

TRACKS, TROOPS, AND TREATIES

Russian and Chinese Competition and Cooperation in Kazakhstan

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Introduction: Kazakhstan's Place in the Post-Soviet World

I began my research for this Honors Thesis in September 2021, planning to finish gathering all the necessary information by January 2022 and writing until May. This changed, however, after Russia launched its unprovoked, massive, and brutal invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. Since then, I have done my best to continue my research while writing to better understand and articulate the quickly changing dynamics between Kazakhstan, Russia, and China. Despite my best efforts to portray a clear image of the relations between these three countries, the outcome of the war remains unclear as does how its conclusion will affect these relations. –Nicholas G. Mosher, May 13, 2022



Holding vast mineral and energy resources, Kazakhstan is the largest country in Central Asia in terms of territory and economy. Located between China and Russia with a population of approximately nineteen million, it has attracted the attention of both. Kazakhstan was part of Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union and is now entering its third decade of independence. The world's attention is currently riveted on Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine; nevertheless, Russia's relationship with Kazakhstan also occupies an important role in Russia's foreign policy. Kazakhstan's oil and gas fields and expansive territory stretching toward Europe have also caught the eye of China as it searches for alternative energy sources and economical trade routes to Europe.

The Kazakhstani independence movement of the late 1980s was prompted, like that of other former Soviet republics, by nationalistic sentiment. In 1986, General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev dismissed long-time General Secretary of Kazakhstan's Communist Party, Dinmukhamed Kunayev, and selected Gennady Kolbin, an ethnic Russian, to replace him. This angered many ethnic Kazakhs to see their republic's leader replaced by an ethnic Russian, setting off nationalist protests in Alma-Ata, the republic's capital.¹ Gorbachev eventually replaced Kolbin in 1989 with Nursultan Nazarbayev, an ethnic Kazakh, who, at the time, held the position of Chairman of the Kazakh Council of Ministers. Nationalist sentiment on its own, however, was not strong enough to break Kazakhstan from the Soviet Union. Independence would only come through soon-to-be President Nazarbayev, who, ironically enough, at first was staunchly against separation. Of the fifteen Soviet Socialist Republics that comprised the Soviet Union, the five Central Asian SSRs were the most reluctant to press for independence. In fact, Kazakhstan would be the very last Soviet republic to declare

independence in late 1991, only after Nazarbayev realized independence was the only path forward.

Nazarbayev's hesitation was understandable. Kazakhstan and Russia shared a long history of unification dating back to the early 18th century when the Russian Empire began slowly absorbing land in Central Asia. Kazakhstan's economy held the strongest and most dependent ties to the rest of the Soviet Union. Supply chains and transportation routes were highly integrated with the Soviet Union, especially the Russian SSR, making it imperative for Kazakhstan's economy to retain close economic ties to Moscow.² Knowing this, Nazarbayev looked to find a way to renew Kazakhstan's vital relationship with Moscow.

Russian Influence in Kazakhstan

Commonwealth of Independent States

The first opportunity for a renewed connection was the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), a multilateral organization meant to reinvigorate ties between independent states that had constituted the Soviet Union. CIS initially included only Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus when it was signed on December 8, 1991, two and one-half weeks before the Soviet Union collapsed. However, Nazarbayev was quick to insert Kazakhstan into the agreement three weeks later, accompanied by the remaining Soviet republics with the exception of the Baltic states, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. CIS aims to coordinate policy on a variety of issues, the most significant being economics, defense, and foreign policy.³ Although still in existence today, CIS is a failure on all three fronts and essentially exists only on paper.

The weakness of CIS is largely due to the structure of the organization. Member states are not obliged to implement any decrees put forward through CIS. They are welcome to join any initiative; however, they have the freedom to opt out as well. This creates an inherent

weakness in CIS as the organization struggles to garner a united front for its policies and initiatives.⁴ CIS is also based on the respect for countries' sovereignty and the renouncement of coercion, sentiments that directly contradict many of the actions taken by Russia towards fellow member states. Both Georgia and Moldova joined CIS due to Russian coercion and Azerbaijan left the organization in 1992 only to quickly rejoin after a coup that replaced the government with one loyal to Moscow.⁵ Ukraine was an associate member of CIS from the time of the group's founding but severed ties completely with the organization in 2018 by closing its offices in the member countries. While still in existence today, CIS is deemed a failure not only by the rest of the world but also by CIS members themselves, including Russia. It is now Moscow's view that it is essentially subsidizing the organization while, simultaneously, not receiving the deference from its fellow member states for which it had originally hoped.⁶

Economically, CIS aimed for the development of joint investment funds and coordinated economic reforms that would lead to opportunities such as free trade zones and a customs union. However, economic cooperation did not materialize and member states struggled to raise money for joint investment. Worse, distrust and infighting led to increased tariffs between CIS members.⁷ Such economic failures led to three major off-shoots of CIS in attempts to revitalize economic integration. The first was a customs union agreement signed in January 1995 between Kazakhstan, Russia, Belarus, and later Kyrgyzstan.⁸ However, this attempt to increase trade hit major obstacles and failed. The common goal was to abolish tariffs between the countries involved, however, in 1995, Russia unilaterally increased import tariffs. The second major agreement was the creation of the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC), formed in 2000 in Astana, Kazakhstan, among Russia, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan, to create a better customs union than the previous attempt. The new union was announced in 2006 and launched in

2010 but did not include Kyrgyzstan.⁹ The group then collaborated once again in 2012 to create the Single Economic Space, an agreement to harmonize domestic economic and trade policies. From this agreement, the seemingly longer-lasting and more effective Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) would be born.

Eurasian Economic Union

Although initially proposed by President Nazarbayev, the EAEU is a Russian-led economic union focusing on regional economic integration, striving for the free movement of goods, labor, and capital. It is seen largely as Russia's attempt to counter the EU and re-integrate large parts of the former Soviet space. The treaty came into existence in 2015 with the original member states being Russia, Kazakhstan, and Belarus. Armenia and Kyrgyzstan joined later that year.

Initially, Moscow hoped for Ukrainian participation as well. Russia viewed Ukraine as an integral member of the EAEU despite Ukraine being on track to gain membership into the European Union (EU). This changed when Ukraine was hit by a recession in 2013. Ukrainian President Yanukovich accepted a much-needed financial package and discounted energy prices from Moscow in return for turning its back on the EU and joining the EAEU. Yanukovich's abrupt about-face sparked massive protests in Ukraine. The confrontation between the government and protestors turned violent in February 2014. The government and protestors signed a compromise agreement on February 21; nevertheless, the following day Yanukovich suddenly fled Ukraine and eventually turned up in Russia. The replacement government then turned away from Russia and back to the EU once again. Putin responded by annexing Crimea in March 2014 and providing support to separatists in eastern Ukraine. Russia would carry on in the formation of the EAEU, but the fallout of Ukraine's absence and the subsequent Russian

aggression led to substantial issues within the EAEU. Instead of cooperating after the initiation of the new Union, the economic downturn caused by Russia's aggression led EAEU countries to look after their own economies at the expense of their fellow member states.

Despite Moscow's aspirations for the EAEU, the initial months of the organization were actually met with decreased trade among member states. The year 2015 was difficult for Russia. Dropping oil prices damaged its economy and sanctions in reaction to Moscow's actions in Crimea and eastern Ukraine and the shooting down of Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 in July 2014 hampered Russia's ability to stimulate economic growth within the EAEU. These road bumps caused trade conflicts as member states attempted to protect their economies and Russia tried in vain to create a united front against the West.¹⁰ In reaction to the West's sanctions put on Russia, Moscow applied retaliatory sanctions to EU exports coming into Russia. Moscow expected its fellow EAEU members to follow suit; however, Kazakhstan and Belarus refused. Russia responded by banning imports from Belarus and Kazakhstan that originated in the EU in an attempt to prevent the Russian sanctions from becoming essentially moot. This move caused major damage to intra-EAEU trade.¹¹ Additionally, due to EU sanctions weakening the ruble, Kazakhstan placed a ban on all Russian fuel and gas imports to protect its own national economy.¹² The currencies of former Soviet Republics are still vulnerable to the volatility of the Russian ruble. This is exhibited most recently when the Kazakhstani tenge fell 14% after the initial collapse of the ruble after the first round of Western sanctions in 2022.¹³

In addition to its goal to increase intra-organizational trade, the EAEU strives to create a common energy market in the three major industries of oil, natural gas, and electricity and to form stronger ties with China and its Belt and Road Initiative. The EAEU acting as a transit corridor for Chinese goods is a more efficient route than shipping goods by sea and cheaper than

by plane. It also offers minimal border crossings; Chinese goods will only pass through two borders, the Sino-EAEU border and the EAEU-EU border in Poland. Kazakhstan is especially well-suited as a transit state for Chinese goods. Its large, flat, and sparsely-populated territory makes it ideal for constructing railways and transport hubs to carry Chinese goods to Europe.

Collective Security Treaty Organization

Plans for an integrated defense system for CIS states never materialized mainly because the most pertinent threats to CIS countries are fellow CIS countries, especially Russia.¹⁴ This is apparent from Russian coercion and military aggression in fellow CIS states such as Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. The looming threat of Russian intervention and so-called “peacekeeping” created tremendous anxiety within CIS. The organization also failed to create a structured and uniform foreign policy that could act as a united front on the world stage. In fact, Russia’s aggressive behavior toward fellow CIS members led to the creation of the GUAM Group (Georgia-Ukraine-Azerbaijan-Moldova) in 1997, which implemented a drastically different foreign policy than Russia, calling for closer ties with the West and NATO.

Like the EAEU, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) was also born from the failures of CIS. CSTO was officially founded in 2002, transitioning from the Collective Security Treaty, the ineffective defense agreement within CIS. The military agreement includes Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Belarus, Armenia, and Tajikistan, and organizes joint military training for officers, a common counter-terrorism task force, discounted arms trade, and a guarantee of member states’ security from external threats. CSTO has proven to be successful in keeping Moscow relevant and influential in former Soviet space. CSTO asserted itself in January 2022 by aiding in the stabilization of Kazakhstan after nationwide protests. This proved immensely beneficial for CSTO and, in turn, Moscow. Within an hour of President Tokayev’s

request for aid, CSTO began mobilizing its peacekeeping force, which demonstrated the military effectiveness of the organization. The events signaled a change in CSTO's temperament after the organization's inaction in Kyrgyzstan's upheaval in 2010 which left CSTO looking like a military alliance in name only. The peacekeeping mission also raises the question of what Kazakhstan's President, Kassym Tokayev, might owe Moscow. Although CSTO is a military treaty if Kazakhstan's government and other, weaker governments within the organization need Moscow's help to ensure stability, serious political and diplomatic concessions may have to be made in deference to the Kremlin. However, Tokayev has not shown such deference to Moscow since its invasion of Ukraine and has instead looked to increase relations with the West instead.

Chinese Influence in Kazakhstan

Direct trade between the newly independent Central Asian states and China began soon after the dissolution of the Soviet Union when Central Asia became a consumer of Chinese finished products and a provider of fuel, metals, and agricultural materials.¹⁵ Although already holding deep historical, political, and economic ties with Russia, President Nazarbayev reasoned that overreliance on one power would be dangerous and possibly threaten the sovereignty of Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan found the best strategy to be tying itself to larger economies. To do so without creating overreliance, Nazarbayev introduced a multivector foreign policy, balancing its relations with Russia, China, the West, and Turkey. Nazarbayev's strategy proved successful and is implemented currently by his successor, President Tokayev. Kazakhstan is close to Russia given its shared history, but Kazakhstan now leans closely to China as well given its giant economy and desire to increase investments in Eurasia. Kazakhstan also benefits from trade with the EU and shares historic and cultural ties with Turkey that it maintains through the Organization of Turkic States. Sino-Kazakhstani economic, security, and political ties are new

and still developing yet significant to both countries and the rest of the region. They are facilitated through two organizations, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Shanghai Cooperation Organization

Critics often view the Shanghai Cooperation Organization as an attempt by mainly authoritarian regimes to create a counterweight to western organizations such as the EU and NATO. The organization originally began in 1996 as the “Shanghai Five,” including China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. The main goal of the group was to work out lingering border disputes between China and the newly independent Central Asian states after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Russia was included in the agreement because of China’s correct assumption that Russian participation would facilitate greater trust between actors, helping ease any tensions during the negotiations.¹⁶ The agreement led Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan to cede about 13,500 square miles of land to China.¹⁷ The Shanghai Five would have the additional benefit of ending historic border disputes between China and Russia, leading to the demilitarization of the Russo-Sino border. The negotiations were so successful that in 2001 the Shanghai Five transitioned into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization to tackle larger issues such as economic and security cooperation in the region. In addition to the original five, the organization now includes India, Pakistan, and Uzbekistan as full members.

The SCO’s security cooperation is based on fighting against what it calls “the three evils,” of terrorism, extremism, and separatism.¹⁸ Kazakhstan cited two of these evils, terrorism and extremism, to legitimize its harsh crackdown on nationwide protests in January 2022. China’s main motivation for security cooperation within the SCO is to suppress a sense of ethnic distinctiveness among the Uighurs of the autonomous region of Xinjiang in northwestern China.

The Muslim Uighurs are closely related to Kazakhs and Kyrgyz. Facilitating close communication and collaboration with the security forces of the Central Asian states bordering Xinjiang helps Beijing monitor and control the region.

Serving as a counterweight to the democratic EU, the SCO harbors contrasting elements that differentiate it from its western counterparts. While the EU holds its members to strict human rights guidelines, the SCO argues that it respects the sovereignty of its member states to act within their own borders as they see fit. Although claiming that the policy is to protect the sovereignty of its members, it is really an excuse to support fellow authoritarian regimes. It also gives these illiberal governments the ability to function freely with an economic support system in place in case they are targeted by Western sanctions. This policy is seen clearly in Kazakhstan's silence on the issue of the Xinjiang internment camps in northwestern China, where ethnic Uighurs and Kazakhs are detained in "reeducation camps" for indoctrination. Reports show evidence of forced abortion and sterilization campaigns among the Muslim population in the region. Kazakhstan's leadership has remained quiet on the subject, prioritizing its relationship with Beijing over the well-being of ethnic Kazakhs.

Sino-Kazakh energy cooperation began in the late 1990s, with China National Petroleum Company (CNPC), China Petroleum and Chemical Company (SINOPEC), and China International Trust Investment Corporation (CITIC) receiving access to oil fields in western Kazakhstan.¹⁹ The Kazakhstan-China Oil and Gas Pipeline, which transports oil and gas from western Kazakhstan to China's Xinjiang region, began construction in 2007 and became operational in 2009.

Belt and Road Initiative

Although the SCO strives to facilitate multilateral economic cooperation among member states, China's success in cooperating with SCO countries comes largely from bilateral agreements facilitated by its global Belt and Road Initiative. BRI is a global infrastructure development project involving over 60 countries. President Xi's vision for BRI is to find new investment opportunities, develop export markets for Chinese goods, and increase Chinese incomes and domestic consumption.²⁰ Xi sees these goals being accomplished through the creation and revitalization of trade networks, energy pipelines, and streamlined border crossings.²¹ Kazakhstan represents a vital aspect of China's Belt and Road Initiative as it will play a major role in China's Silk Road Economic Belt, a trade corridor China hopes to reinvigorate to move Chinese goods across the Eurasian steppe and into Europe. It is no coincidence that President Xi announced the plan in Kazakhstan's capital, Astana (renamed Nur-Sultan in 2019). Investing in Kazakhstan's transport infrastructure will greatly increase the efficiency of Chinese goods transiting this corridor. In his speech at Nazarbayev University, Xi spoke about the rich history China shares with Central Asia, their connectivity allowing for the Silk Road and fostering a connection between East and West. The Kazakhstani government's enthusiasm for BRI is evident. In 2015, 55 projects were announced to increase Kazakhstan's development. After President Xi's announcement, Kazakhstan's government went on a PR campaign advertising the country as a transport corridor to emphasize its importance to China and BRI. Since its announcement, the two countries have hosted large-scale forums and meetings to amplify the prestige of the initiative and Kazakhstan's new position of importance on the international stage. The importance of Kazakhstan's relationship with China is exhibited in President Nazarbayev's hand-picked successor, Kassym Tokayev, a fluent Mandarin speaker who spent his early career as a Soviet diplomat in China.

Scope of this Study

This paper breaks new ground in exploring Chinese and Russian interactions when it comes to their convergence of influence in Kazakhstan. It will focus on three main areas of influence in Kazakhstan: economics, military and security, and politics, and will try to answer whether the convergence of China and Russia's interests in Kazakhstan causes more cooperation or competition between the two powers.

The lack of literature on Russian and Chinese competition and cooperation in Kazakhstan has led me to rely on a wide range of materials. I cite primary sources such as government documents and statements as well as economic databases. I also relied upon major news outlets such as BBC and CNN for relevant information about ongoing events that have affected my research as well as smaller media outlets that specialize in Eurasian events such as Caspian News and Eurasianet. I also refer to scholarly articles for my topic. Most of the scholarly work I rely on is on topics adjacent to mine, such as Russian-Kazakhstani relations, Sino-Kazakhstani relations, Central Asian security, and EAEU-BRI integration. Edward Lemon and Bradley Jardine's writing on Central Asian security was immensely beneficial to my understanding and knowledge of the weapons market within Central Asia. A large amount of literature on my topic derives from Zhenis Kembayev, a professor of law at KIMEP University in Almaty, Kazakhstan, who writes at length on BRI and the EAEU in Kazakhstan. Kembayev's work was instrumental to my understanding of Russian and Chinese influence in Kazakhstan. While Kembayev's writing looks at each relationship, Sino-Russian, Sino-Kazakhstani, and Kazakhstani-Russian individually, I examine these relationships as a whole and how they affect the approaches of one another.

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Chapter 1: Economics

The economic development of Kazakhstan since independence has made the country's importance to both Russia and China abundantly clear. Both countries are heavily involved in Kazakhstan's energy industry with major state-owned companies holding stakes in Kazakhstan's oil and gas fields and transit infrastructure. Kazakhstan holds an important position within the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union as well as China's Belt and Road Initiative. Although China and Russia's similar interests in Kazakhstan may lead some to predict conflict, their economic involvement in the country has led to further cooperation and economic integration.

EAEU

In an official statement sent to fellow EAEU member states in 2018, Vladimir Putin laid out the Union's major goals. The main task of the Union, Putin said, is to "intensify efforts towards creating single markets for goods and services, and providing conditions for free capital and workforce flow."²² The EAEU is an attempt by Russia to balance Western powers, namely the European Union, by reintegrating some of the economies formerly united under the Soviet Union. The EAEU gives Putin the ability to assert the Russian economy in what he considers Russia's "near abroad" and increase Moscow's influence in countries formerly under its control.

Through this market integration, EAEU countries will likely develop greater dependence on one another which greatly benefits Russia. This is evident from the fallout of the Russian war in Ukraine. With the West severing almost all economic ties to Russia, except the importation of Russian natural gas, and punishing Moscow for its actions, Moscow is now attempting to rely more heavily on EAEU countries to stay afloat economically. Even if EAEU countries would rather side with the West, the potential economic fallout in their own countries forces them to continue cooperating with Russia. Kazakhstan is a good example of this. Although Nur-Sultan

has not supported Moscow's actions, it announced that it will not be sanctioning Russia due to the negative implications for their own economy.

Working towards the goal to create a free flow of goods within the Union, member states have abolished internal tariffs on intra-EAEU trade. This includes import and export taxes and fees that would usually be placed upon goods when crossing the border of two countries. Difficulties in EAEU trade arise, however, through the integration of customs information and trade with non-members states. The EAEU is working to create an integrated digital information system for border customs to optimize transit times for goods crossing between member states.²³ EAEU members have also imposed different levels of tariffs on their external borders; however, up to 85% of external tariffs are now uniform.²⁴

The EAEU has already made substantial progress on the free movement of labor. Member states reached an agreement to increase the time allowed for migrant workers to register a place of residence in a different EAEU country and decrease the number of documents needed to do so. Member states also agreed on migrant workers' rights to pensions, healthcare, and preschool education for their children.²⁵ The EAEU has also guaranteed migrant workers' right to transfer money to their families in other EAEU states unimpeded. Migrant workers are taxed at the same rate as locals of the EAEU country, however, if they choose to transfer money back to their home country, there are no legal impediments or extra costs for such transactions. Migrant workers are also eligible for free emergency healthcare services similar to locals.²⁶ In July 2021, the unified Work Without Borders system was launched. This service gives migrant workers access to information on vacancies in all member states and provides employers with information on applicants from all member states.²⁷ This is an important facet for the EAEU due to high levels of labor migration, especially between Russia and Central Asian states. These

rights for migrant workers within the EAEU make membership even more attractive for Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, which send large numbers of migrant workers to Russia every year. It is possible, however, that the contraction of Russia's economy due to Western sanctions could negatively affect the flow of migrant workers to Russia.

Russia had hoped for the creation of a single currency and financial market within the EAEU. This, however, was quickly rejected by fellow members. Instead, Putin is pushing for less use of the US dollar and more use of national currencies within the Union.²⁸ Moscow likely hoped to decrease the use of the dollar to minimize the economic fallout caused by the possibility of more Western sanctions. With the war in Ukraine almost completely severing Russia from the West, Russia will likely continue its push to decrease the EAEU's reliance on the dollar.

The Common Energy Market

A major goal of the EAEU is the creation of a common energy market, which would be the largest in the world, producing 14.6% of the world's oil, 18.4% of the world's natural gas, and generating 5.1% of the world's electricity.²⁹ A common energy market would mean that no export customs duties (taxes and fees) would apply to mutual trade among member states. For exportation to non-member states, EAEU states agreed to apply a uniform export customs duty for all energy exports. Member states agreed to use Russia's level of export customs duty which is higher than that of Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Armenia.³⁰ Originally, the EAEU planned to create the common electricity market by 2019 and the common oil and gas markets by 2025. The creation of the electricity market, however, has been moved back to 2025 as well.³¹

The common electricity market, also known as the Power Market, is seen as the restoration of the common energy system under the Soviet Union.³² According to the EAEU treaty, the Power Market will be achieved through the harmonization of legislation and technical

regulations for each member state as well as the exploitation of parallel member states' power systems. The EAEU aims to create a supranational, independent regulator to facilitate the common market. It also plans on unifying pricing methods and establishing an international trading platform called the Council of the Common Electricity Market.³³ The Power Market is expected to increase the stability of member states' power systems, lower electricity costs, and eliminate mutual trade barriers between member states.³⁴

The goal of the common gas market is to create uniform natural gas prices throughout the EAEU and unify natural gas legislation.³⁵ This will be helpful to gas importers within the EAEU such as Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, and Belarus who believe that a common gas market will push down their comparatively high gas prices.³⁶ It will also likely reduce prices due to increased competition between suppliers by giving gas companies equal access to all markets within the EAEU. For example, Russian gas suppliers will now have to compete with Kazakhstani companies to supply Belarus because the new agreement will allow Kazakhstan to enter into direct deals with Belarus with Russia guaranteeing free transit. Kazakhstan will also be able to buy natural gas from Russia at internal EAEU prices and then sell its domestically-produced gas to China at international prices. Although this is a disadvantage for Russia, the common gas market will also give Russian companies increased access to gas infrastructure in other member states. Russia will therefore be able to use Kazakhstan as a transit state for cheaper transportation costs to send its oil and natural gas to China through the Kazakhstan-China pipelines.

The common oil and petroleum product market is to be based on the following agreements: the non-application of export customs duties and other taxes and fees for mutual trade, normalization of standards for oil and petroleum products, and the creation of a shared information system for customs information on the supply, export, and import of oil and

petroleum products. Member states have also agreed to equal access for all economic entities to the oil transportation systems (i.e. pipelines) whether these entities are state-owned or not.³⁷

Prior to the invasion of Ukraine, the common energy market was an economic concession by Russia that would provide benefits to other EAEU member states, exhibiting Moscow's willingness to sacrifice economic success to retain influence in its "near abroad." Without the common oil market, Kazakhstan has to cut Russia into the deal when it wants to send oil through Russia to the EU. But the common oil market would allow Kazakhstani oil companies to enter into direct deals with the EU, using Russia simply as a transit state. Additionally, with the common oil market, Belarus would be able to import Russian crude oil at a discounted rate and then refine and sell it to the EU at higher international prices. This all changed when Russia invaded Ukraine. The EU is now moving quickly to enact legislation that would ban the importation of Russian oil. This would bar Belarus from re-exporting Russian oil (although Belarus is also receiving sanctions for its role in the invasion) and Kazakhstan will face difficulties because Kazakhstani and Russian oil en route to Europe are often blended together before being transported to Europe.

BRI

Chinese President Xi hopes the Belt and Road Initiative will provide new investment opportunities, develop export markets and satisfy increased energy consumption. Kazakhstan's oil-rich northwest, underdeveloped economy, and wide-spreading territory reaching toward Europe allow it to meet all three of Xi's hopes for BRI.

The developmental goals of the Belt and Road Initiative align well with Nurlı Zhol, former President Nursultan Nazarbayev's modernization plan to bring Kazakhstan into the top 30 most developed countries in the world by 2050 through infrastructural development, industrial

production, innovation, and economic diversification. Therefore, in 2015, President Nazarbayev signed a framework agreement for the cooperation of Nurly Zhol and the Belt and Road Initiative in Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan and China agreed to 55 total projects spanning different industries in which the Chinese government or state-affiliated Chinese companies and banks would buy, give loans, or invest in Kazakhstani companies and projects. Total Chinese BRI investments in Kazakhstan up to 2020 amount to \$42 billion.³⁸

Before the war in Ukraine, Kazakhstan was estimated to receive an additional \$5 billion per year from the transportation of Chinese goods through Kazakhstan to other countries. The improved infrastructure through the joint BRI-Nurly Zhol development projects was projected to increase Kazakhstan's economy by up to 9% in the coming decade if accompanied by the improved trade facilitation the EAEU had promised.³⁹ The new infrastructure would also decrease transit times through Kazakhstan by 8% and the cost of trade by 4%. These projections, however, did not account for the Kremlin's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine. China's Eurasian economic belt that stretches through Kazakhstan and Russia to Poland is under threat given the now severed economic and political ties between Russia and the EU. Although goods that transit through Russia are not specifically banned as of yet, the war still damages China's exports through Eurasia. Some logistics companies such as DB Schenker and Hapag-Lloyd have decided no longer to do business that involves Russia, Belarus, or Ukraine and it is likely international insurers will no longer offer coverage for shipments through Russia and Belarus.⁴⁰ Decreasing cargo due to private companies opting not to do business through Russia will be injurious to both Kazakhstan and China on its own but would pale in comparison to the economic damage that would follow a ban on all goods transported through Russia.

It is also worth noting that China and Ukraine have enjoyed a close economic partnership in recent years. Ukraine is a major exporter of arms and agricultural products to China, surpassing the US as China's number one supplier of corn in 2019.⁴¹ Ukraine has played an important role in BRI after agreeing to join in 2017. Kyiv and Beijing have signed \$3 billion worth of Chinese investments in Kazakhstan which are now in jeopardy due to the Russian invasion.⁴²

BRI Projects

A major project in the development of the Belt and Road Initiative is the Khorgos Gateway Dry Port which straddles the Kazakhstani-Chinese border. For goods going from east to west, the Khorgos Dry Port and the improved transport infrastructure in Kazakhstan have decreased transport costs drastically (even though trains crossing the border have to change wheels, as the countries have different rail widths). What used to take 40 days to ship goods from Yiwu, China to London by sea now takes 18-20 days by rail.⁴³ Khorgos also connects Kazakhstan with the Chinese port city of Lianyungang on the Yellow Sea, the closest seaport for landlocked Kazakhstan. The 4,243 km long Expressway connecting Khorgos and Lianyungang along with the Sino-Kazakhstani International Logistics Base in the Chinese port city gives Kazakhstan an efficient route to export its goods such as wheat, corn, and minerals to China and other southeast Asian countries. Through this expressway facilitated by Khorgos, Kazakhstan tripled its wheat exports to China in 2018 during the US-China trade war and increased wheat exports to the rest of the region.⁴⁴ This is a great example of Kazakhstan's current and future potential and importance to China and Russia. Severe Western sanctions imposed on Russia due to its brutal invasion of Ukraine, as well as China's support for Russia and Beijing's own trade war with the US, are likely to increase Russian and Chinese trade with Kazakhstan.



A tangible example of the framework agreement between the countries is the major construction of a petrochemical complex in the western region of Atyrau, Kazakhstan. The complex is a joint venture between Kazakhstan Petrochemical Industries Inc. and China National Chemical Engineering. It is located in a special economic zone called National Industrial Petrochemical Technopark. The special economic zone allows for zero corporate, land, or property tax.⁴⁵ The main construction of the project was completed in December of 2021 and the plant is projected to produce 500,000 tons of polypropylene per year. In all, the project cost \$2.6 billion and expects to generate up to \$548.6 million annually for Kazakhstan's economy. This chemical compound is used for the production of packaging materials, containers, pipes, and fittings for hot water supply, domestic electronic equipment, and furniture.⁴⁶ The project exemplifies BRI's focus on not just transport infrastructure but industrial development in Kazakhstan as well.

The immense number of BRI projects underway in Kazakhstan has caused the country's cement demand to outstrip its domestic supply despite its high level of production.

Transportation and energy infrastructure development has increased cement demand in Kazakhstan as the country prepares to meet China's energy and transport needs. To ease cement demands in Kazakhstan, Chinese companies look to develop Kazakhstan's cement production further. In 2018, the state-owned company, China Gezhouba Group, completed construction on its cement plant in the southern Kyzylorda region of Kazakhstan. The 178-million-dollar project was built by China Triumph International Engineering, a Chinese construction company and now employs 260 Kazakh workers. The plant specializes in oil well cement which is in high demand as Kazakhstan continues to build up its pipeline infrastructure to send oil and gas to China.⁴⁷

Although large Chinese loans through the Belt and Road Initiative have proven detrimental to some developing countries unable to keep up with payments, this has not been the case for Kazakhstan. Moody's rates Kazakhstan's credit as stable, and its debt to GDP percentage was only 23.4% at the end of 2020.⁴⁸ Kazakhstan owes China \$10 billion, however, this is less than 6.2% of external debt and represents a 33% decrease in debt to China since 2014.⁴⁹ Stable debt levels to China are due to the nature of Beijing's economic presence in Kazakhstan. China has invested far more money in Kazakhstan than it has loaned. While Kazakhstan owes China \$10 billion in loans, Chinese BRI investments in Kazakhstan reached \$26.7 billion in January 2022.

Energy

Russian-Kazakhstani Energy Trade

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, energy production has defined the economies of both Russia and Kazakhstan. Although Nur-Sultan has long held the goal of diversifying its

economy, this is difficult when so much opportunity lies in its oil fields which hold an estimated 30 billion barrels of proven oil reserves, second only to Russia in the region and twelfth in the world.⁵⁰ Kazakhstan relies greatly on Russia for aid in energy production, refinement, and trade to exploit this energy potential.

Russian oil and gas companies are deeply involved in Kazakhstan's energy production industry, located in the northwest of the country on the Caspian coast. The Russian companies Lukoil and Gazpromneft both hold 25% stakes to explore the Tsentralnoye oil and gas field on the Caspian sea.⁵¹ Lukoil and Kazmunaygaz (Kazakhstan's state-owned oil and gas company) in 2020 signed a deal on the Al-Farabi project, an exploration and production project off the Caspian coast of which Lukoil owns 49.99%. Lukoil and Kazmunaygas are also 50-50 partners on the Zhenis project, another plot off the Caspian coast.⁵²

Kazakhstan and Russia also cooperate closely when it comes to oil and gas refinement. Much of Kazakhstan's natural gas is too sulfur-rich to be refined by facilities in Kazakhstan. It therefore must be transported to Orenburg, Russia to be processed at a Russian facility. Russia relies on Kazakhstani refineries as well. Kazakhstan operates three major refineries; one of which, located in the northwestern city of Pavlodar, is supplied almost exclusively by a crude-oil pipeline from western Siberia. This mutual trade of oil and gas is not an unusual practice; crude oil and natural gas can contain varying levels of sulfur and therefore must be sent to refineries with the appropriate capabilities.

Although Kazakhstan exports only about \$25 million worth of oil to Russia per year, about 85% of Kazakhstani oil and almost all of its natural gas exports transited through Russia to other markets. Much of the oil transits through two pipeline systems, the Uzen-Atyrau-Samara pipeline and the Caspian Pipeline Consortium, which are jointly operated by Kazmunaytranz and

Transneft, Kazakhstan and Russia's respective state-owned transportation companies. The Kazakhstani oil is blended with Russian and transported to the Baltic port of Ust-Luga and the Black Sea port of Novorossiysk, foreshadowing major issues as the EU moves to ban Russian oil.⁵³



US Energy Information Administration

Sino-Kazakhstani Energy Trade

Energy cooperation between China and Kazakhstan was well in place before the emergence of BRI. In 2013, Chinese companies and investments accounted for over 25% of oil and gas production in Kazakhstan.⁵⁴ China's increased appetite for energy imports comes from President Xi's hope to transition away from coal power. As China makes promises to improve its

environmental habits, Xi must find new sources of energy as he tries to wean China off coal, which accounts for 72% of its energy consumption.⁵⁵ Central Asia, especially the oil and gas-rich countries of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, offers China an opportunity to diversify its energy imports. China has relied on oil imports from the Middle East which are transported by sea. China is concerned, however, that these trade routes are too vulnerable to chokepoints such as the Malacca Strait. The ability to import oil and gas overland from Central Asia would offer China an alternative source of energy that would be safe from any sort of blockade in the case of escalated tensions with the West.⁵⁶

Kazakhstan plays a major role in producing gas for China but it also serves as a transit state for other Central Asian countries. China imports its Central Asian gas through the Central Asia-China gas pipeline system. The transit network consists of three pipelines, A, B, and C. Lines A and B originate in Turkmenistan, running parallel through Uzbekistan and southern Kazakhstan before reaching the Kazakhstani-Chinese border at Khorgos. Line C begins in northwest Kazakhstan and then turns south to meet lines A and B en route to Khorgos.⁵⁷ Since the creation of pipeline C, Kazakhstan's export of natural gas to China has skyrocketed, increasing in value from \$206 million in 2014 to \$1.45 billion in 2020.⁵⁸

Kazakhstan and China also agreed on the creation of the Kazakhstan-China oil pipeline, connecting Kazakhstan's oil fields with Xinjiang. The \$700-million pipeline, built jointly by CNPC and KazmunayGas, became operational in 2007, producing 400,000 barrels of oil per day. Kazakhstani-Chinese oil trade is not what it used to be, however, decreasing in the 2010s due to falling oil prices, a major drop in the value of the tenge (Kazakhstan's currency), and Chinese financial troubles.⁵⁹ In recent years, however, Kazakhstan's export of crude oil to China has rebounded and reached \$1.19 billion.⁶⁰

Sino-Russian Energy Trade

While China seeks to diversify its energy suppliers, Russia seeks to diversify its consumers as the war in Ukraine has severely diminished trade with the West and ruined its plans for the foreseeable future for Nord Stream 2. Russia is the world's largest combined oil and natural gas producer and China is the world's largest importer of oil and gas. It would only make sense that the two countries sharing a 2,600-mile-long border would turn towards one another for their energy trade needs.

Although both countries agreed that energy trade between the two would be mutually beneficial, distrust and price disputes caused negotiations to drag on from the mid-1990s until 2009 when a deal was finally made for the construction of a pipeline running from eastern Siberia to China.⁶¹ The pipeline was extended to the Pacific Ocean so oil could then be sold to other Asian countries, giving the pipeline the name Eastern Siberia-Pacific Ocean Pipeline. In 2014, China and Russia agreed to create the Power of Siberia gas pipeline running from eastern Siberia to China. While China had provided a \$25 billion loan to Transneft and Rosneft for the development of the oil fields and pipelines in 2009, no Chinese loans were offered for the Power of Siberia deal. It is estimated that Russian investments in the fields and pipelines cost \$55 billion.⁶² The 30-year contract stated that Russia would work up to providing 38 billion cubic meters (bcm) per year by 2025. In 2021, the pipeline provided China with 16.5bcm of gas. However, during the 2022 Olympics in Beijing, a new agreement was announced to up this goal to 48bcm to China by an unspecified date.⁶³ Rosneft also signed a separate deal with CNPC to supply an additional 100 million tons of oil over ten years that will be transported to China through the Kazakhstan-China oil pipeline. The deal is said to be worth over \$10 billion.⁶⁴

Russian-Chinese energy cooperation is likely only to increase with news that the EU is planning to ban the import of Russian oil.

EAEU-BRI Synergy

Although competition between Russia and China would seem obvious given they both vie for economic influence in Kazakhstan, the presence of the two powers has actually led to historically significant increases in economic cooperation. At the Far East Economic Forum in September 2021, Chinese President Xi called for greater integration between the countries' two economic strategies saying, "We need to deepen the collaboration between the Belt and Road Initiative and the Eurasian Economic Union..."⁶⁵ President Putin carried the same tune later at the Meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council, announcing that the strategies of the two countries "rhyme."⁶⁶ At the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in 2018 and again that year when Russia assumed the chairmanship of the EAEU, Putin reemphasized his hope for greater economic cooperation with China, saying he is "confident that the EAEU and China's Belt and Road Initiative can effectively supplement each other."⁶⁷ The synergy of BRI and the EAEU reflects and perhaps facilitates the greater ties created recently between the two countries. China and Russia appear to be aligning their foreign policies to support one another. At the 2022 Olympics, which concluded four days before Russia commenced its invasion of Ukraine, both countries offered support publically for the other's foreign policy. Putin spoke in support of China's claims over Taiwan and Xi reaffirmed China's support of Russia's security concerns over Ukraine and NATO expansionism.

Putin's use of the word "rhyme" is very fitting for EAEU-BRI cooperation. The EAEU can be of great use to China and its Belt and Road Initiative. Due to the EAEU's common markets and free flow of goods, transiting Chinese exports across the EAEU and into the EU

means that Chinese goods will have to cross only two customs borders, the China-EAEU border and the EAEU-EU border. This will increase transit efficiency as tariffs will not be added to products that cross borders within the EAEU. The prices paid when crossing through EAEU member states will be that of interior tariffs within a country, not the much pricier ones of crossing between two independent states. The EAEU, therefore, offers a cheaper and faster route for Chinese goods. The EAEU is also working to decrease non-tariff barriers between members which will greatly improve transport efficiency for goods moving through the Union. War, however, has dampened the benefits of EAEU-BRI synergy. Decreasing demand for goods crossing Russian territory and increased transport costs caused by the global energy crisis may offset the upsides to Russian-Chinese cooperation.

The common electricity market should not have significant effects on intra-EAEU trade. All EAEU states can produce enough electricity domestically to meet their consumption needs.⁶⁸ However, the Power Market will increase electricity trade between the EAEU and China. The Power Market is beneficial to China and its growing electricity demand for several reasons. Synchronizing the transmission of electricity within the EAEU will make trade between EAEU states and China easier. Additionally, the right of EAEU states to use their fellow members to transit their exports will bring down transportation costs for member states not bordering China. This will increase competition between EAEU suppliers leading to decreased electricity costs for China as EAEU states will have to lower prices to attract further Chinese purchases.⁶⁹

Conclusion

China and Russia both have strong economic presences and plans for further cooperation with Kazakhstan. China's emphasis on Kazakhstan's importance to BRI proves that Beijing sees Kazakhstan as a long-time economic partner that will help facilitate greater Chinese economic

influence globally. Further integration within the EAEU will allow Russia continued influence in Kazakhstan's energy industries and economy as a whole despite China's growing presence.

Although Russia sees Kazakhstan as within its sphere of influence, it cannot match the sheer scale of China's economic influence through the Belt and Road Initiative. It must, therefore, embrace its role as a secondary actor in the country. In doing so, the EAEU will allow Moscow to continue its presence in Kazakhstan and remain an essential partner to the former Soviet state. The EAEU will even enable Russia to play a part in China's economic cooperation with Kazakhstan. China's dominant position in Kazakhstan's economic sphere allows Beijing and Moscow to cooperate efficiently and amicably in a country they both view as essential to their foreign policies.

Chapter 2: Military and Security

As occurred in other former Soviet states, Kazakhstan's defense sector suffered from the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Given its historic ties with Moscow, Kazakhstan was left to rely heavily on Russia for protection and arms importation. Since independence, Kazakhstan's most significant national security concerns have been internal, not external. The nationwide riots of January 2022 exhibited the dangers its own people pose given the lack of democratic governance and widespread corruption in the country. Although instability, not invasion, is the first concern for Kazakhstani leadership, there has been and continues to be, a lurking fear of its northern neighbor and former ruler. Russian aggression towards former Soviet states such as Georgia and Ukraine reflects the Kremlin's disregard for the territorial integrity of its neighbors, especially those previously ruled by Moscow that have ethnic Russian populations. The threat posed by Moscow complicates Nur-Sultan's security predicament given Kazakhstan's reliance on Russia for arms trade and military education.

Kazakhstani security is now especially important on the international stage due to China's significant investments in the country. Agitation from Kazakhstan's population over an increasing Chinese presence has caused Nur-Sultan to focus even more intently on domestic security. China, however, does not provide the same level of support for Kazakhstan's security as it does its economy. Despite China's desire for a stable Kazakhstan, the widespread sinophobia found in the Central Asian state prevents Beijing from easily providing overt aid in this sphere. This section will discuss how China and Russia assert their presence in Kazakhstan through military and security diplomacy, arms trade, and security agreements. The section aims to show how the two powers view their roles in Kazakhstan's military and security sphere and how they cooperate within these roles.

Russia-Kazakhstan Relations

Arms Trade and Military Diplomacy

Kazakhstan receives the majority of its arms imports from Russia. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia has attempted to retain its predominance in Central Asia through arms trade and military diplomacy. Russian arms sales to Central Asian states since 1991 amount to over \$3.8 billion, \$2.3 billion of which are sent to Kazakhstan. As Kazakhstan becomes a major actor on the world stage, it sees the modernization of its military as a necessity to ensure its own stability. In 2019, the two countries signed an agreement for Russian companies to build Mi-8AMT and Mi-171 helicopters in Kazakhstan, the majority of which are sold to Kazakhstan's Ministry of Emergency Situations and the National Guard.⁷⁰ Kazakhstan recently bought two minesweepers, four Mi-35M attack helicopters, and 12 Su-30SM fighter-bombers that add to the already 20 Kazakhstan bought from Russia between 2015 and 2018.⁷¹ In addition to being a weapons provider, Russia serves as an educator for Kazakhstan's military. Russian military schools are host to many Kazakhstani military personnel. As a result, over half of the Kazakhstani army is trained at least partially in Russia.⁷²

Since the dissolution of the USSR, Moscow has searched for solutions to increase its military "buffer zone" in case of a military altercation with the West or Asia. As a carry-over from the Soviet Union, Russia owns a cosmodrome in Kazakhstan as well as several radar stations that provide Russia with early warning detection in case of an imminent missile attack. However, Moscow deemed this was not enough and initiated the creation of the CIS Joint Air Defense System (JADS) in 1995 between Kazakhstan, Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. Since then, four members (Ukraine, Georgia, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan) have dropped out of the agreement. JADS is organized

through the integration of joint regional air defense systems that provide Moscow's air defense a far greater reach. By 2022, Russia has integrated its air defense with Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Armenia. The Russia-Kazakhstan Joint Air Defense System was finalized in 2013 with Russia providing Kazakhstan with five S-300PS/SA-10B surface-to-air missile systems for free. The agreement creates a win-win situation for both countries in which Moscow creates an air defense buffer zone and Kazakhstan receives the equipment it needs to build up its own defense capabilities.

CSTO

Evolving out of CIS' Collective Security Treaty, the Collective Security Treaty Organization is Moscow's attempt to increase its military influence and prowess to levels similar to the Soviet era. The organization strives to create a common defense structure for the former Soviet states of Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Armenia. The CSTO, and Moscow in particular, craves an opportunity to prove itself and increase the organization's legitimacy and clout. However, the fractured nature of the CSTO prevents Moscow from rallying the militaries of these countries effectively to present a united front.

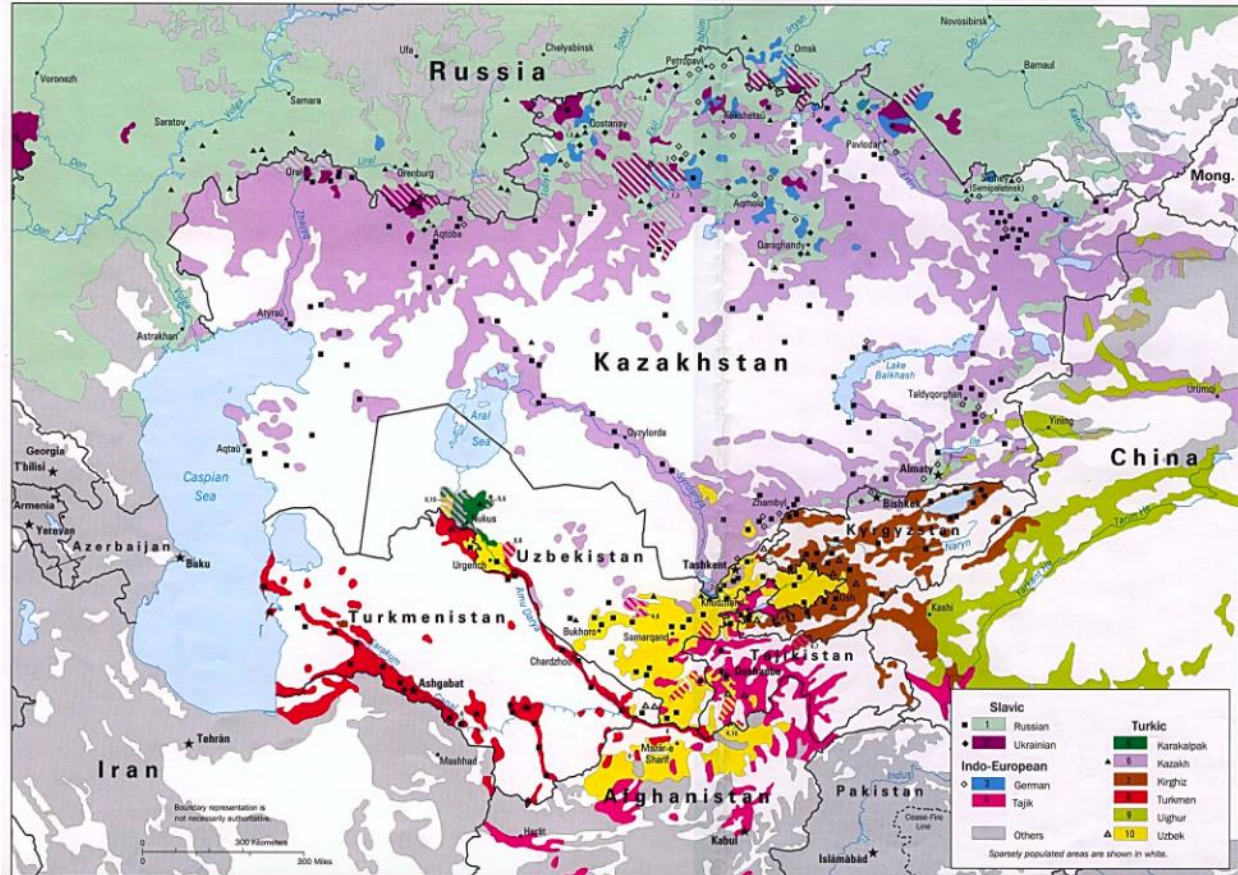
Putin failed on multiple occasions to rally CSTO members behind Russia and instead created greater divisiveness within the organization. This is exemplified by Russia's call for CSTO peacekeepers to deploy in Syria. Moscow saw this as an important step for the organization as it would be CSTO's first mission outside the former Soviet Union. The CSTO, however, requires unanimous approval from all member-states for the deployment of CSTO peacekeepers and both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan refused the call to action. Kazakhstan's ministry of foreign affairs offered a firm rejection; "Astana is not negotiating with anybody to send Kazakhstani servicemen to Syria."⁷³ The Russian-supported Alawite regime in Syria is of

the Shiite branch of Islam while the rebels are Sunni. Kazakhstan's Muslim population is majority Sunni and religious leaders in Kazakhstan have spoken out against Russian intervention in Syria. Nur-Sultan did not view its interests in Syria as vital enough to upset its population.

There have been other signs of disunity within the CSTO. In 2008, Russia deployed troops to Georgia to support the breakaway states of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. CSTO members publically supported the action, however, they did not join Russia in recognizing South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states. In 2014 during a special summit convened by Russia after it annexed Crimea, Moscow garnered approval from fellow member states to recognize the legitimacy of the Crimean referendum. But of the CSTO members, only Belarus and Armenia recognized Crimea as a part of Russia. Given the Russian reasoning to protect ethnic Russians in Crimea and Kazakhstan's own substantial ethnic Russian population, this was a sensitive topic for Kazakhstani leadership. Then-President Nursultan Nazarbayev refused to attend the summit in protest of Moscow's actions.⁷⁴ Recognizing Crimea as a part of Russia is a dangerous act for Kazakhstan because it would create a precedent for acknowledging Russia's right to "protect" Russians in neighboring countries. Russia could invoke that precedent to seize northern Kazakhstan where as much as 49% of the population are ethnically Russian.⁷⁵

Lacking opportunities to show off its military prowess abroad, the CSTO uses major meetings and joint military exercises between member states with massive media exposure to show off its purported capabilities. The military organization holds annual sessions to discuss ongoing security threats and form new agreements and strategies to improve cooperation and dialogue.⁷⁶

Major Ethnic Groups in Central Asia



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Chinese-Kazakhstani Relations

Arms Trade and Military Diplomacy

China lags behind Russia when it comes to the overall volume of military exports to Kazakhstan but has found its niche exporting advanced military technology that Russia is not capable of manufacturing. Chinese arms exports to Kazakhstan began to increase in 2014, a year after the announcement of BRI.⁷⁷ In 2015, China gifted Kazakhstan 30 Jiefang J6 heavy-duty trucks and 30 large-load trailers worth \$3.2 million. In 2018, Kazakhstan purchased 8 Y-8 transportation planes worth \$296 million. Despite these increases, China has only provided 1.1% of Kazakhstan's arms imports since 1991, putting it behind Russia, Europe, Ukraine, Israel, and the US (which provides mostly aircraft to Kazakhstan).⁷⁸ China's small role in Kazakhstan's

arms trade is odd given China's significant economic interests in Kazakhstan and its desire for the country to remain stable.

Sinophobia in Kazakhstan due to China's growing economic presence and the genocide of Muslims in Xinjiang prevents Beijing from a more substantial military presence.⁷⁹ China also appears wary of upsetting Russia, which sees itself as the dominant actor in Kazakhstan's military and security sphere. China, therefore, relies on increasing its influence in military diplomacy rather than large-scale arms trade or boots on the ground.

Although China's arms trade is increasing in Central Asia, this does not necessarily mean that it is encroaching on Russian influential territory. Over the past ten years, Russia's arms trade has remained relatively constant at around 60% of all Central Asian military imports. As China's arms trade in the region has increased, it has eaten up the market share of suppliers such as Turkey, Ukraine, Spain, and France, not Russia.⁸⁰

SCO

Copying Russia's long-running practice of solidifying military influence through education, in 2016 China aided Kazakhstan in establishing a Chinese department at its University of Defense in Nur-Sultan. Falling in line with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's (SCO's) focus on antinarcotics efforts, the Chinese Criminal Police Academy also helped Kazakhstan facilitate a series of anti-drug business training courses. Additionally, China's Ministry of Public Security founded the China National Institute of SCO International Exchange and Judicial Cooperation which will train senior SCO officials in areas such as counterterrorism and transnational crime.⁸¹

The Organization's military component focuses largely on domestic security, leading SCO members to become major buyers of Chinese surveillance technology. As their economies

develop, the authoritarian regimes of Central Asia are looking for ways to clamp down on political opposition which often comes in the form of democratic parties and human rights activists. Chinese surveillance systems, chiefly exported through the company Hikvision, provide these regimes with the technology to better monitor anyone or thing deemed a threat. The Chinese government uses these same surveillance systems made by Hikvision to track the activities of Muslims living in Xinjiang. After visiting Hikvision's headquarters in 2019, President Tokayev lauded China's surveillance technology, asserting that China's use of facial recognition and ability to track citizens' biometric and medical data should be a model for Kazakhstan's aspiring surveillance system.⁸² Huawei, a Chinese telecommunications company, controls almost all of Kazakhstan's telecommunication and is now aiding Nur-Sultan in tracking potential dissidents, monitoring the calls and texts of Kazakhstani citizens as well as tracking social media activity.⁸³

Current Events

Kazakhstan Riots

In January 2022, protests broke out across Kazakhstan over a 100% increase in fuel prices after Kazakhstan's government removed its artificial price cap. The protests quickly evolved to object to Kazakhstan's extreme wealth disparity and authoritarian rule fraught with corruption. Only 162 people in Kazakhstan own over half of the nation's wealth, many of them having close connections to lawmakers in Nur-Sultan or are the lawmakers themselves. Leaders from Kazakhstan, Russia, and China claim these protests were staged and carried out by "international terrorists" but provided no evidence. Kazakhstani authorities arrested over 10,000 people for their participation in the protests and report that 225 were killed during the events, 19 of whom were security personnel.⁸⁴

With both Russia and China having much to lose over a destabilized Kazakhstan, the riots revealed the underlying dynamics and cooperation between the two powers when it comes to Kazakhstan's security. As protests were ongoing, President Tokayev requested CSTO members "to help Kazakhstan overcome this terrorist threat."⁸⁵ Tokayev requested troops, citing article 4 of the Organization which states: "In the case of aggression (an armed attack threatening safety, stability, territorial integrity and sovereignty) against any Member States, all other Member States at the request of this Member State shall immediately provide the latter with the necessary aid, including military." Soon after, 2,500 CSTO peacekeepers, the vast majority of which were from Russia, deployed to Kazakhstan to put down the protests. This was the first time in CSTO's history that the organization enacted Article 4. In 2010, amidst country-wide protests that overthrew Kyrgyzstan's government, the CSTO refused to intervene despite the Kyrgyzstani government's request, calling the event an "internal" dispute. However, because President Tokayev claimed the protestors to be "international terrorists," and therefore an external threat, the CSTO was able to come to Nur-Sultan's aid.

The quick action of the CSTO shows greater unity within the organization where it has often been lacking. Tokayev's request for CSTO-aid and the unified decision and coordinated response from member states showed CSTO's ability to mobilize successfully.

China, despite its serious concern for the security of its energy import routes and BRI projects, did not send troops to stabilize Kazakhstan, exhibiting the dynamics of the SCO and China's deference to Russia's military influence in Kazakhstan. On paper, China seems ready and able to handle a terrorist threat in Central Asia. The SCO conducts anti-terrorism exercises with fellow member states annually. The exercises include the use of the newest military technologies and host thousands of troops the latest of which, "Peace Mission 2021," boasted

over 4,000 troops between eight member states including Kazakhstan.⁸⁶ Despite these exercises, it was Russia and the CSTO that sent troops to deal with the so-called terrorists, not China and the SCO. This exemplifies SCO's preference to focus on economic, not military, relations despite these annual showcases.

China's hesitance to directly support Kazakhstan's government exhibits Beijing's diplomatic practice of non-interference in the domestic matters of other countries. China often criticizes the US for interfering in the internal affairs of other states and claims that the SCO is built upon respect for the sovereignty of each member state.⁸⁷ This is usually used by China to protect fellow authoritarian regimes that may be carrying out violence or crimes against their own populations. Democracy requirements for membership in the EU is another "sovereignty restriction" China cites when criticizing the West for interfering with the independence of other countries. While a thinly veiled lie was able to allow CSTO to enact article 4 of its agreement, China was still not willing to risk losing its diplomatic argument against the West when Russia was already willing to step in.

China did not object to Russia sending its troops into Kazakhstan. Once the troops left, however, China exerted its influence by sending in a special team to Kazakhstan to aid the government in using facial recognition technology to identify protestors. *Bitter Winter* also reported that Huawei's technical team is helping Kazakhstan's government monitor the calls and text messages of Kazakhstani citizens to see whether or not they participated in the January protests. This is how Russia and China cooperate in Kazakhstan. Russia offers the muscle and receives the spotlight for its role as a "stabilizer" and China stands back, quietly aiding Nursultan in its creation of an oppressive surveillance state to ensure greater stability in the future. During the riots, Kazakhstani leadership displayed its multivector foreign policy, espousing SCO

rhetoric against terrorism and extremism while relying on Russian military prowess to deal with the issue on the ground.

Russia's Invasion of Ukraine

On February 24, 2022, Russia launched a massive invasion of Ukraine, in what it calls a “special military operation” to “denazify” Ukraine. The invasion led to an onslaught of sanctions against Russia, isolating Moscow and forcing it to rely more than ever on its closest allies.

Russia’s allies, however, are reluctant to show support.

Russia is a serious security threat to Kazakhstan despite being its closest military ally and arms dealer. Kazakhstan’s multivector foreign policy that relies on ties with the West (discussed in chapter 3), Russia, and China is not looked upon favorably by President Putin. In 2014 after the annexation of Crimea, Putin questioned Kazakh independence, saying “The Kazakhs never had any statehood” and that it would do well to “remain in the greater Russian world.”⁸⁸ These threats made by Putin were substantial given Russia’s actions in Ukraine earlier that year. Ethnic Russians make up approximately 20% of Kazakhstan’s population and the percentage of ethnic Russian in northern Kazakhstan are similar to those in Crimea. President Nazarbayev pushed back, threatening to withdraw membership from Russian-led organizations, “Kazakhstan will not be part of organizations that pose a threat to our independence.”⁸⁹

While attacking a fellow member of a military alliance may seem irrational, there is precedent for Kazakhstan to believe Russian aggression is a realistic possibility. This is exemplified by the Russo-Georgian war in 2008 when Russia supported separatist movements in northern Georgia while the country was discussing NATO membership. Due to Kazakhstan’s preference for a multivector foreign policy, the threat of Russian aggression in an attempt to prevent Kazakhstan from growing closer to the West is a realistic possibility. Therefore,

Kazakhstan is not supporting the Russian invasion of Ukraine as they can envision a scenario where similar actions begin on their own border if Putin's imperialistic inclinations continue.

Putin's war in Ukraine proved to fracture the CSTO once again. Kazakhstan refused Moscow's request for CSTO members to send troops into Ukraine. The government even permitted pro-Ukrainian rallies in Almaty, its largest city, and abstained from voting to condemn Russia in the UN. While this signals Kazakhstan's willingness to turn a blind eye to Russian aggression, it also highlights that Kazakhstan will not be the "yes-man" that the Kremlin desires from CSTO members.

In March, President Tokayev announced in a meeting with the Ministry of Defense that Kazakhstan's military must be modernized. This includes the restructuring of the armed forces, along with improvements and repairs made to military technology. The modernization will also include the restructuring of law enforcement agencies, national security agencies, and intelligence services. Having watched Russia's brutally destructive invasion of Ukraine, Nur-Sultan does not want to rely on its neighbor to the north to ensure the government's rule.

Conclusion

China wants to protect its growing investments abroad. States heavily involved in the Belt and Road Initiative would logically be the most important place for Chinese-sponsored stability and one might expect that Chinese investments would be followed by a major influx of Chinese military and security influence. This is not the case in Kazakhstan. Widespread sinophobia may serve to prevent China from increasing its overt military and security influence. This is a nonissue for Beijing, however, given Russia's already solidified position in Kazakhstan's security sphere. Beijing, therefore, is content to allow security and military to be a

Russian-dominated sphere of influence in Kazakhstan as long as it remains stable and Chinese investments and infrastructure are protected.

Putin's war in Ukraine, of course, threatens the agreement between the two powers. Kazakhstan's history of belonging to both the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union and significant ethnic Russian population make it a potential target for Russian expansion. Russian destabilization of Kazakhstan would almost certainly be a red line for China as instability is the worst-case scenario for its investments and transport hubs in Kazakhstan. It may be possible that China would allow Russia to annex some territory in northern Kazakhstan if such aggression was isolated, retaining regional stability and ensuring the protection of Chinese investments. However, Russian military capabilities have proved lacking in its invasion of Ukraine and cast doubts on Russia's ability to make such maneuvers. Moscow becoming a destabilizing force in Kazakhstan could completely flip the two powers' cooperation to competition or outright opposition as China will have no choice but to take it upon itself to become the stabilizing security force in Kazakhstan. Even the act of Putin invading Ukraine will most likely push Beijing to increase its security presence in Kazakhstan as Russia will be seen as less reliable, pushing the powers into greater competition.

Chapter 3: Politics and Soft Power

Even after Nazarbayev stepped down from power, his multivector foreign policy continues to benefit Kazakhstan. The country has grown economically and strengthened its position on the world stage by latching on to its powerful neighbors, Russia and China, through political, military, and economic agreements and alliances.

This strategy, however, has led to increasing Russian and Chinese influence in Kazakhstan. Economic integration with China has solidified the positions of Kazakhstan's elites, increasing their power, wealth, and prestige internationally. Russian cultural influence is widespread throughout Kazakhstan's population due to Russia and Kazakhstan's shared history and continued close ties. Additionally, twenty percent of Kazakhstan's population is ethnically Russian, most of which live in the north near the Russian border. Recent actions by the Kremlin in Ukraine, however, have caused Nur-Sultan to lean away from Moscow. President Tokayev has laid out reforms for what he calls a "New Kazakhstan" that range from decreasing Presidential powers to more government accountability for human rights abuses and giving greater representation to independent candidates and minority parties. It is yet to be seen whether this "New Kazakhstan" will come to fruition but Nur-Sultan's emphasis on these reforms shows Nur-Sultan's desire to appeal to the West as Moscow isolates itself from the rest of the world.

Russian Cultural Domination

Given their shared political, linguistic, and economic history, Russia holds strong cultural influence and soft power in Kazakhstan. Russia is popular in Kazakhstan for its educational institutions, media presence, and pop culture. Russia is the prime destination for Kazakhstani students hoping to study abroad. In 2018, 69,000 of the 89,000 Kazakhstani students studying abroad were located in Russia.⁹⁰ Russian universities such as Moscow State University have

opened satellite campuses in Kazakhstan. Major Russian universities even offer fellowships for Kazakhstani students to study in Russia.⁹¹

Russian media companies, both state and privately owned, enjoy widespread popularity in Kazakhstan. Pervyi Kanal Yevraziya is owned 80-20 by the Kazakhstani and Russian governments respectively and largely rebroadcasts Russian news and TV shows which is a common occurrence for publically and privately owned channels in Kazakhstan.⁹² Even if the shows themselves are not Russian, the language spoken in the shows is likely Russian, not Kazakh, and certainly not Chinese. Although both Kazakh and Russian are official languages of Kazakhstan, Kazakh is only spoken by about 65% of the population while 95% of people living in Kazakhstan speak Russian fluently.⁹³ So, even if there is no Russian control over media, Kazakhstani companies spread Russian influence themselves due to the population's receptiveness to Russian-originated material. This is understandable. Russian state-sponsored media such as movies and television shows are much higher quality than their Kazakhstani counterparts. Even Kazakhstan's internet is closely tied to Runet, the Russia-speaking internet. The most popular sites online in Kazakhstan – Yandex, vKontakte, Odnoklassniki, and Mail.ru – are all Russian sites. Sputnik News, a Russian state-owned news agency that pushes pro-Kremlin propaganda, is the sixth most visited site in Kazakhstan.⁹⁴

Russian pop culture is very popular in Kazakhstan whose population is interested in Russian literature, bloggers, and celebrities. In a study by the Wilson Center, when people in Kazakhstan were asked from what countries Kazakhstan should “invite musical artists, writers, and artists, and import and translate more books, films, music, and other cultural productions,” 58% of respondents answered Russia while only 10% mentioned China.⁹⁵ Additionally, 19% suggested the United States and the remaining 13% refrained from answering.

Russian soft power in Kazakhstan is effective and even translates to the population's approval of Russian leadership. Between 2007 and 2017, Kazakhstani approval rates of Russian leadership ranged from 55% to 87%.⁹⁶ This is no surprise given the tight control Moscow holds over Russian news which is rebroadcasted widely in Kazakhstan. Popular opinion of the Russian invasion is difficult to gauge in Kazakhstan. However, a new study found support for Russia's actions. The survey found that 39% of those interviewed supported the invasion while 46% refrained from taking a stance and only 10% percent were against it. The remaining 5% was unable to answer either way. The researchers suggest that such high support for the invasion is due to widespread viewership of Russian state-run news that is broadcasted into Kazakhstan. While this survey showed pro-Russian sentiment in Kazakhstan, critics say the sample size was too small and therefore is not able to accurately reflect public opinion.⁹⁷

China's Political Success and Soft Power Struggle

Sinophobia

Sinophobia greatly limits China's ability to increase its soft power in Kazakhstan. In 2019, protests in major Kazakhstani cities broke out objecting to legislative changes allowing foreigners to lease land for up to 25 years when former legislation only allowed 10 years. Chinese businesses leasing large parcels of land in western Kazakhstan worried and angered Kazakhstani citizens who saw the increased lease lengths as a new form of Chinese encroachment. These fears are exacerbated by long-standing sinophobia in Kazakhstan. During the 2019 protests, a demonstrator in Aktobe was recorded saying; "After 25 years, they will stay for 65. After 65 their descendants will take Kazakhstan's citizenship and our descendants will be their slaves."⁹⁸ Not to mention China retains a massive population of 1.4 billion people while Kazakhstan, although territorially expansive, holds not even 19 million people. China has

acquired land from Kazakhstan in the past. In 1994, China and Kazakhstan finalized a border agreement that gave China disputed land that was previously under Kazakhstani control. Fears of China trying to alleviate its overpopulation issue whether through the migration of Chinese workers or border alterations stoke sinophobia in Kazakhstan.

Another major source of contention that stokes sinophobia within Kazakhstan is the genocide of Muslims in China's Xinjiang region. A US State Department report in 2020 estimates that China has detained more than one million Muslims in the region. The largest ethnic population of these Muslims are Uyghurs, followed by Kazakhs. Xinjiang is an area of contention for Beijing. Its underdevelopment has led to issues of extremism and separatism arising amongst the Muslim population. To solve these issues, which are two of the three evils that the SCO asserts it must fight, Beijing's solution is to eradicate the ethnic identities of Uyghurs and other Muslim minority groups. The goal is for these people to assimilate and essentially become Han Chinese. This assimilation begins by detaining these Muslims and forcing them into what Beijing calls "educational training centers."⁹⁹ Here, ethnic Uyghurs and Kazakhs are forced to work in factories with no pay and take mandatory Mandarin and government propaganda classes. There are claims of beatings and rapes by guards as well as a sterilization campaign carried out on Muslim women.

There are cases of ethnic Kazakhs escaping across the Kazakhstan-Xinjiang border and revealing information about the camps, which has led to protests in Kazakhstan against China's actions. Kazakhstani authorities, however, have shown little patience for such demonstrations, cracking down on protestors and human rights groups that speak out on the issue. This is likely due to the economic and political importance of Kazakhstan's relationship with China. A leader of these anti-Chinese demonstrations, Serkzhan Bilash, an ethnic Kazakh living in Almaty but

born in Xinjiang, was arrested in 2019 for spreading information on the internment camps. His human rights organization, Atajurt, was lobbying for the release of ethnic Kazakhs from the Xinjiang camps when Kazakhstani authorities detained Bilash. The activist made a deal with the authorities. In return for his freedom, he pleaded guilty to inciting hate speech and agreeing not to cover the Xinjiang camps for the next 7 years. Bilash would have faced seven years in prison if he had not reached a deal.¹⁰⁰ Given the harsh crackdowns on protests and activists, it appears that the Kazakhstani government will not risk its relationship with China over this issue. However, the protests and news coming out of Xinjiang do hinder China's ability for a greater soft power presence in Kazakhstan.

Kazakhstani Governance and Chinese Political Influence

Kazakhstani elites welcome Chinese influence despite the wariness of the general population. An increased Chinese presence in Kazakhstan is immensely beneficial to the country's small group of ruling elites, offering further prestige to Kazakhstan's government through its inclusion in initiatives such as BRI. Undemocratic, developing regimes are always looking for ways to increase their clout and image. Power is a fragile thing in developing countries that are not accountable to, nor representative of, their populations. Therefore, the small group of elites must do everything they can to posture themselves as the rightful leaders. This can be seen in Kazakhstan's previous administration. Former Kazakhstani President Nursultan Nazarbayev hired several Western public relations companies to help improve the image of the state and his government.¹⁰¹ Cooperation with a country as powerful and established as China provides major benefits as the photoshoots and high-level meetings to discuss economic integration solidify the power and prestige of decision-makers in Nur-Sultan.

Despite Kazakhstan's democratic government structure, the country in practice is an authoritarian regime with true decision-making isolated to a small group of elites. Kazakhstan exhibits virtually no real political plurality. The government is dominated by the Amanat party (formerly known as Nur Otan) which was still headed by Nursultan Nazarbayev until January of 2022 when he was replaced as the party's head by the current president, Kassym Tokayev. Although there are formal opposition parties in Kazakhstan they are simply puppets loyal to Amanat and exist solely to create the facade of political opposition and plurality within the government. Freedom House argues that the lack of opposition within Kazakhstan's parliament causes political accountability and officials following the laws of parliamentary procedure to be of little relevance, allowing elites to do as they please.

Corruption is widespread within Kazakhstan, and while the government investigates and punishes corruption at the regional and local level, it goes unabated amongst Kazakhstani elites. Those with major positions of power and wealth in Kazakhstan's private sector often have close connections to the power center in Nur-Sultan. Former President Nursultan Nazarbayev and his relatives are amongst the worst perpetrators. Nazarbayev's daughter, Dariga, has accumulated a net worth of \$595 million and Nazarbayev's son-in-law has been accused of laundering money from foreign direct investment in Kazakhstan's oil industry.

After the nationwide protests in January 2022, a political power struggle between former President Nazarbayev, who still held significant power in Kazakhstan, and current president Tokayev ended with Nazarbayev stepping down from all positions of influence. Along with Nazarbayev, many of those close to him lost their government and business positions as well. Although Nazarbayev and those loyal to him are no longer in positions of influence, power and decision-making are still centralized, surrounding President Tokayev.

China's Belt and Road Initiative often receives criticism that its loans and investments lead to increased corruption in its partner countries and the initiative lacks the necessary transparency for local populations. Due to the current political realities in Kazakhstan, however, these criticisms, if kept from the public at large, are not of concern to Nur-Sultan. Both of these criticisms actually benefit the governments of Kazakhstan and China. China prefers to do business with authoritarian regimes such as Kazakhstan. The centralized decision-making is more efficient for Beijing, and it is easier for China to appeal to a small group of Kazakhstani elites rather than try to battle widespread sinophobia across Kazakhstan to bolster its public image. It is therefore a win-win situation for Beijing and Nur-Sultan. China only has to deal with a small group of hyper-wealthy and powerful elites, and the decision-makers in Nur-Sultan can line their pockets and further boost their reputations through close cooperation with Beijing.

New Opportunities in the West

Putin's war in Ukraine seriously alters Kazakhstan's foreign policy and relationship with Russia. During a trip to Brussels in March 2022, the first deputy chief of staff to President Tokayev, Timur Suleimenov, emphasized Nur-Sultan's rift with Moscow resulting from the war. When asked if Kazakhstan would help Russia survive Western sanctions, the answer was no, Kazakhstan would not be a "tool" for Russia to use to avoid the consequences of its actions. Kazakhstan's foreign policy, when put to the test, has staunchly backed the continuation of its multivector strategy. Russia's war against Ukraine proves Russia to be an unreliable neighbor and has encouraged Kazakhstan to move closer to the West to consolidate its foreign policy strategy.

The successful implementation of its multivector strategy means that Kazakhstan's pull away from Russia must be followed by a push closer to other powers, such as the EU and US. If

Russia is going to act as a malignant force, causing instability in countries with ethnic Russian populations that refuse to pay homage to its former master, Kazakhstan does not want to continue its reliance on Moscow. Kazakhstan seems to be using the newly announced democratic reforms of President Tokayev's "New Kazakhstan" to appeal to the West and increase cooperation. Suleimenov touched on this as well during his visit to Brussels. He contended that the measures taken by Kazakhstan's government to liberalize are "pro-European" and "pro-democratic."¹⁰² Most of the reforms under Tokayev's "New Kazakhstan" are in response to the nationwide protests of January 2022. In his State of the Union Address in March 2022, President Tokayev laid out his plan to reform Kazakhstan's political institutions. The reforms include transitioning from a super-presidential system to a presidential republic. The powers of the president will be curbed, taking away presidential powers such as the ability to suspend any decision made by local governors and mayors. It will also change Kazakhstan's parliament so that the electoral system is mixed. Seventy percent of deputies will be elected through proportional representation from voting for political parties and 30% will be chosen by a majoritarian model, giving independent candidates a chance to win seats.¹⁰³ The reforms also included the reinstatement of Kazakhstan's Constitutional Court and greater powers for Kazakhstan's Human Rights Ombudsperson. While in Brussels, Suleimenov went on to say that in three to five years, Kazakhstan will hopefully look more like a country in the EU than one of "authoritarian Asia."¹⁰⁴ Nur-Sultan is utilizing Tokayev's proposed "New Kazakhstan" to play to Western countries that are more likely to forge close ties with liberalizing countries.

In addition to the EU, Kazakhstan has facilitated greater talks with the United States since President Putin invaded Ukraine. On April 11, 2022, American and Kazakhstani delegations held a meeting in Nur-Sultan to discuss human rights and democratic reform in

Kazakhstan. The US delegation was headed by Uzra Zeya, the Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights, who expressed US support for the democratic reforms announced by President Tokayev.¹⁰⁵ The US and Kazakhstan are also in close talks to support Kazakhstan in avoiding the hardships caused indirectly by Western sanctions against Russia due to Kazakhstan's close economic ties to Moscow.

Kazakhstan wants to avoid being dragged down by Moscow. However, given the historical, ethnic, economic, military, and cultural ties between Russia and Kazakhstan, cutting off relations with Moscow is not possible in the short or long run. Even with continued cooperation with the West, Russia will not just go away and Nur Sultan will likely keep some level of cooperation with Moscow. Additionally, Kazakhstan is far removed from the West with the Caspian Sea and Russia separating it from Europe. The West may seem like a good alternative to relations with Russia, but geography and history make Kazakh-Western relations difficult and cooperation with Russia almost obligatory.

There is also the option of greater cooperation with Turkey, a country that shares close cultural and historical ties with Kazakhstan. They are both founding members of the Organization of Turkic States, an intergovernmental organization striving for the continued cooperation of nations sharing common Turkic roots. The organization, founded in 2002, has proven inconsequential, but the war in Ukraine could provide an opportunity to create greater cooperation between Kazakhstan and Turkey. On May 11, 2022, President Tokayev met with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to continue discussions of increasing economic and cultural cooperation between the two Turkic states. Although not to the scale of Russia, increased cooperation with Turkey could help Kazakhstan continue its multivector foreign policy with less dependence on Moscow.

Conclusion

Russia, given its shared history with Kazakhstan, exhibits strong control over Kazakhstani popular opinion. However, this “soft power” has little bearing on the decisions made by Kazakhstan’s ruling elite. China is the country that has the money and support to provide Nur-Sultan’s leaders with the stability, wealth, and prestige they desire. Russia is firmly in second place in the minds of Kazakhstan’s elite, although, their second-place standing may be at risk given the Kremlin’s latest actions. Increased talks with the West and liberalizing reforms in Nur-Sultan could end with Kazakhstan moving closer toward the West and away from Moscow out of fear of Russian aggression.

Conclusion

The overlapping Chinese and Russian interests in Kazakhstan lead many to believe it will be a point of contention for Beijing and Moscow. However, Kazakhstan's unique situation proves it to be fertile ground for Russia and China to enhance their cooperation. Kazakhstan's underdevelopment and location within the Eurasian steppe attract China's economic hopes while its sinophobia pushes away Chinese security influence, leaving room for Russia to remain relevant. Kazakhstan's receptiveness to multiple powers deeply influencing its economic, security, and political sectors encourages the two powers to find a way to mutually benefit. Kazakhstani receptiveness allows both countries to cooperate and work towards their goals: China's to become a global superpower, and Russia's to retain influence in what it views as its "near abroad."

Russia's secondary role in Kazakhstan may provide benefits for Moscow but will likely lead to decreasing Russian influence in the long run. Although Russia holds the upper hand over China in Kazakhstan's security sphere and general popularity within the country, China enjoys greater overall influence due to the sheer size of its economic influence. The money China offers is far more important to Nur-Sultan than its population's opinion and Russian-imposed security, from which Kazakhstan is already distancing itself by modernizing its military and reforming its government to prevent further uprisings. Therefore, although Russia has much to benefit from Chinese influence in Kazakhstan, the fact that it is a secondary actor to the much more powerful China will likely cause Moscow's influence in Kazakhstan to decline.

The past decade witnessed unprecedented Sino-Russian cooperation, culminating in Putin and Xi's meeting at the 2022 Winter Olympics during which the leaders claimed their countries' relationship had "no limits." This peak in relations quickly ended, however, with the Kremlin's

disastrous invasion of Ukraine. Russia did not quickly topple Ukraine's government as Putin had hoped and has instead created chaos. Western sanctions in response to Russian aggression have severely damaged the Russian economy and threaten China's Silk Road Economic Belt through Kazakhstan and Russia. Moscow, quickly after becoming one of Beijing's closest allies, proved itself to be unreliable, threatening all the progress the two powers made in Kazakhstan.

The almost complete severance of ties between Russia and the West, which may soon include the end of oil imports from Russia, will force Moscow to lean more than ever on SCO and EAEU partners. This could lead to further competition between China and Russia for supremacy in Kazakhstan as Moscow may demand greater economic control at the expense of Chinese interests.

Moscow will likely rely even more on Beijing to stabilize the Russian economy. While China may welcome the additional energy imports, it will not want to become too entangled with Russia, because China relies on Western financial systems and trade. Hesitancy by China to further integrate its economy with Russia could cause a rift between Moscow and Beijing as Russia's battle against the West extends into the future. A major milestone would be the EU's official ban on oil imports from Russia. If passed, this would likely be met with an additional agreement between Beijing and Moscow to export more oil to China. Because the fields from which oil is transported to Europe are in western Siberia, Russia will likely use the Kazakhstan-China oil pipeline to transport this oil to China instead of Europe, entangling both Beijing and Nur-Sultan even further in Russia's attempts to survive Western sanctions. Kazakhstan and China will likely exert caution when making these deals, causing greater frustration between the countries' policymakers.

Another issue that could arise is if the EU decides to ban all products transiting through Russia. This would destroy China's Silk Road Economic Belt and severely damage China's economy and investments throughout Eurasia, possibly leading to a large rift between Beijing and Moscow as China may try to force Russia to deescalate tensions to repair economic relations with the West. It may also lead to increasing attempts by Kazakhstan to appeal to the West, distancing itself even further from Moscow and shifting its new transport infrastructure to facilitate trade routes that avoid Russian territory, further detaching its economy from Moscow.

The United States' relationship with Kazakhstan is at a crossroads. Kazakhstani-American cooperation was well established during the war in Afghanistan when Kazakhstan served as a stabilizing force to ensure regional stability. With the end of the war, Kazakhstani-American relations had no real direction. This is showing signs of changing, however, with the invasion of Ukraine causing Kazakhstan to appeal to the West. An American delegation visiting Nur-Sultan to discuss democratic and human rights reform is a positive sign for increasing relations between the two countries. Real democratic reform and a greater American presence in Kazakhstan could frustrate Chinese BRI efforts that benefit from authoritarian practices and centralized decision-making. A greater American presence will also irritate Moscow which will see it as a Western attempt to surround and isolate Russia.

Although China and Russia have established a cooperative sharing of influence in Kazakhstan, this is a fragile balance that could fall apart if distrust grows between the two powers. The invasion of Ukraine threatens this balance as Moscow seems more interested in imperial conquest than economic stability. Both countries have much to lose in Kazakhstan and if distrust develops, they may attempt to consolidate their influence in the country at the expense of the other power's interests. At present, there is more evidence of cooperation than competition

between China and Russia regarding their policies in Kazakhstan. The world's most populous nation and the largest in terms of territory have established complementary spheres of influence within Kazakhstan. A change in their relationship regarding the economy, security, or politics of Kazakhstan, however, could serve as an important and early indicator of a more general decline in Sino-Russian relations.

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