



The Republic of Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy: Re-evaluation under president Tokayev

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Abstract

This study offers an in-depth theoretical examination of Kazakhstan's foreign policy evolution during the power transition from Nursultan Nazarbayev to his chosen successor, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev. The analysis illuminates the under-explored realm of post-Soviet Central Asian states' foreign policies, with a special focus on Kazakhstan and its unique geopolitical, economic, and geographic strengths. The methods encompass a comprehensive review of the distinct foreign policy characteristics under Nazarbayev and Tokayev's presidencies, delineating the continuity and alterations in the nation's multi-vector diplomacy approach. Critical findings underscore that Kazakhstan's foreign policy is stepping into an unprecedented phase, emphasizing geo-economic values more than before. Amidst the backdrop of regional geopolitical instability, Kazakhstan's robust multi-vector foreign policy functions as a stabilizing force. Ultimately, this investigation provides valuable insights that fill a substantial knowledge gap concerning power transition in the context of balance-based or multi-vector foreign policy, primarily within post-Soviet Central Asian states. This contributes significantly to academic discourse and offers an invaluable framework for future policy analysis.

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Introduction

The late twentieth century's disintegration of the Soviet Union culminated in the birth of new states within international relations, which, in turn, greatly influenced the formation of foreign policy within the post-Soviet space. Kazakhstan, since achieving independence, has embarked on a multi-vector foreign policy, establishing balanced relations with globally significant geopolitical and economic actors. This principle of pragmatic diplomacy has shaped foreign policymaking, bolstering the country's international standing (Laruelle & Royce, 2019).

Kazakhstan's geographical centrality in the Eurasian continent lends it considerable geopolitical significance in preserving regional political equilibrium. The nation's long-serving leader, Nursultan Nazarbayev, elicited widespread astonishment when he voluntarily relinquished his presidential duties on March 19, 2019. Highlighting the indispensable role of Kazakhstan's foreign policy, Nazarbayev advocated for professional diplomat Kassym-Jomart Tokayev to assume leadership of the parliamentary upper house (Shatalov, 2019).

The transfer of power following Nazarbayev's enduring leadership presented a challenging phase for determining the foreign policy of the newly appointed president, Tokayev (Chatham House, 2019). Amidst some controversial decisions, including the renaming of Astana to Nur-Sultan, seen as political conformity by the international community, a dual process unfolded during Tokayev's presidency. Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy remained intact, but simultaneously, it began evolving compared to the Nazarbayev era (Isaacs, 2020). Following the political upheaval resulting from the January 2022 coup, a decision was made to revert the name of the capital city from Nursultan to Astana. This change in the city's name carries significant political and symbolic implications for Kazakhstan. By reverting to the original name of Astana, the new political administration seeks to emphasize a break with the past and assert its own vision for the future of the country.

Despite numerous studies on multi-vector foreign policy during the presidencies of Nazarbayev and Tokayev, the political situation regarding Kazakhstan's foreign policy during Tokayev's tenure remains relatively under-explored. This article aims to address this gap. The authors first elucidate the fundamental theoretical principles of multi-vector foreign policy through

an exhaustive analysis of multi-vector foreign policy's theoretical-methodological aspects. They then delve into the shifts within this foreign policy during the power transition from Nazarbayev to Tokayev. Lastly, the main challenges and opportunities posed by a multi-vector foreign policy during the Tokayev administration are examined, thus contributing to an understanding of Kazakhstan's strategic multi-vector foreign policy since the power transition in 2019.

The Basic Principles of Multi-vector Foreign Policy: From Nazarbayev to Tokayev

The establishment of the Republic of Kazakhstan as an independent state in 1991 prompted Nursultan Nazarbayev, its leader at the time, to shape the nation's foreign policy. In his policy article titled "Strategy for the Formation and Development of Kazakhstan as a Sovereign State," published in May 1992, Nazarbayev outlined the core principles of the country's foreign policy. Central to this policy was the prioritization of Kazakhstan's security, which would be achieved through various means, including the establishment of strategic partnerships with neighboring countries such as Russia and China, as well as fostering close cooperation with other Central Asian states, Turkey, Pakistan, and India (Nazarbayev, 2017).

Modern Kazakhstan's foreign policy is defined as multi-vector, indicating the nation's intention to foster equal relationships with both global and regional powers. The concept of a multi-vector foreign policy, although applicable to small and middle powers in various regions, is primarily associated with post-Soviet countries. These states may adopt a multi-vector approach for a range of reasons, both external and internal in nature. Additionally, one possible rationale for Kazakhstan's multi-vector approach is the desire to legitimize its statehood in the eyes of both Russians and Kazakhs (Arynov, 2023).

This policy has guaranteed Kazakhstan's independence, establishing the foundation for equal relations with diverse states. With a relatively small population for its geographic size and bordering influential states like Russia and China, Kazakhstan effectively cooperates with the United States, the EU, and the wider global community. For Kazakhstan, maintaining this multi-vector approach is crucial for the country's material well-being (Matveeva, 1999).

Nazarbayev's rule's most prominent legacy was the clear delineation of Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy. According to Matveeva (1999), establishing a

multi-vector foreign policy aimed at monetizing rich natural resources through close Western countries cooperation. During the perestroika period, for instance, relationships with major Western energy corporations, like Chevron and Shell, were initiated, forming the basis of Kazakhstan's Western vector foreign policy. Understanding the concept of multi-vector foreign policy during the post-Nazarbayev era Tokayev's governance period is crucial in determining Kazakhstan's foreign policy specifics for maintaining territorial security and state integrity. Recognized as a seasoned diplomat and professional civil servant, Tokayev has deep knowledge of international institutions and was instrumental in forming Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy during its early independence period (Starr, 2019).

As stated by Vanderhill et al. (2020), Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy mirrors the Southeast Asian balancing system, where secondary powers maintain balance among Great Powers. Since declaring independence, a multi-vector foreign policy has proven efficient by safeguarding Kazakhstan's independence, fostering economic growth, and establishing a positive reputation within the international system. As an independent state, Kazakhstan has asserted itself in international politics as a nation with a multi-vector and pragmatic policy. One principle of this policy is promoting regional integration processes by instigating the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia. The chairmanship of the OSCE organization in 2010 and the election as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council in 2017–2018 significantly elevated the importance of regional issues at an international level. Kazakhstan's diplomatic efforts have consistently aimed towards collective security and peacekeeping. These efforts are evident in the creative actions enacted through Kazakhstan's multi-vector and pragmatic foreign policy (Vanderhill et al., 2020).

Methodology

In this research, we primarily employ a theoretical approach grounded in neorealism to examine Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy. Gleason's (2010) concept of a sophisticated strategy that counterbalances potentially adverse actions from several partners forms the basis for understanding this foreign policy. The research also utilizes the concept of 'opportunistic multi-alignment' by Hanks (2009) to explain the philosophical essence of Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy.

Furthermore, we use the works of Cohen (2008), Hanks (2009), and Cheng-Chwee (2008) to establish the foundation of bilateral and multilateral strategies that shape Kazakhstan's foreign policy. To offer a complete understanding, the study also investigates the nature of power in Kazakhstan, using Guliyeu's (2011) concept of neo-patrimonial power, and assesses its impact on the country's foreign policy.

The term multi-vector foreign policy has recently solidified as an academic theory in the field of international relations. Gleason (2010) defines a multi-vectored foreign policy as a sophisticated strategy centered on a policy approach capable of simultaneously countering potentially adverse actions from several partners. The emphasis of a multi-vector foreign policy is on cooperation with political alliances and financial corporations, minimizing the influence of ideological concepts. Kazakhstan, while preserving its national interests, employs the mechanism of a multi-vector foreign policy primarily on pragmatic grounds rather than ideological ones. Hanks (2009) perceives a multi-vector foreign policy as founded on the "risk-benefit ratio". Thus, both Gleason and Hanks characterize a multi-vector foreign policy as a neorealist political concept grounded on a practical equilibrium of national interests and forces. Cohen (2008) suggests that since its independence in 1991, Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy means that Astana has constructed bilateral relationships with every geopolitical player, with each vector providing an alternative to the other. Consequently, Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy metamorphoses into a compendium of potential bilateral and multilateral strategies that shape the country's foreign policy. According to the theory of neorealism, emerging states typically respond in two ways when the interests of the "great powers" in a region intersect. They either balance the powers or "bandwagon the strongest player" by submitting to its mandate (Cheng-Chwee 2008). This theory posits that the foreign policy of small states is grounded on "maintaining their security either through balancing conflicting interests or bandwagoning."

Kazakhstan's system of power centralization diverges from other post-Soviet systems in its distinct manifestation. Power in Kazakhstan is more neo-patrimonial than autocratic. Power and influence are constructed not solely through the "traditional" informal supporter system but also coupled with rational economic and bureaucratic interests (Guliyeu, 2011). The establishment of the legitimacy of neo-autocratic power in the international arena and the formulation of pragmatic,

balanced relations between interested forces in Central Asia, such as the United States, Russia, and China, have underpinned regional security. Since the 1990s, Kazakhstan's foreign policy has been molded in the context of this concept. Astana has adeptly capitalized on the rivalry between significant regional "major players" to its benefit (Charles, 2014). Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy is crafted in alignment with the post-Soviet period's geopolitical circumstances. Deyermond (2009) posits that Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy diverges from those of Russia, China, the EU, and the United States in its objective to "maintain neutrality in the struggle against regional hegemony." The concept of "opportunistic multi-alignment," introduced by Hanks (2009), comprehensively elucidates the philosophical essence of a multi-vector foreign policy. This foreign policy course has managed to preserve relationships across multiple different directions and attain "its regional goals by pitting active actors against each other." (Yuneman, 2023).

According to the other theory, in contrast, an emerging state uses the method of "supporting the strongest actor," the essence of which is to find a clear direction in foreign policy and locate interests in that country which is considered to be the most effective one (Ahmad, 2016). As the influence of foreign policy interests in the Central Asian region increased, Kazakhstan began to pursue a foreign policy based on "pragmatic balance" which meant that instead of "supporting the strongest player" the country chose a multi-vector policy. However, several other methods are used in international practice as well. For example, it is stereotypical for Southeast Asian countries to use the techniques of "soft balance" and "institutionalization of power" to accompany a strategy of "prosperity and increasing the influence of China" (Estellés et al., 2021). In line with neorealism theory, scholars have identified key domestic variables affecting the foreign policy of emerging states. For instance, according to Cheng-Chwee Kuik, in the case of "emerging states," "the capabilities and obstacles of the domestic political elite in terms of legitimizing power play a key role in determining the direction of foreign policy" (Johnson, 2012). According to Nazarbayev, Kazakhstan's lack of access to direct sea trade paved the way for mutually beneficial relations with Russia and China, which are "the main gateway to the world communication flow" (Goble 2019). This is due to the fact that market diversification is a very important step for the country, where 70 percent of total exports are petroleum products and 40 percent of the

annual budget of the government is accounted for by raw materials.

Multi-vector Policy: Nazarbayev-Tokayev Transit

The Foreign Policy Concept for the Republic of Kazakhstan from 2020–2030 is a significant document, developed during the presidency of Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, delineating the main priorities of state policy for the decade (Akorda, 2020). This document gained particular importance due to the recent leadership transition in the country, with the resignation of the previous President, Nursultan Nazarbayev, and the ensuing concerns over potential changes in Kazakhstan's foreign policy. However, the newly elected President Tokayev, in his address to the nation in 2019, committed to a policy of "continuity" from the previous administration.

The Concept represents an in-depth and systematic analysis of contemporary international politics, including an evaluation of potential crises, emerging challenges, and methods to mitigate risks in the international relations system. In keeping with these commitments, President Tokayev's policy has an emphasis on "economic" diplomacy, focusing on expanding non-resource sectors of the economy and increasing the number of economic priorities from nine to fourteen (Akorda, 2020).

The Concept reflects a significant shift in the country's foreign policy, with Kazakhstan positioning itself as a "regional leader", as opposed to the earlier role of a proponent of regional integration. This suggests an evolving strategy aimed at strengthening broad geostrategic partnerships with major global powers like China, Russia, the US, and the EU while continuing to nurture relationships with Central Asian countries. This shift is manifested in initiatives such as the establishment of a regional trade and investment hub in Almaty and the enhanced status of the UN Interregional Center for Sustainable Development for Central Asian States and Afghanistan, indicating a committed engagement with international organizations to bolster regional security.

Building on these priorities, Kazakhstan's foreign policy under President Tokayev has also notably shifted towards environmental and economic diplomacy. It's reflected in the expanded partnership in the fields of transport, energy, and environmental protection in the Caspian region, adhering to the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea adopted in 2018. Moreover, Kazakhstan's relationship with the Eurasian Economic Union countries has been systematized, suggesting

a strategic aim to deepen economic integration and collaboration within the region.

Importantly, the Foreign Policy Concept reflects a continuity with the multi-vector foreign policy established by former President Nursultan Nazarbayev. This policy, founded on the dual pillars of national security and economic development, has allowed Kazakhstan to leverage its natural resources and geopolitical position to maintain a complex balancing act among the regional great powers. This strategy has welcomed investment from a wide array of international actors in sectors like oil and energy, facilitating economic growth and diversification.

Further, the Concept reveals Kazakhstan's commitment to maintaining stability in the region. It is exemplified by its active role in mediating military and political conflicts in Ukraine and Syria, reaffirming the country's position as an influential "bridge" between the West and the East. Despite the recent transition of power, the Concept reaffirms that the multi-vector foreign policy, which has proven its efficacy over the past thirty years, will continue to guide Kazakhstan's foreign relations in the foreseeable future.

Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy, as argued by Hanks (2009), pivots on two key aspects: national security and economic development. Under Nazarbayev's leadership, the country effectively leveraged its natural resources and geopolitical position to balance its relations with the regional great powers. Notably, a 'strategy of inclusion' has been at the heart of Kazakhstan's foreign policy, an approach that encourages foreign entities (e.g., Russian, Chinese, American companies in the oil and energy sector) to invest in the local market (Omelicheva & Du, 2018). This strategy enables Kazakhstan to balance competing interests and to extract concessions, particularly when other states are constrained by other circumstances.

Kazakhstan's status as a crucial 'bridge' between the West and the East implies that military or economic conflicts will inevitably affect the country. This is why Nazarbayev proactively mediated in the resolution of military and political conflicts in Ukraine, Syria, and beyond. Under Tokayev's presidency, Kazakhstan's foreign policy perspective is unlikely to undergo significant changes. Tokayev is adhering to the multi-vector foreign policy outlined by Nazarbayev, which has demonstrated its efficacy over the past thirty years. Furthermore, the multi-vector foreign policy strategy also correlates to economic diversification, particularly in relation to the oil industry, where the lion's share is controlled by foreign companies.

The year 2022 emerged as a pivotal and arduous period in the history of Kazakhstan, marked by internal political turbulence and external geopolitical unpredictability. In January, the nation encountered its most violent unrest since attaining independence in 1991, culminating in the intervention of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), led by Russia, which Moscow portrayed as a "peacekeeping mission." Furthermore, Russia's incursion into Ukraine on February 24th, 2022, intensified the challenges faced by Kazakhstan (Libman & Davidzon, 2023). On one hand, Kazakhstan remains among the few strategic partners for Russia during this time. On the other hand, it also perceives Russia's aggressive endeavor to redefine the post-Soviet Union landscape as a direct threat. The precarious circumstances confronting the country have prompted observers to question the future of Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy, suggesting that the altered geopolitical reality could render Kazakhstan heavily reliant on Russia.

The diplomatic interaction between Kazakhstan and Russia is underpinned by a rich historical narrative and an impressive border stretching over 6,800 kilometers—the longest globally. Given the profound geopolitical, historical, cultural, and economic ties binding both nations, coupled with the presence of approximately four million ethnic Russians domiciled in Kazakhstan, it is palpable that both countries are significantly interdependent, and their continued interaction is all but inevitable (Ibrayeva et al., 2023). Clear indication of this was Tokayev's first official visit to Moscow upon his ascension to the presidency. Here, he pledged to uphold Nazarbayev's policy and to continue fostering the development of Kazakh-Russian cooperation. Despite the ostensibly cordial relations, the diplomatic relations between Russia and Kazakhstan have been punctuated by several "sensitive" issues, notably the Eurasian Economic Union's activities, the Russia-Ukraine tension, and some comments by Russian nationalist politicians questioning Kazakhstan's territorial integrity. Notwithstanding these concerns, both Kazakhstan and Russia remain active participants in some ambitious projects, which experts argue serves as a viable counterbalance within the Eurasian Economic Union (Osipova et al., 2018).

In a further escalation of events, widespread riots transitioned into acts of vandalism in Kazakhstan in January 2022, compelling the Kazakhstani authorities to solicit assistance from members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Subsequently, on January 6, 2022, the deployment of CSTO forces, including peacekeepers from Russia, Belarus, Armenia,

Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan, began. The intervention of the Russian-led CSTO forces proved instrumental in reinforcing President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's hold on power amid the attempted coup. The intervention raised concerns about its potential implications for Kazakhstan's balanced, multi-vector foreign policy. Nevertheless, President Tokayev's subsequent actions underscored the commitment to preserving equilibrium in Kazakhstan's foreign policy. Umarov (2022) conjectured that the cost of the CSTO-led intervention for Kazakhstan could involve the recognition of Crimea, refraining from the adoption of the Latin alphabet, or the closure of "Anti-Russian" NGOs. However, none of these projected outcomes have materialized, reflecting the resilience and commitment of the Tokayev administration to maintaining a balanced foreign policy. The evolution of Kazakh-Russian relations in the era of President Tokayev underscores the nuanced yet crucial role of multi-vector foreign policy in shaping Kazakhstan's diplomatic interactions with other nations.

As a neighboring nation sharing a border of 1,782 km, China, apart from being Kazakhstan's principal trade and economic associate, also represents a significant geopolitical trade corridor to the West. China's global economic growth enhances Kazakhstan's significance in world politics. Kazakhstan is bolstering its ties with China via platforms such as the SCO and the "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI) initiative. During President Tokayev's term, the role of China as the "eastern neighbor" in Kazakhstan's foreign policy has seen notable progression. Trade and investment relations between Kazakhstan and China remain unaffected by Russia, with the latter adopting a more circumspect stance in its dealings with China compared to Kazakhstan's Western allies. Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, there has been a noted decline in Russian influence in Kazakhstan. This is concurrent with an increasing rise of China's sway in the region. China's increasing influence can be traced to its intensified economic engagement, strategic alliances, and infrastructure projects under the Belt and Road Initiative. As Russia diverts its attention to the European theater, China's strategic expansion into Central Asia fills the void. Consequently, the geopolitical landscape of Central Asia is witnessing a paradigm shift in power dynamics, marking a new era of Chinese predominance.

The President's fluency in Chinese and professional experiences in China signal a robust continuation of Kazakh-Chinese relations during his tenure. The involvement of Kazakhstan in the BRI project

has elevated diplomatic relations with China to new heights. The ambitious trans-Eurasian economic corridor initiative, known as the "Silk Road Economic Belt", dovetails well with Kazakhstan's "Nurly Zhol" program (Laruelle, 2018). The shared goals of developing transport systems, energy, community infrastructure, and the sale of agricultural products underscore this initiative as an ambitious and large-scale twenty-first-century project. The investment of five billion dollars in the "Nurly Zhol" project indicates a bright future for diplomatic relations between China and Kazakhstan, necessitating a thoughtful diplomatic strategy to manage China's increasing influence in Kazakhstan (Laruelle, 2018).

On the other hand, Kazakhstan's active participation in both the Eurasian Economic Union and the "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI) initiative reflects an institutional commitment to maintaining regional balance in foreign policy (Novikov & Bocharova, 2024). The vast borders Kazakhstan shares with Russia (~7000 km) and China (~1700 km) underscore the significance of these neighboring nations in its foreign policy. A relationship rooted in mutual trust with these two pivotal neighbors is crucial to unlock the "Western" direction of Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy. In the context of establishing ties between Kazakhstan and the West, Russia and China must be assured of Kazakhstan's commitment not to act against their interests. As argued by Laruelle and Dylan (2019), the efficacy of U.S. initiatives in Kazakhstan typically hinges on cooperation with Russia.

In this geopolitical tapestry, Tokayev emerges as an optimal choice for Moscow and Beijing, a successor dedicated to preserving Nazarbayev's policy and effectively perpetuating the diplomatic trajectory. Therefore, during Tokayev's term, all interested parties stand to gain from maintaining the status quo concerning Kazakhstan's domestic situation and the established course of its foreign policy. Radical political changes offer no discernible benefits to any of the parties involved (Laruelle et al., 2019).

However, the complexities notwithstanding, China's role as a crucial geostrategic partner for Kazakhstan persists, acting as a counterbalance to potential Russian or US predominance in the region (Laruelle & Royce, 2019).

The "Western" direction of Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy serves as a principal balancing force against the influences of Russia and China. Participation in organizations such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and the Turkic State

Organization (TSO) are counterbalanced by cooperation with NATO. Kazakhstan's chairmanship of the OSCE in 2010 exemplified the effectiveness of its multi-vector foreign policy, indicating that this strategy, grounded in sustainable neutrality and equitable political relations with major powers like China, Russia, and the United States, ensures its security (Isaacs, 2010).

As the geopolitical landscape changes, Russia's role in Central Asia is diminishing due to the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. Concurrently, the United States, albeit demonstrating a decline in interest in Central Asia after the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan, is reshaping its role in the region (Cooley, 2021). Despite the observable shifts, the USA remains one of the largest investors in Kazakhstan, especially in the oil and gas sectors. Diplomatic relations between Kazakhstan and the United States have been actively developing since the former's independence, with key areas of cooperation being energy, oil resources, and international security. The US-Kazakhstan security and military partnership has significantly intensified post the early 1990s terrorist attack on the United States (Bingol, 2004). Given that the United States was the first Western nation to recognize Kazakhstan's independence, the Central Asian nation assumed an important role in US foreign policy.

Kazakhstan operates under the framework of the US-Kazakhstan Joint Statement, "Kazakhstan and the United States: An Enhanced Strategic Partnership for the 21st Century," established during President Nursultan Nazarbayev's official visit to Washington, D.C. on January 15–18, 2018. Relations between Kazakhstan and the US have largely evolved around energy and conflict issues in Afghanistan. According to Ameyaw-Brobbe (2023), the US has two primary energy interests in Central Asia: granting access to US oil companies and fostering the maximum possible development of oil and gas as a means to alleviate pressure on global energy security.

Under President Joe Biden's administration, diplomacy has been emphasized as a key component of foreign policy. Biden's presidency is expected to enhance the U.S. role in Central Asia, particularly with the resumption of U.S. policy in Afghanistan and the Far East (Cooley et al., 2023). This is aligned with President Tokayev's administration, which views increased U.S. activity in the region as a counterbalance to the growing influence of Russia and China.

Discussion

An analysis of Tokayev's multi-vector foreign policy has disclosed two significant innovations. Firstly, the inaugural official foreign policy document published under Tokayev's administration, "The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2020–2030," underscores the prioritization of the economy in foreign policy, thus augmenting the role of "investment diplomacy." Secondly, during Nazarbayev's presidency, key foreign policy issues were resolved due to his personal charisma and individual capacities. In contrast, under Tokayev's leadership, constructive initiatives such as the "Belt and Road Initiative" "New Silk Road" projects, and activities within the SCO, the TSO, the EAEC, and the EU are viewed as markers of equilibrium among the parties. Consequently, under Tokayev, Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy is evolving from a "personalized" form to an "institutionalized" one. Examination of various critical interpretations of the functionality of Kazakhstan's foreign policy reveals that the enactment of multi-vector foreign policy is a complex undertaking. It is suggested that, in certain scenarios, Tokayev's professional diplomatic skills may prove insufficient for maintaining a balance among the various geopolitical vectors.

Though President Nursultan Nazarbayev officially resigned on March 19, 2019, he retained substantial influence in important political decision-making processes until the January 2022 coup attempt. Therefore, the most critical "post-Nazarbayev" phase of Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy remains on the horizon. For President Tokayev, the true litmus test of a balance-based multi-vector foreign policy will arise when dilemmas occur in negotiations with neo-imperial Russia, ascendant China, and the globalist USA and EU. The future of Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy is set to navigate through these challenging geopolitical waters.

Over the years, Kazakhstan has achieved its primary objectives, including the establishment of an independent sovereign state, implementation of structural economic reforms, and integration into the international system of relations and global division of labor. Its geopolitical location between two major powers provides Kazakhstan with additional opportunities to pursue an active policy characterized by a high degree of maneuverability and flexibility while maintaining a steadfast commitment to securing its long-term interests. Its proactive stance and

focus on harmonious and mutually beneficial relationships have positioned Kazakhstan as a stable and predictable partner within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and in its diverse relations with other countries and international organizations. This strategy enables Kazakhstan to actively engage with Russia, China, the United States, Central Asian countries, the European Union, and other states in Asia and Europe. However, the emergence of new actors in the international system has brought new goals and challenges to Kazakhstan, a relatively young country. The constant volatility of global politics necessitates urgent actions in shaping the priorities of its foreign policy.

The active position and commitment to harmonious and mutually beneficial relationships have positioned Kazakhstan as a stable and predictable partner within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and in its diverse relations with other countries and international organizations. This strategic approach enables Kazakhstan to actively engage with Russia, China, the United States, Central Asian countries, the European Union, and other states in Asia and Europe.

However, the recent military intervention by the Russian Federation in Ukraine has presented new challenges and goals for Kazakhstan. In light of this situation, it is necessary for Kazakhstan to reconsider its membership in organizations such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) to enhance its economic and political security. While a withdrawal from these organizations may not be a viable option at present, the President of Kazakhstan should play a more decisive role and lay the groundwork for a gradual exit, highlighting that Russia's aggression violates the fundamental principles of these organizations, including mutually beneficial cooperation, equal rights, and the protection of national interests.

Furthermore, the issue of Afghanistan holds significant importance for Kazakhstan's security in various aspects. Understanding the strategies of Russia, China, and the West regarding Afghanistan is crucial. Strengthening cooperation with Central Asian countries, including the new government in Afghanistan that emerged after the withdrawal of US and NATO forces, is key to addressing this issue.

The internal events in January 2022 have heightened Russia's geopolitical influence on Kazakhstan and raised concerns regarding the country's reputation in the field of law. The political transformation announced by the President of Kazakhstan should be implemented during

a period of reduced pressure from Russia due to the conflict with Ukraine, and in close cooperation with European regulators to improve the human rights situation.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this article affirms that the adoption of a multi-vector foreign policy in the current international relations framework continues to be pertinent. The paper delineated the distinctive Kazakhstani multi-vector policy model and scrutinized the salient features of the state's foreign policy during the tenure of presidents Nursultan Nazarbayev and K. Tokayev. This research essay has undertaken a theoretical analysis of Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy during a period of power transition. The study began by establishing the concept of multi-vector foreign policy in Kazakhstan and proceeded to examine it from a conceptual standpoint. The primary data source utilized in this analysis was the official foreign policy concept of Kazakhstan. The findings of this study reveal a notable shift in the trajectory of Kazakhstan's foreign policy under the presidency of K. Tokayev. It is evident that Kazakhstan's foreign policy has evolved from an individualized approach to an institutionalized one, with the potential for continuity in future presidential terms. This transition signifies the growing importance and necessity of a well-defined foreign policy framework for Kazakhstan. Moving forward, it is crucial for the country to continue developing and implementing a multi-vector approach to effectively navigate the complexities of the international arena and advance its national interests.

Kazakhstan's foreign policy, characterized by its balanced, multilateral approach, is congruent with the country's potential, geographical location, and strategic interests. The singularity of Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy resides in its foundational reliance on a "balance between the major players" to guarantee regional stability, national security, and economic growth.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest. The funders had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript; or in the decision to publish the results.

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