

# TREATY ON ALLIED RELATIONS: PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF SECURITY COOPERATION BETWEEN KAZAKHSTAN AND UZBEKISTAN

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**Abstract.** The article discusses the state and prospects of practical cooperation between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan to ensure regional security in the context of the Treaty on Allied Relations (December 22, 2022).

It is noted that the observed difficult geopolitical situation in the world and its impact on Central Asia contributes to close interstate cooperation between Astana and Tashkent in the field of security. Thus, unlike the Declaration on Allied Relations (December 6, 2021), the Treaty highlights substantive provisions related to strengthening interaction between states in the areas of defense and security, mutual assistance in the event of direct threats.

The relevance of the study is due to the fact that this topic has not yet found a proper comprehensive analysis in the publications of Central Asian and foreign authors.

**Keywords:** *Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, allied relations, Central Asia, regional security.*

## ОДАҚТАСТЫҚ ҚАТЫНАСТАР ТУРАЛЫ ШАРТ: ҚАЗАҚСТАН МЕН ӨЗБЕКСТАН АРАСЫНДАҒЫ ҚАУІПСІЗДІК САЛАСЫНДАҒЫ ЫНТЫМАҚТАСТЫҚТЫҢ ПРАКТИКАЛЫҚ АСПЕКТИЛЕРІ

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**Аңдатпа.** Мақалада Одақтастық қатынастар туралы шарт (2022 жылғы 22 желтоқсан) контекстінде өңірлік қауіпсіздікті қамтамасыз ету бойынша Қазақстан мен Өзбекстан арасындағы практикалық ынтымақтастықтың жағдайы мен келешегі талқыланады.

Әлемде байқалып отырған күрделі геосаяси жағдай және оның Орталық Азияға әсері Астана мен Ташкенттің қауіпсіздік саласындағы тығыз мемлекетаралық ынтымақтастығына ықпал ететіні атап өтілді. Осылайша, Одақтастық қатынастар туралы Декларациядан (2021 жылғы 6 желтоқсан) айырмашылығы, Шартта қорғаныс және қауіпсіздік салаларындағы мемлекеттердің өзара іс-қимылын нығайтуға, тікелей қауіп-қатер туындаған жағдайда өзара көмек көрсетуге қатысты мазмұнды ережелер көрсетілген.

Зерттеудің өзектілігі бұл тақырыптың Орталық Азия және шетел авторларының еңбектерінде әлі де дұрыс жан-жақты талдауын таппағандығымен түсіндіріледі.

**Түйін сөздер:** Қазақстан, Өзбекстан, одақтастық қатынастар, Орталық Азия, аймақтық қауіпсіздік

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## ДОГОВОР О СОЮЗНИЧЕСКИХ ОТНОШЕНИЯХ: ПРАКТИЧЕСКИЕ АСПЕКТЫ СОТРУДНИЧЕСТВА КАЗАХСТАНА И УЗБЕКИСТАНА ПО ОБЕСПЕЧЕНИЮ БЕЗОПАСНОСТИ

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**Аннотация.** В статье рассматриваются состояние и перспективы практического сотрудничества Казахстана и Узбекистана по обеспечению региональной безопасности в контексте Договора о союзнических отношениях (22 декабря 2022 года).

Отмечается, что наблюдаемая сложная геополитическая ситуация в мире и ее влияние на Центральную Азию способствует тесному межгосударственному сотрудничеству Астаны и Ташкента в области безопасности. Так, в отличие от Декларации о союзнических отношениях (6 декабря 2021 года), в Договоре выделены содержательные положения, касающиеся укрепления взаимодействия государств в сферах обороны и безопасности, взаимопомощи в случае возникновения прямых угроз.

Актуальность исследования обусловлена тем, что эта тема еще не нашла должного комплексного анализа в работах центральноазиатских и зарубежных авторов.

*Ключевые слова: Казахстан, Узбекистан, союзнические отношения, Центральная Азия, региональная безопасность.*

## **Introduction**

At the end of December 2022, a significant event occurred that revitalized the deepening of regional partnerships. It was the first foreign state visit paid by President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev to Uzbekistan after his swearing-in ceremony. This visit to Tashkent clearly reaffirmed Kazakhstan's foreign policy focus on mutually beneficial cooperation with Central Asian countries.

A clear indication of the strong potential in Kazakh-Uzbek relations is the growth of mutual trade. This is also favored by the complementarity of the economies of the two states. In recent years, there has been a significant rise in collaborative projects across key economic sectors. As a result, the bilateral trade between our nations has grown from \$2 billion in 2017 to \$5 billion at the end of 2022 [2]. In accordance with the objectives outlined by the two country leaders, measures are being taken to increase this value to \$10 billion in the medium term.

According to statistics covering the period from January to April 2023, Kazakhstan ranks as Uzbekistan's third most important foreign trade partner, following China and Russia, accounting for 7.7% of the total trade volume [3].

With this in view, a pivotal moment in the visit agenda was the interregional business forum held in Tashkent. The forum welcomed leaders from industry sectors, trade and industry chambers, holding companies, and 400 representatives from the business communities of both nations. During the event, the parties signed the Agreement to advance cooperation in trade, economics,

and cultural-humanitarian areas between Samarkand and Turkestan, the "Roadmap" encompassing the agricultural investment projects and trade agreements, as well as the package of agreements outlining the plans to enhance business interactions between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, with a total value exceeding \$2.5 billion.

The logical extension of the forum involved the active participation of President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev and President Shavkat Mirziyoyev in a ceremony marking the commencement of several joint investment projects aimed at reinforcement of the industrial cooperation.

In general, President Tokayev of Kazakhstan held fruitful discussion with President of Uzbekistan dedicated to a wide range of topics related to bilateral cooperation, including the development of trade and economic relations, the potential for transportation and transit, energy sector collaboration, and the co-utilization of cross-border water resources.

These discussions resulted in the signing of 15 documents, including agreements related to the Central Asia Industrial Cooperation Center, collaborative efforts in higher education and postgraduate studies, as well as environmental conservation. The parties approved the Roadmaps for expanding cooperation between various regions such as Turkistan and Tashkent, Turkistan and Jizzakh, Kyzylorda and Navoiy regions. Additionally, agreements were reached for projects related to energy, the chemical industry, transportation, and logistics. In total, the visit resulted in the signing

of investment contracts and bilateral agreements amounting to over \$8 billion.

The key agreements achieved during the visit included those related to allied relations and the delimitation of state borders and poised to enhance stability and security in the Central Asian region, fully unlocking its economic potential.

In this context, the full-fledged Treaty on allied relations (TAR) has ushered in a new era in the history of the relationship between our two neighboring nations. This document marks the further deepening of cooperation across various spheres, including politics, economics, investment, science and technology, culture, and humanities between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

Emphasizing the importance of the signed agreements, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev underlined that they "will be etched in the annals of two nations' cooperative and brotherly ties in golden letters" [4].

Shavkat Mirziyoyev, in particular, stressed that "alliance represents the highest and most trusted level of interstate partnership. According to him "we are committed to shape a common future" [5].

Given the growing global geopolitical tensions, it is vital to pay attention to specific TAR provisions that hold practical significance in strengthening the bilateral cooperation between Astana and Tashkent in terms of security. It's important to note that cooperation in this dimension directly impacts the economic aspects of interregional partnership of the countries.

President Tokayev addressed the current challenges facing our region due to unprecedented geopolitical conflicts during a meeting with the Central Asian leaders and the President of the European

Council held in Astana on October 27, 2022 [6].

During the "Central Asia-China" summit held in Xi'an on May 19, 2023, President of Uzbekistan pointed out that, despite overcoming the trials posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, our region now faces the adverse consequences of a global credibility gap. According to Shavkat Mirziyoyev, this situation disrupts transportation and logistics networks, threatens food and energy security, and presents other complications [7].

Therefore, issues of enhancing close coordination and practical cooperation in ensuring security between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, as the two largest and most developed countries in the region, rise to the fore.

Notably, Article 1 of TRA solidifies the principle of considering each other's national interests, respecting independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the inviolability of state borders [8].

Article 2 stipulates that "in the event of a situation which, in the opinion of either party, constitutes a threat of aggression from third countries, the parties shall promptly hold relevant consultations with each other, both bilaterally and within international organizations to which they are parties, with the aim of facilitating its peaceful resolution" [8]. Moreover, the parties undertake not to align with any blocs or alliances in a way that will compromise the interests of either partner and refrain from participating in actions directed against each other.

It's important to underline that in the current global geopolitical climate characterized by instability, turbulence, and the erosion of international law, TRA is intended to bolster collaboration between the nations in countering

terrorism, extremism, separatism, transnational crime, drug trafficking, cybercrime, illegal migration, human trafficking, and other imminent threats.

Expanding communication in the field of protection against hybrid threats and ensuring information security is highly relevant. During the IV Consultative Meeting of the Heads of Central Asian States, which took place on July 21, 2022, in Cholpon-Ata, the President of Kazakhstan urged his counterparts to intensify their cooperation in preventing detrimental informational occurrences that could detrimentally affect the region [9].

Reinforcement of military cooperation to fortify the defense capabilities of both nations is becoming a focus. A striking example of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan's collaboration in this sphere includes joint military exercises involving Special Forces units from both countries, such as "Kalkan-2021" held in the Zhambyl region, Kazakhstan, "Hamkorlik-2021" held at the Termez training ground and "Kalkon-2023" held at the Angren training ground in the Tashkent region, Uzbekistan.

Furthermore, TRA contains provisions aimed at deepening ecological security ties, including mutual support in the prevention and resolution of natural and man-made emergencies. Another objective of this practical alliance is the advancement of cooperation in the field of food security.

High-level interactions play a substantial role in the multifaceted development of the Kazakhstan-Uzbekistan cooperation. In this context, to enhance the strategic coordination for the execution of agreed commitments and the timely resolution of pressing issues between Astana and Tashkent, the Supreme Interstate Council

led by the heads of the two nations, has been established.

Additionally, TRA envisions the mechanism enabling the work of Special Representatives of the Heads of States, promoting bilateral trade and economic interactions, and enhancing the efficiency of the Joint Intergovernmental Commission and Regional Cooperation Forums between our countries.

In this context, during a conference held on December 27, 2022, in Tashkent, which focused on the outcomes of the President of Kazakhstan's visit to Uzbekistan, experts from both Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan highlighted the evolving dynamics of their bilateral relations across all spheres. Of particular attention was the cooperation in strengthening regional security.

For instance, Yerkin Tukumov, Director of the Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, pointed that Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan stand as the two largest economies in the region with a combined GDP exceeding \$260 billion. To put this in perspective, the total GDP of Central Asia hovers around \$350 billion. Consequently, both nations shoulder a considerable responsibility in upholding economic regional stability and security [10].

During the same event, Eldor Aripov, Director of the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the President of Uzbekistan, emphasized that "the signing of the Treaty on allied relations is a response to the contemporary challenges and threats confronting both countries" [11].

When discussing the significance of the close political and economic ties between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, it becomes crucial to grasp the logic and practice associated with the evolution of allied

relations in the science of international affairs.

The studies of allied relations and military-political alliances primarily include applied research domains within the field of international relations. According to the American realist scholar George Liska, one cannot discuss the international politics without acknowledging the role of alliances [12]. G. Liska's research, in particular, focused on various sources of threats to national security as motives driving the formation of alliances.

It should be noted that a widely accepted explanation of the formation of alliances between countries in the field of international relations theory is centered on collective national security and building military capabilities. In simpler terms, nations create alliances to effectively address anticipated security challenges and threats.

As outlined by political analysts Alexander Groth and Richard Randall from the University of California, "States enter into alliances to become stronger, more secure, and wealthier than they would be individually" [13, p. 109].

Brett Leeds from Rice University, along with various other American political scholars, provides the following description of alliances: "The alliances are written agreements signed by official representatives of at least two independent states, encompassing commitments to provide assistance to a partner in the event of armed conflicts, remain neutral in the face of conflicts, abstain from engaging in armed conflicts with one another, or hold consultation and cooperate in the case of international crises that pose a risk of an armed conflict" [14, p. 238]. Hence, according to this definition, verbal agreements or formal statements

fall short of establishing formalized, equitable alliances.

As highlighted by Professor Douglas Gibler, a professor of political science at the University of Alabama, empirical research reveals that the interpretation of the alliance concept amenable to empirical verification, hinges on two key factors. Firstly, alliance members must be independent and sovereign nations-participants of the international system. For example, alliances formed by the international terrorist organizations cannot be included when operationalization of this concept. Secondly, it is mandatory to prepare the legally formalized treaty text that outlines a military commitment, defense-focused military-political collaboration, or a neutrality agreement [15].

Hence, the objective of this study is to examine the prevalent opinions of Kazakh and Uzbek experts concerning the practical importance of the status of allied relations for the future enhancing cooperation between our countries in the field of regional security.

### **Research methods**

Utilizing discourse analysis of expert community evaluations, situational, content and event analyses, the authors delve into the possibilities of bilateral regional security collaboration between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, all within the context of the Treaty on Allied Relations.

Furthermore, the article employs a method that scrutinizes official documents, including interstate treaties, agreements, statements, public addresses, and media conferences materials issued by officials and organizations of both nations.

## Research results

Factoring in that the treaties governing allied relations and the state border demarcation, as signed by the Presidents of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, not only align with the long-term national interests of both countries but also signify a fresh dynamic in the regional intergovernmental relations, [16] experts draw attention to several vital aspects of the ongoing bilateral interaction in the field of security.

Firstly, a necessity for the development of shared strategies and mechanisms for interstate cooperation aimed at upholding regional security remains relevant.

In this context, experts pointed out that Central Asia has become the world's pioneer region in developing a Joint Action Plan to implement the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy [17]. Under the Treaty on Allied Relations, the parties also coordinate their joint efforts to address contemporary challenges and threats, including terrorism, religious extremism, and separatism.

Overall, in recent years, our countries have successfully established operational cooperation at the level of defense ministries, intelligence agencies, and law enforcement authorities. All of these endeavors align with the mutual goals of both Astana and Tashkent in regional policy, aiming to maintain order and stability in the Central Asia [18]. This positive synergy generated by the mutually advantageous partnership of Astana and Tashkent serves as a promising model for enhancing regional collaboration.

Secondly, one of the primary directions of bilateral cooperation, requiring joint efforts, is the sphere of water and ecological security.

According to experts, the ongoing global warming in Central Asia has

resulted in adverse effects, such as a shortage of water resources, land degradation, and an increased occurrence of natural disasters. Over the last 50 years, the amount of lands affected by desertification in our countries has increased by 15-20%. Furthermore, some Central Asian states are among the 30 countries grappling with a severe water deficit [19]. Concurrently, the utilization rate of regional water resources surpasses global averages, reaching over 80% [20].

Nevertheless, experts noted the increasing cooperation between Astana and Tashkent on water security issues, significantly contributing to the sustainable development of the entire Central Asia, which is home to over 70 million people [21].

For instance, since 2016, a bilateral working group has been operational, focusing on searching for the solution to resolve water-related issues. In 2018, a joint Kazakh-Uzbek working group was established to address environmental protection and water quality in the Syr Darya River basin. In 2020, both parties adopted a roadmap for cooperation in water-related issues. Additionally, Astana and Tashkent maintain a close working relationship within the framework of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea.

Concerning the mitigation of the Aral Sea's drying effects, the stewardship of water resources, and environment preservation, Uzbek experts highlight the importance of implementing the "Green Agenda" adopted by the Fourth Consultative Meeting of the Central Asian Heads of State on July 21, 2022, in Cholpon-Ata [21].

Kazakhstan voiced the idea of establishing the Water-Energy Consortium of Central Asian States [22]

and increasing cooperation through river basin associations like "Syr Darya" and "Amu Darya" [23].

Thirdly, another key vector of bilateral cooperation under TRA is the development of close collaboration to ensure food security.

Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have actively engaged in the agricultural sector activities, in line with the "Roadmap" signed in February 2022. This collaboration includes several key areas: crop cultivation; marketing early varieties of potatoes, greens; and the processing of Kazakh grain in Uzbekistan [24].

Additionally, a significant component of our bilateral relationship involves formulating a practical strategy regarding Afghanistan, including the ongoing provision of humanitarian aid to the Afghan people.

Experts emphasize the strong interest of both Astana and Tashkent in stabilizing the Afghan situation. The parties maintain consistent communication with the new Afghan administration, extend comprehensive assistance, and discuss the implementation of economic and infrastructure projects [25].

Therefore, in the court of public opinion, there is a growing need for developing a unified, region-wide approach to practical collaboration with the new Afghan administration [26]. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan consistently contribute to efforts supporting the Afghan economy and delivering humanitarian aid.

For example, on April 16, 2023, Kazakhstan dispatched 5,000 tons of food aid to Afghanistan, including dairy products, vegetable oil, flour, and buckwheat [27]. Similarly, on April 19, 2023, Uzbekistan transported 185 tons of food products to Afghanistan, comprising flour, wheat, vegetable oil, pasta, canned

goods, and sugar [28].

Fifthly, the parties address issues of cooperation in the field of information security. In this regard, a paramount objective is the establishment of the basis of regional identity, chiefly through media channels.

According to the Uzbek analysts, the President of Uzbekistan proposed the essential tenet of this approach: "Central Asia - a common future stemming from a shared past." Consequently, our neighboring countries should join forces to build a regional identity grounded in cultural heritage and history. Experts contend that this kind of expanded collaboration proves significantly more effective in battling the shared challenges and threats, serving as a catalyst for regional cooperation [29].

Additionally, a similar viewpoint is espoused by experts concerning the reinforcement of regional collaboration related to the information sphere. This tool can enhance mutual trust among neighboring nations, facilitate collaborative information projects, and direct information exchange without reliance on "information intermediaries" from other nations. For instance, Kazakhstan's initiative to create a cross-regional television channel or news website serves as a spectacular example of endeavor in this field [30].

### **Discussion of the results**

In this context, expert evaluations indicate that the period from 2021 to 2023 has been marked not only by an enhancement of political and economic collaboration between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan but also by a noticeable intensification of their joint efforts towards security.

To begin with, this is evidenced by

the convergence of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan approaches to regional security. Both Astana and Tashkent adopt a principled stance on issues related to the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of their nations.

In addition, they engage in fruitful cooperation on specific regional matters within the framework of international organizations such as the UN, Organization of Turkic States, OSCE, CICMA, SCO, and other multifaceted establishments.

Furthermore, there is a growing importance attached to the experience gained in maintaining inter-agency contacts related to the defense and security.

Over the past few years, significant achievements have been reached, including the finalization of legal documentation concerning the Kazakhstan-Uzbekistan state borders and cooperation in defense, law enforcement, as well as emergency prevention and management.

All this suggests that, at this stage, the mutual approaches of Astana and Tashkent in ensuring security can be characterized as fiducial. Currently, we are witnessing an expansion of such cooperation over the medium term. In this context, it's worth

noting that the research topic holds a long-term outlook.

At the same time, it is required to conduct comprehensive and systematic examination of the relevant factors in the entire spectrum of practical security collaboration between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, encompassing both bilateral initiatives and their broader regional implications.

## Conclusion

Summarizing the above, it's important to mention the consensus reached by experts that the signing of treaties on allied relations and state border demarcation between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan on December 22, 2022, has significantly bolstered their practical cooperation across various domains and had a positive impact on regional stability as a whole.

It's evident that in the official political and expert discourse of both Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, the substantive aspects of security cooperation hold a prominent position and are increasingly crucial, contributing to the establishment of a more extensive regional security initiative.

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