

Russia and Kazakhstan now share Kazakhstani Strategic Sites

By [Elena Kosolapova](#)

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Kazakhstan decided to significantly increase its control over the Baikonur Cosmodrome, situated in the desert steppes and leased by Russia until 2050, despite Russia's objections. Finally Russia yielded and the two countries signed an agreement on joint operation of this facility in late 2013.

Russia plans to commission its own new cosmodrome (Vostochniy) in Siberia in 2018 but currently has no alternatives to Baikonur. Understandably, that is why Russia has a dire need for Baikonur to remain a space center. Moscow sees any restrictions posed by Kazakhstan on this facility as an infringement of its economical and geopolitical interests.

Last week the parties agreed on joint operation of Sary-Shagan anti-ballistic missile testing range located near Balkhash Lake in Kazakhstan which was used by Russia alone earlier.

While Moscow may have reason to see red, experts from both countries do not think that these changes in the operation of the complexes — which are of strategic importance for Russia — is likely to hamper relations between two countries.

The period when Kazakhstan took no part in the management of important facilities on its territory was transitional, believes Russian policy analyst on Central Asia Alexander Knyazev.

"It is a normal integration process in the military-political sphere. There is nothing special about it. This is a common international practice," the regional program coordinator of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences Alexander Knyazev told Trend on Feb. 4.

On the contrary, he believes, that joint operation of strategic objects is evidence of bilateral confidence.

The Russian expert says that Kazakhstan remains Russia's most reliable partner in the Central Asia region.

"There are some countries in Central Asia which are formally Russian allies within the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) – Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. But these two countries are very inconsistent in their foreign policy. They are allies on paper, but I would consider them as very unreliable allies. They are constantly trying to change the conditions of Russian military objects presence on their territory to get some economic preferences," Knyazev said.

Meanwhile, the foreign policy of other countries – Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan – does not envisage the presence of Russian military forces on their territories, the expert noted.

Kazakh political analyst Eduard Poletayev shares the opinion of his Russian colleague that changes in conditions of leasing agreements do not mean that there are any problems in the bilateral relations between Russia and Kazakhstan.

“It is normal practice when agreements which envisage monetary compensation are revised from time to time. It is resulted from inflation, rising prices, etc. But nobody is going to change the leasing agreements fundamentally,” the head of World of Eurasia Public Foundation Poletayev told Trend on Feb. 5.

He noted that it is not the first time Kazakh-Russian leasing agreements are under revision and that the sum of Russia’s payment to Kazakhstan for Baikonur was once increased some years ago.

Poletayev admitted that some bodies and officials of both countries were unhappy with the relations between Russia and Kazakhstan in the military and space spheres and made negative statements.

“However these problems do not threaten bilateral relations. All of them were resolved along the way. The situation just had a working character,” Poletayev said.

In general, the ecology protests which took place across Kazakhstan following the explosion of the Russian carrier rocket Proton in Kazakhstan were not against cooperation with Russia but urged to use ecological fuel at Baikonur, the Kazakh political analyst said.

The Proton-M carrier rocket with three Glonass-M Russian navigation satellites crashed on July 2 at the Baikonur Cosmodrome one minute after take-off and spilled its toxic fuel on Kazakhstan’s territory.

So the bilateral relations between Kazakhstan and Russia remain positive the experts believe. However it is difficult to make long-term forecasts in such issues they warned.

Meanwhile Russia is going to strengthen and develop its military base in another Central Asia republic — Kant air base in Kyrgyzstan.

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