



Foreign &  
Commonwealth  
Office

## **Conference on Inter-Action & Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA)**

### **KEY POINTS**

- **CICA is an inter-governmental body originally set up by Kazakhstan.** Recent Chinese interest in working through CICA to advance its regional agenda may boost this organisation's profile over time.

### **DETAIL**

**CICA is an inter-governmental co-operation forum of which 26 Asian countries – primarily from Central & Western Asia - are members<sup>1</sup>.** Its creation was initially proposed by Kazakhstan's President Nazarbayev in 1992, who put forward an initiative for an inter-governmental body encompassing the 'wider Central Asian region' (i.e. the Central Asian states themselves plus a range of Asian neighbours interested in forging closer ties with them).

The idea lay dormant for several years, but was taken up again in the late 1990s (in the wake of the Taliban's emergence in Afghanistan). **CICA was formally established in 2002** via the adoption of its founding Charter, the Almaty Act, at the inaugural CICA Heads of State Summit held in that city. Since then, three further CICA Summits have been held – in Almaty (2006), Istanbul (2010) and Shanghai (2014). The next one is due in 2018 (venue as yet unspecified). CICA's Secretariat is currently based in Almaty, although plans have been announced for it to move to Astana.

**CICA's membership is wide and unusual** – e.g. it's the only regional inter-governmental body in which Israel and Iran sit down together around the same table. Its aim, loosely modelled on the OSCE template, is to provide a platform for inter-governmental co-operation across a wide range of security-related issues (e.g. mil-mil contacts, information exchanges, collaboration over CT, non-proliferation, combating financial crime, scientific & educational exchanges, environmental protection, etc.). References to human rights in the CICA founding charter are relatively few, in contrast to its prominent emphasis on the agenda of combating terrorism, extremism and separatism.

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<sup>1</sup> CICA's member-states are: Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Egypt, India, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Korea (South), Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Pakistan, Palestine, Qatar, Russia, Tajikistan, Thailand, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan and Vietnam. CICA also has seven observer-states: Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Ukraine and the USA.

**CICA's initial institutionalisation was driven largely by Kazakhstan.** But since 2010, the position has changed - from 2010 to 2014, CICA was chaired by Turkey, who last year passed the baton on to China (which will remain as chair until 2016), suggesting that other CICA member-states are now taking a more active interest in its potential as a forum. President Xi used the 2014 CICA Summit in Shanghai to launch a new 'Asian security concept', predicated on the notion that Asia's security should be dealt with by Asian countries themselves. This security concept can be seen as complementary to the '**Silk Road Economic Belt**' initiative launched by China in 2013 with a view to strengthening further its economic links with the wider Central Asian region. In addition to creating new bodies such as the AIIB, China also appears keen to utilise pre-existing multilateral platforms – CICA and the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation (SCO) – as mechanisms via which these strategies can be promoted.

**CICA's ability to pursue its stated objectives in practice** – e.g. the promotion of military confidence-building measures, commitment to the peaceful settlement of disputes, etc. – remains largely untested. But a key attraction for many of its member-states – and a substantive feature that distinguishes it from e.g. the OSCE – is CICA's commitment to the principle of non-interference by individual member-states in each others' internal affairs, as was reconfirmed at last year's CICA Summit in Shanghai<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> We shall respect each other's right to freely choose and develop our political, social, economic and cultural systems... we reaffirm not to interfere in the internal affairs of States, and not to adopt or support actions that aim at overthrowing legitimate governments... we also renounce application of double standards in international affairs.' (extracts from CICA Summit Declaration, Shanghai, May 2014).