

STABILITY AND SECURITY IN CENTRAL ASIA: ENGAGING KAZAKHSTAN



A REPORT ON THE SECOND NCAFP TRIP TO KAZAKHSTAN (JUNE 24-JULY 1, 2006)

As Well as Policy Recommendations

CENTRAL ASIA PROJECT:
U.S INTERESTS IN CENTRAL ASIA
AND U.S.-KAZAKHSTAN RELATIONS

MICHAEL RYWKIN, Project Director

AUGUST 2006

Our Mission

The National Committee on American Foreign Policy was founded in 1974 by Professor Hans J. Morgenthau and others. It is a nonprofit activist organization dedicated to the resolution of conflicts that threaten U.S. interests. Toward that end, the National Committee identifies, articulates, and helps advance American foreign policy interests from a nonpartisan perspective within the framework of political realism.

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supporting countries committed to the values and the practice of political, religious, and cultural pluralism;

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FOREWORD

In April 2005 the National Committee on American Foreign Policy's (NCAFP's) first Central Asia Project delegation went to Kazakhstan at the invitation of Kazakhstan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. On its return, the NCAFP published a report entitled Stability in Central Asia: Engaging Kazakhstan. It contained an overview of the current state of affairs in that country as perceived by the delegation, plus conclusions and policy recommendations. That report was based on high-level meetings in Almaty and Astana, briefings and debriefings in Washington, and consultations with Central Asian experts in both countries as well as among members of the delegation. It reflects our views of the situation and our belief in the necessity to "engage with Kazakhstan," the most advanced and the most promising post-Soviet republic of the "southern belt." The report was positively received both in Washington and in Astana, where it was translated into Russian.

In January 2006 the NCAFP, in cooperation with the Dwight D. Eisenhower National Security Series, organized a roundtable conference entitled "Stability and Security in Central Asia: Differing Interests and Perspectives." Presenters discussed the situation in Central Asia as seen from Washington, Astana, Bishkek, Moscow, Beijing, and Ankara. Although the conference dealt with the region as a whole, the bulk of attention was focused on Kazakhstan. A summary of the roundtable with policy recommendations designed to facilitate mutual understanding between the United States and Central Asia, particularly Kazakhstan, was subsequently published.

The NCAFP Central Asia Project was invited by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan to return to Almaty and Astana for a second trip from June 24 to July 1, 2006. The four-member delegation consisted of Senior Vice President Donald S. Rice, NCAFP Central Asia Project Director Dr. Michael Rywkin, NCAFP member Steven Chernys, and Dr. Peter Sinnott, director of the Caspian Sea Project at Columbia University. The delegation engaged in briefing sessions with U.S. government officials in Washington, D.C., on May 24, 2006. On July 13, members of the delegation returned to Washington to attend debriefing sessions with U.S. government officials.

The NCAFP expresses its gratitude to the government officials, scholars, businessmen, and policy analysts, both in the United States and Kazakhstan, who took time from their busy schedules to confer with its Central Asia Project delegates. A list is included in the appendix. All conversations were off the record. The NCAFP alone is responsible for the conclusions and policy recommendations in this report.

Special gratitude goes to the NCAFP's Central Asia Project Director Dr. Michael Rywkin, who is the author of this report. Without his keen insight into developments in the countries of the region and his deep substantive knowledge of the former Soviet republics, especially their political situations, nationalities, and ethnic relationships, the NCAFP's Central Asia Project could not have developed to its present status, which has begun to fulfill its potential as a long-term track II vehicle involving the United States, Kazakhstan, and, eventually, the other countries of Central Asia. I also thank my fellow NCAFP colleagues Donald S. Rice, who headed our delegation to Kazakhstan, and Steven Chernys, whose business experience in the region and insights into developments have contributed greatly to the project. They join me in expressing the NCAFP's gratitude to Dr. Peter Sinnott for participating for a second time in a trip to Kazakhstan and providing invaluable assistance and expertise.

The NCAFP's Central Asia Project trip to Kazakhstan would not have occurred without the generosity and hospitality of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Perspektiva Foundation. Funding for events in the United States and for travel to and from Kazakhstan over the past two years has been provided primarily by the Dwight D. Eisenhower National Security Series, the Shelby Cullom Davis Foundation, and certain NCAFP trustees, members, and others.

The views expressed in this report are those only of the National Committee on American Foreign Policy.

**George D. Schwab, President
National Committee on American Foreign Policy**



INTRODUCTION

Since the first National Committee on American Foreign Policy (NCAFP) Central Asia Project's visit to Kazakhstan in April 2005, several events have taken place. These events prompted our second mission in late June 2006 to clarify the consequences of some of those developments. Even though our overall appreciation of Kazakhstan's achievements, of its importance to the United States, and of its key geopolitical position at the crossroad of the new "Silk Road" remains unchanged, important developments have occurred that warrant a new look at the situation.

Among the occurrences in question, we have pinpointed the following as having a substantial impact.

- ❖ Despite many differences, Beijing and Moscow have managed to combine their efforts with the aim of reversing the inroads made by the United States in Central Asia, especially those achieved after September 11, 2001. Washington's preoccupation with the ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan and its difficulties in the larger Middle East provided a window of opportunity for both powers. A new Russo-Chinese understanding resulted in the July 2005 Shanghai Cooperative Organization (SCO) declaration that demanded the removal of U.S. military bases from the area.
- ❖ The "Tulip Revolution" in Kyrgyzstan (seen as a coup d'état in Central Asian capitals), which followed revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia, as well as the transmission of power in Azerbaijan from President Aliev to his son, has influenced Central Asian thinking about American intentions and raised suspicions that there is a hidden agenda behind U.S. exhortations to adopt democracy and observe human rights.
- ❖ Uzbekistan's disenchantment with American policies reached a high point after the bloody events in Andijon prompted Western condemnations of President Karimov's repressive actions. Although the events were interpreted in different ways, even by Western scholars, the U.S. reaction became the final straw in the Uzbek regime's disillusion. Karimov shifted alliances and sought Moscow's protection. Moscow disregarded Uzbekistan's poor record with respect to the Russian minority. To facilitate Tashkent's shift, both Moscow and Beijing offered substantial financial assistance to the new ally.
- ❖ Kazakhstan, which had consistently tried to maintain a balance

among the great powers, tilted away from the United States, allowing several Russian and Chinese inroads into strategically important energy and metal extraction sectors. It concluded new security agreements with Moscow and signed the 2005 SCO anti-American declaration (though it claims it succeeded in moderating the language).

- ❖ In the months that followed, Kazakhstan tried to restore equilibrium by joining the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline arrangement, increasing bilateral contacts with the United States, and reiterating its appreciation of the American role in the area. Astana appears willing to do what is necessary to maintain the strategic balance that is indispensable for the country's independence.
- ❖ In conversations with representatives of Kazakhstan's Foreign Ministry since President Nazarbayev's reelection in December 2005, the delegation formed the impression that Kazakhstan felt underappreciated by the United States for its successful efforts to tone down the original wording of the declaration issued at the SCO meeting in Astana in July 2005.
- ❖ American critics expressed consternation with the 91 percent majority obtained by President Nazarbayev in the December 2005 presidential election in Kazakhstan. The stalling of the democratization process after the election and, most of all, specific provisions of the new media law have not been welcomed. Still, Washington has acknowledged the reality of President Nazarbayev's overwhelming popularity. Unlike neighboring states, Kazakhstan has experienced steady economic progress that has raised the standard of living.
- ❖ Kazakhstan's leading position in the region has been propelled by its economic development, which has increased the gap between it and its neighbors. The development of Almaty as the uncontested financial center of Central Asia has been confirmed by the establishment of a regional cargo hub by the FedEx Corporation.
- ❖ Nevertheless, Kazakhstan is not yet qualified to become a member of the group of 50 most competitive economies and remains at the lower end in the international ratings of economic freedoms.



KAZAKHSTAN'S NINE POINTS

Before our visit we were told that Kazakhstan was interested in discussing with us nine points concerning its relationship with the United States. They can be divided into two groups: positive statements and wish list.

Positive Statements

1. Kazakh–American relations are a prime concern for Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan continues to cooperate with the United States in the fight against terrorism, opening its air space to support U.S. operations in Afghanistan and participating in mine-sweeping and bomb-disposal operations in Iraq.
2. Kazakhstan sees the U.S. presence in the area as a stabilizing factor. It opposes the use of the SCO and of other organizations as counterweights to the United States and NATO.
3. Kazakhstan is ready to offer assistance to the United States in spreading democratic values in the region. It wants U.S.-Kazakhstan relations to be the basis for regional security and stability.
4. The strategic partnership between Kazakhstan and the United States has been based on achieving cooperation in liquidating weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and nuclear infrastructure. Kazakhstan shares U.S. concerns about the spread of nuclear technology.

Wish List

5. Kazakhstan is waiting to receive concrete U.S. proposals concerning the fulfillment of the June 2004 U.S.-Kazakh agreement on trade and investment.
6. There has been little progress in realizing the Houston Initiative under which it was contemplated that the United States would provide assistance to small- and medium-size businesses with a view to helping to build a middle class in Kazakhstan as a foundation for social stability and democratization.
7. Given the one-sided subjective nature of making such an evaluation, Kazakhstan objects to the linkage between U.S. assistance to Kazakhstan and the requirement that the secretary of state, before granting assistance, certify that a significant improvement has taken place during the preceding six-month period in protecting human rights in Kazakhstan (or grant a waiver for national security reasons).
8. Kazakhstan sees no reason for the continued application of the outdated Jackson-Vanik amendment to present-day Kazakhstan.
9. Kazakhstan looks forward to receiving U.S. assistance in gaining the chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) for 2009, a goal that now appears unrealistic.



POINTS OF PARTICULAR INTEREST

Taking into consideration the points listed above and the delegation's evaluations, we focused on three points of particular interest. We raised those points in each of our geopolitical discussions in Astana and Almaty. The first point was based on our impression that the Kazakh government wished to rectify or rebalance to the *status quo ante* the tilt that had taken place toward Russia and China. The second point was the emergence of Kazakhstan as the economic, political, and moral leader in Central Asia. The third point was the succession issue for each of the very different countries in the region—the prospects for a peaceful and legal transfer of power that would be regarded as legitimate.

The Geopolitical Situation

Regarding the first point, it was our impression that at the highest levels of both government and business, there is a full and nuanced understanding of the geopolitical situation in the region and of the particular constraints with which Kazakhstan is forced to reckon. We were eager to find out the nature of the pressures applied by Russia and China in order to obtain Kazakhstan's signature on the 2005 SCO declaration. For the most part such pressure appears to have been economic. The ability of the Russian government and Russian businesspeople to project influence in Kazakhstan reflects both economic and cultural reality. It ranges from the control of oil and gas pipelines located in Russian territory to the presence of a large and influential Russian minority in Kazakhstan and to the existence of centuries-old cultural and business ties between the two countries. It is not only "Gazprom diplomacy," although that is a significant economic reality. It is a two-way flow: Kazakhstan's banks and entrepreneurs are active in investing in Russia. Similarly, Chinese government and government-supported businesses are active in Kazakhstan and are able to pay premium values to purchase or lease Kazakh mineral resources.

American Competitiveness

Although there may be a preference to rebalance toward the United States, there was a widespread feeling among many persons we spoke with that the United States will not or cannot compete with Russian and Chinese government-sponsored business activities. Kazakhstan is a long way from the United States; the Russians and Chinese have set strategic objectives for their businesses and can afford to overpay; apart from major U.S. companies that know how to deal in Kazakhstan on major energy projects, the risk profile is discouraging. Of equal or perhaps of more concern to a U.S. foreign policy group is the impression that a number of

our interlocutors may view the United States as a superpower in decline and an inconstant partner, taking into account the distraction of the Iraqi and Afghan conflicts; continued instability in Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan, which all experienced U.S.-supported “regime changes”; and U.S. budget and trade deficits.

What Can Be Done?

The best counter to such largely economic pressures from a U.S. foreign policy point of view is to concentrate on the areas in which the U.S. government can be effective. First, we were impressed with the effectiveness of U.S. programs that provide assistance to the Kazakh military in military-to-military relations and in training and in the funding of International Military Education and Training (IMET) and Partnership for Peace programs. There seems to be very substantial “bang for the buck,” and a significant increase in these programs would be a relatively low-cost way of expanding U.S. influence. The same would apply to cooperation in counterterrorism and counternarcotics efforts. Second, it was clear in a number of our meetings that Western civilization exemplified by freedom, tolerance, and secular government remains the ideal model for Kazakh society and is favorably evaluated against the models of its Russian, Chinese, and other Central Asian neighbors. The United States and its European colleagues must skillfully use the leverage they have here and not overplay it. Third, a very important counter to business inroads by Russian entrepreneurs flush with cash, backed by the Kremlin, and rich in long-time connections with local Kazakh ruling circles is the growing number of Western-educated young business leaders in Kazakhstan. The United States should promote the expansion of the Bolashak Scholarship Program to educate graduate students in technical and engineering fields by expediting the processing of visa applications and the acceptance of Kazakh students at U.S. universities.

Regional Leadership

Regarding the second point, the emergence of Kazakhstan as the economic, political, and moral leader in Central Asia, we discussed the several multilateral organizations through which Kazakhstan is endeavoring to play that role but concluded that a viable economic union is some years away and most likely awaits some regime changes in neighboring countries. We were encouraged by the fact that investments have been made across the Caspian and that there is a willingness to do business in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

Despite Kazakhstan’s efforts, there are difficulties on the path to regional integration caused by the small size of the intra-Central Asian trade, the growing economic disparity between Kazakhstan and its neighbors, and the lack of cooperation on the part of some of Kazakhstan’s neighbors.

Succession Issues

We had difficulty engaging with our interlocutors on the subject of succession in Kazakhstan. Our focus was on the need for transfers of power throughout the region—not just President Nazarbayev’s succession—that are peaceful and will be perceived as legitimate. Recognizing cultural differences, we did not discuss the specifics of how to accomplish this objective. We did discuss the Western perception of press restraints and questioned the advisability of the Kazakh parliament’s enactment of the proposed new media law in light of the quest for the OSCE chairmanship.

Democratization Misinterpreted

Finally, we were struck but not surprised by the fact that the U.S. insistence on democratic freedoms and respect for human rights is missing its targets. Official circles regard it as a call for “regime change” that represents an unwelcome intrusion into justly earned independence and sovereignty. Opposition elements regard U.S. hectoring as far too timid and ineffectual. Intellectuals see it as a cover-up for oil policies and believe that business circles are more interested in the freedom to conduct business unhindered by outside interference than in any other kind of freedom.



OTHER POINTS OF INTEREST

In addition to the above points of particular interest to the NCAFP delegation, we were very interested to learn of the following points from our interlocutors.

The Oil Fund

Mindful of the poor record of many oil-producing countries in managing their oil revenues, the Kazakhs have made a decision to direct the totality of oil income into the existing Special Fund and not to allocate any to the current budget (starting in 2007). Only income derived from the fund’s investments will be used for future annual budgets. We commend the concept but question whether the budget can be sustained without contributions from oil revenues unless there is a significant transition period.

The Legalization of Illegal Immigrants

The Kazakhstan government intends to legalize all illegal immigrants (between 1.0 and 1.5 million persons) in order to minimize projected future labor shortages, regularize a *de facto* situation, and end the abuse of illegal workers and tax avoidance.

The Mining Industry

The growing role of uranium mining (Kazakhstan has a quarter of the world's reserves) has attracted Russian interests that have established a strong foothold in the country. New agreements have recently enhanced cooperation between Russia and Kazakhstan.

The Diversification of the Economy

The Development of Small- and Medium-Size Businesses

Kazakhstan's attempts to diversify the economy and develop sectors for nonextractive industries have been bolstered by the creation of a "Sustainable Development Fund" named KAZYNA that will act as an adviser to investment funds with about one billion dollars of seed capital. KAZYNA's mission is to assist in implementing the efficient management of assets and in establishing a comprehensive business development program and support system. Its ultimate objective is to promote the competitiveness of the national economy at all levels and to fulfill the national government's objective of transforming Kazakhstan into the trade and industrial center of Central Asia. Astana is appealing to the United States to honor previous promises of providing assistance to develop small- and medium-size enterprises.

Kazakhstan's Available Investment Capital and Need for Foreign Direct Investment

It is our impression that Kazakhstan's banking system is sound, well-managed, both at the central bank and commercial bank levels, and flush with deposits. Although foreign direct investment (FDI) has been critical to the development of the oil and gas drilling and distribution systems (the U.S. participation at around 35 percent represents the largest FDI), we understand that future economic development in Kazakhstan may be largely if not wholly financed by domestic Kazakh investment. Indeed Kazakhstan may become a net exporter of FDI in Russia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and elsewhere in the region. There is a sense that it would be desirable for the United States to maintain its current significant share of Kazakhstan's FDI. However, there appears to be at least as great an interest in obtaining U.S. involvement in the development of brand products and technology in Kazakhstan by using Kazakh capital and U.S. training, management assistance, and know-how, as demonstrated in the new Marriott mixed-use occupancy development in Almaty.



NCAFP POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The United States should make a point of continuing to engage with Central Asia, especially its major state, Kazakhstan, not only as an important supplier of oil and gas or as a focus of our policy in Afghanistan but as a subject of great geopolitical importance by itself. The recent number and status of Russian, American, and other official visitors to this area constitute the best acknowledgment of renewed international attention given to the region. In the last year the United States has paid high-level attention to Kazakhstan, including visits by Secretary of State Rice and Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld last October, Secretary of Energy Bodman in March 2006, Vice President Cheney in May 2006, and Secretary of Agriculture Johanns in July 2006. The forthcoming official visit to Washington of President Nazarbayev with President Bush affords a further opportunity to develop and reinforce a coherent approach to the region and Kazakhstan in particular. The specific recommendations listed below are consistent with American foreign policy interests.

- ❖ The United States should take steps to offset the Russian and Chinese economic inroads achieved with the support of their governments. Without serious efforts on the part of the United States, the undertakings can turn to its disadvantage, weakening the geopolitical position of the United States in the region. In fact, many local observers have predicted that this will happen.
- ❖ The United States should not threaten historic Russian interests or growing Chinese commercial involvement but should work to maintain a healthy equilibrium among the interests of the great powers—an equilibrium that coincides with the aims of Kazakhstan's foreign policy.
- ❖ The key country in Central Asia, Kazakhstan, no longer requires financial help. It needs recognition, managerial, and technical assistance, the investment of human capital in the nonenergy sectors of the economy, and so forth; most of all, it needs a sense of certitude that the United States intends to remain a key player in the region.
- ❖ The United States should increase its interactions and cooperation with Kazakhstan's military and intelligence agencies that are forces of professionalism and stability. This should include increases in military-to-military contacts, IMET funding, participation in Partnership for Peace activities, sales and financing of military equipment (FMS and FMF) and assistance in tracking terrorist and narco-traffic activities.

- ❖ As noted in the first NCAFP report, the secular ethos that has produced a spirit of tolerance in the Muslim population in Kazakhstan has not received enough recognition in the West; nor has it been recognized that the present state of democratization and human rights in Kazakh society, though far from perfect, results from a compromise among social forces, ethnic diversity, economic factors, outside influences, and layers of conflicting historic traditions.
- ❖ We should not consider the presence of a large Russian-speaking minority in Kazakhstan as an element that exclusively benefits Moscow. Also, European settlers in the area are carriers of Western values and know-how. Moreover, the Russian language remains the language of communication, facilitating access to the outside world.
- ❖ The United States should follow up on the recent visit of Secretary Johanns to promote the acquisition of U.S. agriculture, ranching, and food-processing technology and know-how in order to improve productivity, including the possible expansion of the Boloshak Program to include students studying agriculture/agribusiness at U.S. universities and land-grant colleges, based on a commitment made by the U.S. government to facilitate the processing of their visas.
- ❖ The United States should endeavor to persuade the Kazakh government to liberalize telecommunications by ending the present monopoly, making telecommunications, especially Internet access, available at less cost, and facilitating the free flow of information that is consistent with developing a civil society and conducting economic activities (especially those engaged in by small- and medium-size enterprises).



APPENDIX

Hosts: Kazakhstan

The NCAFP expresses special thanks to our hosts in Kazakhstan. We are especially grateful to Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan H. E. Kassymzhomart Tokaev. He met with the NCAFP Central Asia Project group three times in New York over the past several years and invited us to send delegations to Kazakhstan in April 2005 and in June 2006. Also, we thank H. E. Yerzhan Kazykhanov, Kazakhstan's ambassador and permanent representative to the United Nations, for his assistance and express our appreciation as well to Serik Zhanibekov, counselor of Kazakhstan's Mission to the United Nations, and Timurkhan Akhmedin of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kazakhstan who handled all the technical arrangements with great skill and accompanied us in Kazakhstan. We express thanks as well to Birjan Murataliyev, deputy chairman of the Entrepreneurs Union "ATAMAKEN," and the Perspektiva Foundation, whose representatives, Shamil Tyncherov and Assel Karasheva, assisted in making our appointments; keeping us on schedule; translating when necessary; and wining, dining, and accommodating us in every way imaginable.



Interlocutors

We are grateful also to the following high-level government officials in the Republic of Kazakhstan and the United States and to other individuals and nongovernmental organizations that took time to meet with us to discuss the issues covered in this report.

Republic of Kazakhstan *(in chronological order)*

Government Officials

Karim Massimov
Deputy Prime Minister

Dr. Marat Shaikhutdinov
*Administration of the President,
Deputy Chief of the Foreign Policy Center*

Nurlan M. Abdirlov
*Administration of the President, Deputy Secretary of the Security Council-
Head of the Secretariat of the Security Council*

Erlan Baizhanov
*Administration of the President,
Head of the Information Analysis Center*

Major General V. Bozhko
*First Deputy Chairman of the National Security Committee
(assisted by Major General N. Bilisbekov, head of the Department of
Economic Security, and Colonel N. Alkenov, deputy head of the
Antiterrorism Department)*

Kairat K. Abdrakhmanov
Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs

Serzhan Abdykarimov
Director, Europe and America Departments, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Zagipa Ja. Balieva
Minister of Justice

Lt. General B. Sembinov
Deputy Minister of Defense,
and his staff (Major General Abdulmanov, Colonel R. Kusmuldin,
Colonel I. Khurmatov, Lt. Colonel K. Kushambayev,
Lt. Colonel A. Adishev, Lt. Colonel K. Amanzhanov)

Byrlyk E. Orazbaev
*Vice-Minister, Ministry of Energy and
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Tleuken Z. Akhmetov
*Chief of Staff, Ministry of Energy and
Mineral Resources*

Almaz K. Tulebayev
*Director, Department of Nuclear Energy, Ministry
of Energy and Mineral Resources*

Maksat N. Mukhanov
*Managing Director, National Asset
Management Company “Sustainable Development Fund KAZYNA”*

Arken K. Arystanov
*Chairman, Agency of the Republic of
Kazakhstan on the Regulation of Almaty Regional Financial Center Activity*

E. Babakumarov
Deputy Minister of Culture and Information

Zhambul Bekzhanov
Deputy Chairman of the Women's and Family Affairs Commission

Marat Tolybaev
Deputy Akim of Astana City

Kairat A. Bukenov
First Vice-Mayor of Almaty City

Other Individuals

Baktyzhan Zhumagulov
Acting Chairman of the OTAN Political Party

Ermek Kosherbaev
Leader of the Central Staff of the OTAN Political Party

Amzebek Zholshybekov
Member of Parliament (upper house) OTAN party

Alikhan Baimenov
Chairman of the AKSHOL Democratic Party

Zharmakhan Tuyakbay
Chairman of the Bloc of Democratic Forces for a Just Kazakhstan

Dr. Sanat K. Kushkumbaev
First Deputy Director, Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies

Dr. Murat Laumulin
Deputy Director, Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies

Burikhan Zh. Nurmukhamedov
Director, Institute of Nationalities Studies

Magzhan M. Auezov
Managing Director, Kazkommertsbank

Nurlan Abduov
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Vice President, Kazakhstan's Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs

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