

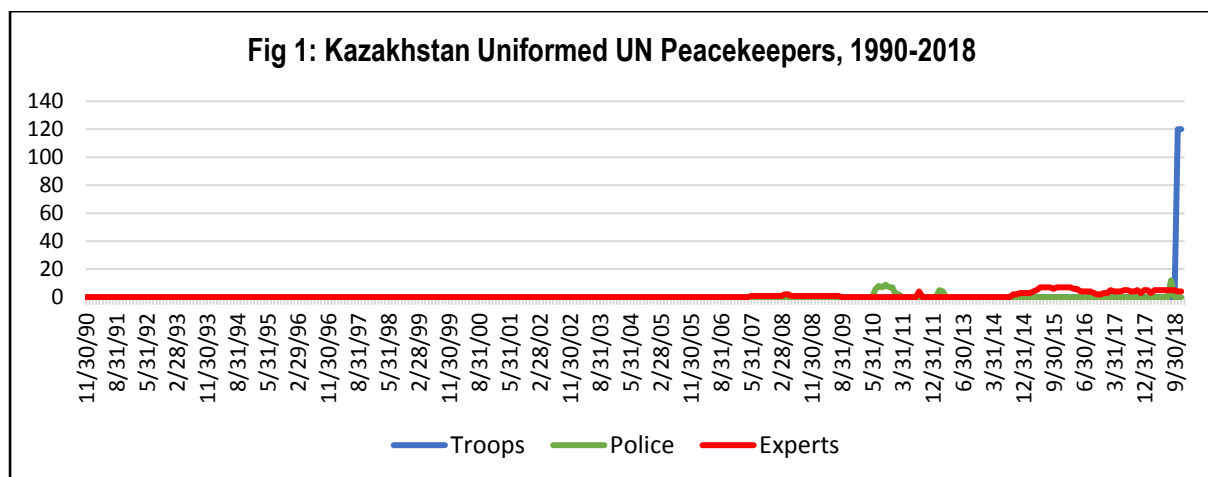
Country Profile: Kazakhstan

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Active armed forces	Helicopters & fixed-wing transport	Defense Budget	UN Peacekeepers	UN Contribution Breakdown	Other Significant Deployments
Active (2018): 39,000 (Army 20,000; Navy 3,000; Air 12,000; MoD 4,000) Paramilitary 31,500 World Ranking (size): 50	24: 20 Mi-24V Hind (some upgraded); 4 Mi-35M Hind Attack helicopters 4 Mi-26 Halo; Light 10: 4 Bell 205 (UH-1H Iroquois); 6 H145 26: 20 Mi-17V-5 Hip; 6 Mi-171Sh Hip Heavy/medium transport helicopters	2017: US\$1.2bn (0.8% of GDP) 2016: US\$1.13bn (0.85% of GDP) 2015: US\$1.7bn (0.92% of GDP)	125 (1 female) 28 Feb. 2019 Ranking: 66th Top Central Asian contributor	MINURSO: 5 experts UNIFIL: 120 troops	Organization for Security & Cooperation Europe Ukraine: 4
Defense Spending / Troop: US\$62,300 (compared to global average of approximately US\$70,000)					

Part 1: Recent Trends

Kazakhstan gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, but only started providing personnel to UN peacekeeping operations in 2007. In part due to the death of several Kazakhstani troops in Tajikistan in the 1990s, Astana maintained a cautious approach towards its participation in military operations abroad. For the next decade, Kazakhstani contributions to UN peace operations were minimal, consisting of experts and police officers to the UN missions in Western Sahara (MINURSO) and Ivory Coast (UNOCI). This trend changed on 31 October 2018 when Kazakhstan deployed a contingent of [120 troops](#), commanded by Major Ayan Nurkassov, to the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). The contingent works alongside the Indian Battalion in Ibl al-Saqi, south-eastern Lebanon.



Kazakhstan has also participated in non-UN missions, including a deployment under the banner of the Commonwealth of Independent States to Tajikistan in the 1990s, and non-combat support to the US-led coalition in Iraq after the 2003 war. [According to the embassy of Kazakhstan to the US](#), “in 2003, Kazakhstan sent 27 military engineers to assist operations of the coalition in Iraq. Over five years, nine contingents totaling 290 Kazakhstani peacekeeping troops were rotated through Iraq.” It is important to stress that these sappers, which served under Polish command, were engaged in non-combat operations, such as humanitarian support and water purification. Moreover, the sappers carried out important mine clearing operations. Kazakhstan currently has peacekeepers in MINURSO and UNIFIL as well as four observers to the OSCE mission in Ukraine.

Part 2: Decision-Making Process

The principal actors in the decision-making process to deploy peacekeepers are the leadership of the Kazakhstani government and the armed forces. These policymakers include the Kazakhstani President; Minister of Defense Nurlan Yermekbayev; Minister of Foreign Affairs Beibut Atamkulov; Lieutenant General Murat Maikeyev, the chief of the general staff of the armed forces; and the Kazakhstani Parliament.

As the long-time head of state of the Central Asian state, President Nursultan Nazarbayev’s support was crucial for foreign policy initiatives such as participation in UN missions. On 19 March 2019, however, the longtime leader of [Kazakhstan announced that he was going resign](#). It will therefore be important to see whether the next president shares Nazarbayev’s interest in participating in UN peacekeeping operations.

The deployment of Kazakhstani troops abroad is regulated by a law called [“On the peacekeeping activities of the Republic of Kazakhstan.”](#) (No. 320-V ZRK, 15 June 2015; and amended in 2017). This law is based on a 2013 proposal by President Nazarbayev to utilize “the Armed Forces of the Republic of Kazakhstan to fulfill international obligations for maintaining peace and security” (Article 7, Section 1). The law also defines the Kazakhstani government’s responsibilities to the deployed troops.

Part 3: Rationales for Contributing

Political Rationales: Kazakhstan is the most developed Central Asian state and generally regarded as the de facto leader of the region. The Kazakhstani government aims to expand its influence outside the region to become a global player. The country held a rotating seat in the UN Security Council during 2017-18 and was president of the Council in January 2018. This was an important development as Kazakhstan is the first Central Asian state to be elected to this position. Hence, a growing participation in UN peace operations should be seen as another pillar of Kazakhstani foreign policy to increase its international image and increase its influence in the greater Central Asian region.

Economic Rationales: The Kazakhstani troops will benefit from the additional allowances that they receive when deployed as UN peacekeepers. These allowances and other financial incentives may encourage Astana to deploy more peacekeepers in the future to support its defense budget.

Institutional Rationales: The Kazakhstani military has maintained a positive predisposition towards greater participation in UN peacekeeping operations.

Security Rationales: Kazakhstan enjoys generally stable and enjoys consistent relations with its neighbors. The possibility of clashes with bordering states like [Kyrgyzstan](#), Tajikistan and even Uzbekistan (particularly now that [bilateral relations are improving](#)) is minimal. The same can be said of Kazakhstan's relations with Russia and China (Beijing is investing heavily in Kazakhstan as part of the Belt and Road Initiative). There have been some [analyses](#) that suggest Russia could attempt an incursion in northern Kazakhstan as it did in Crimea in 2014. However, this is unlikely. Thus, UN peacekeeping missions, particularly those where the threat of violence is somewhat minimal, are an ideal opportunity for Kazakhstani troops to gain operational experience and take part in prestigious international activities. Additionally, it is worth noting that violent extremism has spilled from Afghanistan to neighboring Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. These nations serve as a "buffer zone" that has, so far, prevented radicalism from reaching Kazakhstan. This situation is another factor that provides Astana the option to deploy its troops abroad.

Normative Rationales: Kazakhstan aims to play a bigger role in international affairs, including increasing its role as a global good Samaritan. For example the Central Asian state hosted a round of talks on [Iran's nuclear program in 2013, and](#) talks on the [war in Syria in 2018](#). Moreover, in 2018 an agreement that may potentially bring an end to the dispute over the Caspian Sea was signed in the Aktau, Kazakhstan. Astana has also [offered to hosts talks](#) on the conflict in Ukraine in early 2018. Hence, there is an ideological rationale that explains the Kazakhstani government's interest in becoming a peacemaker. With that said, Kazakhstan has not established a "peacekeeping habit" per se. Over the past decade, the country's contributions to peace missions were minimal, in large part due to the incidents in Tajikistan in 1990s. The success of the Kazakhstani deployment to UNIFIL, combined with the government's foreign policy ambitions, may encourage Astana to deploy more troops to UN missions in the future.

Part 4: Barriers to Contributing

Resistance From Veterans: In 2011, Kazakhstan's Coordination Council of Public Organizations, which brings together veterans of the Afghan war, protested [a government proposal to send troops to](#) Afghanistan for non-combat operations. The Kazakhstani senate ultimately did not ratify the bill and no Kazakhstani troops were deployed. Nevertheless, this appears to have been an isolated incident and no protests were reported regarding the deployment to UNIFIL.

Casualty Aversion: The major deterrent to greater Kazakhstani participation in UN missions over the past couple of decades is arguably the violent events in Tajikistan. Kazakhstan deployed troops there during its civil war (1992-97) under the banner of the Commonwealth of Independent States' (CIS) Collective Peacekeeping Forces in Tajikistan. On 7 April 1995, Kazakhstani troops were attacked by Tajikistani opposition forces, which resulted in the deaths of 17 Kazakhstani peacekeepers. Overall, some [40 Kazakhstani troops](#) lost their lives in Tajikistan. Similarly, [one Kazakhstani soldier](#), along with seven Ukrainian troops, was killed in

January 2005 while detonating ordinance at an ammunition depot south of Baghdad.

The possibility that the 1995 incident in Tajikistan could occur is an obvious concern, hence it is no surprise that UNIFIL was chosen as the destination for Kazakhstan's first major deployment of peacekeepers, instead of UN operations in more violent zones, such as Central African Republic (MINUSCA); Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO); or Mali (MINUSMA).

Part 5: Current Challenges and Issues

The Kazakhstani government published its fifth new military doctrine in 2017. While the country maintains cordial relations with its neighbors, the new military doctrine does mention the possibility of armed conflict as a potential security threat, more so than violent extremism. As noted above, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan serve as a "buffer zone" that has so far prevented violent extremism from reaching Kazakhstan. For example, in July 2018 members of [ISIS killed four cyclists](#) in neighboring Tajikistan.

The 2017 military doctrine suggests that Astana views protecting its borders as a greater priority than the potential appearance of a terrorist organization. The hybrid warfare in Ukraine is a likely cause for this switch in defense priorities. [Peacekeeping is reportedly](#) mentioned in the new military doctrine as well, which highlights Astana's evolving pro-contribution stance regarding UN peace operations.

While over the past decade, contributions have been limited to experts and police officers, the deployment of 120 troops to UNIFIL is a dramatic improvement towards greater participation. [The Astana Times reported in February](#) 2019, that a new contingent of troops will be deployed by the end of April to UNIFIL, which would mark the first ever major rotation of peacekeepers. It will be important to monitor how these troops operate under Indian command, which, incidentally, is a sign that the Kazakhstani troops require more field experience before they can operate independently. Moreover, Kazakhstan's peacekeeping battalion (KAZBAT) can only maintain one infantry battalion deployed at a time, hence we will not likely see two major deployments simultaneously.

With that said, smaller deployments of helicopter units or mine clearing experts could occur. One precedent is El Salvador, which has deployed [MD 500E armed reconnaissance helicopters](#) to MINUSMA in Mali.

Part 6: Key Champions and Opponents

On 19 March 2019, President Nazarbayev resigned and the speaker of the [Kazakhstani Parliament, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev](#), was sworn in as interim president. In a speech, President Nazarbayev remarked that "the issue of succession of power in Kazakhstan is resolved in the Constitution. In case the current President relinquishes the duties, his duties are [transferred to the Chairman of the Senate](#) until the end of the current term. Then, the election of a new President is held." It will be important to monitor whether interim President Tokayev and the next head of state share Nazarbayev's interest in participating in UN peacekeeping missions as the support of the now-former head of state was the most influential factor in determining Kazakhstan's participation in UN missions. For example,

the 2015 law that authorized participation of peacekeeping came from a 2013 proposal by the former Kazakhstani president. [Major General Bulat Sembinov](#), a former Deputy Minister for Defence, was also a key supporter of KAZBAT when some of its personnel were deployed to Iraq in 2003.

Part 7: Capabilities and Caveats

U.S. Assistance: Washington has provided significant assistance to Kazakhstan via the State Department’s Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI). U.S. assistance to KAZBAT has primarily taken the form of equipment and the refurbishment of facilities. Additionally, under GPOI, KAZBAT has received training in the legal aspects of peacekeeping operations and equipment-related training. Moreover, GPOI has funded Kazakhstan’s participation in peacekeeping training exercises like the PACOM Capstone exercise and Steppe Eagle. Another U.S. defense agency that has trained Kazakhstani troops is the [U.S. Defense Institute for Medical Operations \(DIMO\)](#), which trained 35 Kazakhstani peacekeepers in September 2017 in the facilities of the [Ministry of Defence’s Centre for Military Medicine](#).

In 2010 the U.S. opened the [Peacekeeping Brigade Training Center](#) (KAZBRIG). Peacekeeping troops receive schoolroom training at the KAZCENT Partnership for Peace Training Center, which was [renovated in 2014](#). According to the [U.S. embassy in Kazakhstan](#), GPOI “funded a six-month construction project at the KAZCENT PFP Training Center, which worth around US\$216,000.” Field training takes place at the [training center in Illisky](#).

In July 2017, the Arizona National Guard and the Kazakhstani Ministry of Defense formally renewed their bilateral partnership, “[extending the 24-year-old legacy of cooperation](#) for five more years.”

Finally, it is worth noting that a 2004 report in the [Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst](#) explains that the U.S. has provided training via Special Forces (SF) 12 man A-teams to train KAZBAT. However, these initiatives have not continued in recent years.

Training, Exercises and Other Partnerships: KAZCENT offers a variety of training courses, which include the participation of international staff. For example, a December 2018 course on peacekeeping included the participation of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Central Asia and the International Center for the Advancement of Peace stability (Pakistan). The students were “[military personnel and government officials](#) from Kazakhstan, the United Kingdom, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.”

Kazakhstan regularly participates in, and occasionally hosts, the multinational Steppe Eagle exercises. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has similarly aided Kazakhstan to develop its peacekeeping capabilities as part of the Individual Partnership Action Plan. Kazakhstan also participates in peacekeeping exercises [organized by CSTO](#)—the first ever CSTO peacekeeping exercise took place [in Kazakhstan in 2012](#) although the scenario was not particularly peacekeeping-focused. For some time, there were rumors that Kazakhstan would [deploy peacekeepers to Syria](#) under the CSTO flag, but this has not occurred.

Deployment of Aerial Vehicles: Kazakhstan has a variety of rotary platforms, for example, four Mi-35M Hind attack helicopters, four Mi-26 Halo and six H145 helicopters. Additionally, the U.S. has supplied Kazakhstan with [four refurbished Huey II helicopters](#). There are no reports about Kazakhstani helicopters operating in UNIFIL.

Female Personnel: According to data provided by UN Peacekeeping, as of February 2019 there is only one female Kazakhstani expert on mission deployed to MINURSO.

Part 8: Further Reading

Законодательная база присутствия ИСО ВС РК в Ираке. [[Legislative base of the presence of the ISO of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Kazakhstan in Iraq](#)] Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

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McDermott, Roger and Col. Igor Mukhamedov. “[Kazakhstan’s Peacekeeping Support in Iraq](#).” Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst. 28 January 2004.

Ovozi, Qishloq, “[After A Generation, Kazakh Peacekeeping Contingent Prepares To Go Abroad](#).” Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty, 10 April 2018.

Stein, Matthew, “[The History of Central Asian Peacekeepers: The Development of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan’s Peacekeeping Units by Fits and Starts](#).” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 8 April 2018, pp.257-271.

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