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How Kazakhstani Multivector Foreign Policy Works: Analysis of Its Voting in UNGA ¹

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Abstract

The concept of multivectorism underlies the foreign policy strategy of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Kazakhstani foreign policy within international organizations and integrational institutions is also carried out within the framework of multivectorism. However, the implementation of that foreign policy within the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) has not yet been studied. To study the concept of multivectorism, the author analyzes the voting cohesion in the UNGA of Kazakhstan, Russia, China, the U.S., Turkey, and Germany from 2007–22. For this purpose, the author also studies the behaviour of Kazakhstan in cases of opposite voting of these countries. Among other things, this article analyzes the voting cohesion of Kazakhstan and other countries under study on certain topics (disarmament, decolonization, human rights, development issues, armed conflicts, and so on), as well as voting on key resolutions relating to armed conflicts involving the Russian Federation. As a result of quantitative and qualitative analysis of more than 1,300 resolutions, the author concludes that the main vector of Kazakhstani foreign policy is China, not Russia, which is formally a key ally of Kazakhstan. The greatest coincidence of Kazakhstan's foreign policy positions is found with China (the lesser is found with Russia, Turkey, and Germany, and minimally with the United States). Moreover, in the case of the opposite voting of China and the other three countries under consideration, the votes of Kazakhstan coincided more often with the Chinese. The author argues that Kazakhstan avoids explicit support for the Russian Federation in voting on resolutions related to armed conflicts involving Russia. This is also manifested in the voting of the Republic of Kazakhstan on resolutions related to the war in Ukraine. However, the reasons behind the high level of voting cohesion between China and Kazakhstan in the UNGA require further research.

Keywords: Kazakhstan, Russia, U.S., China, Germany, Turkey, UNGA, voting, multi-vector foreign policy

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In May 1992, Nursultan Nazarbaev gave definition to the foundation of Kazakhstan's foreign policy programme in his article, "The Strategy of the Formation and Development of Kazakhstan as a Sovereign State." The security of this new Kazakhstan was the primary declared goal of its foreign policy, requiring, amongst other things, strategic partnerships with its neighbours, Russia

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and the People's Republic of China (PRC), as well as tight cooperation with the states of Central Asia, Turkey, Pakistan, and India [Nazarbaev, 1922]. This foreign policy imperative demanded an orientation toward several centres of power, an approach later described as “multivectorism.”

The Republic of Kazakhstan's recent request to the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CTSO) for assistance in regulating its internal crisis and the beginning of the Russian Federation's Special Military Operation (SMO) in Ukraine raise questions about the future of multivectorism as the concept guiding Kazakhstan's foreign policy. This makes it even more important to understand how said concept has historically manifested.

Despite Kazakhstan's de facto adherence to a policy of multivectorism throughout the entirety of its existence as a sovereign state, multivectorism was first officially announced as a concept in 2007 in the Address of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the People of Kazakhstan [President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2007]. Later, multivectorism was again defined as the guiding principle of Kazakhstani foreign policy in Concepts of the Republic of Kazakhstan's Foreign Policy from 2014 to 2020 [Ibid., 2014, 2020]. The foreign policy officially carried out by the Republic of Kazakhstan is described as a “diplomatic strategy based on building relationships with the international community as a whole and with neighbouring countries in particular on a pragmatic and balanced basis” [Ibid., 2020]. In his official article in 2021, Kassym-Jomart Tokaev also confirmed Kazakhstan's dedication to multivectorism in foreign policy as a necessary condition for the maintenance of the country's independence [Kazahstanskaya Pravda, 2021]. Overall, even after its change in government, the country continues to follow this policy, at least declaratively.

To a certain extent, multivectorism is characteristic of the foreign policy of many post-Soviet countries. For example, a similar policy in Armenia is called “complimentarism,” and under Islam Karimov, Uzbekistan also declared its dedication to a multi-vectored foreign policy [Minasyan, 2012, p. 268; Nomerovchenko, Kim, Kang, 2018, p. 401]. Multivectorism can also be understood as a state's readiness to cooperate “with everyone”—that is, with several, often conflicting, centres of power in a given region. Minsk, for example, officially supports this interpretation of multivectorism.

According to M. Hanks, multi-vectored foreign policy is one in which relationships with other countries are built on a pragmatic rather than ideological basis [2009, p. 259]. This interpretation of multi-vectored politics makes it synonymous to the foreign policy of a state in general (in a neorealist context). However, scholar E. Gnedina asserted that the basis of a policy of multivectorism is “neither balancing nor bandwagoning” and that it is instead a special manner in which post-Soviet elites maximize their own benefit in the short-term by taking advantage of conflicts and contradictions between large states [2015]. Such an approach raises the question about the similarities between multivectorism and a policy of hedging, which, as defined by C. Kuik, uses strategies located along the spectrum between bandwagoning and balancing in order to maintain the safety of a state and maximize the profits of its ruling elite [2008, p. 163].

Despite the lack of political manoeuvrability that small and medium-sized states face when confronted with large-scale actors in various regions, the term multivectorism is primarily used to refer to states in the post-Soviet space. In addition, the particular reasons for a multi-vectored foreign policy may vary state by state. Thus, for example, one of the reasons that the Republic of Kazakhstan embraced multivectorism in its foreign policy might have been the need to legitimize its statehood in both the eyes of Russians and Kazakhs [Cummings, 2003, p. 150]. Nevertheless, for all post-Soviet states, multivectorism acts as a means to assert one's own sovereignty vis-à-vis Russia in one way or another.

The concept of multivectorism in the Republic of Kazakhstan's foreign policy is a relatively well-studied area. When the term was first introduced, attention was given to its introduction and the reasons behind it [Bastas, 2013; Kassen, 2018]. Practical applications of multivectorism in terms of balancing between China and Russia have been studied [Diyarbakirlioğlu, Yiğit, 2014], as have the applications of multi-vectored policies in the politics surrounding the economy and energy [Nurgaliyeva, 2016]. The works of C. Sullivan and M. Clarke

deserve particular attention in this regard. They defined multivectorism as policies defending a sovereign Kazakhstan from the domination of the Russian Federation and pointed out the unpredictable future prospects of such policies due to the continuing opposition between Russia and the West [Clarke, 2015; Sullivan, 2019]. In this context, multi-vectored politics is, at its heart, a policy of balancing against Russia.

Nevertheless, Kazakhstan's multi-vectored approach to the primary questions of international politics has not yet been well-studied. Therefore, it is important to establish the cohesion between the foreign policy of Kazakhstan and that of several other key powers. To begin, the extent to which Kazakhstan's positions are in conformity with those of the U.S., Russia, China, Turkey, and the European Union (EU)—the main foreign actors in Central Asia—must be established.

This examination was carried out based on an analysis of voting habits in resolutions in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). E. Voeten, one of the leading modern scholars of country voting patterns in the UNGA, noted that the results of such an analysis can show “to which degree countries share foreign policy interests or preferences” [2013, p. 13]. In turn, Russian scholar D. Khachatryan used a qualitative analysis of UNGA voting to draw conclusions about the type of relationships (“allied” and “privileged”) and voting cohesion in the UNGA between Armenia and Russia/France [Khachatryan, 2017].

Voting patterns are examined for a country both as a sovereign actor and as a member of an alliance in order to determine the true existence and extent of foreign policy cohesion [Lijphart, 1963, pp. 902–17]. Moreover, the extent to which countries within a block align with the foreign policy aims of large individual actors can be determined based on their UNGA resolution voting. For example, on the basis of an analysis of the voting of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries compared to the voting practices of Japan, China, and the U.S., one can assert that these countries' foreign policies are closer to those of China than to those of Japan or the U.S. [Burmester, Jankowski, 2014].

The majority of works dedicated to an analysis of Kazakhstan's voting in the UNGA look at the Republic of Kazakhstan in the context of Central Asia or the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) as a region. For example, the alignment between Kazakhstan's foreign policy and the foreign policy of other CIS countries on the basis of their UNGA voting cohesion has been studied several times [Degterev et al., 2018; Hansen, 2015; Kurylev et al., 2018]. In his article entitled “May We Have a Say? Central Asian States in the UN General Assembly,” F. Costa-Buranelli also studied the results of the Republic of Kazakhstan's voting—only in the context of the cohesion of its foreign policies with those of the other countries of Central Asia and Russia. He drew the conclusion that Central Asian countries have more cohesion amongst themselves than with the Russian Federation [2014].

G. Kozlov's study of Kazakhstan's and the United States' votes in the UNGA deserves separate attention as one of few works that is dedicated to establishing the alignment between Kazakhstan's positions and those of a large-scale international actor [Kozlov, 2020]. The author qualitatively analyzed the results of Kazakhstani and American voting in UNGA resolutions and concluded that there is a significant difference between the two countries' positions (and a greater cohesion of positions between Kazakhstan and Russian) [Ibid., p. 584].

Nevertheless, Kazakhstan's voting cohesion with China, Turkey, and Germany (as one of the leading EU countries that is most active in the Central Asian region) has not yet been studied. Additionally, the voting patterns shared between Kazakhstan and Russia have only been studied in general terms. In order to understand the politics of multivectorism, we must undertake a holistic examination of Kazakhstan's voting in the UNGA compared with that of other key regional actors: Russia, the EU, the U.S., China, and Turkey.

It is also important to study UNGA cohesion when considering the “shared foreign policy” that Russia and Kazakhstan formally announced in the fourth article of the Treaty on Good-Neighborliness and Alliance in the XXI Century [Dogovor, 2013]. Kazakhstan has no such agreements about a shared foreign policy with the other states in question. Therefore, to understand

the reality of this treaty, one must study the position the Republic of Kazakhstan has taken in situations when Russia’s votes have been in opposition to those of the other states in question.

This study will thus examine Kazakhstan’s voting cohesion in UNGA resolutions with five main countries: Russia, the U.S., the PRC, Turkey, and Germany. Only resolutions voted on during sessions of the General Assembly from 2007 through 2022 were taken into account, from the 63rd to 77th sessions (1,320 resolutions in total). The year 2007 was chosen as a chronological boundary as it was the year in which the term “multivectorism” was introduced into official discourse, and also the second launch of the Eurasian integration project and the signing of the Customs Alliance. Using 2022 as a chronological boundary allows for this study to include UNGA voting with regard to the Russian SMO in Ukraine. Within these chronological boundaries, the periods 2007–13 and 2014–22 will be analyzed separately in order to follow the evolution of the Republic of Kazakhstan’s voting patterns before and after the beginning of the active phase of confrontation between Russia and the West. Any change in Kazakhstan’s voting patterns before or after the reincorporation of Crimea into the Russian Federation would be worthy of note. The growing antagonism between Russia and the United States/Germany could additionally have led to a decrease in Kazakhstan’s support for the Russian position in UNGA voting.

All the following data for analysis of voting results were taken from the Digital Library of the United Nations [n.d.]. In the following analysis of resolutions, a strict approach was used for calculating voting cohesion: only situations where there was a complete alignment of positions (four positions are possible: “yes”, “no”, “abstained”, and “did not participate in voting”) were counted, and their total was then divided by the total number of resolutions over the time period and multiplied by 100 in order to obtain a number in terms of percentage. The result of this calculation is the voting cohesion percentage between two countries. Moreover, votes were only considered to oppose one another when two countries voted completely opposite one another (only the positions “yes” and “no” were counted).

Analysis of Voting on UNGA Resolutions

The table below shows the results of an analysis of the voting of Kazakhstan, Russia, the U.S., China, Turkey, and Germany at the UN General Assembly in terms of voting cohesion from 2007–13 on relevant topics. It includes the total number of resolutions that were voted on and a description of the topics in question.

Table 1. Kazakhstan’s Voting Cohesion With Russia, the U.S., China, Germany, and Turkey in UN General Assembly Resolutions, 2007–13 (%)

Year	Number of Resolutions	RUS	U.S.	PCR	GER	TUR	Main Resolution Topics
2007	79	82%	9%	84%	68%	72%	Palestine Nuclear proliferation Arms sales Sanctions
2008	78	78%	12%	82%	65%	71%	Palestine Nuclear proliferation Arms sales Human rights in Syria
2009	68	78%	16%	87%	59%	65%	Palestine Nuclear proliferation Arms sales Human rights in North Korea Refugees from Abkhazia and Ossetia
2010	72	75%	17%	83%	60%	72%	Palestine

							Nuclear proliferation Arms sales Human rights in North Korea Refugees from Abkhazia and Ossetia International trade
2011	69	74%	25%	86%	62%	71%	Palestine Nuclear proliferation Arms sales Human rights in Myanmar
2012	74	69%	16%	76%	57%	69%	Palestine Arms sales Refugees from Abkhazia and Ossetia
2013	64	64%	17%	83%	55%	64%	Palestine Ending the embargo of Cuba Nuclear proliferation and acquisition

Source: Author's calculations based on data from the UN [n.d.].

Using the given table, the following conclusions may be drawn:

- the voting cohesion between the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation is fairly high, oscillating between 64% and 82%, but has significantly decreased over the time period in question;
- despite the Russian Federation's officially declared role as the Republic of Kazakhstan's main foreign policy ally, and despite the existence of an official shared foreign policy, Kazakhstan's votes are more often in alignment with the Chinese position (from 76% to 89% of the time) than with the Russian position, and this cohesion with China has not decreased over the time period in question;
- Kazakhstan often votes the same as Germany (from 55% to 68% of the time) and in the vast majority of cases votes differently from the United States—their voting cohesion varies from 9% to 25%;
- over the course of the entire period in question, there is a high, stable level of voting cohesion between Kazakhstan and Turkey—by the end of this time period, their overall level of cohesion is similar to voting cohesion between Kazakhstan and Russia.

Overall, these voting patterns are to be expected considering the larger roles played by China and Russia (when compared to the U.S. and Germany) in Kazakhstan's foreign policy. Voting cohesion with Turkey is of interest as Turkey is trying to deepen its relationship with Kazakhstan and is already at the same level of the voting cohesion with Kazakhstan as Russia, officially declared to be Kazakhstan's key ally. Nevertheless, that the voting cohesion between the Republic of Kazakhstan and China is higher than that with Russia seems surprising. Kazakhstan does practice balancing against Russia by leaning against China, but this balancing takes place primarily in the economic sphere [Nurgaliyeva, 2016, p. 93]. Moreover, Kazakhstan and Russia are part of a typical asymmetrical military and political alliance (CTSO), within which symbolic gestures from the lesser power in support of the foreign policy of the bigger country are traditionally of great importance [Istomin, Baykov, 2019, p. 39].

Thus, it follows that one should only consider the votes where Russia's position was directly opposed to one of those other four countries (for example, one country for and the other against a given resolution), as shown below:

Table 2. Cases in Which Kazakhstan Supported the Russian Position When Russia Was Voting in Opposition to a Different Country Under Examination, 2007–13 (%)

	Supported Russia	Total Cases
Russia-U.S.	91%	293
Russia-China	31%	13
Russia- Germany	67%	88
Russia-Turkey	67%	86

Source: Author’s calculations based on data from the UN [n.d.].

From this table, it is apparent that in the vast majority of votes where Russia and the United States voted in opposition to one another, Kazakhstan supported Russia. In analogous situations with Germany and Turkey, it supported Russia two thirds of the time. However, when China was opposed to Russia, Kazakhstan supported Russia only 31% of the time (though the number of votes in question is too small to draw convincingly strong conclusions).

For further analysis, one must examine the topics in question where Kazakhstan chose for or against supporting the Russian position when it was in opposition to those of the PRC, the U.S., Turkey, or Germany.

The Republic of Kazakhstan voted in support of the Russian Federation in situations where Russia and the U.S. opposed one another the vast majority of the time. However, despite that, Kazakhstan supported the U.S. and Turkey when voting on a resolution about the situation in Syria in 2012 (resolution 67/183), even though the Russian Federation voted against it. Additionally, Kazakhstan voted for resolutions regarding human rights in North Korea and Myanmar (for example, resolutions 64/238 and 65/225) between 2007 and 2013.

Furthermore, in some of the cases where Russia and the U.S. voted opposed to one another, Kazakhstan abstained from voting. This was the case with resolutions initiated by western countries about the situation with refugees from Abkhazia and South Ossetia (64/296 and 66/283), and, beginning in 2013, with resolutions regarding the Syrian conflict. Here one must note that once the Syrian question became important to both the Russian Federation and the United States, Kazakhstan switched its tactic of voting “for” to “abstained.” This switch is a reflection of its multi-vectored politics, where Kazakhstan tries to maintain neutrality in questions dividing foreign centres of power.

In cases where Germany and Russia were in opposition, Kazakhstan chose not to lend Russia its support in one third of cases. In addition to the resolutions already mentioned—resolutions regarding the conflicts in Georgia and Syria (in which Germany and the United States often voted the same way)—Kazakhstan also supported the German position in opposition to Russia in support of resolutions about nuclear non-proliferation (67/55 and 68/39).

When the positions of the Russian Federation and the People’s Republic of China were opposed, Kazakhstan lent its vote more frequently to China (though there were only 13 total cases where China and Russia thus diverged in the period under study). Kazakhstan’s votes aligned with the Chinese position in questions of nuclear non-proliferation (67/46), and with the Russian position in questions of the repeal of the death penalty (65/206). Kazakhstan voted in cohesion with Turkey in resolutions regarding North Korea, Myanmar, and nuclear non-proliferation.

It should be noted that from 2007 to 2013, Kazakhstan voted in opposition to all of the above—Russia, China, the U.S., Turkey and Germany—more than 20 times, primarily in questions of nuclear security. Kazakhstan supported resolutions aimed at restricting the proliferation and use of nuclear weapons, such as 65/60, 66/58, and 67/45. This is to be expected, as Kazakhstan has, since independence, positioned itself as a country fighting for nuclear disarmament [Kazinform, 2020]. Among other things, such positioning is necessary to symbolically support its sovereignty as a relatively young state.

Overall, during this time period and among these five countries, Kazakhstan shared the highest voting cohesion with China. In addition, Kazakhstan’s voting cohesion with Russia and Germany decreased significantly across this time period—by 18% and 13% respectively—while maintaining a low level of voting cohesion with the United States. Kazakhstan’s voting cohesion with Turkey remained at a stable, high level, a level that by the end of the time period was comparable with Kazakhstan’s voting cohesion with Russia. Moreover, Kazakhstan abstained from voting on key resolutions for Russia such as those about the conflict in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and voted in complete opposition to the Russian position on questions of nuclear disarmament and human rights in North Korea and Myanmar.

Table 3. Kazakhstan’s Voting Cohesion With Russia, the U.S., China, Germany, and Turkey in UN General Assembly Resolutions, 2014–22 (%)

Year	Resolution Count	UR	U.S.	PRC	GER	TUR	Main Resolution Topics
2014	80	64%	21%	81%	59%	66%	Palestine Nuclear proliferation The Ukrainian conflict Human rights in Syria
2015	78	62%	19%	78%	47%	56%	Palestine Nuclear proliferation Sanctions against Cuba Human rights in Iran
2016	81	64%	23%	74%	57%	62%	Palestine Nuclear proliferation Human rights in Syria Refugees from Abkhazia and Ossetia
2017	94	69%	15%	82%	56%	60%	Palestine Nuclear proliferation Human rights in Syria Human rights in Iran International trade
2018	107	65%	13%	78%	61%	64%	Palestine Nuclear proliferation The Ukrainian conflict Human rights in Syria
2019	100	65%	14%	79%	50%	60%	Palestine Nuclear proliferation State cooperation in space and in the cyber-sphere The international financial system
2020	100	68%	15%	78%	57%	67%	The coronavirus pandemic The conflict in Ukraine The conflict in Syria
2021	86	62%	21%	76%	52%	55%	Ecology and sustainable development The conflict in Ukraine The conflict in Syria
2022	90	52%	22%	69%	42%	53%	The special military operation in Ukraine

						Ecology and sustainable development Disarmament
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Source: Author’s calculations based on data from the UN [n.d.].

In examining voting on UNGA resolutions from 2014–22, the Republic of Kazakhstan voted in agreement with the Russian Federation in 62–9% of cases, except in 2022. In 2022, this percentage fell to 52%. The same year also showed a decline in voting cohesion with Germany and China. These simultaneous declines were caused by the increased frequency with which Kazakhstan abstained from voting in that year. Nevertheless, Kazakhstan’s voting cohesion with China remained higher than its cohesion with the Russian Federation, varying over the time period around 69–82%. Overall, Kazakhstan shared a stable, high voting cohesion with Turkey in the range of 53–67%, and a stable, low level of voting cohesion with the U.S.: 14–23%.

Table 4. Cases in Which Kazakhstan Supported the Russian Position When Russia Was Voting in Opposition to a Different Country Under Examination, 2014–22 (%)

	Supported Russia	Total Cases
Russia-U.S.	82%	474
Russia-China	15%	53
Russia-Germany	56%	198
Russia-Turkey	50%	149

Source: Author’s calculations based on data from the UN [n.d.].

In votes where Russia’s position was diametrically opposed to the position of the U.S., China, Turkey, or Germany, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- in the vast majority of cases in which Russia and the U.S. voted in opposition to one another, Kazakhstan continued to vote in support of the Russian position;
- in around half of disputed votes between Russia and Germany or Russia and Turkey, Kazakhstan voted in support of the Russian position;
- in only 15% of the cases between 2014–22 in which Russia and China voted in opposition to one another did Kazakhstan vote in support of the Russian position and in opposition to the Chinese position;
- in comparison with the previous period, the percent of times that Kazakhstan supported Russia in votes disputed with any of the other four countries decreased significantly - 7% for votes against the position of the U.S., -11% for Germany, -16% for China, and -17% for Turkey. The total number of situations where these pairs of countries voted in opposition to one another increased for all country-pairs in question.

In UNGA resolutions on which the positions of the U.S. and the Russian Federation were in opposition, Kazakhstan voted against the Russian position 16% of the time. In particular, as in the previous period, this occurred in votes about human rights in North Korea and Myanmar (69/188 and 73/264). In addition, this was the case for resolutions regarding non-proliferation of chemical and nuclear weapons (72/43 and 74/50). Kazakhstan further abstained in more than 30 resolutions over this time period on which Russia and the U.S. voted in opposition to one another: on resolutions regarding the situation in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, the militarization of Crimea (74/17) and the withdrawal of military forces from Moldova (72/282). Kazakhstan also abstained from voting on Resolution 68/262, On the Territorial Integrity of Ukraine.

It is worth noting that Russia’s CTSO-allies, Armenia and Belarus, supported Russia’s position on Resolution 68/262, and China also supported Russia’s position on Resolutions 74/17

and 72/282—Kazakhstan abstained in all three of these votes. It is interesting to note that Kazakhstan voted against resolutions fewer than 30 times from 2007–22. Nevertheless, in 2019, Kazakhstan voted against 74/167 and 74/168—resolutions on human rights in Iran and Crimea. Thus, one cannot assert that an abstention from Kazakhstan is the expression of a political position against a resolution in the aforementioned votes on resolutions about armed conflicts of particular importance to Russia.

It is also worth noting that the Republic of Kazakhstan has abstained from voting on all UN resolutions regarding the conflict in Syria (for example, 73/182, 71/130, and 68/182) since 2013. Meanwhile, both China and Russia voted against these resolutions, and Germany and the U.S. voted for them. This example once again demonstrates that Kazakhstan leans toward hedging policies during a confrontation of several centres of power and takes a neutral position (on the Syrian question in particular).

After the beginning of the SMO, Kazakhstan abstained from voting on key UNGA resolutions, continuing its traditional voting tactics on highly disputed resolutions (ES-11/1 and ES-11/2). Nevertheless, Kazakhstan voted against the UNGA resolution for excluding Russia from the Committee on Human Rights, supporting the Russian Federation's position (ES-11/3). It is possible that Kazakhstan chose to vote against because it felt it necessary to compensate for the harsh statements of the head of the administration of the president of Kazakhstan against aiding Russia in circumventing western sanctions.

When Germany and Russia voted in opposition to one another (besides the votes already examined where Russia and the U.S. were opposed), Kazakhstan voted in agreement with Germany in the following situations: opposition to the proliferation of cluster munitions (74/62), nuclear non-proliferation (71/51), and environmental protection (72/277). Kazakhstan and Turkey also voted together primarily on resolutions about nuclear and regular disarmament (76/54 and 73/264).

From 2014–21, China and Russia voted in opposition to one another 46 times. Kazakhstan continued to support China more than Russia in these conflict situations. Thus, the Republic of Kazakhstan supported Russia in votes on the death penalty (71/187) and decolonization (70/231) but supported China in votes about nuclear non-proliferation (73/60 and 74/45) and environmental protection (72/277).

There are several factors that could have influenced these voting cohesion patterns. First, nuclear disarmament is a key policy for Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan votes consistently every year for all resolutions dedicated to this topic. Second, over this time period Russia and China once again did not have a direct, important conflict at the UNGA that would have forced Kazakhstan to decide between their positions. Questions of environmental protection and nuclear non-proliferation are not key foreign policy areas for the Russian Federation, which allows Kazakhstan noticeable freedom for manoeuvring.

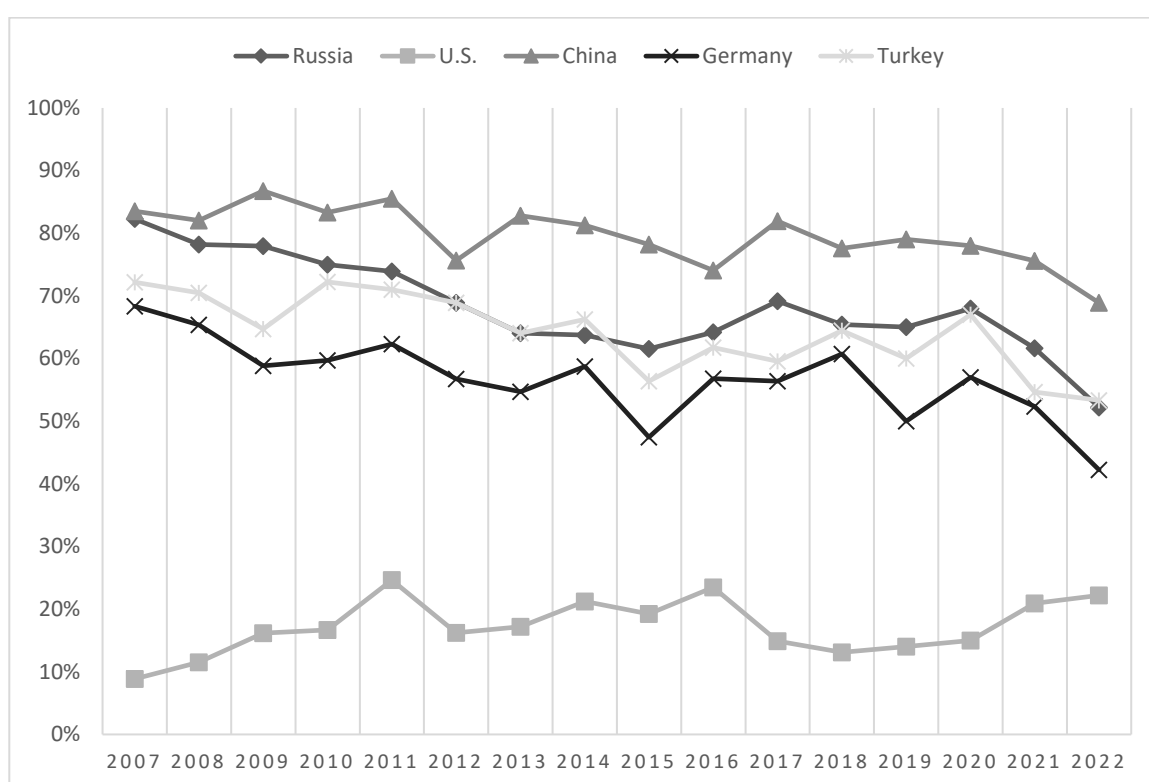
In this context, Kazakhstan's behaviour in this small and not particularly high-tension number of conflict situations is less notable than Kazakhstan's overall voting patterns as a whole, which are closer to those of China than to those of Russia. Taking into account the existence of agreements on cooperation and collective security between Kazakhstan and Russia (and the lack of such agreements between Kazakhstan and China), this pattern seems unusual. It is difficult to understand the exact reason for this voting cohesion—it could reflect a concordance in the two countries' foreign policy agendas or an attempt by Kazakhstan to use UNGA voting as an arena in which to practice balancing policies against Russia. A serious conflict between Russia and China at the UNGA would give clarity to this situation as it would force Kazakhstan to choose between them.

From 2014–22, there were more than 80 times when Kazakhstan voted differently from all the countries examined in the given work. Among these were more than 40 resolutions regarding the topics of nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament (for example: 74/41, 73/57, and 72/41). The Republic of Kazakhstan voted for these resolutions while China, Germany, the U.S., Turkey, and the Russian Federation either abstained from voting or voted against. Kazakhstan did not

change its overall position from 2007–13, continuing to defend its agenda of nuclear disarmament despite possible disagreements with large actors in Central Asia.

In general, Kazakhstan continued its policies from 2007–13: it refused to directly support Russia in resolutions on conflicts in Georgia and Ukraine and also voted for all resolutions connected to nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. Though Kazakhstan’s overall UNGA voting pattern did not change after 2014, the voting cohesion between the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan continued to decline, especially in situations where Russia was voting in opposition to China, Turkey, Germany, or the United States. Moreover, in 2022, Kazakhstan’s voting cohesion decreased with all countries except the United States (already low) due to Kazakhstan’s more frequent abstentions from voting in questions about international conflicts (primarily about the SMO in Ukraine).

Chart 1. Kazakhstan’ Voting Cohesion With Russia, the U.S., China, Germany, and Turkey in UNGA Resolutions, 2007–22



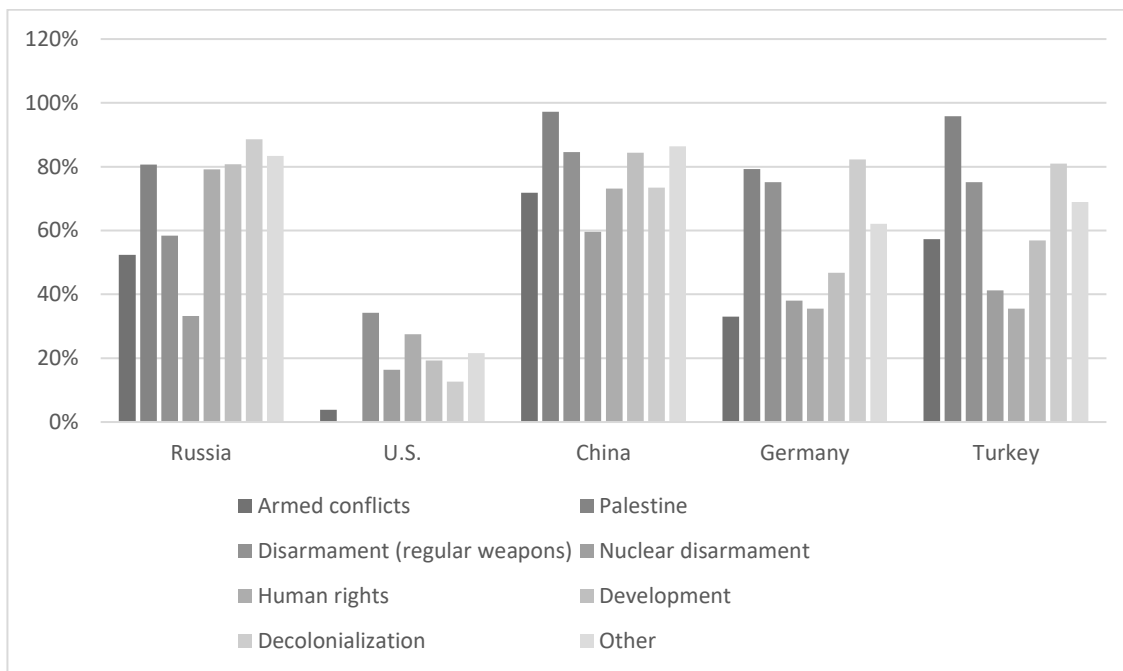
Source: Author’s calculations based on data from the UN [n.d.].

As demonstrated above, Kazakhstan votes in agreement with China—its (supposedly) second most important regional partner—more frequently than the other countries examined. Moreover, since 2010, Kazakhstan’s voting cohesion with Russia has been at around the same level as its voting cohesion with Turkey. Though Turkey is increasing its presence in Central Asia, it still plays a smaller role in the region’s security and economy than do Russia or China. This chart also demonstrates that Kazakhstan’s votes have, over time, begun to differ more and more from the votes of all the other countries except the United States. Overall, Russia’s position has changed significantly: while at the start of this period Russia and China vied for the top position of partner with the highest voting cohesion with Kazakhstan, recently Russia is closer to competing with Germany and Turkey for second or third place.

Kazakhstan’s voting cohesion with these other countries also varied based on resolution topic, raising questions of changes in resolution frequency by topic over time. Kazakhstan’s

UNGA votes were in agreement with the Russian position more than 80% of the time on resolutions regarding human rights, development, the Palestinian conflict, and decolonization (89% cohesion, see Chart 2). However, on resolutions regarding military conflicts and disarmament, the positions of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Kazakhstan were in agreement only half the time, and on questions of nuclear disarmament, only one third of the time.

Chart 2. Kazakhstan UNGA Voting Cohesion With Russia, the U.S., China, Turkey, and Germany by Resolution Category, 2007–22 (%)



Source: Author’s calculations based on data from the UN [n.d.].

Kazakhstan and China were in almost complete agreement on the Palestinian conflict (where their votes aligned 97% of the time), as well as on questions of development and disarmament (where their votes aligned more than 80% of the time). On all other questions, the positions of Kazakhstan and China were in agreement no less than 60% of the time. It is notable that the positions of Kazakhstan were significantly more aligned with those of China on questions of military conflicts and nuclear disarmament than with those of the Russian Federation, Turkey, or Germany.

Kazakhstan and Turkey often voted in agreement (over 75% of the time) on resolutions about the Palestinian conflict, disarmament, and decolonization. However, they were only in agreement on one third of resolutions about military conflicts, nuclear disarmament, and human rights.

The positions of Kazakhstan and Turkey were almost completely in agreement on resolutions regarding the Palestinian conflict (96% of votes) and significantly in agreement on questions of decolonization and disarmament. Nevertheless, they disagreed frequently on questions of nuclear disarmament and human rights (only 41% and 36% agreement, respectively). Kazakhstan’s voting cohesion with the United States remained low, from 0% on votes related to the Palestinian question to 34% on votes regarding disarmament.

Within separate categories of resolutions, Kazakhstan was most closely aligned (among all five countries examined) with China on questions of military conflicts, including the Palestinian conflict, and disarmament, including nuclear disarmament, as well as questions of development. It was most closely aligned with Russia on questions of decolonization and human rights. Overall,

when examining UNGA resolutions divided by category, the same patterns are evident: Kazakhstan has the strongest voting cohesion with China overall, and, sometimes, in particular areas, with Russia.

* * *

Multivectorism in the Republic of Kazakhstan's foreign policy is reflected in and realized through its voting on UNGA resolutions. First, Kazakhstan applies its multi-vectorized policies to the very act of voting—it abstained from resolutions regarding Ukraine and Syria that were important both to Russia as well as to the U.S./Germany. Second, the multivectorism that Kazakhstan practices is displayed through its high level of voting cohesion with China, despite Russia remaining its key regional ally.

A clear hierarchy of vectors is apparent in Kazakhstan's relationship to key players from outside its region, at least in terms of the most important international questions. Kazakhstan's main vector is not the Russian Federation, its CTSO partner, but the People's Republic of China. Kazakhstan and China have a significantly higher voting cohesion than Kazakhstan has with Russia, Turkey, Germany, or, especially, the United States (with whom Kazakhstan shares a very low level of voting cohesion). This overall view remains consistent when one examines voting cohesion on a more detailed level in terms of categories of international issues. In the majority of categories, Kazakhstan has the strongest voting cohesion with China—this is particularly true in resolutions on armed conflicts, disarmament, and development. However, Kazakhstan has the highest voting cohesion with Russia in categories of resolutions dedicated to human rights and decolonization.

Despite an officially declared shared foreign policy between Kazakhstan and Russia, their voting cohesion decreased over the time period in question and remained consistently lower than the cohesion observed between the voting patterns of Kazakhstan and China. Moreover, in situations where Russia and China voted in opposition to one another, Kazakhstan voted in support of China the vast majority of the time. Despite the fact that, in analogous situations between Russia and the U.S., Kazakhstan supported Russia more frequently, in analogous situations with Germany and Turkey, Kazakhstan only took the Russian side in slightly over half of cases (from 2014–22). This leads one to assert that there cannot be a shared foreign policy for Russia and Kazakhstan in UNGA resolution voting practices. Of course, neither is there a shared foreign policy with Turkey, a state currently pretending at the role of leader of the Turkic world (except in resolutions regarding the Palestinian question).

To determine the exact reasons for such a level of voting cohesion with China in particular would go beyond the scope of this work. Nevertheless, one can assert that such cohesion could proceed from similarities in the Kazakhstani and Chinese foreign policy agendas and could be underpinned by the absence of a direct conflict between the PCR and the Russian Federation that would force Kazakhstan to make a difficult choice. In addition, internal political factors should be taken into account: from the turn of the millennium into the 2020s, the leadership of Kazakhstan considered its independence (primarily politically) as its key value and the foundation of its nation-building [Kazhstanskaya Pravda, 2021]. Any statements about the history and sovereignty of Kazakhstan on the part of Russian officials (even those without any ties to foreign policy) were perceived extremely poorly by society in Kazakhstan [Savostyanov, 2020]. These factors could lead to the necessity of political distancing from Russia and could possibly affect Kazakhstan's UNGA voting patterns. In any case, the surprisingly low cohesion in the voting patterns of Kazakhstan and Russia, despite the fact that Kazakhstan is joined to Russia in a military and political alliance, demands the reassessment and further study of the specifics and dynamics of the Russian-Kazakhstani alliance.

Overall, when examining multivectorism in terms of UNGA voting, it seems that multivectorism in practice is closer to a policy of hedging than to its official definition. On one hand, Kazakhstan is in a defensive alliance with Russia that has recently proven its vitality in times

of internal crisis. On the other hand, Kazakhstan abstained from the majority of resolutions that were truly key to Russia regarding armed conflicts (Syria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Crimea, and Ukraine). Kazakhstan abstained from voting even in cases where both Russia and China voted against—demonstrating that the relationships between Kazakhstan and other leading powers are more complicated than a simple policy of balancing between Russia and China. Kazakhstan simultaneously employs a bandwagoning policy in regard to Russia from the security perspective and a balancing policy on political questions by taking a neutral position.

The Republic of Kazakhstan's consistency in defending an agenda of nuclear disarmament in UNGA voting should be separately noted as part of a necessary agenda for self-assertion as an independent, sovereign actor on the international stage.

The trends above held true across the entirety of the period in question, 2007–22. The intensification of the confrontation between Russia and the West after the reincorporation of Crimea (2014) does not seem to have affected Kazakhstan's overall UNGA voting patterns. Only after the conflict escalated to a new level with the beginning of the SMO did Kazakhstan's voting cohesion with all countries in question decrease (except for the United States). Further observation is necessary to understand if Kazakhstan's UNGA voting patterns as a whole will have changed moving forward, or if this decrease reflects a temporary anomaly.

In conclusion, though an analysis of UNGA resolution voting patterns cannot give a full picture of Kazakhstan's relationships with key actors outside of its region, it certainly demands a re-examination of relationships between Russia and Kazakhstan as well as Kazakhstan and China for scholars of the post-Soviet space. An analysis of the internal and external reasons for Kazakhstan's UNGA voting behaviour would require its own further study.

In a time of political changes in Central Asia, growing Chinese influence, and declining U.S. military presence, multivectorism might undergo significant changes in the near future. The policies enacted in a multi-vector framework can change over time, bringing Kazakhstan closer to one of the power centres around it, or, quite the contrary, provoking a conflict between two or more actors in the region. In any case, due to the changes in Russia's international position since the beginning of the SMO in Ukraine, Kazakhstan's policy of multivectorism is likely to undergo significant changes in the near future.

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