

Security and defence

Military technical co-operation and peacekeeping

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Kazakhstan has been working on military cooperation with the UK Ministry of Defence since 1996, under the annual military cooperation plan. In order to implement this plan, the Kazakhstan-British Working Group was established, meeting annually in Astana and London in turn. In June 2004 an agreement was reached with Britain's BAE Systems (a key shareholder in Air Astana) to upgrade Kazakhstan's air defence systems.

As Colonel Bob Stewart notes elsewhere in this report, the main areas of continuing cooperation between the two countries are in peacekeeping training, the training of Kazakh servicemen in UK military educational institutions, and language training in the military-technical sphere. The latest two-year plan for 2016-2017 was adopted in December 2015 and on September 13, 2016 Kazakhstan and the United Kingdom signed an MoU on military technical co-operation. The Kazakh Embassy in the UK commented at the time:

"Signing of the Memorandum shows the Defence Ministries of the two countries wish to provide a basis for mutually beneficial military and technical collaboration. The implementation of the agreement will help expand bilateral ties to develop (the) defence industry of Kazakhstan and

modernise its armament and military equipment."

The MoU reflects the formalisation of a process that was already underway. Prior to the signing, in May 2015, as part of the withdrawal of its troops from Afghanistan, the British Government made a gifting package to the Republic of Kazakhstan of surplus quad bikes with trailers and handheld night vision equipment intended to contribute to the deployment of Kazakh troops in support of UN peacekeeping tasks.

The Steppe Eagle peacekeeping training programme is currently the UK's largest bilateral defence exercise. In July 2016 Exercise Steppe Eagle saw troops from the 1st Battalion, the Rifles join forces with soldiers from Kazakhstan, the US, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan at the Stanford Training Area in Norfolk, England. Brigadier Martyn Gamble, who oversaw the 800 troops taking part, said:

"Exercise Steppe Eagle is the corner-stone of UK-Kazakhstan defence engagement and we welcome Kazakhstan and other Central Asian republics. This is the 13th year the exercise has taken place and the first time it has been held in the UK, and it is vital in assisting Kazakhstan's development of a capable peace-keeping force".

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Kazakh soldiers take part in Exercise Steppe Eagle at Stanford training area in Norfolk



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