**SCO Special Forces Train At U.S.-Funded Base In Kyrgyzstan**

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[](http://www.eurasianet.org/sites/default/files/imagecache/gallery/Screen%20Shot%202015-04-23%20at%202.26.42%20PM.png)

Special operations troops from SCO member state militaries at the opening ceremony of joint exercises in Tokmok, Kyrgyzstan. (photo: MoD Kazakhstan)

The China-led Shanghai Cooperation Organization is holding joint exercises with special operations forces from Russia, China, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan -- and they're doing it at a military base in Kyrgyzstan that the United States spent $9 million to build.

The SCO exercises [taking place this week](http://ria.ru/defense_safety/20150423/1060360873.html) involve 20-25 special operations troops from each participating country (all the member states except Uzbekistan, which typically sits out SCO military exercises). During the five-day exercise the troops will practice deploying to mountain areas, deploying from helicopters, seeking and destroying terrorist groups, rescuing hostages, and treating and evacuating wounded troops. Pretty standard stuff for a joint special operations exercise.

What makes this drill stand out is the [site](http://kg.akipress.org/news:614046/): the base of the Scorpions special operations unit in Tokmok, Kyrgyzstan. Readers may recall that this is the base that U.S. Central Command and the U.S. embassy in Bishkek spent $9 million to build. It's no wonder it was attractive to the SCO, given that a Wikileaked U.S. [diplomatic cable](https://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/11/09BISHKEK1191.html) from the opening ceremony of the base in 2009 described it as "the gold standard in Central Asian construction ... far exceeds any other facility the Kyrgyz currently have." The facility includes   
"officer and enlisted housing, classroom training facilities, a multipurpose facility, a dining facility and shower/sauna complex."

That was when military relations between the two countries were significantly tighter, thanks to the presence of the U.S. air base at Manas. The U.S. particularly focused on training and equipping [Kyrgyzstan's special forces](http://www.eurasianet.org/node/64736); in fiscal year 2012 alone U.S. special forces soldiers conducted [six-week training courses](http://www.eurasianet.org/node/71496) for 880 of their Kyrgyzstan counterparts. The Scorpion base at Tokmok was the centerpiece of this effort; when I visited Kyrgyzstan in 2012 to report on [U.S. military aid to Central Asia](http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/reports/us-military-aid-central-asia-who-benefits), the U.S. embassy took me on a tour of Tokmok.

But military-to-military ties soured shortly after that. Kyrgyzstan's government evicted the Americans from the base in 2013 and the U.S. cut back its military aid and training activities, for which [each side blamed the other](http://www.eurasianet.org/node/69136).

The base now belongs to Kyrgyzstan and the Scorpions, and the U.S. doesn't seem to have put any strings on its use. But it's safe to say the Pentagon didn't envisage, just a few years after spending $9 million on the base, that it would be used for training Chinese and Russian special forces.

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