placed well above any feasible reference to Afghanistan and most likely relates to Kyrgyzstan and memories of the 2010 revolution and the 2010 ethnic violence in southern Kyrgyzstan.⁵⁴

Despite being coy about its national security documents, statements by Uzbekistan's senior officials and political leadership seem to place Afghanistan post-2014 at the top of the country's national security agenda, though this serves to make Tashkent pursue yet greater independence in its security policy. These differences in the security policies of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan and how they are likely either to inhibit or to facilitate measures strengthening regional security are issues explored in the following chapters.

3. Astana: Strengthening Multilateral Security Options

Kazakhstan has developed close defence and security cooperation with the United States and NATO since 9/11 and more recently has supported the logistical and maintenance requirements of the International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) in Afghanistan by playing an active role in the Northern Distribution Network (NDN).⁵⁵ NATO members seeking to use the NDN for reverse transit as part of the drawdown from Afghanistan by 2014, that is, using this Ground Line of Communication (GLOC) to withdraw military hardware overland through Central Asia and Russia, succeeded in securing Kazakhstan's agreement in early 2012; it was the first country in Central Asia to do so. Since then, in January 2013, Paris has signed an agreement with Astana to open a new NDN spur to fly its hardware from Kabul to Shymkent and then transport it onward through Kazakhstan and Russia to the Baltic Sea ports as part of France's withdrawal of forces from the theatre of operations.⁵⁶

Clearly, Kazakhstan has played an important role in strengthening NATO GLOCs prior to the exit from Afghanistan, and like other Central Asian partners it is actively cooperating in providing the best and most cost-effective options for the overland withdrawal of military hardware by NATO members. Astana has arguably developed the closest ties with NATO in the region, participating in Partnership for Peace (PfP) programmes on a level that goes way beyond other countries in Central Asia.⁵⁷ Kazakhstan utilized defence cooperation with NATO and individual NATO members to develop and strengthen its peacekeeping capabilities, initially by creating and staffing its peacekeeping battalion (KAZBAT) and seeking assistance to use this as a basis to enhance it as a peacekeeping brigade (KAZBRIG).⁵⁸

Linked to the security threat from Afghanistan in so far as an international terrorist threat was present, it has also sought to enter and develop bilateral security assistance ties with NATO members aimed to assist in force development, modernization, and strengthening its antiterrorist capabilities.⁵⁹

This chapter examines the extent to which Astana views the NATO drawdown from Afghanistan as changing the regional threat environment and consequently serving as a justification for additional changes to its defence and security policies. Is Kazakhstan anxious over the NATO exit from Afghanistan and expect a worsening of its national security as a result? Will such factors influence defence and security plans, or render Kazakhstan more open to deepening its defence and security ties either with the

Alliance or individual member states? Could Astana, like Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, try to extract agreements from NATO militaries on the handover of some of the hardware assets in Afghanistan in order to boost its own security?

From the perspective of policy-makers in Astana, could there be scope to enhance existing security cooperation with Western partner states in order to strengthen the country's military and security capabilities? Or might more subtle mechanisms be used to bind Kazakhstan more closely to a Euro-Atlantic approach to security? These issues are explored here and lead to the rather surprising conclusion that Astana does not regard the NATO exit from Afghanistan in 2014 as heralding a decline in the country's security environment.

Consequently, Western policy-makers should not expect Kazakhstan to shift its defence and security policies post-2014, or to act like a Central Asian state keen to seek and accept defence and security assistance wherever it is to be found.⁶⁰ Moreover, Kazakhstan's cool reception of the type of scaremongering that can pass for analysis elsewhere is diametrically opposed to regarding the post-2014 security environment as offering grounds for genuine anxiety; unlike in the other Central Asian capitals, Astana does not place Afghanistan at the forefront of its security agenda.⁶¹

These factors will also be considered in terms of how the country is furthering its security interests through multilateral organizations such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) or the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the extent to which its policy priorities in either relate to Afghanistan post-2014.⁶²

Kazakhstan's defence and security policy

Consistent with the 2011 Military Doctrine, the classified National Security Strategy and the 2012 Law on National Security, Astana has prioritized developing its armed forces and security structures so as to respond to low- and medium-intensity conflicts.⁶³ This involves improving military command and control (C2), communications systems and information support for troops during combat operations, and in terms of force structure the emphasis is on building professional and mobile forces. Defence ministry units will be tasked with playing a supporting role with border troops, interior troops, or participating in peace support operations or antiterrorist operations alongside allied forces. Kazakhstan's armed forces will gradually transition from line tactics towards precision operations, develop independent force groupings, enhance the efficacy of

C2 to include the use of automated systems, and introduce modern equipment and weapons systems.⁶⁴

Yet, the threat assessment and plans to develop the armed forces further lends little credibility to the thesis that Astana is calibrating contingency planning into its defence and security policy linked to Afghanistan post-2014. There is no evidence that Astana takes seriously the prospect of Taliban or Taliban-inspired militants launching incursions into Central Asian territory. Specialists involved in working on the country's security documents in fact do not consider the Taliban to be a pressing threat to the country or the region; they regard the Taliban as primarily an Afghanistan-centric threat.⁶⁵

Colonel (retired) Georgiy Dubovtsev was involved in the process of drafting these security documents and has extensive experience in the creation of Kazakhstan's security documents over the past twenty years. In a commentary on the 2011 Military Doctrine, Dubovtsev noted:

The greatest threat to Kazakhstan's security and regional stability over the mid-term are an unstable domestic, economic and social climate; growth of ethnic and demographic tension in some neighboring countries, which could push much of the population toward extremist fighting methods; transnational terrorism and religious extremism; organized crime; arms and drug trafficking; shortage of natural resources, especially water; and deterioration of the environment.⁶⁶

Dubovtsev's outline of the sources of threat to national security places a number of factors above anything remotely linked to Afghanistan. Despite the recognition of the transnational threats emanating from Afghanistan, there is nothing to indicate anticipation that these threats might worsen post-2014, and no specific reference to Afghanistan-linked militant activity. It is important to note that Dubovtsev's article was written one year after the 2011 Military Doctrine was signed into law, and that the experience of domestic terrorist attacks in the interim had not encouraged a reassessment of the Afghanistan factor in Kazakhstan's national security.⁶⁷

In this context, it is interesting to note that no major change to force structures in Kazakhstan's armed forces has occurred since the announcement of the NATO drawdown from Afghanistan. Moreover, in terms of the training and military exercises held by the country's armed forces, there is no commensurate effort to enhance either

counter-insurgency or antiterrorist capabilities which would be consistent with such a detectable shift in the security environment; in other words, Kazakhstan's General Staff is not drawing up any training programmes or contingency planning to confront Taliban or Taliban-inspired militants.⁶⁸

Distinct perspectives in Astana on post-2014 security

Kazakhstan's security documents therefore contain little to suggest that a high priority is being attached to Afghanistan either as a potential threat to national security or as a reason to modify the country's existing security policy in light of the NATO drawdown from Afghanistan. This lack of priority in the country's threat assessment related to Afghanistan also reflects its geographical distance from the potential source of threat, unlike its neighbours in Central Asia, which allows a more sober or perhaps realistic evaluation of the possibility of any 'bleed out' from the post-conflict zone negatively impacting on Astana.⁶⁹

Astana simply does not see Afghanistan as a direct security threat to Kazakhstan. The country's security structures see no demonstrable link between the Taliban and the instances of domestic terrorism or political violence in Kazakhstan since 2011, nor do they anticipate any upsurge in militant activity in the country as a result of the NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan.⁷⁰ Moreover, the ongoing modernization of the country's armed forces and efforts to boost the fledgling domestic defence industry has no connection to considerations regarding post-2014 Afghanistan.

Experts recognize that there will be some level of change as a result of the NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan, but even among those suggesting there may be a worsening of the regional security environment, there is no explanation as to why the Taliban might be motivated to attack Central Asia. In this hypothesis such experts consider that Afghanistan will fall into chaos after 2014 and consequently that the 'southern border' of Central Asia will present a constant flow of regional security threats. These threats, far from extending to include militant incursions or an upsurge in terrorism in Central Asia, relate to the appearance of greater numbers of illegal immigrants or refugees in the region. Among these specialists, positive developments linked to Afghanistan post-2014 are also mooted, for example, the way in which countries such as Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have constructed more proactive bilateral relations with the country in recent years, and this is seen as a mechanism through which any escalation in tensions may be avoided in the future.⁷¹

Kazakhstan's security experts generally expect little to change after 2014 and do not share the levels of anxiety in neighbouring countries that NATO or its leading member states will abandon Afghanistan. Indeed, a more sober assessment of the completion of the NATO drawdown in 2014 is consistent with Western policy statements on the issue, namely that, rather than marking an end, it denotes a change of strategy and will initiate a protracted period of transition. Kazakhstan's security specialists point to issues such as the US strategic partnership with Afghanistan, as well as the Obama Administration's plans to conduct talks with Kabul on a Status of Forces (SOF) agreement in 2013, which is considered as presaging long-term US military basing in the country. Until a US-Afghanistan SOF agreement is in place, any US military access to Central Asian supporting military infrastructure cannot be determined.⁷²

Kazakhstan's leading security specialists, including those with established expertise on Afghanistan, show broad familiarity with the work and ideas of their Western counterparts, and similarly have a realistic and frequently ideologically free approach to assessing these issues.⁷³ Such specialists see the fragmented and divided tribal system in Afghanistan, the weakness of the Karzai central government, and the vast waste and inefficiency involved in Western donor aid programmes linked to the disparate and evolving Taliban structure and presence of al Qaeda-linked groups as providing a set of complex security dynamics inhibiting the long-term stabilization of the country.⁷⁴

Moreover, the possibility that Central Asian security may deteriorate as a result of the 2014 NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan is not serving as a driver of Kazakhstan's defence and security policy. This can be adequately established both by careful reference to the 2011 Military Doctrine and the 2012 Law on National Security; neither provide convincing evidence that Astana is bracing itself for a security crisis post-2014.⁷⁵

In order to consider these issues further and understand how Astana calibrates these factors into its defence and security policy-making, it is important to explore the views of its experts and contrast them with the state structures involved in formulating such policy. A fundamental point must be grasped by Western policy-makers grappling with how Astana sees 2014, and that is to stress that the views of the country's leading security experts do not always reflect state policy; this is because the state structures pay scant regard to domestic expertise in the decision-making process.⁷⁶

What can be deduced from the work or expressions of opinion among the country's foremost international relations or security specialists and experts on Afghanistan

represents at best some traces of government thinking. However, these specialists are frequently well versed in the publications of Western, Russian or domestic experts on Afghanistan and its impact on Central Asian security.⁷⁷

A tiny minority of international relations and security experts in Kazakhstan are actively involved in influencing the governmental decision-making process, but this level of influence should not be overestimated. For the purposes of this analysis, therefore, it should be noted that both these experts and the civil service and intelligence machinery feeding government may be wrong, or underestimate the potential threat, or the unpredictability involved in assessing how such a threat may develop or metastasize over time.⁷⁸

Despite these caveats, Astana possesses its own distinct perspectives on Afghanistan post-2014 and its implications for regional security, and shows no sign of pursuing any major policy revisions as a result. Therefore, it is likely to cooperate in a limited way at the multilateral level, or to offer bilateral initiatives to strengthen security in the region or promote enhanced stability in Afghanistan, although the latter will be restricted to humanitarian or economic assistance.⁷⁹

Scenarios for Afghanistan post-2014

Kazakhstan's leading specialists on Afghanistan interpret 2014 as a symbolic date and question whether a 'real' withdrawal of forces will occur in the sense of leaving behind no long-term military footprint. These experts highlight the ongoing rebuilding of military infrastructure in Bagram, Shindan and Kandagar, suggesting a comparison with the 'drawdown' in Iraq, which left behind 60,000 US troops and numerous private security companies. Moreover, in this interpretation the leading Western actors are seen as having long-term interests in Afghanistan, especially as the entire region may be considered strategically important and potentially volatile for China and Russia too. Afghanistan, like the South Caucasus, is increasingly seen in Western capitals as part of a wider policy related to transport corridors. In the event that Afghanistan and Central Asia destabilize, this may spill over into Europe. A possible war against Iran is an additional factor complicating any assessment of the long-term security environment in Central Asia post-2014, since this can also dramatically influence the situation surrounding Afghanistan and Central Asia.⁸⁰

According to Kazakhstani security specialists, one of the biggest internal political problems in Afghanistan stems from the fact that the Pashtuns are not properly

represented, while Tajiks enjoy support from Russia and Iran. In the view of such experts, the West has to understand that the Taliban is not some kind of global terrorist organisation, but a group of militia from Pashtun tribes, mostly two main tribes the Gilza and D Zadran. The fact that Pashtuns are not included in the political process or involved in forming the ANA and national police serves as a constant factor for clashes and instability.⁸¹

An article published in early 2011 by Eldar Gabdullin, an expert in the Almaty-based Centre for Contemporary Policy, considered various scenarios for the development of Central Asia to 2030. Gabdullin's list of factors influencing the development scenarios for the period to 2015 again reveals the low priority linked to Afghanistan:

1. The state of the economy throughout the entire region in the context of the global situation;
2. The level of consensus or antagonism among the external geopolitical forces;
3. The political situation in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and possible changes in the political elites in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan;
4. The influence of the situation in Afghanistan;
5. The likelihood of the US carrying out any new military operations against Iran;
6. The degree of involvement of the new regional forces (India, Iran, and Turkey) in the Central Asian processes.⁸²

At very best, therefore, such expert analyses characterize Afghanistan as a fairly predictable threat, mainly in the area of well-known transnational threats such as drug trafficking, but they do not over-stress this as an impending and serious security threat to Kazakhstan. This focus on socio-economic, domestic or Central Asian sources of instability is also reflected in the country's recent security documents, suggesting that the state structures are certainly not attaching increased attention to Afghanistan post-2014.⁸³

Similarly, a sixteen-page article published by Kazakhstan's Centre for Social and Political Studies offers no encouragement to those who may seek to exaggerate the potential impact of 2014 on the country's defense and security policy. In the 'Threat Analysis of National Security in the Medium Term,' Afghanistan is mentioned only three times. Each of these references is to already well-established threats emanating from the country and its continued instability. The article offers no credence to the idea that Kazakhstan's expert community expects a decline in Central Asian security to follow the NATO exit from Afghanistan.⁸⁴

The document also notes that, according to UN experts, more than ‘twenty percent’ of opiates produced in Afghanistan transit through Kazakhstan’s borders to the world market. Kazakhstan has thus emerged as part of the drug-trafficking route from Afghanistan to Europe. There is no analysis or forecast regarding whether this might grow further after 2014 or of any connection being made to the NATO withdrawal.⁸⁵

Afghanistan is mentioned in the analysis of international terrorism, but only in the more narrow focus of efforts by terrorist groups to influence or hasten the withdrawal of ISAF members from Afghanistan. Finally, Afghanistan is named as one of the wider sources of instability in Central Asia due to conflicts involving the great powers, and here there is also an acknowledgement of the risks stemming from a possible conflict between the US and Iran.⁸⁶ Seen from this perspective, Afghanistan’s possibly negative impact on Central Asian security post-2014 is only one among a number of hypothetical risks.

The prospect of a serious crisis in the country or within Central Asia resulting from the aftermath of the NATO drawdown in 2014 is not taken seriously by Kazakhstan’s international relations and security experts, nor does it feature in official security policy. Experts also question what might motivate the Taliban to target Kazakhstan specifically, or even to aspire to influence regional dynamics beyond its traditional focus on Afghanistan. Indeed, any expectation that major policy change is required as a result of the implications of 2014 is further undermined by reference to the ‘bleed out’ theory. Some Western experts link the emergence of militant activities and terrorist bombings in Kazakhstan since 2011 to the prospect of a worsening of the security situation caused by Kazakhstani nationals who have allegedly been fighting alongside the Taliban returning to the country post-2014 with the intention of causing domestic political instability.⁸⁷

This post-2014 scenario is not considered a serious threat to national security either by the state structures or by most security specialists in Kazakhstan. Although the number of such Kazakhstani citizens with experience of fighting alongside the Taliban in Afghanistan is unknown, it is not seen as significant. From this small group, even if a residue decide to return to Kazakhstan with the aim of carrying out terrorist attacks or fuelling Islamic militancy, there are already structures in place to deal with it: the National Security Committee (KNB), or KNB Special Forces and the KNB Border Service, as well as other agencies, would be at the forefront of detecting and combating this.⁸⁸ There are few concrete grounds to suggest that this might stimulate any major change to defence or security policy on the part of Kazakhstan’s government. Based

upon this assessment, there is no reason to drive the country's leadership to consider or implement systemic defence and security sector reform to boost defences against a threat that at best is seen as purely hypothetical.

To be clear, Astana does not anticipate a deterioration of security in the country or in the region itself as a result of the NATO drawdown in Afghanistan. Any scenario modelling that may occur within the state structures therefore excludes the prospect that a doomsday event may take place such as the far-fetched incursion of the Afghanistan-based Taliban, or even a hypothetical 'mass' exodus of Kazakhstani pro-Taliban militants arriving in the country to cause destabilization. On the contrary, its experts anticipate either no change, or only a relatively moderate impact at worst to the security environment stemming from post-2014 Afghanistan.⁸⁹

Balancing multilateral options: the CSTO, SCO and NATO

In the post-2014 security environment, Kazakhstan will continue to pursue a balanced or 'multi-vector' foreign policy aimed at avoiding preferring any one partner state above others. However, some experts believe that this policy will come under pressure after 2014. Although Russia is undoubtedly Kazakhstan's closest defence and security ally, many Kazakhstani security experts believe this relationship will become more unpredictable after the NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan, though their reasons are rooted in 'geopolitics.'⁹⁰

In this context, Astana considers the implications of Vladimir Putin's return to the Kremlin in May 2012 for Russian foreign and security policy in Central Asia to be unclear. Other Kazakhstani experts believe that there is no real consistency or overarching strategy in Russian security policy in Central Asia, which may leave scope for the Kremlin to exert increased pressure upon Central Asian countries at random and on a case-by-case basis. When Putin came to power in 2000 he altered Russian foreign policy on Central Asia, and there is also anxiety that he may choose to do so again, perhaps to strengthen Russia's role in regional security or to exert pressure on other actors, or to protect Russian strategic interests from encroachment by others.⁹¹

Seen in this light, Moscow may try to use 2014 to exploit the opportunity to boost its own influence in Central Asia, but this does not imply a real and tangible shift in the regional threat environment. If the Kremlin does follow such a path, it would stress the need for Central Asian countries to cooperate more closely with Russia on security policy following the NATO exit from Afghanistan in order to protect their

own interests and consolidate regional elites.⁹² This ‘geopolitical’ interpretation of the likely course of Russian foreign and security policy in Central Asia post-2014 appears to be supported by Moscow’s efforts to extend its military basing leases in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, which were successfully negotiated in the autumn of 2012.

The Russian leadership is also considered to be unhappy with the lack of support from its Central Asian allies within the CSTO following the Five Day War with Georgia in August 2008 and the Kremlin’s unilateral recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia; none of the Central Asian CSTO members followed Russia in recognizing these ‘independent states.’ Referring to this strain in relations with Russia, Kazakhstani experts also note that Moscow is concerned about Kazakhstan’s continued level of cooperation with NATO, and these factors combined suggest there could be grounds for Moscow to become more assertive in its foreign, defence and security policies in Central Asia.⁹³

One possible way of avoiding this potentially longer term negative development in the impact of geopolitics on the region, or offsetting the impact of the Kremlin reasserting its regional security role, would be to advocate closer cooperation in Central Asia between the US and Russia. Part of the policy problem in this regard is the lack of an obvious mechanism to do so and the sensitivity in the region about national sovereignty.⁹⁴ However, experts in Kazakhstan see little realistic prospect for deep and systemic US–Russian security cooperation within the region. Although Moscow and Washington may have common goals in Central Asia, the problem remains one of coordination, with little appetite in either capital for overcoming the policy issues inhibiting genuine security cooperation between these powers in such a strategically important region.⁹⁵

This also extends into multilateral frameworks involving the United States and Russia, especially NATO and the CSTO, where political factors limit the scope for strengthening security cooperation.⁹⁶ Some Alliance members object on political grounds to any official cooperation occurring between NATO and the CSTO, as it is considered as a mechanism to boost Russia’s role in the region, while the level of each organization and internal divisions on such policy issues are not likely to be resolved anytime soon.

Kazakhstani security specialists believe that, although there are no serious policy differences in terms of promoting regional security, Washington and Moscow are likely to pursue only very limited cooperative arrangements in Central Asia. In the

meantime, Astana is staking a great deal on the further transformation of the CSTO, a process in which it has been actively involved since 2008. Nevertheless, the efforts to improve the level of security cooperation and options for the CSTO taking real action during a crisis are not driven by factors linked to Afghanistan.⁹⁷

Astana views the CSTO as an essential multilateral security organization that may respond to the evolving sources of potential instability surrounding the CSTO. Similar to Moscow and Minsk, policy-makers in Astana have become convinced in recent years that the CSTO must be transformed beyond a merely collective security organization, prepared to act against external threats, and adopt new powers to act across a wider remit of potential security crises. Although the CSTO was already implementing radical change to its structures and potential areas of action in a future security crisis, the violence in southern Kyrgyzstan in June 2010 served as an additional stimulus in this process of organizational transformation. Indeed, changes to the organization since then have tried to reconcile the existence of 20,000-strong multilateral rapid reaction forces with the security environment; this has resulted in its members agreeing to widen the scope for using this force to include domestic or environmental crises.⁹⁸

The CSTO is in transformation, and is arguably undergoing an internal crisis of its own following the de facto withdrawal of Uzbekistan from the organization, raising many questions over its potential to act during a regional security crisis. However, this process is not driven by the situation in Afghanistan but stems from widespread agreement among the CSTO members that they should enhance their military capabilities, meet modern and emerging threats and challenges, and improve the organization's legal framework to facilitate action in response to a future security crisis that overstretches the capabilities of any individual member state and thus requires multilateral operations. As part of this process the CSTO will also attempt to strengthen information security among its members, and some have even pushed for multilateral support if a member state is confronted by an 'Arab Spring' scenario.⁹⁹

The CSTO's Collective Rapid Reaction Forces (*Kollektivnyye Sily Operativnogo Reagirovaniya* or KSOR) must also not be viewed as a primarily Afghanistan-linked contingency force. The creation of KSOR occurred long before the Obama Administration announced its intention to end combat operations in Afghanistan. The force structure is not modelled on counter-insurgency operations, and in theory it can be used in numerous ways.¹⁰⁰ However, the scenarios deployed in the annual

military exercises since 2009 in which KSOR has been trained do not present conclusive evidence of a greater emphasis upon counter-insurgency.

CSTO officials and Russian politicians advocate a greater role for the organization in ensuring Central Asian security post-2014. However, beyond the political rhetoric involved, there is no real correlation between the existence of KSOR and the distant and hypothetical risk of a militant incursion into Central Asia orchestrated from Afghanistan. In order for the host nation in the CSTO to request assistance from the organization during a security crisis, it would need to reach a scale that overstretches its own defence and security forces.¹⁰¹ This scenario may gain some traction in the smaller Central Asian states where the militaries, security structures and intelligence agencies are weakest, namely Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, but simply does not hold in the case of either Kazakhstan or Uzbekistan. The latter countries are certainly capable of dealing with such a low-intensity threat without recourse to a multilateral framework.

In such scenarios Tashkent is highly unlikely to become involved in any direct capacity; in any case its 'power projection' capabilities remain very limited. This would leave a situation in which the CSTO is triggered to act in the region in response to an Afghanistan-linked security threat stemming from an incursion into Tajikistan or Kyrgyzstan as the only hypothetical cases. Within the CSTO Security Council, agreement between Kazakhstan and Russia would be an essential prerequisite for any action, but the process is likely to be complex and may not result in a speedy response.¹⁰² But in order to deploy a sizeable force grouping using the KSOR to de-escalate or contain the security crisis, the sheer scale of the initial incursion would already take the scenario into the implausible.

Moreover, careful examination of the KSOR military exercises since 2009 reveals that the approach adopted by the commanders resembles much more clearly a combined-arms operation against a conventionally armed adversary.¹⁰³ Consequently, for the scenario to be played out and for the KSOR to be at its most effective, the 'Taliban' or 'Taliban-inspired' incursion would have to include conventional force elements presumably acquired through collusion with the Afghan National Army (ANA). Anything on a smaller scale or more realistic could be dealt with by supporting host-nation forces in a joint operation conducted at a bilateral level.

Nevertheless, one of the fundamental weaknesses in the CSTO is that the scenario planning for military exercises involving the new rapid reaction forces relies heavily on Russian planning and Russian threat assessment. Moreover, in Astana's view, if

hypothetically a 'bleed out' from Afghanistan resulted in a security crisis within Kazakhstan, it is unlikely that any multilateral force response would be required. Astana attaches high priority to the CSTO in its defence and security policy, but this is certainly not rooted in an assessment connecting it to Afghanistan or a possible deterioration in domestic security after 2014.¹⁰⁴

Equally, Kazakhstan has proved to be an active participant in the security dimension of the SCO. However, its leading experts consider the role of the SCO in relation to Afghanistan to be more restricted to economic issues.¹⁰⁵ Astana sees no realistic prospect for the SCO 'intervening' or taking concrete action in the unlikely event of a regional security crisis stemming from Afghanistan-related scenarios.¹⁰⁶

This is based upon recognition of the fundamental conundrum at the heart of the SCO: Moscow and Beijing have different visions for its future development. Moscow would like to see the SCO emerge as a security organization, whereas Beijing wants to limit its development mainly to the economic sphere. In a security crisis, achieving consensus to act between Moscow and Beijing, let alone defining the strategic aims of such operations, is highly unlikely. Therefore, among security experts in Kazakhstan, if not within the corridors of power itself, the question is raised as to what exactly the SCO could do during a Central Asian security crisis.¹⁰⁷

Moreover, some experts in Kazakhstan regard the potential role of the SCO post-2014 as restricted to mediation or humanitarian assistance. Its scope to contribute positively if a security crisis were to occur remains rather limited.¹⁰⁸ These security specialists believe that the main source of conflict in Central Asia is rooted in poor socio-economic conditions and that the SCO could do more to contribute to economic development and resolve water issues, among other concerns, or to act as a forum in which to discuss the region's most urgent security challenges.¹⁰⁹

Conclusion

Kazakhstan is not preparing contingency plans for a marked deterioration in regional security as a result of the NATO drawdown in Afghanistan, simply because there is no perceived real need to do so, as Astana sees it. Neither its expert community nor the state security structures expect the post-2014 security environment to differ so significantly that adjustments would be required to defence and security policy.¹¹⁰ The search for signs of increased activity in the country's defence or security forces,

or policy initiatives aimed at boosting security in response to this hypothetical threat is therefore largely redundant.

Despite Kazakhstan's participation in NATO's PfP, its advances in defence capabilities and force structure through actively cooperating with NATO members in various bilateral defence and security assistance programmes, and its commitment to supporting the NDN, Astana never regarded Afghanistan as 'its war.' The country's leadership resisted several years of pressure from London and Washington to send peacekeepers to Afghanistan, and after a political commitment by President Nursultan Nazarbayev to send a small number of officers to ISAF HQ in Kabul, the process became trapped in Kazakhstan's Senate in May 2011.¹¹¹

Some foreign observers have suggested that this might have been stimulated by the Taliban reportedly threatening to target Kazakhstan should it send its peacekeepers to Afghanistan, but this is way off the mark. There was never any great enthusiasm in Astana to send members of KAZBAT/KAZBRIG to Afghanistan, and it was only supported by the country's General Staff as a means to deepen their experience of international peace support operations. It was never successfully implemented precisely due to the feeling among the country's security experts, and shared by the security elite, that Afghanistan was not their war.¹¹²

This sense of geographical distance from the conflict and recognition that it was not a conflict that the country wished to become a party to influences security thinking on the level of cooperation on offer to the Alliance. Astana is willing actively to support the withdrawal process by agreeing to allow the NDN reverse transit to bring heavy organic military equipment out of Afghanistan and transit through its territory en route to its point of origin. However, it has not requested any direct benefits from the NATO drawdown such as the equipment transfers sought by its neighbours.¹¹³

Kazakhstan's security documents, and in particular its 2011 Military Doctrine, indicate that the country's security elite does not anticipate a major shift in the security environment post-2014.¹¹⁴ The country's armed forces and security forces show no sign of additional reform or shifts in posture in response to the drawdown from Afghanistan, and military exercises likewise do not reveal any increased interest in rehearsing counter-insurgency or counter-terrorist operations. The single most important policy implication for Western planning staffs, therefore, is to note the sharp divide between perspectives in Astana on the 2014 drawdown contrasted with views elsewhere in the region, especially in Tashkent.

4. Tashkent: Pursuing the ‘Uzbek Way’ on Security

All the potential multilateral security options to strengthen Central Asian security in the context of 2014 and NATO’s end to combat operations in Afghanistan face a reality check and are often completely contradicted by the leading strategic actor in the region: Uzbekistan. Yet, the perspectives in Tashkent on the drawdown from Afghanistan, the possible developments in that state post-2014 and its implications for security in Central Asia are precisely those least understood in Western capitals. Uzbekistan’s role in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and its perspectives on the security activities of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) are equally unfathomable for Western policy-makers.¹¹⁵

These issues are examined here from Tashkent’s perspective in an effort to address some of the common misperceptions about Uzbekistan’s security policies. The key assertion is that these policies and widespread scepticism of the potential or present course of development in the CSTO or the SCO reflect deep systemic analysis among Uzbekistan’s expert community, as well as constant monitoring of the security situation in Afghanistan and Central Asia by its government agencies. Tashkent adopts a more independent stance on foreign and security policy issues than its neighbours, and its proximity to Afghanistan will always make the country a key player in assisting even indirectly in long-term regional stability efforts.

CSTO Transformation: ‘Rapid Reaction’ and ‘Mission Creep’

The extent to which Tashkent sees multilateral security mechanisms as plausible or even preferred ways to bolster security in the region post-2014, or indeed actually chooses to pursue alternatives, can be seen with reference its attitude to the CSTO. As Tashkent prepares for 2014, there are no indications that it considers the CSTO as even remotely contributing to its security or boosting regional security. This has its origins in the nature of Tashkent’s complex relations with its CSTO partners and objections to the organization’s transformation, as well as its assessment of the potential role the body might play in any Afghanistan-linked security crisis within Central Asia.¹¹⁶

Changes to the threat environment in Central Asia, Moscow’s security concerns over the US military presence and influence within the region, and the widespread recognition that Afghanistan will continue to be a potential source of regional

instability, especially if the Taliban prove to be successful in their insurgency efforts at the expense of NATO forces, all served as a set of disparate factors which set in motion significant changes to the CSTO.¹¹⁷ The nature of these changes, its aims and origins are critical factors in establishing the level of growing discontentment in Tashkent concerning both the CSTO transition and its possible role in strengthening Central Asian security in relation to Afghanistan-linked threats.

Viewed from each capital of the CSTO members, these changes and the organizational transformation could appear to serve national interests, or be left open to varied interpretation, but one country has consistently opposed the entire process: Uzbekistan. Not all of the CSTO members (Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) regarded the developmental priorities for the organization in the same way, and indeed two countries stood out as the main drivers in conducting a de facto reform of the body, namely Kazakhstan and Russia. Astana and Moscow therefore placed themselves at the forefront of efforts to transform the CSTO, and this began with discussion on the possible creation of a new force structure. Arguably Minsk also later became a driver in this process, but its interests revolved around persuading the CSTO to act in domestic crises with host government consent. Nonetheless, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan were assigned the role of policy-takers rather than policy-makers within the CSTO.¹¹⁸

In 2007-2008 Moscow and Astana explored ways in which the existing CSTO structures might be enhanced, particularly in the areas of peacekeeping and rapid reaction forces. Since 2007 the CSTO suggested participating in peacekeeping operations under UN auspices internationally or non-UN mandated operations within its member states, and it finally staged its first peacekeeping exercise in Kazakhstan in October 2012, called 'Enduring Brotherhood'.¹¹⁹ Since 2002, the CSTO has possessed a limited 'rapid reaction' capability centred upon the Collective Rapid Deployment Forces (*Kollektivnyye Sily Bystrogo Razvertyvaniya* or KSBR), a force numbering no more than 4,500 and tasked with a counter-terrorist responsibility.¹²⁰

Uzbekistan had been sceptical about the KSBR, and despite the annual military exercises which served to 'test' or more accurately 'showcase' the CSTO's counter-terrorist capabilities through the KSBR, few regarded it as a credible force. The exercises were frequently criticised for more closely resembling a combined-arms exercise with little to link it in real terms to counter-terrorism. Indeed, the main criticism made against the CSTO generally, even by Russian specialists, was that it was basically a 'paper' organization, and the KSBR and even the CSTO airbase

in Kant, which is in reality a Russian Air Force facility in Kyrgyzstan, or the 201st Russian Military Base, with its headquarters in Dushanbe, never really broke free from the ‘paper’ force interpretation.¹²¹

The fruits of Russian and Kazakhstani discussions in 2007-2008 emerged around the recognition that the CSTO was in essence a collective security body designed only to counter external threats. It had a collective defence article similar to NATO’s Article 5, compelling other members to act if one member is attacked, but that aggression had to be external in its origins. Adapting this to fit a much broader range of potential threats or military operations meant changing the whole nature of the organization, but to carry out such a deep transformation, there needed to be certain structures put in place in order to justify reforming the legal basis of the CSTO and increase its scope for action.¹²²

This resulted in an informal CSTO summit held in Borovoye, Kazakhstan, in December 2008 to discuss the idea of creating a new force structure in the form of a greatly expanded rapid reaction force. The idea was first aired by Astana, but following the Russia–Georgia conflict in August 2008 Moscow had given the idea fresh impetus. The first sign of trouble ahead within the CSTO over this issue was signalled by the absence of any representation at the informal summit from Uzbekistan; few paid attention either to the Borovoye meeting or Tashkent’s absence.¹²³

The focal point of Borovoye 2008 was therefore to air the issue of and garner support for the formation of a new force structure in the CSTO, with some early reference to a broader range of security crises in which it might be activated, though these details needed further refinement. What emerged in its aftermath was only a tentative agreement, and not among all CSTO members, to create the Collective Rapid Reaction Forces (*Kollektivnyye Sily Operativnogo Reagirovaniya* or KSOR). The new force would be up to 20,000 strong and tasked with operational use in counter-terrorism and other security crises that might erupt on the territories of member states.¹²⁴

KSOR was formally created six months later during the Moscow CSTO summit in June 2009. It did not replace, nor was it intended to replace, the existing KSBR; both were exercised simultaneously in September 2011. Only five members of the CSTO signed the initial KSOR agreement, with Belarus and Uzbekistan withholding consent. Bilateral ties were strained at the time between Moscow and Minsk, which may have contributed to the delay in Belarusian approval, combined with domestic legislation which prohibited it from deploying its military forces abroad.¹²⁵ It soon

transpired that Tashkent opposed the KSOR on principle, and these specific areas of concern relate to force composition, its expanded mandate and the terms on which it may be authorised to act.

On force composition, Tashkent advocated that all members contribute equally with an equal say in all operational and training issues. What resulted, however, was a force structure that mainly consisted of units from Russia and Kazakhstan placed under Russian command. KSOR is formed mainly from the elite Russian airborne forces (*Vozdushno-Desantnyye Voiska* or VDV) and Kazakhstan's airmobile forces. Russia contributes the VDV 98th Airborne Division (Ivanovo) and 31st Air Assault Brigade (AAB) (Ulyanovsk), Kazakhstan its 37th AAB (Taldykurgon).¹²⁶ Kazakhstan and Russia provide Special Forces – Kazakhstani Arystan and Russian Rys and Bars, in addition to combat air support; Kazakhstan also contributes a marine battalion. Other CSTO members offer smaller forces (Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan each provide one battalion), while Belarus contributes 2,000 personnel, including its 5th Spetsnaz Brigade, an interior ministry Almaz unit, a KGB Alpha antiterrorist unit and an additional emergencies ministry unit.

In the period 2009-2010, these arguments went unresolved as the transformation process continued. Tashkent raised its objections with its partners and also bilaterally with Moscow, opposing the force structure, and arguing that any move to increase the tasking for the KSOR would push the CSTO beyond its collective security origins. Eventually, after Minsk finally signed the KSOR agreement on 26 May 2010, Tashkent appeared more isolated within the CSTO, though it did not back down on any of its core concerns.¹²⁷

With Tashkent opposing the KSOR structure, which appeared in its command levels to be 'Russia-heavy' and to have an unequal representation of members within the KSOR, it continued to object to efforts to broaden the mandate for the new CSTO force.¹²⁸ Despite that opposition the other CSTO members agreed to a wider range of security crises that might trigger the use of KSOR, including a domestic security crisis in which a member state calls for assistance and natural or man-made disasters; in short, the CSTO could send the KSOR into action even if the source of the security threat was internal to the organization or located within the territory of a member state. Tashkent also opposed any effort to abandon the need for all members to approve such military action, endeavouring to uphold the CSTO's original principle of consensus.¹²⁹

The extent to which Moscow was pushing these initiatives – albeit with full approval and support from Astana, which functioned as the key axis in this transformation for the CSTO – was further compounded in 2009 by Russia's efforts to open a second airbase in Kyrgyzstan. Although Moscow dropped this plan following the downfall of the Bakiyev regime in Bishkek in April 2010, Tashkent was alarmed by the manner in which Moscow had handled the whole affair.¹³⁰ At no point during Moscow's efforts to open an airbase in southern Kyrgyzstan, close to Uzbekistan's borders, did Russian officials inform Tashkent either through the CSTO or bilaterally; at the very least this seemed to be a breach of diplomatic protocol. The disagreement was also a CSTO issue, since such changes to basing options in the region should be subject to consultation and information exchange among members.¹³¹

By the Moscow CSTO summit in December 2010 the die was cast, and a number of amendments to the founding charter made possible the earlier agreement to authorize the deployment of the KSOR in a much wider set of security crises.¹³² Moreover, as part of the CSTO transformation, amendments were signed to abrogate the need for full consensus to approve military action: in the future the KSOR could be sent into combat operations after a majority of the CSTO members voted in favour. Other CSTO members argued that this was needed in order to prevent the organization becoming dysfunctional by, for instance, one member blocking action during a security crisis.¹³³

Despite Uzbekistan's disapproval of these initiatives the KSOR was formed, and the force staged military exercises in 2009-2010 and again in September 2011 during the Russian operational-strategic exercise Tsentr 2011. Its mandate for operational use had been widened, the CSTO principle of consensus had been replaced with a majority vote being sufficient for it to act, and the CSTO had effectively added to its original collective security mandate.¹³⁴

Underlying all Tashkent's objections in this period was a legal argument that no other member adequately answered or refuted. Uzbekistan essentially argued that the organization's founding charter does not permit any major change within or to the organization without the consent its members. In this sense, without Tashkent signing the KSOR agreement, the force is *de facto* illegal. Equally, changing the principle for the need for full consent by its members in order to authorize the use of the new force also contravened this basic legal need for agreement by all CSTO members. None of the members could initiate any significant changes within the CSTO that bypassed the need for full consensus.¹³⁵

All other CSTO members based the need for these fundamental changes on the fact that, when the organization was ‘tested’ in June 2010, it was legally unable to react to the crisis in southern Kyrgyzstan. Had the political will existed to send a CSTO force to Kyrgyzstan, it was still effectively legally impossible to do so because the crisis had not originated in an act of external aggression against the country.¹³⁶

At a political level Tashkent fundamentally objected to the CSTO transformation away from mere collective organization of defence to adding new responsibilities and capabilities. For Tashkent these were hardly abstract arguments, since the likely location of KSOR military operations would have been in the Fergana Valley, close to Uzbekistan’s borders. Bilateral discussions on these areas of disagreement continued between Tashkent and Moscow until and after June 2012, when Uzbekistan made its controversial decision to suspend its participation within the CSTO. Uzbek security specialists emphasize that Moscow is fully aware of Tashkent’s stance on all these issues.¹³⁷

Suspension of ‘Participation’ in CSTO Activities

Tashkent had therefore already produced and raised a number of concerns about the trajectory of the CSTO’s transformation. These concerns were the subject of ongoing closed bilateral discussions with Moscow, and decisions were taken on a case-by-case basis regarding whether Uzbekistan should participate in official CSTO meetings. This process culminated in June 2012 in what many came to regard as Tashkent reaching the controversial decision to exit the CSTO, prompting erroneous speculation that this might pave the way for the country to host a foreign military base, as well as a great deal of media attention on the reasons underlying its ‘membership’ suspension.¹³⁸

To untangle the various interpretations of Tashkent’s actions, its motives, aims and how this was presented in the Russian media, it is necessary to establish some core facts. These must be clarified in order to identify the distinction between how the suspension was presented in the Russian media, which in turn spread into Western views of this development, and the exact nature of Tashkent’s move to distance itself from CSTO policy on key issues. The overriding error contained in much of the reporting, and even in expert commentary, was to overlook the fact that Uzbekistan had not reached its decision on a whim, but reluctantly took this step after several years of opposing conceptual changes in the CSTO.¹³⁹

On 20 June 2012 Tashkent dispatched a diplomatic note to the CSTO secretariat in Moscow to outline its position on the transformation of the CSTO, including its

reasons for effectively freezing or suspending its participation in the organization.¹⁴⁰ At this critical stage, it is important to note a gap of several days before the Russian media began to report on Tashkent's actions; during this hiatus it is likely that, although Moscow had anticipated some sort of demarche from Uzbekistan, additional time was needed to formulate a public response. Within a few days, consequently, in late June 2012, the Russian media published numerous articles portraying Tashkent as taking an irrational decision to suspend its membership of the CSTO, and characterized official policy in Uzbekistan as at best erratic and unpredictable.¹⁴¹

It was also particularly noticeable that officials in other CSTO member states such as Belarus or Kazakhstan offered a more measured and muted response to Tashkent's statement. These officials in Minsk and Astana spoke of requiring time to study the note and avoiding issuing any prompt response, stressing that this needed discussion among CSTO members.¹⁴²

Tashkent's diplomatic note to the CSTO secretariat suspended the country's 'participation' in the CSTO, not its membership. The distinction is important, and the position adopted by Tashkent is far from irrational but rooted in conveying its strongest possible objections to the future direction of the CSTO within the organization's legal framework. This legal framework refers to the original Collective Security Treaty (CST) Charter and subsequent agreements which prohibit a member country from either suspending its membership or unilaterally withdrawing.¹⁴³

On the latter point, if a member of the CSTO chooses to withdraw from the organization it must according to protocol submit this decision to the CSTO at an official level, providing the organization with six months advanced notice of its intention to pull out. Finally this would be discussed and accepted by all other members during a CSTO summit. In June 2012 Uzbekistan did not inform other CSTO members of any decision to withdraw from the body, and in fact suspended only its *participation*, since suspending membership would have been illegal; there is simply no legal mechanism allowing this option.¹⁴⁴

In essence, Tashkent's decision constitutes a protest action against the direction of the CSTO, and especially over these initiatives occurring without its approval or consent. Speaking off the record to Russian media sources, officials in Uzbekistan's foreign ministry explained that the diplomatic note focussed on two main justifications for the decision: attempts to place Afghanistan on the CSTO agenda, and the increasing militarization of the organization.¹⁴⁵

On the first point, Tashkent opposition to the CSTO raising security issues related to Afghanistan reflects more than its wider concern about the overall direction of the organization. On principle Uzbekistan objects to two key points: the CSTO assuming 'NATO-like' global functions within the former Soviet space, and the multilateral approach it has adopted to Afghanistan post-2014. Since Uzbekistan suspended its participation in the CSTO, Moscow has indeed pushed relentlessly to portray the organization as preparing for a 'worst case' scenario in Afghanistan post-2014 and positioning itself to act to protect Central Asian security during any future Afghanistan-linked crisis. These views were expressed publicly by the CSTO Secretary-General Nikolai Bordyuzha, which prompted some Russian experts to note his apparently gleeful stance about security in the region inevitably deteriorating and casting Russia as a regional guarantor of security.¹⁴⁶

Tashkent's second objection concerning the increasing militarization of the CSTO actually extends well beyond its position on the KSOR. The evidence that, mainly as a result of Moscow's security policy, the CSTO is seeking to strengthen its military dimension and de facto militarize itself stems from changes to the CSTO command structure. Moscow acting alone, and without consulting its allies during the formulation period, developed a revised vision for the CSTO military command which would have united all CSTO forces, including KSBR, KSOR and the peacekeeping forces, under a single unified command. Moscow sold this concept to its CSTO allies on the basis of further strengthening the CSTO, as well as streamlining and enhancing its command and control.¹⁴⁷

However, the new structure, earmarked to be led by a Russian general, had some features that caused anxiety in Tashkent. Quite apart from the favoured candidate in Moscow being Colonel-General Vladimir Shamanov, the commander of the Airborne Forces (VDV) with a reputation for ruthlessness established during the second Chechnya conflict, the systemic change to the command structure had significant implications. These modifications would allow the command to bypass both the Collective Security Council and the Collective Defence Ministers' council, implying at least in theory that its actual subordination to the Kremlin.¹⁴⁸

The rapid media campaign in Moscow effectively obscured these issues from public view and misrepresented Uzbekistan's position on a range of CSTO issues, while using the familiar motif in criticizing Tashkent of portraying the regime as unpredictable and subject to sudden policy reversal. By December 2012, writing in the *Financial Times*, even the award-winning Ahmed Rashid referred to Uzbekistan as having

‘withdrawn’ from the CSTO.¹⁴⁹ Tashkent could hardly compete with the power of Russian dominance of the post-Soviet information space.

This included persistent references to Uzbekistan withdrawing from the CSTO previously, only to re-join the organization in 2006. Unfortunately, few experts in Russia or among Western commentators noticed the misrepresentation in this portrayal of Tashkent’s involvement in the CSTO – it had never in fact withdrawn from the organization.¹⁵⁰ In 2000 Tashkent declined to renew its membership of the Collective Security Treaty. By 2002 this body had been transformed into the CSTO, and in 2006 Tashkent chose to become a member. On both occasions it reached this policy stance based on evaluating its own national security interests.

Nonetheless, even in the Russian media misrepresentation of Tashkent’s June 2012 protest against the CSTO transformation, masking its deeper concerns about the legality of the changes adopted by the other members that contravened the CST charter, some of its aspects point to Moscow managing its own interests within the CSTO. For example, the characterization of Uzbekistan as a troublesome CSTO member that should be removed in order to facilitate further organizational development and unity emerged publicly in December 2011 after the Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka suggested that Uzbekistan should be thrown out of the CSTO due to its opposition to key policy issues. Sources in the Russian presidential administration later confirmed, however, that the statement made by Lukashenka had been ‘requested’ by the Kremlin in order to create the impression that pressure on Uzbekistan was not simply emanating from Moscow; in fact, the Lukashenka statement had been ‘pre-cooked.’¹⁵¹

The apparent crisis within the CSTO, discussed during the CSTO summit in December 2012, was therefore long in the making. But Tashkent was not the initiator of that crisis, which had its origins in the steps being discussed at the informal CSTO summit at Borovoye in December 2008 as a precursor to the creation of the KSOR. And this crisis deepened with every additional step towards changing the organization away from being rooted in collective defence acting on the principle of full consensus to a new style organization capable of action across a wider range of security crises and no longer requiring agreement among all its members. The Moscow CSTO summit in December 2012 formally suspended Uzbekistan’s membership and agreed to proceed without this key member, while Tashkent may still argue that these decisions are illegal according to the existing framework of the organization.¹⁵²

Tashkent finally arrived at the conclusion that its real security interests may not be best served by participating at any level within the CSTO, and therefore, within only a few days of President Vladimir Putin's visit to Tashkent in early June 2012 and President Islam Karimov signing a strategic partnership with China on the sidelines of the SCO summit in Beijing, a diplomatic note was presented to the CSTO. Uzbekistan's actions did not result in or precipitate any reduction in the level of its defence and security cooperation with Russia, and the spat at the CSTO level had no knock-on effect on bilateral relations.¹⁵³

Moreover, it is worth highlighting the linkage to Afghanistan, which was not an exclusive element in the reasoning underlying Tashkent's revised policy on the CSTO: Uzbekistan considers that the CSTO has no role to play in strengthening security in Central Asia in relation to Afghanistan. Its assessment of the KSOR from a military perspective alone is that such a force would struggle to deploy operationally in Central Asia to counter any incursion by Taliban-inspired militants. At the political level, seen from Tashkent the CSTO transformation is rooted in Moscow's efforts to provide a multilateral cloak for any future emergency operation it might mount in the region, while all the changes made to the CSTO to facilitate such options are illegal without the consent of all its members, including Uzbekistan.¹⁵⁴

At a practical policy level these issues are vitally significant for Uzbekistan's national security. In any hypothetical security crisis in Central Asia post-2014 linked directly or indirectly to Afghanistan, the question of how and under what circumstances a KSOR response might be invoked becomes urgent and pressing. Depending upon the precise details and the circumstances of such a security crisis, Tashkent may choose tacitly to support KSOR containment operations close to its borders without direct participation, or equally it might object. Uzbek defence and security specialists consider it impossible to imagine the likelihood of CSTO combat operations occurring in Central Asia without Uzbekistan's tacit approval. This makes sense in terms of Uzbekistan being the most populous and strategically important country in the region and the likelihood that any operations would involve Uzbekistan's logistical support. In other words, at some level, Tashkent's support would be needed.¹⁵⁵

Paradoxically, this undeclared understanding between Moscow and Tashkent concerning the potential role of Uzbekistan in any regional security crisis really renders the question of whether Tashkent remains a participant, member or non-member of the CSTO largely irrelevant.¹⁵⁶ Despite the actual position of Uzbekistan at any time

on the CSTO, it would remain a key player in any effort to restore regional security; whether directly or indirectly.

From its entry into the CSTO in 2006, Uzbekistan frequently proved reluctant to participate fully in the organization, abstaining from attending its summits, refusing to participate in CSTO military exercises and opposing numerous proposals to improve the organization. In its preparations for the possible scenarios that may unfold in Afghanistan and their implications for its national security or the wider regional stability, Tashkent's leading defence and security experts pay little attention to the CSTO as it presently stands as a factor in dealing with any of these contingencies. In December 2012, according to the CSTO press secretary Vladimir Zainetdinov, the collective Security Council meeting in Moscow would among other issues discuss 'Uzbekistan's decision to *suspend its participation* in the CSTO activity.'¹⁵⁷

However, its June 2012 decision to freeze its involvement within the CSTO, while stopping short of complete withdrawal, did not occur in isolation and should be understood as part of the country's wider preparations for 2014. These preparations are quintessentially calibrated to harness its own security capabilities and to cooperate selectively on security at a bilateral level with the country's partners.¹⁵⁸

The Role of Afghanistan in Tashkent's Security Policy

Thus the idea, popular in some expert commentaries or within Western policy-making circles, that the CSTO might be encouraged to play a more pro-active role in ensuring Central Asian security post-2014 is not widely shared within the region, particularly in Uzbekistan. Tashkent, despite its membership of the CSTO since 2006, regards the organization as mainly a tool for Russian security policy in the region. Uzbekistan's policy-makers do not attach great importance to the CSTO in contributing to the country's security, and this is intrinsically linked to the central role played by Afghanistan in Tashkent's security policy.¹⁵⁹

It is not possible to establish the role of a threat assessment related to Afghanistan by examining the country's security framework documents.¹⁶⁰ The National Security Concept of 1997 and the Defence Doctrine of 2000 remain classified as state secrets and consequently remain unpublished, but the country's leadership has consistently cited Afghanistan as the main potential threat to national security. Of course there were domestic linkages such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), but the security elite always regarded the key threat or set of threats as stemming from

Afghanistan, and the possible de-stabilization of the region as linked to Afghanistan-related security issues.¹⁶¹

In the 1990s Uzbekistan was at the forefront of protecting Central Asia when the Taliban threat was underestimated by Western governments. Since the overthrow of the Taliban and the start of Operation Enduring Freedom in October 2001, many Western experts have accused the authorities in Tashkent of hyping the 'threat' issue concerning terrorism or Afghanistan in an attempt to deflect Western criticism over human rights or democratization concerns. However, renewed IMU activity in Afghanistan raises further concerns for Uzbek security experts.¹⁶²

Nonetheless, three factors underlying the role played by Afghanistan in the calculations surrounding Uzbekistan's security policy need to be understood, as well as the deeper aspects of the policy-making machinery at work within the governmental system. These concern threat assessment, the continuous monitoring of the security situation in Afghanistan and the country's capacity to establish these views independently.

The first point should have powerful resonance with Western policy-makers: Uzbekistan is the only country in Central Asia with a sufficiently advanced intelligence infrastructure to facilitate genuine national threat assessments. This not only reflects professional differences in the distinctiveness of the National Security Service (*Sluzhba Natsionalnoy Bazapasnosti* or SNB), but also its access to the quality and quantity of human intelligence in Afghanistan through the Uzbek diaspora in the country. The SNB is known to have intelligence-sharing relationships with Russia, India and China; however, its close intelligence cooperation with Moscow does not inhibit the formation of independent threat assessments. Elsewhere in Central Asia, national security services are much more dependent upon Russian intelligence threat assessments and access to their Russian counterparts. Moreover, Uzbekistan's government-linked think tanks seem more able to contribute to the policy-making machinery than in other Central Asian states, while expert views are not as easily disregarded.¹⁶³

Through this intelligence assessment network and the work of Uzbekistan's government-linked think tanks, Tashkent has developed the capacity to continuously monitor developments in Afghanistan and its implications for the country and regional security. This body of detailed research and expert knowledge feeds into the policy-making community, and subsequently its level of influence is more developed than in other regional capitals.

Finally, these distinguishing factors enable Tashkent to form security policy much more independently of Moscow, despite its close cooperation with Russia on defence and security. Although Tashkent and Moscow cooperate very closely on intelligence issues, unlike the other security services within the region Uzbekistan does not rely heavily on Russian threat assessments. As a result, Tashkent will frequently openly disagree with Moscow on security issues, which the Russian government and its government-linked media portray as evidence that Uzbekistan is simply unreliable as a security partner. This also partly explains why the Uzbek government resisted the idea of the CSTO issuing NATO-like joint communiqués following CSTO summits; in reality the regional governments have no firmly established views on issues such as missile defence, which Moscow uses to portray its own position as being supported within this multilateral framework.

Tashkent recognizes that Central Asian countries have limited capacity to influence developments within Afghanistan, but nevertheless it has also become more pro-active in Afghanistan, despite offering only lukewarm support for the Istanbul Initiative launched in November 2011. In 2011 Uzbekistan completed the construction of a major rail route into northern Afghanistan from Termez to Mazar-i-Sharif. Uzbekistan's key lending partner in such infrastructure projects is the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and support from the ADB facilitated the country in becoming the first and only supplier of round-the-clock electricity to Kabul, providing 1.2 billion kW/hours of electricity per annum. The ADB was also used to assist in Uzbekistan in completing work on the major rail link into Afghanistan which has helped to support ISAF.¹⁶⁴

At a foreign policy level, Tashkent has consistently argued that military force alone would not result in success in stabilizing Afghanistan. Since the NATO summit in Bucharest in April 2008, Tashkent has also advocated a revised version of the contact group on Afghanistan, modified to include NATO in a '6+3' format (the US, Russia, NATO and Afghanistan's six neighbours). Tashkent opposes including Kabul within this framework since it axiomatically opposes multilateral efforts to deal with the fragile government in Kabul. This initiative was repeated by President Karimov in December 2012.

The country has also played a strategic and pivotal role in facilitating ISAF's Ground Lines of Communication (GLOCs) by opening up its territory as part of the Northern Distribution Network (NDN) to take supplies from northern Europe overland into Afghanistan. This proved most useful for ISAF as it sought to open alternative GLOCs due to militant pressure on the Pakistan GLOC. The costs involved in securing

Tashkent's continued involvement in the NDN, and in particular agreeing to 'reverse transit' in order to use the NDN to bring NATO hardware out of Afghanistan as part of the drawdown, are high priority short-term concerns for Western policy-makers. Although that hardware may be brought out in other ways, NATO governments are primarily concerned about minimizing the costs, and the NDN is believed to be the most cost-effective option. NATO capitals pay close attention to Uzbekistan's policy on this issue as well as to any hint that it might be affected by the question of the domestic succession.

These issues are viewed very differently from Tashkent's perspective. The country is at the forefront of efforts to ensure that the post-2014 security environment does not impact in any major way on the region or on its national security. Experts in Tashkent consider that the prospect of the NATO drawdown, or a period of protracted transition lasting another decade or more, present fundamental challenges to Central Asian security.¹⁶⁵

Tashkent's perspectives on the NATO drawdown from Afghanistan and its potential implications for security either domestically or in Central Asia can be divided into two broad themes: the future of Afghanistan post-2014, and possible scenarios for its development and the need to strengthen Uzbekistan's national security in anticipation of this transition period. On the first point, there is broad agreement among Uzbekistan's security experts that Kabul is not ready for the transition to commence in 2014: the Afghan National Army (ANA) and police lack sufficient quality manpower, with the majority of the recipients of Western security assistance training suffering from poor numeracy and literary skills.¹⁶⁶

Indeed, Tashkent views the presence of the ANA and its Western-sponsored training and equipment programmes as an additional source of concern, not only for the domestic situation in Afghanistan, but also how this force might be used under a replacement government or if sufficiently infiltrated by the Taliban. Western governmental delegations visiting Central Asian capitals to discuss issues linked to the NDN and the NATO drawdown are frequently surprised to discover that Tashkent voices concern both about the Taliban as well as Afghan security forces. The latter are themselves seen as a potential danger.¹⁶⁷

There is also a great measure of uncertainty concerning how Tashkent perceives the future of Afghanistan after 2014, mainly stemming from a number of variables, including the role to be played by Pakistan, the influence of other powers such as the

US, Russia, India and China, and Iran's policies towards Afghanistan. The primary source of uncertainty, however, concerns the fate of the Karzai government, and whether it will survive and ensure security.¹⁶⁸

Tashkent is considering the following three scenarios for Afghanistan post-2014:

1. Kabul will hold successful negotiations with the Taliban;
2. The Taliban will topple the Afghan government and return to power;
3. The present *de facto* civil war will continue.¹⁶⁹

Official statements indicate that Uzbekistan's leadership anticipates a deterioration of the security situation in Afghanistan after the cessation of NATO combat operations in 2014. Tashkent bases this view on its analysis of recent events in Afghanistan and its negative perceptions of the potential of the ANA and police post-2014, – these forces are expected to continue to be weak and disunited. Narco-trafficking and other transnational threats emanating from Afghanistan could well worsen too as a result of the NATO drawdown.

Some security experts in Uzbekistan regard the likelihood of an increased risk to Central Asia from Afghanistan-linked security threats as high across a range of transnational threat factors. This is compounded by the insidious involvement of Iran in Afghanistan and the difficulty of forecasting whether Tehran will step up its clandestine support for the Taliban in Afghanistan post-2014; the Taliban are also seen as having been involved in organized militant activity in Tajikistan in September 2010.¹⁷⁰

While Tashkent expects the security situation in Afghanistan to deteriorate after 2014, with negative implications for Central Asian security, this should not be interpreted as representing a 'doomsday scenario.' The starting point in this assessment is to recollect that, when the Taliban controlled the whole of Afghanistan in the late 1990s, no large-scale insurgency was triggered in Central Asia. The Taliban is not the same organization as in the 1990s, and in the worst case scenario it may not reach a point where it fully governs the entire country. Therefore, any preparations or adjustments needed to Uzbekistan's security efforts to 2014 and beyond need to be tailored to realistic rather than exaggerated assessments of the threat environment.¹⁷¹

What Tashkent does not advocate or consider a high priority in any efforts to strengthen Central Asian security linked to post-2014 Afghanistan are the

multilateral options: its experts believe there is little in reality that either the CSTO or the SCO can do to promote security and stability within the region. It is essential to appreciate that measures to enhance security will be provided from within, and only in certain areas will Tashkent add to this policy by pursuing and using bilateral defence and security cooperation.¹⁷²

As a result of the Obama administration restoring military aid to Uzbekistan in February 2012, Tashkent expects to receive \$1.5 million in military aid and access to excess defence articles (EDA), and it has already submitted requests for US military equipment.¹⁷³ Furthermore, Tashkent seeks to receive military equipment donations as part of the NATO drawdown process, though its main concern is to avoid any change in the military balance within the region. But it would be a mistake to assume that Uzbekistan's Armed Forces might acquire such assets to threaten its neighbours; it primarily wants to strengthen its counter-terrorist capabilities to meet any terrorist threat emanating from Afghanistan. Indeed, the long-term trend which began in the late 1990s in the development of Uzbekistan's armed forces will continue to lay emphasis upon small unit training for low-intensity conflict. Mountain warfare and counter-terrorist operations are a high priority in the armed forces, rather than combined-arms operations or peacekeeping missions.¹⁷⁴

Tashkent is more likely to prioritize strengthening intelligence collection and analysis, increasing intelligence cooperation over Afghanistan, entering into bilateral arrangements to train small units, including Special Forces from the defence ministry and other power ministries, and enhancing border security.¹⁷⁵ In order to raise its overall defence and security capabilities, Tashkent will seek to diversify its foreign military cooperation in order to procure weapons and equipment beyond its traditionally heavy reliance on the Russian arms market and reassess its access to foreign military training programmes. As Annette Bohr, associate fellow at Chatham House in London, observes President Karimov understands that the armed forces and security structures must be modernized to meet the challenges stemming from Afghanistan, and also that achieving this will entail some 'outsourcing' or using existing defence partnerships to facilitate such aims. These processes are evidently already underway.¹⁷⁶

The 'Uzbek Way:' Independent Security Policy and Cautious Bilateral Cooperation

As Uzbekistan prepares for the NATO drawdown in Afghanistan and a lengthy transition period to follow, it is clear that it will rely on its own capabilities to step

up security in the country. Tashkent is not only deeply sceptical about the potential of the CSTO to contribute to regional security, but this also extends to the SCO.¹⁷⁷ Other members of the SCO, such as Russia, have used rhetoric about a security belt being somehow constructed around Afghanistan by the SCO, yet Tashkent sees no realistic possibility for the organization to act during any future Afghanistan-linked security crisis in Central Asia.¹⁷⁸

In terms of the security dimension of the SCO, Uzbekistan has tried to cooperate at a certain level and as far as possible, but its reservations about the military exercises staged by the SCO have proved revealing. The question as to whether the SCO possesses the capacity to act during a security crisis in Central Asia pivots on the nature of the decision-making processes in its two leading members, China and Russia.¹⁷⁹

Tashkent has long held reservations concerning the efforts by the SCO to develop and strengthen its anti-terrorist capabilities. This centres on the SCO 'Peace Mission' military exercises, which grew out of bilateral Sino-Russian military exercises under the SCO umbrella.¹⁸⁰ Since the anti-terrorist Peace Mission exercises began, Tashkent has consistently avoided full participation. Tashkent chose to participate in only one such Peace Mission exercise, while only sending a few officers to the command element of Peace Mission 2007.¹⁸¹

The nature of Tashkent's reluctance to become more actively involved in such military exercises stems from the extent to which the early Peace Mission exercises were anti-terrorist in name only. The presence of submarines or heavy strategic bombers in early SCO exercises indicated that Moscow and Beijing had a very different combined-arms scenario in mind, which was seen in Tashkent as inconsistent with the real security needs of the Central Asian states.¹⁸²

However, the full extent of Tashkent's perspective on the potential for the SCO to act during a real security crisis in Central Asia can be gauged from a particularly apposite example provided by Peace Mission 2012, namely an exercise staged in northern Tajikistan in July 2012. On the surface, given Tashkent's earlier reticence to participate in such 'anti-terrorist' exercises, Peace Mission 2012 seemed much closer to a real anti-terrorist exercise; it was the smallest such exercise staged by the SCO and appeared to factor into its scenario Tajikistan's experience of militant activity in the country in 2010. Ahead of the exercise, Russia's defence ministry promoted the view that Peace Mission 2012 would witness the rehearsal of 'new methods' of interdicting a terrorist group and containing the situation.¹⁸³

Despite these seemingly positive factors, Tashkent deemed it a waste of time to send any representatives to the exercise. Moreover, the authorities also turned down a request from Astana to move Kazakhstani armed forces units and hardware through Uzbekistan en route to the exercise area.¹⁸⁴ Apparently, Tashkent not only decided to avoid the SCO exercise, but wanted to remind its members that in any real crisis logistical support, agreement between members on routes to move troops and strategic mobility would be critical factors facing the organization. Faced with the prospect of a real security crisis within the region, it appears that Uzbekistan's leadership considers the capacity of the SCO to initiate any action to be minimal to zero.¹⁸⁵

Faced with the prospect of the NATO drawdown in Afghanistan, Uzbekistan has made no efforts to strengthen its security through the CSTO or the SCO. Some Western security specialists point to Tashkent hosting the headquarters of the SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) as evidence that in some way it attaches great importance to the security dimension of the organization. However, although RATS should in theory facilitate information exchange on security issues directly affecting SCO member states, a number of factors reduce its practical value.¹⁸⁶ These range from the differences among members on the definition of terrorism or on which terrorist groups to include in its database, with no agreement on how to construct an integrated list of known terrorist groups or any effort to list individuals, as well as SCO members proving reluctant to share sensitive information through this multilateral channel. Neither SCO military exercises nor the continued work of the RATS serve to convince Uzbekistan's policy-makers that the SCO would prove an effective instrument to handle a security crisis.¹⁸⁷

These issues are reflected in a law on foreign policy approved by the Oliy Majlis, the lower chamber of Uzbekistan's parliament, on 1 August 2012. 'The Concept Paper on the Foreign Policy Activity of Uzbekistan' lays down the principle of the country's non-participation in politico-military blocs. This was essentially a restatement of the position outlined in earlier legislation such as the 1996 Main Principles of Foreign Policy Priorities or the 1992 Law on Defence.¹⁸⁸ The 2012 concept paper also effectively bans foreign military bases on the country's territory, but its precise wording appears to leave open the question of access to its facilities. The concept paper rules out any participation in peacekeeping operations abroad, which is the first statement of its kind by Uzbekistan's leadership.¹⁸⁹

Moreover, in the context of its suspension of participation in the CSTO in June 2012 and lukewarm support for SCO military exercises, the concept paper stresses that

the country is free to join any multilateral organization but reserves the option to withdraw if it becomes a military bloc. In effect, this statement of principle on foreign policy encapsulates Tashkent's pursuit of building its own security and guaranteeing its sovereignty by avoiding relying on any single great power.¹⁹⁰

This prompted Zabikhulla S. Saipov, lecturer in the School of World Politics in Tashkent, to conclude: 'The foreign policy behaviour of Uzbekistan reflects the country's firm stand in safeguarding its sovereignty that may at times clearly recall the principles of the Non-Aligned Movement, heralded by China, India, Indonesia and others, whose non-aligned posture saved them from being involved in individual ideological camps and proxy wars during the Cold War. Tashkent is fully conscious that the fortification of one's own security may lead to a proportional military build-up of a competitor, and thus it acts specifically to prevent the initiation of an arms race in Central Asia.'¹⁹¹

Nevertheless, although the 2012 foreign policy concept paper dampened speculation generated in the Russian media that Tashkent had stepped back from the CSTO in order to allow a US or NATO military base on its territory, it provides no evidence of neutrality, nor does it contradict any earlier outline of its foreign policy principles. Essentially, ahead of 2014, and convinced that security in Central Asia is likely to deteriorate as a result of the transition in Afghanistan, Tashkent is restating its fundamental approach to foreign and security policy, which is to pursue its own interests independently of other actors. As Annette Bohr and Gregory Gleason, Professor of Security Studies at the European Marshall Centre, have long noted, in economic development policy there is an 'Uzbek model, or "economic self-reliance."¹⁹² Similarly, a variant of this approach to policy-making feeds into foreign and security policy. Uzbekistan does not seek either isolation or neutrality, but it conducts its policy-making more independently than other Central Asian states – in other words, Tashkent pursues these policies the 'Uzbek way.'

5. Conclusion: Implications for Policy Planners

Western policy-makers trying to understand the future contours of defence and security policy in Central Asia post-2014 and the potential impact on policy planning in the Central Asian capitals must recognize as a starting point that there is really no such entity as the 'region' of Central Asia. This is the case across a whole host of policy-related issues in Central Asia, but perhaps no better illustrated than in comparing and contrasting their views on the possible security implications of the NATO drawdown from Afghanistan. Put simply, there is no common or shared set of views on this issue, and its interpretation and the perspectives and opinions it gives rise to in each capital differ widely from country to country.

Before highlighting some of the most salient conclusions of this study that have implications for Western policy-makers, it is necessary to place this in the context of Western defence engagement with Central Asia since 9/11. Perhaps the prospect of 2014 as a transition period for Afghanistan may allow planners to take stock of Western approaches to building or assisting in the development of indigenous defence and security capacities. These programmes will continue at the bilateral and multilateral levels beyond 2014, and some capitals would like to target such assistance more accurately to foster local Central Asian defence and security capacities.¹⁹³

Moreover, it is equally necessary to note that many of these countries are presently involved in an ongoing transformation of the CSTO, the results of which remain uncertain. Western policy-makers are also struggling to follow or understand the complex and unique evolution of Uzbekistan's role in Central Asia, and how its decision to step back from the CSTO only two years before the NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan may be rationalized.¹⁹⁴ The extent to which each of the Central Asian states views Afghanistan post-2014 differently, and even whether they are considering contingency plans or adjusting state defence policies as a result is well illustrated over this multilateral question: can the CSTO transformation offer genuine security guarantees or help to strengthen security in Central Asia linked to Afghanistan post-2014?

The following conclusions are divided into two groups: first, how Astana and Tashkent perceive the drawdown, and whether this influences their defence and security policies; and secondly, how Western planning staffs may attempt to foster enhanced security relationships with these states post-2014. This is offered with the caveat that many

of these issues are subject to change and unpredictability, with both Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan facing the prospect of managing internal political succession. Moreover, these issues are also subject to external influences, such as how other actors may change their policies post-2014.

Astana and Tashkent: agreeing to differ

The following conclusions may be offered as representing perspectives on the NATO Afghanistan drawdown in Astana and Tashkent. These may be taken to reflect the longer-term trends in how these countries will calibrate defence and security policy as a result.

- There is no consistency or agreement between Astana and Tashkent on the level of threat stemming from Afghanistan post-2014;
- Both countries have a limited intelligence capacity to conduct independent threat assessments especially concerning an emerging or complex threat. To some extent each intelligence service in these states relies upon close cooperation with its Russian counterparts in order to access assets and formulate an analysis of the threat environment;
- Generally, the weaknesses in the intelligence agencies in these states are inhibiting the emergence of a clear or accurate view of the threat environment.¹⁹⁵ Too much time is wasted in analysis of political opposition groups, or in pursuing individual interests rooted in corruption;¹⁹⁶
- Astana and Tashkent believe they are capable of providing their own security and that they can deal with any hypothetical crisis post-2014;¹⁹⁷
- Astana sees no 'doomsday scenario' linked to Afghanistan post-2014 and does not place Afghanistan as the highest potential threat to national security in its security documents;¹⁹⁸
- Astana's perspectives on post-2014 Afghanistan and its implications for Central Asian security has not resulted in any shift in its defence and security policies. The country's armed forces structure, training and doctrine remain unaffected by the issue of a potential threat stemming from a possible militant incursion into Central Asia or Taliban-inspired militant activity within the country itself;
- Although Astana is deepening its involvement in the security dimension of the SCO and helping in the transformation of the CSTO, there is scepticism among its expert community as to whether these organizations have the potential to act or respond adequately during an Afghanistan-linked security crisis in Central Asia;¹⁹⁹

- Astana expects leading NATO members to maintain long-term interests in the security of Afghanistan and does not anticipate the country being ‘abandoned;’
- There is some level of anxiety among Kazakhstani experts concerning whether Russian security policy in Central Asia may change after 2014 in order to strengthen Russia’s strategic interests. This is considered to be an unpredictable factor in the post-2014 security environment;²⁰⁰
- A perception exists among of the country’s experts that the NATO PfP has exhausted itself and that it may be an appropriate time to develop new approaches and forge different relationships in Central Asia;²⁰¹
- Kazakhstan will play an active role in reverse transit through the NDN and is likely to use these arrangements to facilitate the development of transportation hubs in the country beyond 2014;²⁰²
- Unlike its neighbours, Kazakhstan has less interest in acquiring military equipment transfers of NATO hardware as a result of the drawdown. By April 2013, its military equipment transfer requests related mainly to logistical or engineering assets.²⁰³ Its long-term military modernization is not linked to such opportunistic policies;
- There will be no change in the country’s foreign policy linked to 2014. Astana will preserve its ‘multivector’ policy post-2014, but there is some understanding that this may come under pressure from other actors;²⁰⁴
- The NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2014 is not resulting in any contingency planning in Astana linked to its defence and security policies. Its experts and state structures do not anticipate any major change as a result of the completion of the drawdown;²⁰⁵
- Astana regards the main sources of instability in Central Asia as stemming from a socio-economic crisis or even a state collapse in Kyrgyzstan or Tajikistan.²⁰⁶ It also recognizes that these states cannot provide for their own security;
- Tashkent claims that the main threat to its national security has been and continues to be Afghanistan. Its experts and state structures anticipate a worsening of security in Central Asia post-2014;²⁰⁷
- Tashkent is anxious that the West may completely abandon Afghanistan, and is taking steps to strengthen national security modelled around a ‘worst case’ scenario;²⁰⁸
- Uzbekistan is sceptical about the transformation of the CSTO and does not regard involvement in the body as genuinely contributing to its security. Tashkent has not sought closer ties with alternative multilateral security organizations following its June 2012 decision to suspend participation in the CSTO;²⁰⁹

- Tashkent questions whether the CSTO could take real action during an Afghanistan-linked security crisis within Central Asia. Some security experts believe that Moscow would not initiate military or security operations in Central Asia without Tashkent's tacit approval;
- Uzbekistan objects to what it sees as the emergence of the CSTO as a military bloc. Tashkent does not want to see either the CSTO becoming more militarized or the appearance of new CSTO military infrastructure in the region. This is also consistent with its avoidance of entering host nation agreements related to foreign military bases on its territory;²¹⁰
- Tashkent pursues an independent defence and security policy that remains sceptical about the role or utility of multilateral security organizations, and prefers to develop security relationships on a bilateral basis;
- Tashkent also questions whether the SCO will emerge as an organization that can actually contribute to Central Asian security linked to a perceived Afghanistan threat. It sees no mechanism or political appetite in the SCO to develop response capabilities to a real security crisis within Central Asia;²¹¹
- Uzbekistan's Armed Forces are increasingly focussing their training on mountain warfare and enhancing small unit tactics, consistent with preparing to support other security structures to combat terrorists or insurgents on its territory. Tashkent is interested in receiving defence and security assistance support from its partners to further strengthen these niche capabilities;²¹²
- Tashkent will also continue to play an active role in reverse transit through the NDN and may use these arrangements to facilitate further internal economic development.²¹³
- By April 2013 Tashkent secured Washington's agreement to transfer 20 Raven UAVs to boost Uzbekistan's border security capabilities. Such assets, featuring among the reconnaissance-boosting end of the UAV range rather than providing strike capability, may help Uzbek border forces to monitor border areas and conduct small-scale operations against drug traffickers or militants attempting to enter the country illegally. However, Tashkent's equipment transfer requests may not be rooted in a thorough analysis of which assets are most needed, and it comes after an eight-year hiatus in the United States and other NATO members entering such arrangements. The UK, on the other hand, has restricted itself to supplying trucks and spare parts for Land Rovers.

These distinctive perspectives on regional security post-2014 give rise to the following points:

- Western-inspired 'regional' security initiatives will gain little traction within the Central Asian capitals. Across key security areas it is crucial for Western policy-makers to understand that Central Asia is not a region as such;
- NATO members must prioritize bilateral approaches to defence and security cooperation with the Central Asia states that allows such policies to be crafted and tailored to suit the specific needs and interests of each individual country. Moreover, this must also take account of the interests or concerns of other actors that could limit or impinge upon such arrangements;
- There is an opportunity to redefine the aims and processes involved in delivering defence and security assistance to the Central Asian states. These packages and programmes need to match the evolving security needs of each partner state by jointly working towards achieving targets agreed and measured in an atmosphere of transparency and cooperation;
- More emphasis must be placed on enhancing the threat assessment capacities of the Central Asian states. This may also need to extend to intelligence-sharing where an imminent threat to a Central Asian state stemming from Afghanistan is detected, working with partners in the host country to disrupt such activities;²¹⁴
- Western planners must carefully avoid agreeing equipment transfers that in any way either alter the military balance in Central Asia or result in such a perception taking root in the Central Asian capitals;
- Defence and security assistance packages often bypass the forces that would be 'first in' during any counter-insurgency or counter-terrorist operation, such as intelligence agency Special Forces or other forces drawn from the power ministries. Local defence ministry forces would only be used in an escalating security crisis, and even then they may be restricted to playing a supporting role;
- Some Central Asian states may exaggerate an increased Afghanistan-linked security threat post-2014 in order to maximize their access to Western defence asset transfers or to deflect criticism of the policies of their governments.²¹⁵

While these factors in policy and expert perspectives in Astana and Tashkent may not provide the basis of a route map for Western planning staffs, they do provide sufficient insight into the security thinking that will shape policy in the region beyond 2014. They also serve as warning to those planners who may advocate highly ambitious and even aspirational plans that ultimately perish on the rock of reality within the host nation.

More than twenty years after gaining their independence, these countries have yet to devise mechanisms through which they may forge a security system that meets their

needs. For Uzbekistan this has resulted in an independent, even isolationist approach to security, while Kazakhstan tries to invigorate multilateral options and strengthen its own defence and security capabilities.²¹⁶

Bilateral security cooperation with their Central Asian neighbours often remains more in the realm of rhetoric than real practical measures. However, the distinct and varied interpretation of the post-2014 security environment in Astana and Tashkent should illustrate the nature of the problems facing Western governments and organizations with an interest in promoting wider regional security. What the existence of such a dichotomy in their views may signal is the underlying need specifically to tailor defence and security assistance on a primarily bilateral basis and avoiding the conclusion that what suits the 'needs' of one state will automatically benefit its neighbour.

Above all, these Central Asian states are painfully aware that, since combat operations began in Afghanistan, Western security policy has centred on viewing the 'region' through an Afghanistan-centric prism. Tashkent will take a great deal of effort to convince that the security environment will not worsen post-2014, whereas in Astana the challenge may be to encourage a level of caution concerning future unexpected security developments, including any link between the Afghanistan-based Taliban and militants who may operate within Kazakhstan; security experts and governmental structures remain sceptical that such a link exists or may exist in the future.²¹⁷ Nevertheless, in their own particular way, neither Kazakhstan nor Uzbekistan is showing any sign of preparing for a dam burst in the security environment post-2014; each are confident that they possess the capability to deal with the aftermath of the NATO drawdown, whatever the precise nature of that aftermath proves to be.

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²⁰⁹ Vladimir Mukhin, 'Collective Supra-National Defence: CSTO Seeks to Become an Analog of Warsaw Treaty Organization,' *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, 20 September 2012; Richard Weitz, 'Global Insights: Uzbekistan's CSTO Withdrawal Highlights Russia's Dilemma,' *World Politics Review*, 10 July, 2012; David Trilling, 'Uzbekistan Ditches Moscow-Led Military Alliance for NATO?' *EurasiaNet*, 29 June, 2012.

²¹⁰ Andrey Rezchikov, Anna Analbayeva, 'Karimov Makes His Second Exit,' *Vzglyad Online*, 30 June, 2012; Gennadiy Sysoyev, Yelena Chernenko, Maksim Yusin, 'Uzbekistan is Breaking Away From the Collective: Tashkent is Requesting Suspension of its Participation in the CSTO for the Sake of Strengthening Bilateral Relations,' *Kommersant*, 29 June, 2012.

²¹¹ Author interviews with local security experts in Tashkent, 15, 16 October, 2012.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ It is important to note that all countries in Central Asia are undemocratic and not based on the rule of law. Hence the problems in providing them with powers or tools that can be used against an internal opposition, as during the war on terror, where legislation increasing the powers of intelligence and police investigations were exported uncritically despite the democratic situation and the potential for external oversight.

²¹⁵ See Chapters 3 and 4.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Author research interviews with Kazakhstani international relations and security experts, Astana, July 2012; Almaty, October 2012.

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