

BOWLES'S NEW AND ACCURATE MAP OF THE WORLD, OR TERRESTRIAL GLOBE, laid down from the BEST OBSERVATIONS and NEWEST DISCOVERIES; particularly those of the celebrated CIRCUMNAVIGATORS: Illustrated with a variety of useful PROJECTIONS and GEOGRAPHICAL DEFINITIONS, TABLES, and PROBLEMS: With an easy and familiar Explanation of the most curious and interesting Phenomena in the UNIVERSAL SYSTEM.

THE WORLD, OR TERRESTRIAL GLOBE, by made in the SOUTH SEAS, by ANSON, BYRON, WALLIS, BOUVANVILLE, COOK, and REPRESENTATIONS of the HEAVENLY BODIES: the most approved ASTRONOMICAL and of the most curious and interesting Phenomena in the UNIVERSAL SYSTEM.



Transition in the Armed Forces of Kazakhstan - From Conscripts to Contract Soldiers

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Transition in the Armed Forces of Kazakhstan: From Conscripts to Contract Soldiers

Kazakhstan's Armed Forces have been working to modernize, reform and expand their capabilities since the state became independent in 1991. Much of the attention on this development has been on security cooperation with Russia, the United States and other partners, but there have also been internally driven efforts that could have just as significant an impact. One of these efforts over the past several years has been the increase in the number of professional contract soldiers in the Armed Forces, which is part of a plan to have contract soldiers make up 99 percent of the Armed Forces by the end 2016. While the result has yet to be announced, an examination of Kazakhstan's effort to have its Armed Forces made up of contract soldiers will show how this effort has been progressing and the impact this could have on the capabilities of the country's Armed Forces and on the Central Asian region.

Background

Modernization and reform efforts by the government of Kazakhstan and the Ministry of Defense (MoD) have been taking place for a number of years and have included revisions of the national military doctrine in 2011, new or additional training for service members, upgrades and repairs of equipment, changes in the structure of the force, and changes in personnel, specifically adding more contract soldiers.¹ The MoD has stated that the goal is to have the Armed Forces made up of 99 percent contract soldiers in 2016.² Some of the MoD's development and reforms can be tied to the growth of Kazakhstan's economy, the bulk of which has taken place since the mid-2000s. The economy grew steadily from 2000-2007, when the GDP rose from \$18 to \$133

billion. The GDP dropped slightly in 2008-2009 due to international and domestic economic problems, and then grew from an estimated \$115 billion in 2009 to \$231 billion in 2014.³

Regardless of Kazakhstan's GDP at any time over the past 20 plus years, its defense expenditures have been around one percent of the GDP. One of the last times that the government publically announced the defense budget was for the year 2014, and it was estimated to have been \$2.4 billion.⁴ The exact budget for 2015 or 2016 has not been publically available, but there have been reports that it could grow by half a percent during that time.⁵

One of the most noticeable effects of the increased defense expenditures over the past several years has been the expansion of the domestic defense industry and the procurement of new equipment, as well as a number of high-profile corruption cases in the MoD (these topics will be discussed in a later section). The increased defense expenditures have supported the MoD's goal of changing the personnel system from conscript to contract based.

The personnel system in Kazakhstan's Armed Forces is based on the Soviet Union's system of conscription.⁶ All males in Kazakhstan between the ages of 18-27 are obligated to serve for a period of 12 months in the Armed Forces, though there are medical waivers and those with a criminal background are barred from service. Conscription takes place every year in the fall and spring, during which an average of a few thousand males are drafted into service.⁷ Any conscript wishing to continue service in Kazakhstan's Armed Forces beyond the requirement can enlist as a contractor for an initial period of three years. This is followed by contracts of five and ten years until he reaches an age limit to retire from service, which ranges from 45 years of age for senior non-commissioned officers (NCOs) to up to 60 years for officers.

Any potential contract soldier must have a military specialty, which conscripts would have already received, though there is an alternative service program for those who want to

become contractors without prior service.⁸ The MoD established this program in 2013 for men aged 22-27 who had not yet completed their military service. It involves an intensive month-long training course, after which participants are eligible to become contract soldiers. The MoD reported that the number of positions in the program have filled up quickly every year since it started.⁹

Building a Contract Soldier Force

The increase in the number of contract soldier positions in Kazakhstan's Armed Forces has been taking place for a number of years, but noticeable efforts to boost recruitment started in 2013.¹⁰ In 2004 the percentage of contract soldiers was estimated to be 38, which grew to 65 in 2013 and around 70-80 by the end of 2015.¹¹ The MoD has claimed that there have been increases in salaries for contract soldiers since 2008, plus there was more funding available for housing and other benefits.¹² While the government improved salaries and benefits for contract service members as a way to increase numbers, various programs have also appeared in recent years to promote military service. The majority of the programs are for youth and are typically extra-curricular activities or clubs designed to showcase various aspects of the armed forces and to instill a sense of patriotism.

The most intensive military clubs or activities attempt to simulate a few days in the life of a service member, and they include classroom instruction, physical training or team sports, field training exercises, and instruction in assembling and shooting small caliber rifles or Kalashnikov rifles and machine-guns. The clubs are active over the summer months at MoD facilities. Participants have included boys and girls in their mid-to-late teens from public schools, as well as students from the several military academies across Kazakhstan.¹³ These are similar to the

“Volunteer Society for Cooperation with the Army, Aviation, and Fleet (known by the Russian acronym DOSAAF) that took place in the Soviet Union, though a key difference is that the Kazakh MoD is also trying to promote a career in the Armed Forces through these programs instead of only indoctrinating youth.¹⁴

There are other programs or clubs that meet on a regular basis and take part in similar activities, but they reportedly do not receive funding or support from the MoD and are instead led by veterans groups or other organizations.¹⁵ The various clubs are not the only contact that personnel from the MoD have with youth. At the start of the school year in 2015, Kazakhstan’s MoD and Ministry of Education implemented a program for students called “Lessons of Courage,” with the goals of learning about patriotism and protecting the country.¹⁶ There have been instances of soldiers visiting schools to promote careers in the Armed Forces, and some of these visits were connected to the alternative service program noted earlier.¹⁷ Additionally, soldiers appeared at a video game competition in Almaty in 2015 as part of a display of various small arms, and while there was nothing to indicate this was related to recruitment efforts, it took place at a public event with a large number of youth.¹⁸

Kazakhstan’s MoD has also been publically active in areas that are not focused entirely on youth, but could have an impact on increasing the number of contract soldiers in the force. The MoD provided support for a reality television series titled, “Special Mission,” which aired for four iterations from 2012-2014. Each iteration featured celebrities and other public figures from across Kazakhstan who could pass a medical exam and had agreed to be available on short notice to be “drafted” into the army, including going through a period of training, living in barracks, working through various tactical and psychological tasks, and then completing a special mission with other participants. The later seasons included non-celebrity civilians, and

the MoD hoped that the series would show a positive image of the Armed Forces and its overall development.¹⁹ In addition to the reality series, the MoD has helped produce two dramatic television series, “An Officer’s Honor” and “The Word of an Officer,” both of which have depicted the lives of service members.²⁰ (Episodes of the series “The Word of an Officer” are available, in Russian, on the MoD’s You Tube channel).²¹

In addition to the MoD, other security ministries in Kazakhstan have taken up efforts to appeal to youth and for public relations purposes. Officers from Kazakhstan’s Interior Ministry have been involved with a club for youth in the city of Aktobe.²² The National Security Committee (KNB) hired a company to produce a short documentary on “Aktau Antiterror-2015,” a joint ministry exercise that took place in May 2015 in the port city of Aktau on the Caspian Sea. In this exercise special purpose units from the KNB, Interior Ministry, and the MoD practiced rescuing hostages in buildings and on ships in the port. The documentary featured a KNB officer discussing the issue of combating terrorism, but the most notable aspect of it was how the production company shot footage alongside the units during the mock assaults and used mounted cameras on the helmets and weapons of several personnel during the exercise.²³ In addition to demonstrating the capabilities of various units, the action-oriented parts of the documentary had a certain public relations value and could have a positive effect on recruitment.

Obstacles to a Contract Force

While there has been an increase in the number of contract soldiers in the Kazakh Armed Forces, there are several issues that could delay the goal of having a force made up of 99 percent contractors by the end of 2016 and hinder overall long-term development. First, Kazakhstan’s economy experienced two setbacks to continued growth throughout 2015 and into

2016: the drop in the prices of oil and metals, which make up an important part of the country's exports, and the government changing its currency, the Kazakh Tenge, from a fixed to a floating exchange rate.²⁴ It is believed that the economy will take longer to recover than in previous economic recessions. This will have an immediate impact on the defense budget and possibly result in cuts that could delay the increase for more contract soldiers and affect the various programs that help with long-term recruitment.²⁵

Another issue that could become an obstacle is how there are still quality-of-life issues for service members that need to be addressed even after the MoD has taken steps to improve salaries, housing and other benefits. The number of suicides and cases of *dedovshchina* (hazing) reportedly dropped during the period of 2013-2015 compared to previous years, and these cases involved conscripts more often than contract soldiers. Still, crime, *dedovshchina*, and suicides have been documented by the media as problems in Kazakhstan's Armed Forces even as the percentage of contract soldiers rose during that period of time.²⁶

Furthermore, there has been an increase in the number of private security companies in several major cities across the country that often employ former service members. Employees of private security companies are not limited to former members of the Armed Forces, but also come from the ranks of the Interior Ministry or the KNB. Some of them served in the military or security forces and took their positions after retiring, but security companies have been noted to offer salaries that are competitive with that of the Armed Forces. Thus, if the market for security continues to grow, there is concern that this could influence contract service members to leave the Armed Forces after their initial commitment instead of staying there as a career.²⁷

One other issue that could be an obstacle to increasing the number of contract service members is the level of corruption in the MoD. There have been several high-profile cases of

corruption in recent years, and Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev mentioned corruption as a threat to national security in an address to senior officers in the MoD and the Chief of the General Staff in 2014.²⁸ The MoD also underwent changes in leadership in 2014, when then Minister of Defense Adilbek Zhaksybekov was named Secretary of State. Serik Akhmetov was appointed in his place, but resigned around six months later and was subsequently charged with embezzlement, though the charges stemmed from a government position he had held previously. Imangali Tasmagambetov replaced Akhmetov in October 2014 and has been in that position since then.²⁹

Other Developments in Kazakhstan's Armed Forces

The government of Kazakhstan revised its national security doctrine in 2011, and there have been other developments within the Armed Forces over the past several years that have increased the number of contract soldiers. The government has mentioned on multiple occasions its intention to deploy a unit for a UN peacekeeping mission.³⁰ The effort to have a unit capable of such a deployment dates back to the Central Asian Battalion (CENTRASBAT) in the 1990s, a unit that consisted of companies from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan and trained through the NATO Partnership for Peace program before being disbanded in 2000.³¹

Only Kazakhstan continued to develop a unit for potential peacekeeping operations with the creation of the Kazakhstan Peacekeeping Battalion (KAZBAT) after CENTRASBAT ceased operations. Soldiers from KAZBAT deployed to Iraq from 2003-2008 and worked on ordnance disposal and water purification.³² The unit has been conducting joint exercises with NATO partners annually since 2003 and has been declared as capable of interoperability with NATO forces. KAZBAT has also been expanding into a brigade and will eventually be designated as

KAZBRIG.³³ Members of KAZBAT have deployed on various UN peacekeeping missions as observers or experts on mission, but the battalion as a whole has yet to deploy for a UN mission.³⁴ Outside of the work with NATO to build a peacekeeping force, Kazakhstan is a member of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the leadership of which has stated an interest in having the organization's Collective Operational Reaction Force deploy for a UN peacekeeping mission. This CSTO force has conducted a few joint exercises with a peacekeeping scenario, but it does not appear to be in consideration for deploying on a UN peacekeeping mission before KAZBAT.³⁵

Lastly, the increased defense budget has resulted in the development of Kazakhstan's defense industry and the procurement of weapon systems and equipment from international defense companies. Procurement deals have sometimes included requirements that equipment be partially assembled in Kazakhstan in order to increase engineering and manufacturing capabilities in the domestic defense industry. The most notable deals include purchases from: Airbus Helicopters (formerly Eurocopter) for the EC-145 transport helicopters, Otokar (Turkey) for the "Cobra" armored vehicle, and Paramount Group (South Africa) for variants of mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicles. Additionally, a ship yard in the city of Oral has produced a couple of different classes of ships for service with Kazakhstan's Navy and a Border Guards' detachment on the Caspian Sea.³⁶ The growth of Kazakhstan's defense industry is also a part of the strategic development plans for the Armed Forces.³⁷

This growth has enabled the government of Kazakhstan to provide security assistance to other Central Asian states, and there have been assessments that Kazakhstan's Armed Forces have emerged as the most capable in the region. Uzbekistan's Armed Forces have often been considered the most powerful in Central Asia, but a lack of information on any developments in

Uzbekistan has led some to believe that Kazakhstan has now bypassed the capabilities of its neighbor.³⁸ Additionally, Kazakhstan's role within the CSTO reaction force has grown over the years, though Russia remains the strongest member. Kazakhstan transported its own units to a CSTO reaction force exercise in Tajikistan in May 2015 that involved a scenario of rapid deployment to the Tajik-Afghan border; Russia provided the bulk of transportation for other members' units to the exercise.³⁹

Outlook

While Kazakhstan's MoD has been increasing the number of contract service personnel in the Armed Forces through improvements in salary and benefits to attract service members, the various programs for youth and the community show that it is looking at long-term methods to fulfill its goal and maintain a force made up almost entirely of contract soldiers. Kazakhstan's economic growth and increased defense spending enabled the MoD to create and sponsor various programs which have helped recruiting efforts and improved public relations for the Armed Forces. These programs show that these efforts take place directly, with visits to schools and the alternative service program, and indirectly, through youth programs that attempt to instill patriotism and show life in the Armed Forces in a positive light.

The youth programs might only result in a small number of recruits and will need to consistently take place in order to be effective over a long period of time, but they have proven to be popular as extra-curricular activities. The reality and dramatic television series supported by the MoD may have been popular, but reports in the media on quality of life issues show that the programs likely served more as entertainment than as a vehicle for improving the public perception of the Armed Forces. Despite the increase in the percentage of contract service

personnel in the Armed Forces, quality of life issues remain a problem for service members. The number of cases of *dedovshchina* and suicides may have dropped over the past few years, and this could be attributed to having more contract service members, but media reports in Kazakhstan on these types of cases show these problems have not diminished from a public viewpoint. If the number of cases do not continue to decrease or are not perceived to have been handled correctly by the MoD, this could have a negative impact on recruitment. This also applies to the corruption cases in the Armed Forces and the impact that they could have on public relations.

Perhaps the most important factor for Kazakhstan's MoD to achieve its goal is how the country's economy fares over the next few years. If defense spending remains at around one percent of the overall GDP and it takes a few years for the economy to recover, then cuts to the defense budget are very likely. There have been no reports in Kazakhstan's media about which programs within the Armed Forces will receive less funding. At the same time, unemployment has been a factor during the most recent economic recession, and this could result in a boost in the number of contract soldiers.

Kazakhstan's goal to have its Armed Forces comprise 99 percent contract soldiers by the end of 2016 could fall short, but it is likely to be fulfilled within a few years. There are still quality of life issues for service members, but this has not prevented an increase in the number of contract soldiers to date. Ultimately, the increase in the percentage of contract service member in Kazakhstan's Armed Forces could enable further development and readiness of the force and be a contributing factor in making it one of the strongest and most capable in the Central Asian region.

Notes

¹ Roger McDermott, "Kazakhstan's Defense Policy: An Assessment of the Trends," *Strategic Studies Institute*, February 11, 2009, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=904>, (accessed August 24, 2015); "Kazakhstan's 2011 Military Doctrine and Regional Security Beyond 2014," *Central Asia Caucasus Institute*, June 13, 2012, <http://old.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/5794>, (accessed August 24, 2015); Vladimir Severniy, "В боевой готовности... (In preparation for war...)," *Inform Buro*, August 18, 2014, <http://informburo.kz/politika/armiya/v-boevoy-gotovnosti-732.html>, (accessed April 22, 2016).

² Mihail Kozachkov, "Бес призыва (Without conscription)," *Vremya*, October 23, 2013, <http://www.time.kz/articles/territory/2013/10/23/bes-priziva>, (accessed August 25, 2015); Kazakhstan 2050, "Укрепление региональной безопасности (The strengthening of regional security)," October 9, 2011, <http://strategy2050.kz/ru/news/2011>, (accessed August 25, 2015); "Казахстанская армия к 2016 г перейдет на контрактную основу (Kazakhstan's army will shift to a contract basis by 2016)," *Ak Zhaiyk*, October 9, 2013, <http://azh.kz/ru/news/view/17020>, (accessed August 25, 2015).

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⁴ Vladimir Severniy, "Военный бюджет увеличится на 43 млрд Тенге (The military budget will increase by 43 billion Tenge)," *Inform Buro*, November 18, 2013, <http://informburo.kz/politika/armiya/voenny-byudzhet-uvelichitsya-na-43-mlrd-tenge-908.html>, (accessed August 26, 2015); Vladimir Kadyrbayev, "А я люблю военных (And I love the military)," *Vremya*, May 8, 2014, <http://www.time.kz/articles/Infografika/2014/05/08/a-ja-ljubliju-voennih>, (accessed August 26, 2015).

⁵ Zhanar Kusanova, "Военная доктрина Казахстана: может, надо вроде НАТО (2-я часть) (The military doctrine of Kazakhstan: maybe it should be like NATO (part 2))," *Inform Buro*, June 25, 2015, <http://informburo.kz/stati/voennaya-doktrina-2-6111.html>, (accessed August 20, 2015).

⁶ Christopher Donnelly, *Red Banner: The Soviet Military System in Peace and War* (Coulson, Surrey: Jane's Information Group, 1988), 175-181.

⁷ Zhanar Kusanova, "Не бойтесь военкомов: они не "забреют" вас в армию (Do not be afraid of the military commissar: They will not "kidnap" you into the army)," *Inform Buro*, September 10, 2015, <http://informburo.kz/stati/ne-nado-boyatsya-voenkomov-oni-ne-zabreyut-vas-v-armiyu-11797.html>, (accessed April 26, 2016); "В Казахстане завершился осенний призыв в армию (The fall conscription for the army has wrapped up in Kazakhstan)," *Tengri News*, November 13, 2015, https://tengrinews.kz/kazakhstan_news/v-kazahstane-zavershilsya-osenniy-prizyv-v-armiyu-284006/, (accessed April 26, 2016).

⁸ Электронное правительство Республики Казахстан (Electronic government of the Republic of Kazakhstan), "О воинской службе и статусе военнослужащих (On military service and the status of service members)," December 31, 2015, http://egov.kz/wps/portal/!ut/p/b0/04_Sj9CPYkssy0xPLMnMz0vMAfjlc7PyChKtUvKTS3NT80r0w_Wj9KNgPM8U_cgoQyMDEDA1MwRJ5STmpZcmpqfqR6bm6Rfk5lqUOyoqAgDi4V-1/, (accessed April 26, 2016).

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¹⁰ Kozachkov, “Бес призыва”; McDermott, “Kazakhstan’s Defense Policy: An Assessment of the Trends,”; “Новый метод поступления на контрактную службу разработан в Казахстане (A new method for entering contract service has been created in Kazakhstan),” *Tengri News*, July 5, 2013, http://tengrinews.kz/kazakhstan_news/novyy-metod-postupleniya-kontraktную-slujbu-razrabotan-237492/, (accessed October 26, 2015); Viktoriya Izbitskaya, “Армия – школа мужества (The Army – the school of courage),” *Vecherniy Almaty*, March 13, 2014, <http://vecher.kz/node/28046>, (accessed October 26, 2015); “К 2016 году 99 % армии будут составлять профессионалы-контрактники - Минобороны РК (The army will be made up of 99 % professional contractors by the year 2016 – Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Kazakhstan),” *Kazinform*, October 9, 2013, <http://www.kazinform.kz/eng/article/2595845>, (accessed October 26, 2015); Shukhrat Khashimov, “Служба Отечеству – огромная честь и ответственность, а не просто решение бытовых вопросов (Service to the Fatherland – it is a huge honor and responsibility and not just a solution to everyday problems),” *Karavan*, May 5, 2014, <https://web.archive.org/web/20150910094124/http://www.caravan.kz/article/83763>, (accessed February 22, 2016).

¹¹ Kusanova, “Военная доктрина Казахстана: может, надо вроде НАТО (2-я часть),”; “Профессиональная армия Казахстана появится в 2016 году (The Army of Kazakhstan will become professional in 2016),” *Tengri News*, October 9, 2013, http://tengrinews.kz/kazakhstan_news/professionalnaya-armiya-kazahstana-poyavitsya-v-2016-godu-243242/, (accessed February 18, 2016); Dulat Moldabayev, “Весенний призыв (The spring draft),” *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda*, March 27, 2015, <http://www.kazpravda.kz/fresh/view/vesennii-priziv1/>, (accessed February 18, 2016); Alla Ivanilova, “На одно место в рядах казахстанской армии претендуют десять юношей (For a single position in the ranks of Kazakhstan’s Army there are ten youths applying),” *MK RU Kazakhstan*, October 8, 2015, <http://mk-kz.kz/articles/2015/10/08/na-odno-mesto-v-ryadakh-kazakhstanskoy-armii-pretenduyut-desyat-yunoshey.html>, (accessed February 19, 2016); Aslan Kudabayev, “Талгат УТЕГЕНОВ: «Ребята хотят идти в армию» (Talgat Utegenov: «Young men want to join the army»),” *Kostanayskie Novosti*, November 17, 2015, <http://kstnews.kz/newspaper/259?node=26524>, (accessed February 19, 2016); “К концу этого года казахстанская армия станет на 65% контрактной (Kazakhstan’s Army will be made up of 65% contractors by the end of this year),” *Kazakhstan Today*, February 13, 2004, <http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1076620020>, (accessed at Centrasia.ru, February 19, 2016).

¹² Министерство обороны Республики Казахстан (The Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Kazakhstan), “Социальное обеспечение (Social Provisioning), Финансовое обеспечение (Financial Provisioning),” http://www.mod.gov.kz/rus/socialnoe_razvitie/fin_obespechenie/, (accessed August 25, 2015).

¹³ Nadezhda Plyaskina, “В бой идут одни пацаны (Some guys will go to war),” *Vremya*, May 24, 2014, <http://www.time.kz/articles/sport/2014/05/24/v-boj-idut-odni-pacani>, (accessed February 23, 2016); Sergey Gradov, “Профессия - Родине служить (A profession – to serve the motherland),” *Vremya*, June 13, 2015, <http://www.time.kz/articles/grim/2015/06/13/professija-rodine-sluzhit>, (accessed February 23, 2016); Talgat Kirbetov, “Служим Республике Казахстан! (We serve the Republic of Kazakhstan),” *Vremya*, June 16, 2015, <http://www.time.kz/articles/territory/2015/06/16/sluzhim-respublike-kazakhstan>, (accessed February 23, 2016).

¹⁴ Donnelly, *Red Banner: The Soviet Military System in Peace and War*, 173-175.

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