

## **No. 2 Political and security relations - Mapping Central Asia's relations with other Asian states**

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## POLICY PAPER

### No. 2 Political and security relations Mapping Central Asia's relations with other Asian states

September 2018



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## Executive Summary

Few of the countries examined (India, Japan, Iran, Turkey and South Korea on the one hand, the five Central Asian countries on the other) have included one another in their national strategy papers, with the exception of Turkey. Ankara features prominently in the foreign policy strategies of all five of the Central Asian states. With deep historical ties, since their independence, Central Asian states have relied on Turkey’s assistance to enter international economic, financial and political multilateral organisations. The majority of Central Asian states have also supported Japan in its bid for a UN Security Council seat and vote alongside South Korea in UN votes.

Even where strategic alliances have not been outlined in overarching foreign policy, these countries have signed extensive bilateral political agreements with one another covering a variety of fields of cooperation. These have often followed periods of high levels of activity in bilateral relations and high-level (including heads of state) meetings and visits. Bilateral relations are further solidified by reciprocal diplomatic representation in each state and a variety of visa free regimes.

Political ties are also underscored by shared security threats and challenges. The continued instability in Afghanistan, in particular, is a concern for countries in this region given that drug trafficking as well as the potential risks around radicalisation and terrorism remain a considerable challenge. Afghanistan is a particular driver of activity for India, Japan and South Korea. Furthermore, Central Asian republics and South Korea have a similar understanding of responsibility for international security and stability in Asia.

Central Asian states and the other Asian states covered in this paper have had few disputes. There has in the past been political tension between Turkey and several Central Asian states for a variety of reasons. Iran has had a variety of disputes over territorial boundaries and natural resources, as well as Iran’s nuclear programme and the resulting restrictions placed on Iran in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), an agreement between the EU and Iran on curtailing Iran’s nuclear programme. Indeed, the Central Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty also ensured that the support for a country’s nuclear weapons programme was limited. Despite this, Iran has, by some countries, been used as a counterbalance to Russian influence in Central Asia. More recently, there have been growing tensions between Iran and Tajikistan, which reflects a concern across the region about the Islamic Republic’s negative influence.

Of all the Asian states examined in this paper, India and South Korea are the most involved in the sphere of defence and security relations. They have engaged in military training, exercises, as well

as arms sales and military modernisation, and India has sought the lease of an airbase in Tajikistan. Turkey has limited, but growing, potential in this area for greater cooperation.

## 1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to outline the political and security relationships between the Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan) and a group of key Asian players in the region (India, Japan, Iran, Turkey and South Korea).

The mapping of this relationships has been undertaken in a variety of categories: the place of these countries in one another's strategy papers; formal bilateral political agreements; high-level meetings and visits; cooperation in international and regional organisations; embassies and visa regimes; common security threats and risks; formal and informal alliances between Central Asian states and world powers; disputes and conflicts; military sales and assistance; joint exercises and training; and military bases.

Information collected as part of this paper has been found through open sources, largely online. Desk-based research was conducted primarily in English. The period examined for this paper is 2007-2017, so as to capture the most recent developments in the region.

This paper identifies over-arching trends between Asian and Central Asian countries in the political and security sphere. The results of this mapping exercise will provide a comprehensive basis for the following analysis of political and security relations as well as policy recommendations for future priorities for European policy-making vis-à-vis Central Asia to be elaborated in the course of the H2020 project "SEnECA – Strengthening and Energizing EU-Central Asia Relations".

## 2. Mapping of political and security relationships

### 2.1. India – Central Asia

India is not named in any of the Central Asia countries' strategy papers, nor does India name any of the Central Asian countries in its own strategy paper. However, India and Kazakhstan have signed agreements including memoranda of understanding on defence cooperation, as well as transportation and transit (e.g. the multilateral, multimodal 'Ashgabat Agreement', which seeks to create a transport and transit corridor between India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Oman, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan). India and Tajikistan have concluded agreements on cooperation in countering terrorism and terror financing, countering money laundering, intelligence sharing, joint military training, and defence cooperation.<sup>2</sup> India and Uzbekistan have signed agreements covering cultural cooperation and tourism<sup>3</sup>, trade and investment<sup>4</sup> and transportation and transit. India and Kyrgyzstan have signed agreements on defence cooperation<sup>5</sup>, tourism, agriculture, and youth affairs<sup>6</sup>. India and Turkmenistan have signed agreements on defence cooperation<sup>7</sup> and transit and transportation.

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<sup>2</sup> Neha Dwivedi, "Can India 'Connect' with Central Asia?" *The Diplomat*, last modified November 30, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/11/can-india-connect-with-central-asia/>; Ashok Sajjanhar, "Tajikistan President Visits India; Gives Big Impetus to Bilateral Ties," Observer Research Foundation, last modified December 20, 2016, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/tajikistan-president-visits-india-impetus-bilateral-ties/>

<sup>3</sup> "India, Uzbekistan Ink Pacts to Boost Cooperation," *The Hindu*, last modified July 6, 2015, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/prime-minister-narendra-modis-visit-to-uzbekistan/article7392482.ece>

<sup>4</sup> "Uzbekistan and India Ink Contracts and Agreements for US\$150m," *UzDaily*, last modified August 23, 2017, <https://www.uz-daily.com/articles-id-40551.htm>

<sup>5</sup> "PM Modi Signs 4 Agreements with Kyrgyzstan; Cooperation on Combating Terrorism Likely," *DNA*, last modified July 12, 2015, <http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-pm-modi-signs-4-agreements-with-kyrgyzstan-cooperation-on-combating-terrorism-likely-2103899>

<sup>6</sup> "India, Kyrgyzstan Sign Six Agreements," *The New Indian Express*, last modified December 20, 2016, <http://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2016/dec/20/india-kyrgyzstan-sign-six-agreements-1551228.html>

<sup>7</sup> "India, Turkmenistan Ink 7 Pacts; Agree to Combat Terrorism Together," *The Indian Express*, last modified July 11, 2015, <http://indian-express.com/article/india/india-others/indiaturkmenistan-ink-7-pacts-pm-modi-for-early-operation-of-tapi/>

There have been almost yearly high-level meetings of the Indian, Kazakh, Tajik, Uzbek, Kyrgyz and Turkmen Presidents and other senior ministers at multiple locations during various events and summits. Moreover, India and the Central Asian states (save Turkmenistan) are all members of the Almaty-based Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia. Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan support India's pursuit of a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). India has embassies in Astana, Dushanbe, Tashkent, Bishkek and Ashgabat. It also has representation in Almaty. Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan have an embassy in New Delhi. There is an e-visa regime in place between India and Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan. There is a (simplified) visa regime in place between India and Uzbekistan and India and Turkmenistan.

The biggest common security threats and risks are instability in Afghanistan and an obstacle it poses to India's trade with Central Asia, which relies on overland access. Afghanistan poses a challenge to India's vision of Central Asia as "a commercial bridge between South and Central Asia"<sup>8</sup> and is a source of drug trafficking<sup>9</sup>. Radicalisation of Muslims in Central Asia is another area of concern, as it threatens to exacerbate India's struggle against Islamist violence<sup>10</sup> and bring about "the establishment of an 'Islamic belt' allied to Pakistan".<sup>11</sup> India, a Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) observer state from 2006 to 2017, is now an SCO member-state, along with the rest of Central Asia (minus Turkmenistan). India and Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have all bilateral working groups on counterterrorism.<sup>12</sup> Finally, India like Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, has had disputed border regions with China – though the Central Asian countries for the most part have now resolved their disputes. There are no disputes or conflicts between India and the Central Asian countries.

There have been examples of military sales and assistance from India to the Central Asian countries and vice versa. As these countries are common users of the Russian military hardware, there is some capacity for direct trade and common training. Kazakhstan was sold two MI-8s by India in 2001, and India has since imported Kazakh-made torpedoes. India has helped Tajikistan to upgrade the Ayni air base near Dushanbe (where more than 100 Indian military personnel were stationed as of April 2013<sup>13</sup>), entered into a formal defence cooperation arrangement with Tajikistan, gifted Tajikistan two MI-17s in 2013, and sent Indian military advisers to man a military outpost on the Afghan-Tajik border.<sup>14</sup> In April 2013, India airlifted an entire military hospital to Tajikistan.<sup>15</sup> India and Uzbekistan have jointly produced transport aircraft. India and Kyrgyzstan jointly developed a torpedo testing centre. India has established IT centres at the Kyrgyz military institutions.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Meena Singh Roy, "India's 'Connect Asia' Policy: Building Cooperative Partnership," *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal* 8, no. 3 (July-September 2013): 306, <http://www.associationdiplomats.org/Publications/ifaj/Vol8/8.3/8.3-ARTICLE-1.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Roza Smolinska, "Mapping Central Asia: Indian Perceptions and Strategies," *Europe-Asia Studies* 65, no. 6 (2013): 1230, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2013.815030>

<sup>10</sup> Nishtha Kaushiki, "The New Great Game and India's Connect Asia Policy: Strategic Perspectives and Challenges," *Journal of International and Area Studies* 20, no. 2 (2013): 89, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43107259>

<sup>11</sup> Scott Moore, "Peril and Promise: A Survey of India's Strategic Relationship with Central Asia," *Central Asian Survey* 26, no. 2 (September 2007): 280, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02634930701517508>

<sup>12</sup> Meena Singh Roy, "India's 'Connect Asia' Policy: Building Cooperative Partnership," *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal* 8, no. 3 (2013): 307, <http://www.associationdiplomats.org/Publications/ifaj/Vol8/8.3/8.3-ARTICLE-1.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> "India Airlifts Military Hospital to Tajikistan to Strengthen Geo-Strategic Footprint in Central Asia," *Economic Times*, last modified April 18, 2013, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/india-airlifts-military-hospital-to-tajikistan-to-strengthen-geo-strategic-footprint-in-central-asia/articleshow/19609593.cms>

<sup>14</sup> Scott Moore, "Peril and Promise: A Survey of India's Strategic Relationship with Central Asia," *Central Asian Survey* 26, no. 2 (September 2007): 283, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02634930701517508>

<sup>15</sup> "India Airlifts Military Hospital to Tajikistan to Strengthen Geo-Strategic Footprint in Central Asia," *Economic Times*, last modified April 18, 2013, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/india-airlifts-military-hospital-to-tajikistan-to-strengthen-geo-strategic-footprint-in-central-asia/articleshow/19609593.cms>

<sup>16</sup> "India-Kyrgyzstan Joint Statement during the State Visit of President of Kyrgyzstan to India," Ministry of External Affairs of India, last modified December 20, 2016, <http://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/27870/IndiaKyrgyzstan+Joint+Statement+during+the+State+visit+of+President+of+Kyrgyzstan+to+India>

The armies of India and Kazakhstan held joint training exercises in late 2017.<sup>17</sup> The Kazakh military personnel have been trained in India. In July 2015, India and Kazakhstan signed a memorandum of understanding on defence cooperation “widen[ing] the scope of bilateral defence cooperation including regular exchange of visits, consultations, training of military personnel, military — technical cooperation, joint exercises, special forces exchanges and cooperation in the U.N. peacekeeping operations”.<sup>18</sup> Tajik military personnel have been trained in India (especially air force personnel) and numerous places opened for Tajik military cadets and junior officers at Indian military academies (more Tajik military cadets were studying in India than in Russia in 2004).<sup>19</sup> In December 2016, the agreements were signed expanding joint military training and defence cooperation.<sup>20</sup> Uzbek military personnel have participated in joint counter-narcoterrorism exercises held in India.<sup>21</sup> Uzbek military personnel have also been trained in India. India and Kyrgyzstan jointly developed a torpedo testing centre. In July 2015, India and Kyrgyzstan signed an expanding defence cooperation and participation in joint military drills; information sharing would be increased and military observers and instructors exchanged<sup>22</sup>. India's Modi government has sought to lease an air base in Tajikistan.<sup>23</sup>

## 2.2. Japan – Central Asia

Japan is not named in any of the Central Asia countries' strategy papers, nor does Japan name any of the Central Asian countries in its strategy paper. Nevertheless, Kazakhstan and Japan have signed agreements on (nuclear) energy cooperation<sup>24</sup> and investment cooperation.<sup>25</sup> Japan and Tajikistan have signed agreements covering areas of cooperation including economy, science, and water security.<sup>26</sup> Japan and Kyrgyzstan signed agreements, covering areas of cooperation such as financial intelligence, countering money laundering and terror financing, and infrastructure.<sup>27</sup> Turkmenistan and Japan signed agreements on infrastructure development and natural gas plant projects.<sup>28</sup> Japan has also financed the Central Asian Network for Preventing and Countering Violent

<sup>17</sup> Neha Dwivedi, “Can India ‘Connect’ with Central Asia?” *The Diplomat*, last modified November 30, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/11/can-india-connect-with-central-asia/>

<sup>18</sup> “India, Kazakhstan Sign Five Key Agreements,” *The Hindu*, last modified July 8, 2015, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-kazakhstan-sign-five-key-agreements/article7398943.ece>

<sup>19</sup> Scott Moore, “Peril and Promise: A Survey of India's Strategic Relationship with Central Asia,” *Central Asian Survey* 26, no. 2 (September 2007): 283, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02634930701517508>; Meena Singh Roy, “India's ‘Connect Asia’ Policy: Building Cooperative Partnership,” *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal* 8, no. 3 (July-September 2013): 308, <http://www.associationdiplomats.org/Publications/ifaj/Vol8/8.3/8.3-ARTICLE-1.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> Ashok Sajjanhar, “Tajikistan President Visits India; Gives Big Impetus to Bilateral Ties,” Observer Research Foundation, last modified December 20, 2016, <http://www.orfonline.org/expert-speaks/tajikistan-president-visits-india-impetus-bilateral-ties/>

<sup>21</sup> Scott Moore, “Peril and Promise: A Survey of India's Strategic Relationship with Central Asia,” *Central Asian Survey* 26, no. 2 (September 2007): 284–285, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02634930701517508>

<sup>22</sup> “PM Modi Signs 4 Agreements with Kyrgyzstan; Cooperation on Combating Terrorism Likely,” *DNA*, last modified July 12, 2015, <http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-pm-modi-signs-4-agreements-with-kyrgyzstan-cooperation-on-combating-terrorism-likely-2103899>

<sup>23</sup> Sandeep Unnithan, “PM Modi to Ask Tajikistan for Lease of Ex-Soviet Airbase,” *India Today*, last modified July 12, 2015, <https://www.indiatoday.in/mail-today/story/pm-narendra-modi-tajikistan-indian-air-force-ayni-airbase-sushma-swaraj-pakistan-china-281955-2015-07-12>

<sup>24</sup> “Kazakhstan Signs Cooperation Deal with Japan,” *WNN*, last modified March 3, 2010, [http://www.world-nuclear-news.org/NP-Kazakhstan\\_signs\\_cooperation\\_deal\\_with\\_Japan-0303104.html](http://www.world-nuclear-news.org/NP-Kazakhstan_signs_cooperation_deal_with_Japan-0303104.html)

<sup>25</sup> “Agreement with Japan,” Investments and Development Ministry of Kazakhstan, last modified July 9, 2015, <http://www.mid.gov.kz/en/news/agreement-japan>; “Kazakhstan and Japan Intended to Develop Relations in the Field of Investment,” Prime Minister of Kazakhstan, last modified October 31, 2017, <https://primeminister.kz/en/news/all/15557>

<sup>26</sup> “8 New documents on cooperation signed between Tajikistan and Japan,” President of Tajikistan, last modified October 24, 2015, <http://www.president.tj/en/node/10216>

<sup>27</sup> “Kyrgyzstan and Japan Sign Number of Agreements during Official Visit of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe,” *24.kg*, last modified October 26, 2015, <https://24.kg/archive/en/politic/177680-news24.html/>

<sup>28</sup> “Abe Reaches Engineering, Economic Agreements with Turkmenistan, Mongolia,” *Japan Times*, last modified October 23, 2015, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/10/23/national/politics-diplomacy/abe-reaches-engineering-economic-agreements-turkmenistan-mongolia/#.WqwBnpPFKgw>

## Extremism of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).<sup>29</sup>

There have been almost bi-annual high-level meetings of the Japanese, Kazakh, Tajik, Uzbek, Kyrgyz and Turkmen Presidents and other senior ministers at multiple locations during various events and summits. Japan and the Central Asian states (save Turkmenistan) are all members of the Almaty-based Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia. Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan support Japan's pursuit of a permanent seat on the UNSC.

Japan has embassies in Astana, Dushanbe, Tashkent, Bishkek and Ashgabat. Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan have an embassy in Tokyo. There is a visa free regime between Japan and Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, and an e-visa/visa on arrival regime between Japan and Tajikistan. A visa regime is also in place between Japan and Turkmenistan.

Japan supports the Central Asian Nuclear Weapon Free Zone Treaty<sup>30</sup> and is in agreement with the Central Asian states when it comes to the necessity of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation and the peaceful use of nuclear energy. However, there are no formal or informal alliances between Japan and the Central Asian countries and world powers.

Japan has no previous or on-going disputes or conflicts with the Central Asian countries. It also does not engage in military sales and assistance to Central Asian countries. There are neither joint exercises or training between Japan and the Central Asian countries nor military bases of Japan in Central Asia.

### 2.3. Iran – Central Asia

Iran is not named in any of the Central Asia countries' strategy papers, nor does Iran name any of the Central Asian countries in its strategy paper. Between 2010 and 2018, Iran and Kazakhstan signed numerous agreements or memoranda of understanding covering cultural cooperation,<sup>31</sup> economic relations, trade and investment,<sup>32</sup> transit, transportation,<sup>33</sup> technology (space,<sup>34</sup> telecommunications<sup>35</sup>) and agriculture.<sup>36</sup> In February 2008, Iran and Tajikistan concluded agreements covering the areas of transportation, energy, and culture.<sup>37</sup> Iran and Uzbekistan have signed agreements on

<sup>29</sup> "UNODC Launches Counter-Extremism Network for Central Asia Region," UN Office on Drugs and Crime, accessed May 23, 2018, <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2018/May/unodc-launches-counter-extremism-network-for-central-asia-region.html>

<sup>30</sup> Lutfullah Mangi, "The political and Economic Strategy of Japan Towards Central Asia," <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/145121/The%20Political%20and%20Economic%20Strategy%20of%20Japan%20towards%20Central%20Asia.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> "Iranian, Kazakh Art Academies Ink MoU," *Fars News Agency*, last modified February 22, 2010, <https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Iranian%2C+Kazakh+Art+Academies+Ink+MoU.-a0219561461>; "Iran, Kazakhstan Sign Cultural Agreement," *Iran Daily*, last modified August 11, 2017, <http://www.iran-daily.com/News/198421.html>

<sup>32</sup> "Iran, Kazakhstan Bolster Logistical Interactions," *Financial Tribune*, last modified February 9, 2017, <https://financialtribune.com/articles/economy-domestic-economy/59215/iran-kazakhstan-bolster-logistical-interactions>

<sup>33</sup> "Iran & Kazakhstan Concluded Five Maritime Cooperation Agreements," Ports and Maritime Organization of Iran, last modified April 3, 2017, <http://www.pmo.ir/en/news/38603/Iran-Kazakhstan-Concluded-Five-Maritime-Cooperation-Agreements>

<sup>34</sup> "Iran Signs Space Launch Agreement with Kazakhstan," *SpaceWatch*, last modified April 2016, <https://space-watch.global/2016/04/iran-signs-space-launch-agreement-kazakhstan/>

<sup>35</sup> Hamed Jafari, "Iran and Kazakhstan to Cooperate in the Telecommunication Sector," *Techrasa*, last modified May 18, 2016, <http://techrasa.com/2016/05/18/iran-kazakhstan-cooperate-telecommunication-sector/>

<sup>36</sup> Madina Zhaliil, "Kazakhstan Will Export 200 Tons of Meat to Iran," *The Qazaq Times*, last modified November 27, 2017, <http://qazaq-times.com/en/article/28397>; Eric Schroeder, "Iran, Kazakhstan, and Russia Ink Wheat Trade Deal," *World Grain*, last modified March 5, 2018, [http://www.world-grain.com/articles/news\\_home/World\\_Grain\\_News/2018/03/Iran\\_Kazakhstan\\_and\\_Russia\\_ink.aspx?ID=%7BA59530F5-2C6F-41F5-A9CC-21888F3B46E9%7D&cck=1](http://www.world-grain.com/articles/news_home/World_Grain_News/2018/03/Iran_Kazakhstan_and_Russia_ink.aspx?ID=%7BA59530F5-2C6F-41F5-A9CC-21888F3B46E9%7D&cck=1) and Aigerim Seisembayeva, "Iran, Kazakhstan to Enhance Cooperation; Ink Agreements on Health, Shipping, Travel, Labour, and Trade," *The Astana Times*, last modified December 23, 2016, <https://astanatimes.com/2016/12/iran-kazakhstan-to-enhance-cooperation-ink-agreements-on-health-shipping-travel-labour-and-trade/>

<sup>37</sup> Bahrom Mannonov, "Tajikistan, Iran Sign Three Cooperation Agreements," *Asia-Plus*, last modified February 11, 2008, <http://www.asiaplus.tj/en/news/tajikistan/20080211/tajikistan-iran-sign-three-cooperation-agreements>

transit and transportation as well as agriculture and textile.<sup>38</sup> Iran and Kyrgyzstan have signed memoranda of understanding and cooperation agreements relating to communications and IT, counter-narcotics efforts, health,<sup>39</sup> and political and economic cooperation.<sup>40</sup> Iran and Turkmenistan have concluded agreements on health, communications and IT, energy, sports, road construction, and transportation.<sup>41</sup>

There have been almost yearly high-level meetings of the Iranian, Kazakh, Tajik, Uzbek, Kyrgyz and Turkmen Presidents and other senior ministers at multiple locations during various events and summits. All five Central Asian countries and Iran are members of the Jeddah-based Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, and the Tehran-based Economic Cooperation Organization, though the latter's importance is "marginal".<sup>42</sup> Iran, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan are also members of the Almaty-based Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia.

Iran has embassies in Astana, Dushanbe, Tashkent, Bishkek and Ashgabat. It also has a consulate-general in Mary (Turkmenistan). All five Central Asian countries have an embassy in Tehran. Kazakhstan also has a consulate-general in Gorgan and Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan - a mission in Mashhad. There has been a talk of setting up consulates between Turkmenistan and Iran in Golestan (Iran) and Turkmenbashi (Turkmenistan), but this action is still pending. Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan have an e-visa regime in place with Iran, though strained political ties between Tajikistan and Iran since 2016 have led to denial to entry Tajikistan for certain Iranian citizens.<sup>43</sup> Kyrgyzstan and Iran agreed to end visa requirements in May 2017. Uzbekistan and Iran have a visa regime.

The biggest security threat is the war in Afghanistan and its spill-over effects, specifically drug trafficking and cross-border terrorism. Another major risk is the Iran nuclear deal, or the JCPOA. Prior to that, Turkmenistan sided with Iran, defending its right to the peaceful development of nuclear energy. Kazakhstan also supported Iran's peaceful development of nuclear energy, though it declined to supply Iran with uranium out of consideration for Israel's concerns; Kazakhstan is a signatory of the Central Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty. Uzbekistan was far less involved in the international conversation about the Iran's nuclear program than its neighbours, but nonetheless maintained that the dispute should be resolved peacefully. The Tajik President Emomali Rahmon has also viewed Iran as a useful counterweight against Russia when it comes to cultural influence, embracing Persian culture and language.

Iran was granted a SCO observer status in 2005, but was denied membership because of a clause introduced in 2010, denying membership to countries under international sanctions. Iran considers SCO "a useful bulwark against American intentions in the region".<sup>44</sup> Iran has attended the 2013, 2014, 2016, and 2017 SCO summits. Currently, Tajikistan opposes Iranian membership because of political tensions.<sup>45</sup> Iran and Kazakhstan have joined other Caspian states in pledging not to allow

<sup>38</sup> "Uzbekistan, Iran Sign Agreements Worth \$25.5M," *AzerNews*, October 19, 2017, <https://www.azernews.az/region/120818.html>

<sup>39</sup> "Iran Inks Agreements with Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan," *Iran International*, last modified June 2017, [http://www.iraninternationalmagazine.com/issue\\_83&84/text84/iran%20inks%20agreements.htm](http://www.iraninternationalmagazine.com/issue_83&84/text84/iran%20inks%20agreements.htm)

<sup>40</sup> Kamila Aliyeva, "Iran, Kyrgyzstan Sign MoU," *AzerNews*, last modified April 24, 2017, <https://www.azernews.az/region/111944.html>; "Iran, Kyrgyzstan to Establish Bilateral Relations in Number of Sectors," *AzerNews*, last modified January 16, 2018, <https://www.azernews.az/region/125604.html>

<sup>41</sup> "In the Presence of the Two Countries' Presidents; Iran, Turkmenistan Ink 9 Agreements," President of Iran, 2015, <http://www.president.ir/EN/90546>

<sup>42</sup> Sebastien Peyrouse and Sadykzhan Ibraimov, "Iran's Central Asia Temptations," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* 10 (2010): 90, [https://www.hudson.org/content/researchattachments/attachment/1290/peyrouse\\_ibraimov.pdf](https://www.hudson.org/content/researchattachments/attachment/1290/peyrouse_ibraimov.pdf)

<sup>43</sup> Fatemeh Atri-Sangari, "Iran's Relations with Tajikistan: Trends and Prospects," *Iran Review*, last modified July 26, 2017, <http://www.iranreview.org/content/Documents/Iran-s-Relations-with-Tajikistan-Trends-and-Prospects.htm>

<sup>44</sup> Edward Wastnidge, "Central Asia in the Iranian Geopolitical Imagination," *Cambridge Journal of Eurasian Studies* 1 (2017): 11, <https://doi.org/10.22261/1YRJ04>

<sup>45</sup> Fatemeh Atri-Sangari, "Iran's Relations with Tajikistan: Trends and Prospects," *Iran Review*, last modified July 26, 2017, <http://www.iranreview.org/content/Documents/Iran-s-Relations-with-Tajikistan-Trends-and-Prospects.htm>

the use of their territory by other states for acts of aggression or military action against other Caspian states.

Iran's relations with Tajikistan are most strained. Tajikistan accuses Iran of having supported Islamist militants in Tajikistan's civil war (1992-1997), having been involved in the fall of the Rakhmon Nabiev government,<sup>46</sup> and having ties to ex-deputy defence minister Abdukhalim Nazarzoda, who was killed by the Tajik authorities in 2015 after being accused of plotting to overthrow the government.<sup>47</sup> In 2017, the Iranian state-run organizations and charities in Tajikistan were forced to end their operations under pressure from Dushanbe.<sup>48</sup> Iran was involved as a mediator in the peace talks that ended Tajikistan's civil war, hosting three peace conferences in 1994, 1995, and 1997.<sup>49</sup> In response to warming Saudi Arabia-Tajikistan ties, Iran hosted Muhiddin Kabiri, the head of the Tajik opposition party, outlawed and designated as a terrorist organization in 2015, in Tehran, where Kabiri met with Khamenei.<sup>50</sup> When Kabiri's father died in October 2016, a ceremony was held for him in Mashhad, further angering Dushanbe.<sup>51</sup>

Uzbekistan viewed Iran similarly to Tajikistan under Islam Karimov.<sup>52</sup> Relations are now improving, in particular in the economic sphere.<sup>53</sup> In the Caspian Sea, Iran contests the majority opinion of the median line because adopting it would cause Iran's share of the Sea to drop from 20 to 13 percent, which causes strains over the relationship with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan.<sup>54</sup> Prior to the announcement of the JCPOA in 2015, Kazakhstan took a firm stance on denying Iran uranium out of consideration for Israel.<sup>55</sup> Iran-Turkmenistan relations strained by dispute over Turkmen natural gas exports to Iran;<sup>56</sup> in January 2018, Iran declared that it intended to file a case with the International Court of Arbitration (ICA).<sup>57</sup>

Iran and Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan do not appear to cooperate much on military matters, nor do they appear to have concluded any major arms deals in the recent past. In June 2009, Kazakhstan established a military attaché office in its Tehran embassy.<sup>58</sup> In 2010, Iran and Tajikistan

<sup>46</sup> Sebastien Peyrouse and Sadykzhan Ibraimov, "Iran's Central Asia Temptations," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* 10 (2010): 89, [https://www.hudson.org/content/researchattachments/attachment/1290/peyrouse\\_ibraimov.pdf](https://www.hudson.org/content/researchattachments/attachment/1290/peyrouse_ibraimov.pdf)

<sup>47</sup> Kanat Shaku, "Could Uzbekistan be Iran's Bastion of Influence in Central Asia?" *BNE IntelliNews*, last modified November 14, 2017, <http://www.intellinews.com/could-uzbekistan-be-iran-s-bastion-of-influence-in-central-asia-132451/>

<sup>48</sup> Ahmad Majidyar, "Tajikistan Closes Iranian Organizations in New Diplomatic Escalation," Middle East Institute, last modified June 30, 2017, <http://www.mei.edu/content/io/tajikistan-closes-iranian-organizations-new-escalation>; Ahmad Majidyar, "Tajikistan Accuses Iran of Sponsoring Terrorism, Restricts Iranian Organizations' Activities," Middle East Institute, last modified August 9, 2017, <http://www.mei.edu/content/io/tajikistan-accuses-iran-meddling-its-civil-war-restricts-iranian-organizations-activities>

<sup>49</sup> Luciano Arvin, "Iran Courts Tajikistan," *The Diplomat*, last modified May 31, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/05/iran-courts-tajikistan/>

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Fatemeh Atri-Sangari, "Iran's Relations with Tajikistan: Trends and Prospects," *Iran Review*, last modified July 26, 2017, <http://www.iranreview.org/content/Documents/Iran-s-Relations-with-Tajikistan-Trends-and-Prospects.htm>

<sup>52</sup> Kanat Shaku, "Could Uzbekistan be Iran's Bastion of Influence in Central Asia?" *BNE IntelliNews*, last modified November 14, 2017, <http://www.intellinews.com/could-uzbekistan-be-iran-s-bastion-of-influence-in-central-asia-132451/>

<sup>53</sup> Bruce Pannier, "Warming Uzbek-Iranian Relations Worth Watching," *RFE/RL*, last modified October 20, 2017, <https://www.rferl.org/a/uzbekistan-iran-oil-qishloq-ovozi/28806277.html>

<sup>54</sup> Sebastien Peyrouse and Sadykzhan Ibraimov, "Iran's Central Asia Temptations," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* 10 (2010): 90, [https://www.hudson.org/content/researchattachments/attachment/1290/peyrouse\\_ibraimov.pdf](https://www.hudson.org/content/researchattachments/attachment/1290/peyrouse_ibraimov.pdf)

<sup>55</sup> Theodore Karasik, "Kazakhstan's Foreign Policy Balancing Act: Israel and Iran," *The Hill*, last modified January 22, 2017, <http://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/foreign-policy/315485-kazakhstans-foreign-policy-balancing-act-israel-and-iran>

<sup>56</sup> Kanat Shaku, "Could Uzbekistan be Iran's Bastion of Influence in Central Asia?" *BNE IntelliNews*, last modified November 14, 2017, <http://www.intellinews.com/could-uzbekistan-be-iran-s-bastion-of-influence-in-central-asia-132451/>

<sup>57</sup> "Iran Ready to Seek Arbitration in Turkmenistan Gas Row," *Reuters*, last modified January 29, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkmenistan-iran-arbitration/iran-ready-to-seek-arbitration-in-turkmenistan-gas-row-idUSKBN1F18K>

<sup>58</sup> "Kazakh Embassy in Iran Opens Military Attaché Office," *Interfax-Kazakhstan*, last modified June 4, 2009.

concluded a military cooperation agreement to increase collaboration in military education and development of military technology.<sup>59</sup> Iran and Turkmenistan concluded one or several military cooperation agreements in 1994, it remains unclear what the agreement(s) entailed.<sup>60</sup> Iran and the Central Asian countries do not conduct any joint exercises or training. Iran does not have access to any Kazakh, Uzbek, Kyrgyz, Tajik or Turkmen military bases, or vice versa. However, Kyrgyzstan publicly declared that the U.S. military base at Manas, vacated by the U.S. forces in 2014, could not be used to launch an attack against Iran.<sup>61</sup>

## 2.4. Turkey – Central Asia

Central Asia and Turkey are linked by a centuries-old history, common language group (apart from Tajikistan), religion, values, similar customs and traditions. Turkey became the first country to recognize newly independent states in the region on December 16, 1991. Turkey is very important for the Central Asian countries since the Turkish market introduces economic opportunities, trade diversification and strategic flexibility.<sup>62</sup>

According to the Strategy Kazakhstan-2050, Astana pays great attention to strengthen comprehensive cooperation with Turkey.<sup>63</sup> The Kyrgyz foreign policy concept also focuses on the deepening relations with Ankara.<sup>64</sup> The Tajik foreign policy concept aims to attract Turkish investments.<sup>65</sup> Turkmenistan's foreign policy outlines strategic partnership with Ankara in the framework of international and regional organizations.<sup>66</sup> According to the Strategy of actions, Uzbekistan will develop mutually beneficial relations with Turkey in various areas, in particular in trade, investment and tourism.

Kazakhstan and Turkey have signed more than 80 bilateral agreements. The Strategic Partnership Agreement that was signed in 2009 paved the way for strengthening the dynamic of bilateral relations between the two countries. The High Level Strategic Cooperation Council, established in 2012, has become an institutional mechanism to further develop strategic relations between the two countries.<sup>67</sup> More than 90 bilateral agreements and protocols were signed between Uzbekistan and Turkey. In 2018, Turkey and Uzbekistan also agreed to establish the High Level Strategic Cooperation Council. The relations between Kyrgyzstan and Turkey are following the path of its neighbours, including high level strategic cooperation council. More than 30 treaties and protocols have been signed between Tajikistan and Turkey. Turkey and Turkmenistan have dozens of bilateral agreements in the fields of energy, agriculture, diplomacy, youth and sports.

The Central Asian countries and Turkey have had an intensive dialogue at the highest political level. At the very beginning of the establishment of their Kazak-Turkish relations the heads of the two states reached an agreement to make visits at the highest political level every year. Particularly, President Nursultan Nazarbayev visited Turkey in 2007, 2009, 2012, and 2016. The heads of Turkey

<sup>59</sup> "Agreements Will Strengthen Ties with Tajikistan, Says Iran' Defense Minister," *Asia-Plus*, last modified May 14, 2010, <http://news.tj/en/news/tajikistan/20100514/agreements-will-strengthen-ties-tajikistan-says-iran-defense-minister>

<sup>60</sup> Hooman Peimani, *Regional Security and the Future of Central Asia: The Competition of Iran, Turkey, and Russia* (Westport: Praeger, 1998), 83.

<sup>61</sup> Sebastien Peyrouse and Sadykzhan Ibraimov, "Iran's Central Asia Temptations," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* 10 (2010): 90, [https://www.hudson.org/content/researchattachments/attachment/1290/peyrouse\\_ibraimov.pdf](https://www.hudson.org/content/researchattachments/attachment/1290/peyrouse_ibraimov.pdf)

<sup>62</sup> Vladimir Fedorenko, "Turkey as viewed from Central Asia," Rethink Institute Washington D.C, April 2016, accessed August 30, 2018, <http://www.rethinkinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Fedorenko-Turkey-As-Viewed-From-Central-Asia.pdf>

<sup>63</sup> "Foreign Policy Concept for 2014–2020 Republic of Kazakhstan," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, last modified September 17, 2014, <http://mfa.gov.kz/en/content-view/kontseptsiya-vneshnoj-politiki-rk-na-2014-2020-gg>

<sup>64</sup> "Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Kyrgyz Republic," Ministry of Justice of Kyrgyzstan, accessed April 26, 2018, <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/4569?cl=ru-ru>

<sup>65</sup> "Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Republic of Tajikistan," Tajik Embassy in Kyrgyzstan, accessed April 26, 2018, <http://www.tajikemb.kg/files/2016/concept-of-the-foreign-policy-of-the-republic-of-tajikistan.pdf>

<sup>66</sup> "Concept of Foreign Policy of Turkmenistan for 2017–2023," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan, accessed February 12, 2018, <https://www.mfa.gov.tm/en/articles/118>

<sup>67</sup> Zhansait Tuimebayev, "Kazakhstan-Turkey Strategic Partnership Can Serve as Example," *Astana Times*, last modified April 16, 2015, <https://astanatimes.com/2015/04/kazakhstan-turkey-strategic-partnership-can-serve-as-example/>

Abdullah Gul and Recep Erdogan paid official visits to Kazakhstan in 2010, 2012, 2015, and 2017. 16 bilateral high-level visits took place between Uzbekistan and Turkey. Today, Uzbekistan is becoming a new strategic partner for Turkey, ending decades of mistrust.<sup>68</sup> Latest visits of President Erdogan to Uzbekistan took place in 2016 and 2018, and Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev visited Ankara in 2017. There have been many high level visits between Turkey and Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan. During the 1992-1997 war, the visit of the Turkish Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel was the only high level visit to Tajikistan. The president Emomali Rahmon visited Turkey twice (in 2006 and 2012), while the Turkish president Abdullah Gul paid an official visit to Dushanbe in 2009. Contacts at the levels of ministers and members of the parliaments with all Central Asian states have been always active.

With the Turkish assistance, the Central Asian republics got membership in regional economic and political organizations such as the United Nations and Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in 1992. Turkey (in 2009 – 2010) and Kazakhstan (in 2017-2018) are among elected members of the UNSC.<sup>69</sup> Ankara also contributed to Central Asian states involvement into international financial institutions (the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the Asian Development Bank). Turkey is a founding member of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The Centre for Private Sector Development in Istanbul provides a central platform for cooperation between the OECD and transition economies in Central Asia on private sector development policies.<sup>70</sup> Turkey and all Central Asian countries are members of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC), as well as participate in the NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) program.

Turkey is also the only NATO country to participate in the SCO as a dialogue partner since 2012. Since 2016, Turkey and all Central Asian countries, except Turkmenistan, have joined the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).<sup>71</sup> Central Asia and Turkey are also cooperating under such regional efforts as the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA). The Turkic Council, established in 2009 by Turkey, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, has become a new platform to strengthen the existing ties.<sup>72</sup> A recent decision of Uzbekistan to join the Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States represents a major breakthrough for Turkey in its bid to expand its regional influence in Central Asia.

Turkey has embassies in all Central Asian capitals: in Tashkent, Bishkek and Dushanbe (since 1992), in Ashgabat (1998) and in Astana (2008). Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan have their embassies in Ankara since 1992, Uzbekistan since 1993 and Tajikistan since 1995. Turkish citizens enjoy visa-free relations with Central Asian countries. Ordinary and official passport holders from Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are exempted from visa for their travels to Turkey up to 30 days. In case of Kyrgyzstan, ordinary and official passport holders are exempted from visa for their travels up to 90 days.

Central Asian governments do not see Turkey as a military ally ready to address security concerns in the region. Nevertheless, due to its important geographic location and growing economy, Turkey has a capacity to become a more influential partner in Central Asia. Turkey has already managed to

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<sup>68</sup> "Uzbekistan Is Turkey's New Strategic Partner – Adviser," *Ahval*, last modified May 2, 2018, <https://ahvalnews.com/turkey-uzbekistan/uzbekistan-turkeys-new-strategic-partner-adviser>

<sup>69</sup> "Countries Elected Members of the Security Council," United Nations, accessed May 8, 2018, <http://www.un.org/en/sc/members/elected.asp>

<sup>70</sup> "Turkey and the OECD," Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, accessed May 8, 2018, <http://www.oecd.org/turkey/turkey-and-oecd.htm>

<sup>71</sup> "Members and Prospective Members of the Bank," Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, last modified March 21, 2018, <https://www.aiib.org/en/about-aiib/governance/members-of-bank/index.html>

<sup>72</sup> "About Turkic Council," Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States, accessed May 8, 2018, <http://www.turkkon.org/en-US/HomePage>

gain a foothold in Russia's traditional strategic hinterland. As China moves deeper into Central Asia with its Belt and Road Initiative, Turkey is also reconsidering its own role in the region. Besides, Ankara possesses a unique set of geopolitical advantages over other regional powers that allow to convert its aspirations to influence diplomatic ventures on Afghanistan.

Domestic political developments in Turkey have affected relationships with some of the Central Asian countries. The relationship between Uzbekistan and Turkey deteriorated in the 1990s after Tashkent accused the Turkish government of interfering in domestic relations and harbouring opposition leaders in Turkey.<sup>73</sup> Turkey's commercial potential was restricted, as many businesses operating in Uzbekistan were linked with the Fethullah Gülen movement, known by its abbreviation FETO – an Islamic social movement banned in Turkey, as the Turkish government frequently maintains that FETO is attempting to overthrow Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government.<sup>74</sup> Another example of how the Turkish foreign policy agenda influenced the region was the mediation role of Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan initiated and moderated talks between Russia and Turkey after the relations between the two countries deteriorated after the downing of the Russian warplane in 2015.<sup>75</sup>

So far, Turkey does not have any significant military cooperation with the Central Asian countries. Turkey has been allocating the resources to modernize different spheres of the Central Asian states' armed forces. To render assistance to the Kazakh armed forces, a special representative office of the Turkish General Staff was established in Astana. Turkey provided USD 13 million in military aid to Kyrgyzstan and helped Turkmenistan to upgrade its navy. Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan signed agreements with the Turkish companies on the joint production of armoured vehicles. Besides, all Central Asian states, except Tajikistan, have several agreements on military training and education with Ankara. The military units from Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan were planning to participate in Turkey's high-profile conventional international exercise "The Ephesus 2018 Joint Combined Live Fire", set for May 7-11, 2018.<sup>76</sup> Turkey has no military bases in Central Asia.

## 2.5. South Korea – Central Asia

Central Asia has friendly relations with South Korea on the basis of mutual trust in various spheres. The Korean aid and investment is viewed to strengthen independence of the Central Asian states. The engagement of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan with South Korea is the largest in the region and the lowest level of foreign policy activity can be seen in the Tajik-South Korean relations. Since 2007, the Korea – Central Asia Cooperation Forum has represented a new format for regional and inter-regional cooperation.<sup>77</sup>

Central Asian countries mention the role of South Korea in their strategy papers as an opportunity to diversify their foreign relations, as well as a source to receive foreign investment and new technologies. In the "Kazakhstan-2050" Strategy, Astana wants to attract innovative technologies, introduce energy- and water-saving technologies and strengthen "Central Asia - South Korea" dialogue.<sup>78</sup> According to the Kyrgyz National strategy for sustainable development 2018-2040, Bishkek will search new tools of effective economic and political cooperation with South Korea. The concept of

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<sup>73</sup> Vladimir Fedorenko, "Turkey as viewed from Central Asia," Rethink Institute Washington D.C, April 2016, accessed August 30, 2018, <http://www.rethinkinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Fedorenko-Turkey-As-Viewed-From-Central-Asia.pdf>

<sup>74</sup> Cihangir Yıldırım, "The New Turkish-Uzbek Relations in Post-Karimov Era," Humanitarian and Social Research Center, last modified March 1, 2018, <http://insamer.com/tr/the-new-turkish-uzbek-relations-in-post-karimov-era-1122.html>

<sup>75</sup> Özge Nur Ögütcü, "The current state of relations between Kazakhstan-Turkey," September 9, 2017, accessed August 30, 2018, <https://avim.org.tr/en/Analiz/THE-CURRENT-STATE-OF-RELATIONS-BETWEEN-KAZAKHSTAN-TURKEY>

<sup>76</sup> Metin Gurcan, "Turkey Gears Up Military Might to Host Live-Fire War Games," *Al-Monitor*, last modified May 4, 2018, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2018/05/turkey-military-displays-show-of-forces-in-new-exercise.html>

<sup>77</sup> Park Joungho, "The Role of Korea-Central Asia Cooperation Forum for Eurasia Initiative," Korea Institute for International Economic Policy, last modified March 22, 2016, [http://www.kiep.go.kr/cmm/fms/FileDown.do?atch-FileId=FILE\\_00000000004650&fileSn=0&bbsId=kiepOpi](http://www.kiep.go.kr/cmm/fms/FileDown.do?atch-FileId=FILE_00000000004650&fileSn=0&bbsId=kiepOpi)

<sup>78</sup> "Foreign Policy Concept for 2014–2020 Republic of Kazakhstan," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, last modified September 17, 2014, <http://mfa.gov.kz/en/content-view/kontseptsiya-vneshnoj-politiki-rk-na-2014-2020-gg>

the Tajik foreign policy outlines the country's commitment to strengthen mutually beneficial relations with Seoul.<sup>79</sup> The concept of the Turkmen foreign policy 2017-2023 also mentions the necessity for Ashgabat to boost bilateral relations with South Korea. According to the Uzbek strategy of actions for 2017-2021, Tashkent will continue a full-scale cooperation with Seoul in the fields of investment, trade, high technologies and cultural-humanitarian exchanges.

Central Asia-Korean multilateral agreements have been actively implemented and the range of cooperation is expanding. 210 documents have been signed between Uzbekistan and South Korea (joint declaration on strategic partnership was signed in 2006). Kazakhstan and South Korea have signed more than 55 agreements and one of the main documents is the Joint declaration on strengthening the strategic partnership. Kyrgyzstan and South Korea have signed an agreement to increase high-level exchanges to further enhance friendship and cooperation between the two countries in 2013. Tajikistan and South Korea signed several cooperative documents in various sectors, including aviation, economy, science, technology, sports, foreign affairs, culture and arts in 2015. Ashgabat and Seoul signed the package of bilateral documents in 2008 and a four-billion USD agreement to build natural gas-processing plants in Turkmenistan in 2014. In 2015, the two governments signed additional eight documents to cooperate in sports, finance and economy.

During 2007-2018, the president of Kazakhstan paid two state visits (in 2010 and 2016) to South Korea and the president of Kyrgyzstan visited South Korea in 2013. When it comes to South Korean-Kyrgyz visits at the ministerial level, the most recent one was South Korea's Vice-Foreign Minister Lim Sung-nam visit in September 2017 to mark the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the South Korea-Kyrgyz relations.<sup>80</sup> The president of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon visited Seoul with an official visit in 2015. In 2008, the president of Turkmenistan paid a state visit to South Korea. In 2014, President Park Geun-hye paid the first state visit to Turkmenistan. Uzbek-South Korean interstate dialogue is based on regular high-level meetings (the Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoev paid a state visit to Korea in November 2017). Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan have also developed bilateral inter-parliamentary relations with South Korea.

Central Asian states and South Korea provide mutual support and confidence to each other, particularly within the framework of the United Nations. Uzbekistan supports a bid of South Korea to the executive bodies of international organizations almost in all elections, following the principle of reciprocity. South Korea was a non-permanent member of the UNSC last time in 2013-2014. As a member of the UNSC in 2017-2018, Kazakhstan is representing Central Asia in the Council for the first time in its history.<sup>81</sup>

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan (all since 2016) and South Korea (since 2015) are members of the China-initiated Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).<sup>82</sup> Kyrgyzstan became the first Central Asian member of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 1998. Tajikistan has been a member of WTO since 2013 and Kazakhstan joined in 2015, while South Korea is a member of WTO since 1995. Uzbekistan is currently in the accession process and the accession party is chaired by South Korea. Turkmenistan has not yet applied for WTO membership, yet it is exploring the opportunities.<sup>83</sup> South Korea as a member of the Development Assistance Committee of OECD spends

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<sup>79</sup> "Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Republic of Tajikistan," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Tajikistan, accessed April 28, 2018, <http://mfa.tj/?l=en&art=1072>

<sup>80</sup> "Vice Foreign Minister Lim Visits Kyrgyzstan", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea, accessed May 20, 2018, [http://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/brd/m\\_5674/view.do?seq=319200](http://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/brd/m_5674/view.do?seq=319200)

<sup>81</sup> "Members and Prospective Members of the Bank," Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, last modified March 21, 2018, <https://www.aiib.org/en/about-aiib/governance/members-of-bank/index.html>

<sup>82</sup> "Members and Prospective Members of the Bank," Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, last modified March 21, 2018, <https://www.aiib.org/en/about-aiib/governance/members-of-bank/index.html>

<sup>83</sup> Kamila Aliyeva, "Turkmenistan Studies Possibility of WTO Membership," *AzerNews*, last modified February 21, 2017, <https://www.azernews.az/region/109221.html>

0.25 % of its gross national income (GNI), with Central Asia receiving significant portion of this budget.<sup>84</sup>

The Embassy of South Korea in Kazakhstan was opened in 1993 and the Kazakh Embassy in South Korea has been functioning since 1996. In addition to an embassy in Astana, South Korea has a representative office in Almaty. The embassy of South Korea in Tajikistan was opened in 2008 and an official opening of the Tajik Embassy in Seoul was held in 2015. In 2007, the Embassy of South Korea began operating in Ashgabat, while the Turkmen embassy in Seoul was opened in 2013. The Uzbek embassy in South Korea was opened in 1995. Citizens of South Korea enjoy a visa-free regime (up to 30 days) in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. They are eligible for visas through a simplified procedure in Tajikistan and require a booked tour for a tourist visa in Turkmenistan. Holders of passports, issued by Kazakhstan, do not require a visa to enter South Korea for up to 30 days and only holders of diplomatic passports of Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan may enter South Korea without a visa.

Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have previously enhanced relations with South Korea as a way to hedge against China and Russia.<sup>85</sup> The positions of Central Asian countries and South Korea on issues of global and regional importance are similar or close. All five Central Asian countries support South Korea's policies in dealing with the North Korean nuclear weapons issue.

There are no political disagreements between Central Asian states and South Korea. The driver behind Seoul's presence in the region has been primarily economic, but recently South Korea began to provide military and security assistance to Central Asian states. South Korea has agreed to provide border security equipment to Uzbekistan. Tashkent is also exploring South Korean defence-industrial complex as a model to emulate as well as a potential source of new equipment. Astana's cooperation with South Korea has been predominantly in the development of the Kazakh naval forces.<sup>86</sup> South Korea neither conducted any military exercises with the states of Central Asia, nor had military bases in Central Asia.

### 3. Conclusions

This mapping demonstrates that over the years of independence the countries of the Central Asian region have managed to establish multidimensional cooperation with a number of leading states of the world. The political and economic cooperation of the Central Asian countries with India, Japan, Iran, Turkey and South Korea have shown a dynamic growth in the past ten years, with the exception of certain periods of tension in bilateral relationships. The steady alignment of Central Asian countries' relations with these powers is an expression of their eagerness to develop multi-vector foreign policies that try to strike a balance without becoming embroiled in international disputes. The specific Asian powers focused on in this paper all provide opportunities for the Central Asian powers to explicitly balance against China and Russia, their most dominant neighbours.

Few of the countries examined have included one another in their national strategy papers, with the exception of Turkey. Even where strategic alliances have not been outlined in overarching foreign policy, these countries have signed extensive bilateral political agreements with one another covering a variety of fields of cooperation. These were often followed by periods of momentum in bilateral relations and high-level meetings and visits, including at the highest level.

<sup>84</sup> \$231.5 million the ODA-eligible portion of South Korean assistance was allocated to South and Central Asia in 2015: *Development Co-Operation Report 2017: Data for Development* (Paris: OECD, 2017), 230, [https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/development-co-operation-report-2017\\_dcr-2017-en#page230](https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/development-co-operation-report-2017_dcr-2017-en#page230)

<sup>85</sup> Balbina Hwang, "A New Horizon in South Korea-Central Asia Relations: The ROK Joins the 'Great Game,'" *KoreaCompass*, last modified December 2012, [http://keia.org/sites/default/files/publications/kei\\_koreacompass\\_template\\_balbinahwang.pdf](http://keia.org/sites/default/files/publications/kei_koreacompass_template_balbinahwang.pdf)

<sup>86</sup> "Kakuyu voennuyu tekhniku Kazakhstan zakupaet v Kitae i Yuzhnoi Koree," *Kazinform*, last modified December 25, 2017, [http://www.inform.kz/ru/kakuyu-voennuyu-tehniku-kazahstan-zakupaet-v-kitae-i-yuzhnoy-koree\\_a3104496](http://www.inform.kz/ru/kakuyu-voennuyu-tehniku-kazahstan-zakupaet-v-kitae-i-yuzhnoy-koree_a3104496)

Political ties are also underscored by shared security threats and challenges. In particular, the continued instability in Afghanistan is a concern for countries in this region given that drug trafficking remains a considerable challenge, as well as the potential risks around radicalisation and terrorism. This is particularly the case for India, Japan and South Korea who for varying reasons have a particular focus on Afghanistan.

Of all the Asian states examined in this paper, India and South Korea are the most involved in the sphere of defence and security relations. They have engaged in military training, exercises, as well as arms sales and military modernisation, and India has sought the lease of an airbase in Tajikistan. Turkey has limited, but growing, potential in this area for greater cooperation.

## Document metadata

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