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GENESIS AND EVOLUTION OF THE U.S.-KAZAKHSTANI RELATIONS IN 1990S

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Abstract. The article traces the chronology of the political interactions between the U.S. and Kazakhstan in the 1990s. Utilizing factual information and official sources the authors assess the genesis and evolution of the relationship between two countries. The basis for the development of bilateral cooperation was nuclear disarmament and extensive cooperation in the energy sphere. Despite political obstacles in the interaction between countries in the late 1990s the U.S. always held Kazakhstan in high regard as a gateway into the Central Asian region. Likewise, Kazakhstan continues to perceive Washington as one of the most important extraregional power that supports its economic development and helps keep the geopolitical balance.

Key words: *United States, Kazakhstan, Clinton, Nunn-Lugar Program, Nuclear Disarmament.*

1990-жж. АМЕРИКА-ҚАЗАҚСТАН ҚАТЫНАСТАРЫНЫҢ ГЕНЕЗИСІ МЕН ЭВОЛЮЦИЯСЫ

Андрей Шенин, Әйгерім Раимжанова

Аңдатпа. Бұл мақалада Америка Құрама Штаттары мен Қазақстан Республикасы арасындағы 1990-шы жылдардағы саяси қарым-қатынастарға мол фактілік материалдар мен ресми деректер негізінде егжей-тегжейлі шолу ұсынылады. Екіжақты

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ынтымақтастықты қалыптастырудың негізі ядролық қарусыздану және энергетика саласын дамыту болды. 1990 жылдардың екінші жартысында туындаған саяси келіспеушіліктерге қарамастан, АҚШ Қазақстанды Орталық Азиядағы стратегиялық әріптес ретінде қарастырды. Астана (қазіргі Нұр-Сұлтан) өз кезегінде Вашингтонды елдің экономикалық дамуына инвестиция салатын және аймақтағы геосаяси тепе-теңдікті сақтайтын ең ықпалды сыртқы күштердің бірі ретінде қарастырды.

Түйін сөздер: АҚШ, Қазақстан, Клинтон, Нанн-Лугар бағдарламасы, ядролық қарусыздану.

ГЕНЕЗИС И ЭВОЛЮЦИЯ АМЕРИКАНО-КАЗАХСТАНСКИХ ОТНОШЕНИЙ В 1990-х гг.

Андрей Шенин, Айгерим Раимжанова

Аннотация. В данной статье предлагается подробный обзор политических взаимоотношений между Соединенными Штатами Америки и Республикой Казахстан в 1990-х гг. на основе богатого фактического материала и официальных данных. Исследование демонстрирует, что фундаментом для формирования двустороннего сотрудничества были вопросы ядерного разоружения и развития энергетической сферы. Далее, несмотря на возникшие во второй половине 1990х гг. некоторые политические разногласия, США по-прежнему рассматривали Казахстан в качестве стратегического партнера в Центральной Азии. Астана (ныне – Нур-Султан), в свою очередь, рассматривала Вашингтон в качестве одной из наиболее влиятельных внешних сил, которая при этом инвестирует в экономическое развитие страны и поддерживает геополитический баланс в регионе.

Ключевые слова: США, Казахстан, Клинтон, программа Нанна-Лугара, ядерное разоружение.

Introduction

In 2021, Kazakhstan will celebrate 30 years of independence. The country has come a long way in the process of building a modern and progressive state in the aftermath of the fall of the Soviet Union.

In the beginning of the 1990s the situation in the country was looking very difficult for the new leadership: destruction of stable economic relations, deficit of goods, new reality of international system, difficult economic conditions, ambiguous future of the Soviet nuclear heritage, among others. Still, the country possessed not only the world's fourth strongest nuclear potential, but also rich energy resources, skilled population,

vast territory, and a convenient geographical location. These obvious advantages were noticed by the USA – a superpower that had emerged victorious from the Cold War.

Washington has quickly assessed Kazakhstan's capabilities and began to develop active bilateral cooperation. The U.S. initially focused on two areas: elimination of Soviet nuclear legacy to prevent leakage of technology, researchers and materials in the direction of “untrustworthy countries” (North Korea, Iran), and the development of Kazakhstan's energy structures. Through joint initiatives, the countries have laid a solid foundation for bilateral relations.

This paper provides an analysis

of Kazakhstan-U.S. political relations from 1991 to 2000. While numerous publications take on this issue, the particular contribution of this article is a step-by-step assessment of the relationship-building process, which contains numerous implications and significant insights for the evaluation of cooperation dynamics. The focal point of the analysis are the specific agreements, participants and outcomes of the joint initiatives.

Literature review

The research is based primarily on official American and Kazakhstani documents. Numerous legal documents, memoranda and archival documents highlight key areas of bilateral cooperation, terms of the partnership and anticipated outcomes. The presidents' speeches, government and ministerial resolutions, statements by diplomats, and legislative acts of both countries are insightful as well. The individual agency materials are also worth noting, such as the "The Political Environment of Kazakhstan in the Post-Soviet Era" from the U.S. Department of Justice, for instance; it clearly reveals that back in 1994 American experts already had a fairly good understanding of the internal processes of Kazakhstan [1].

Similarly, it is important to mention a range of documents dedicated to the implementation of the "Cooperative Threat Reduction" or "Nunn-Lugar Program" for the processing and elimination of the nuclear legacy of the Soviet Union in the territories of former Soviet republics (Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, and Ukraine), namely the Lisbon Protocol of 1992 and the Budapest Memorandum of 1994 [2].

In the framework of the bilateral agreements it is worth mentioning the documents related to cooperation with the U.S. government (i.e. the 1992 Agreement on Trade Relations between the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Government of the United States, or the 1994 Agreement on

the Purchase of Highly Enriched Uranium) and the cooperation with individual US multinational corporations: Chevron, J. P. Morgan, and Halliburton Company.

Notably, there are not many extensive studies devoted to a comprehensive study of U.S.-Kazakhstan relations. In 2020, Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies under the President of Kazakhstan published E. Tukumov's monograph "Discovering America: A View from Kazakhstan", which is primarily related to the study of U.S. history rather than bilateral relations [3]. Shaymardanov's thesis research titled "Kazakhstani-American Relations in the Process of Becoming Sovereign of the Republic of Kazakhstan" was useful for the initial research phase but was constrained by time framework as it was published back in 1993 [4]. Separate provisions related to the Kazakhstani-American relations are included in Tursunbaev's doctoral dissertation titled "International Cooperation of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the 1990s", but they assess separate aspects of cooperation, without a comprehensive study [5].

The historian and political scientist Martha Brill Olcott stands out among researchers in the field - she published the "The Kazakhs" book back in the USSR period, and since then has published numerous articles on Kazakhstan and its geopolitical role in the world [6]. The work of Togzhan Kassenova of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace on disarmament and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and materials was similarly insightful. For instance, her publications "Banning Nuclear Testing: Lessons from the Semipalatinsk Nuclear Testing Site" and "Kazakhstan and the Global Nuclear Order" highlight important aspects of the U.S.-Kazakhstan nuclear cooperation from the 1990s period to present [7,8].

Of particular value to researching this article was the book written by Pulitzer Prize

winner David Hoffman, “The Dead Hand: The Untold Story of the Cold War”, dedicated to the study of the Nunn-Lugar programme [9].

The question of U.S. foreign policy in Kazakhstan and Central Asia attracts great attention from Kazakhstani researchers. The various aspects of bilateral relationships were analyzed by various authors including Hisham H., Kydyrbekuly D.B., Tulepbayev R.M., Tulepbergenov G.K., Alimov S.M., Aldubashev Zh.M., Kakenova Z.A. [10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16]. The authors take on the issue from different aspects, including security issues, energy relations, nuclear disarmament, trade and democratic developments. The distinct feature of the current paper is the formation of short but comprehensive review of bilateral relationship from various pillars, excluding energy that represents a separate study on its own between the United States and Kazakhstan in the 1990s, the period that formed a foundation for the relationship between countries and Kazakhstan’s further positioning of the world arena.

With regard to energy relations, numerous American experts have analysed the various aspects of the U.S.-Kazakhstani partnership. For example, Forsyth looked at the politics of oil in the Caucasus and Central Asia, with a specific focus on oil exploration and export in the Caspian basin [17]. The expert of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) Cordesman studied the narrative of the U.S. Administration related to the implementation of the different energy initiatives in the Caspian Sea region [18]. The works by Blank, Jaffe, Starr and other American experts are also utilized in the article [19, 20, 21].

Another valuable source of information was presented the U.S. Congress hearings, which highlighted the various aspects of American-Kazakhstani relations. For instance, in 1998 the U.S. House of Representatives held a

hearing titled “Hearing on US interests in the Central Asian republics” [22]. Various state policies, such as the Talbott Doctrine promulgated by Deputy Secretary of State Talbott in 1997 with regard to democratic reforms in Central Asian states, also belong into this category [23].

Numerous sources that present significant information on the various aspects of the U.S.-Kazakhstan relations can be found in Russian language. Among significant ones are the works of Kazakhstani expert Laumulin “U.S. Central Asian Policy under the presidency of Barack Obama”, Russian expert of the Moscow State Institute of International Relations Kazantsev “U.S. Policy in Post-Soviet Central Asia: Character and Prospects”, works of historian Troitsky “U.S.-Kazakhstan relations in the energy sphere (1992-2007)”, Popov’s “Russian Center for Strategic Studies”, among others [24, 25, 26, 27]. The authors of this paper also utilized materials from Kazakhstani, American, European and Russian newspapers, such as “Kazakhstanskaya Pravda”, “New-York Times”, “Izvestiya”, and other publications.

Statistical data was obtained from official national and international sources published by the Statistics Agency of Kazakhstan, the National Bank of Kazakhstan, UN agencies and the U.S. Government, the World Bank, departments of US TNCs and other agencies.

Methodology

This paper bases its research on secondary sources utilizing historical method. This means that authors analyzed the evolution of bilateral relations on a year-to-year basis. Both qualitative and quantitative data is assessed. Case-method is also used as authors focus on two specific countries for analysis. Various secondary sources are used, including archival documents, memoranda, agreements, official state reports, interviews, and statistical data that are relevant for assessing the evolution

of U.S.-Kazakhstan relation during the period of 1990s. The paper also accumulates data from business and international public organizations, think-tanks, media reports, as well as scholarly publications of Kazakhstani and international experts. The usage of wide range of sources is accumulated to provide a broad perspective on the subject.

Genesis and evolution of the U.S.-Kazakhstan relations in 1991-1996

After the brief euphoria related to the fall of the Soviet Union, Washington suddenly realised the full range of challenges that the U.S. would face as the world's only superpower and global leader. One of the key issues that required close attention was the Central Asian region, both due to attractive hydrocarbon reserves and the nuclear weapon inheritance that was passed on to Kazakhstan. Washington's concern was related to the fact that Kazakhstan possessed 18 percent of the USSR's nuclear legacy, effectively becoming the fourth most powerful arsenal in the world, which, combined together with its Muslim population and vast hydrocarbon reserves, could turn the country into a real threat to the United States. The term "Islamic atom bomb" was often used in the reports of American analysts in the early 1990s. It was suggested that Muslim identity could become the potential basis of a rapprochement between the Central Asian countries and Iran, which had begun an active regional religious expansion. Although later it became clear, however, that the decades of propaganda for atheism in Kazakhstan - a legacy of the USSR - had radically affected the thinking and worldview of the republics' inhabitants, the fears of American experts were justified at the time.

The U.S. has prioritized building a strong relationship with Kazakhstan, leaving other Central Asian republics in the region 'for later'. In the framework of the new Great Game

theory it made sense to focus on Kazakhstan to balance the impact of other countries. Kazakhstan, in turn, was following a 'multi-vector' strategy and actively seeking partners on the world stage to bring investments and technology to the national oil and gas sector. A key point of cooperation with the U.S. was also related to the dismantling of the Soviet nuclear complex that required large maintenance costs and posed environmental issues.

The development of U.S.-Kazakhstan relations got off to a fairly dynamic start. On December 16, 1991 Kazakhstan became an independent state and on January 14 the head of state Nursultan Nazarbayev received the United States' Undersecretary of State for Economic Affairs Fauver with whom he discussed the development of direct bilateral economic relations and the establishment of most favourable trade and tax regime for Kazakhstan. On January 17, the President of Kazakhstan met with the U.S. Ambassador to the CIS Straus and a week later a delegation from the State Department led by First Undersecretary of State Bartholomew arrived in Kazakhstan. On February 3, the U.S. Embassy - the very first foreign embassy in the country - was opened in Almaty. This signalled a strong commitment to cooperation.

Security and arms control comprised focus of these meetings and negotiations. The first step to the establishment of security was the discussion of a unified control of ex-Soviet nuclear arms in the framework of CIS agreement, although the latter did not discuss the issue of ownership of these arms. Therefore, President Nazarbayev, using all possible levers to raise the prestige of the country, in an interview to the U.S. Christian Science Monitor declared the intermediate position of Kazakhstan on elimination of nuclear weapons as a "nuclear state choosing a path of disarmament" [28]. However, in order to avoid an open conflict with Russia

and the United States during his visit to Washington, D.C. to meet Secretary of State John Baker and President Bush from May 17 to 23, the president of Kazakhstan reaffirmed the country's commitment to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) [29].

Another significant aspect of the negotiations during Nazarbayev's visit on May 19, 1992 to the United States was the signing of the founding agreement between Kazakhstan and the American oil corporation Chevron to establish the Tengizchevronoil venture, aimed at the joint American-Kazakhstani development of the Tengiz oil and gas field. The very next day on May 20 a Memorandum between the Republic of Kazakhstan and the J.P. Morgan was signed; the document reflected the corporation's significant role as a financial consultant to the government on the Tengiz project [30].

To create favourable economic conditions for trade between the Republic of Kazakhstan and the United States, an agreement on capital investment support that outlined the principles of insurance, investment and lending was signed [31], as well as the memorandum of understanding between the countries [32], among others. Following the meeting with Nazarbayev President Bush declared "the beginning of a new relationship" between the two countries, in which the U.S. would provide Kazakhstan full support in its transition to a market economy [33]. The country began to follow the Washington Consensus guidelines in the economy reforms.

In support of the non-proliferation agenda in May 1992 in Lisbon the foreign ministers of Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine, together with the U.S. Secretary of State, signed an additional protocol to the US-Soviet START-1 Treaty that signified the commitment of Belarus, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan to join the NPT as non-nuclear

weapon states. Kazakhstan's Supreme Court ratified the document on July 7, 1992.

On the whole, in the period between 1991 and 1992, the United States was fairly successful in achieving its initial goals: Kazakhstan actively pursued the implementation of the terms of the START I Treaty, while the economic expansion launched by Chevron gradually brought the state into the sphere of Washington's global interests. In both areas multinational companies and high-level state officials were actively involved. In 1992 alone Kazakhstan was visited by Senators S. Nunn, R. Lugar and J. Cranston, former President J. Carter, USAID Deputy Director L. Crensdall, a senior official from the U.S. Defense Department L. Libby, Vice President of General Motors G. Deyonkez, and others. In the end of 1992 Kazakhstan signed an agreement with the United States related to the activities of the Peace Corps on the territory - an independent federal agency of the U.S. Government that sends volunteers for provision of humanitarian assistance to the countries in need [34].

Toward the end of 1992, President Nazarbayev visited the United States again. The purpose of the visit was to address the 47th session of the UN General Assembly and deliver a message to the world regarding security issues of Kazakhstan and the consequences of nuclear tests at the Semipalatinsk test site. It had already been closed at that time but ramifications of 456 nuclear tests were enormous and had a negative impact on the health of more than a million people [35]; hence, Nazarbayev proposed cooperation of Asian countries to address urgent issues under the auspices of a new organization, the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) [36]. Hence, already in the initial stage of its independence Kazakhstan has demonstrated readiness for conducting dialogue with the international community on a wide range of issues.

The year of 1993 was dedicated to discussions of security issues and the disposal of nuclear weapons. On February 18 the leader of Kazakhstan met with an Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of the United States to the Republic of Kazakhstan W. Courtney, where he confirmed his obligations under START I and the Lisbon Protocol, and also stressed the need for security guarantees and financial, technical support for the dismantlement and elimination of nuclear weapons. In particular, personnel was required as toward the end of 1993 nearly 70 percent of the Russian officers working in Kazakhstan (including those at nuclear facilities) had requested Russian citizenship and intended to return home [37]. At that time Russian servicemen accounted for about 80% of the officer corps, while the proportion of Kazakhstani servicemen did not exceed 10% [38].

On June 8-9, 1993 a large delegation of U.S. officials and businessmen arrived in Almaty to agree on support mechanisms. The first group, headed by Ambassador-at-Large Strobe Talbott, discussed security and disarmament issues under the NPT and START I agreements (it was common knowledge that the United States had allocated around \$800 million for the CIS disarmament and nuclear weapons disposition program). The second group, led by senior USAID officials B. Atwood and M. Butler, discussed economic, technical and humanitarian cooperation with Kazakhstan. President Nazarbayev has prepared a large package of proposals aimed at expanding economic cooperation between two countries to increase the U.S. investment in the country's economy. Two months later, on September 12, Talbott and the Ambassador J. Goodby met with President Nazarbayev to discuss outlined economic proposals and determine a joint strategy for nuclear disarmament.

The series of meetings in 1993 concluded with a delegation visit led by the U.S. Vice

President Al Gore; during this trip Kazakh Supreme Soviet ratified the NPT, signalling to the U.S. that the country had fulfilled all its obligations and should be regarded as a reliable partner. At the end of the visit A. Gore and N. Nazarbayev signed the Agreement Concerning the Destruction of Silo Launchers of Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs), Emergency Response, and the Prevention of Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (ICBMs), as well as several agreements on the Nunn-Lugar program, including five implementing agreements, under which the United States allocated \$85 million for Kazakhstan's nuclear disarmament program [38].

Gore also brought with him a letter from President Clinton inviting Nazarbayev to visit Washington in February 1994. The following visit confirmed the parties' commitment to disarmament and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. Three items on the agenda were particularly noteworthy for the development of bilateral relations:

- First, in response to Kazakhstan's accession to the NPT, President Clinton pledged (in addition to \$85 million under the Nunn-Lugar programme) to increase the U.S. aid from \$91 million in 1993 to \$311 million in 1994. In the following month the Defence Secretary William Perry visited Kazakhstan and consolidated the presidential agreements in the "Agreement on Conversion of Kazakhstan's Defence Industry" and the "Agreement on Intergovernmental Direct Communication between the Kazakhstan Ministry of Defence and the U.S. Department of Defence" [39];

- Second, Gore-Nazarbayev commission was established, similar to the Gore-Chernomyrdin bilateral commission designed to coordinate the development of U.S.-Russian relations in the nuclear and scientific spheres;

- Third, the presidents signed a "Bilateral Charter on Democratic Partnership" aimed at

strengthening the rule of law, market reforms and human rights in Kazakhstan.

In addition, one of the most important points of the charter was the promise of the United States to provide very limited, but still “security guarantees”, which were reaffirmed in the framework of the Memorandum on Security Assurances Related to Kazakhstan’s Accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in Budapest on December 5, 1994.

The Budapest Memorandum reaffirmed the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Kazakhstan and (in paragraph 6) obliged the signatory countries to consult with the Kazakh government on all developments affecting these notions. As a result of the signed memorandum Kazakhstan obtained commitments from great powers to protect the state against aggression by third countries [40]. Hence, Kazakhstan began the process of removing nuclear material, in particular, highly enriched uranium (HEU) of the Ulba Metallurgical Plant, which had been previously bought by the U.S. government (agreement from November 17, 1994). According to a rough estimate, the Ulba plant alone contained 187 kg of metal enriched to about 98 per cent, 25 kg of uranium oxide, 170 kg of uranium-beryllium alloy fuel rods, 156 kg of scrap, damaged uranium-beryllium fuel rods, and powder. In addition to these figures, in late 1994 - as part of the top-secret Operation Sapphire - about 600 kilograms of unprotected highly enriched uranium (which by some miracle have not yet been dispersed) were also moved from the Ulba plant to the United States [42].

In addition to nuclear issues other agreements regulating trade, financial, and legal aspects of the U.S.-Kazakhstan cooperation were signed in 1994. For example, during Prime Minister Kazhegeldin’s visit to the United States statements on “Future Tasks of the Kazakhstani-American Committee on

Business Development” and on “Cooperation in Supporting the Rule of Law and Combating Crime” were issued, and on November 1 in Almaty the two governments negotiated a document, which permitted the United States to finance its NGOs in the implementation of assistance programs to Kazakhstan.

The aforementioned agreements formed the basis for the launch of the U.S.-Kazakhstan Joint Committee that was established to implement the provisions of the Charter for Democratic Partnership in the areas of business, defence, environment, science, and enterprise conversion. At this stage, however, there was a certain discrepancy in the priorities of the U.S. and Kazakhstan, where the first regarded the conversion of enterprises, dismantlement of nuclear weapons, and transportation of valuable nuclear materials to the U.S. as top priorities, while the latter was more focused on the economic cooperation programs. However, as most funding in this case was from Washington, the U.S. were able to set the priorities for bilateral cooperation [42].

In 1995 the “honeymoon” phase of the relationship between the two countries was overshadowed by the internal events of Kazakhstan. After the parliamentary elections of 1994 one of the candidates, Tatyana G. Kvyatkovskaya, filed a suit to the Constitutional Court of Kazakhstan on violation of the Election Code during the participant registration process. Following lengthy proceedings, the court issued an unexpected ruling in March confirming the violations and questioning the legitimacy of election and of the incumbent parliament. Without waiting for further action, the deputies promptly resigned on March 11, and the political life of the country in the absence of a parliament was regulated by the Law on Temporary Delegation of Additional Powers to the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan and Heads of Local Administrations (dated 10 December 1993).

These events in Kazakhstan were perceived positively by American counterparts. It is widely known that the U.S. ambassador to Kazakhstan W. Courtney had noted that Kazakhstan was “no longer a student but a teacher of democracy”. However, when a month later President Nazarbayev held a referendum extending his authority until the year 2000 instead of calling a presidential election, the U.S. was unpleasantly surprised, as they feared that their most important in Central Asia would turn from an emerging democracy into authoritarianism. In a similarly negative way the U.S. reacted to another referendum in Kazakhstan on August 30, 1995, which adopted a new constitution. One of the key features of the new constitution was the transformation of Kazakhstan into a presidential republic, which for American observers strengthened the view that authoritarian tendencies were developing in the country.

One should note that during that period the U.S. considered Kazakhstan as a potential beacon of liberal-democratic reorganization of the region, through which their own economic, political and geopolitical interests could be realized. The gradual modernisation of the country was planned through the privatisation of Kazakhstani enterprises and their conversion through the efforts of American companies, the expansion of trade and market relations, and the strengthening of the role of democratic institutions (i.e. through the activity of U.S. non-profit organisations operating in Kazakhstan on the basis of a bilateral agreement of 1994). Moreover, Washington believed that political life in Kazakhstan would take into account the Charter for Democratic Partnership, which despite certain ambiguity, still envisioned American involvement in disseminating liberal democratic values in the country.

Disagreement with the controversial political decisions, however, did not have

a critical impact on the U.S.-Kazakhstan relations; security and hydrocarbon development remained the focal points of bilateral relations. This is exemplified by the numerous reciprocal visits with the invariable signing of various agreements regulating the issue of the liquidation of the Soviet nuclear legacy or the participation of American business in the extraction of Kazakhstani resources. For instance, during Kazakhstani Prime Minister Kazhegeldin’s visit to Washington, D.C. on March 20-27 he and U.S. Vice President A. Gore signed 10 documents concerning trade, ecology, crime fighting, finance, standardization and metrology, conversion of productions, non-proliferation of nuclear materials, etc.

A week later a reciprocal visit took place. The U.S. Secretary of Defence W. Perry arrived in Kazakhstan and speaking at a press conference on April 5, he mentioned the state of democracy in Kazakhstan but dedicated most of his speech to Kazakhstan’s successes in the field of nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament. During this visit, Perry did not only reaffirm Washington’s commitment to implementing all the planned initiatives of the Nunn-Lugar programme, but also signed an additional agreement worth \$37 million. In doing so, the Secretary of Defence demonstrated that the first priority for Washington was to reduce the nuclear threat and that democracy-building was a secondary goal.

Nevertheless, the demand for democratic and economic reforms was inextricably linked to the implementation of the nuclear agreements. For example, on June 13-15 1995, when the American commission headed by Deputy Defence Secretary E. Carter visited Kazakhstan, officials from Washington demanded that Kazakhstan carry out general privatization, because the conversion of defence enterprises was to be carried out by American companies. In addition, the

delegation insisted on tax exemptions or, to be more precise, the complete elimination of taxes on equipment imported from the United States.

This was one of the key issues in the implementation of the Nunn-Lugar programme in Kazakhstan - the U.S. was keen to allocate money to transform Kazakhstan's economy to the maximum benefit of American business. For instance, most of the money allocated under the disarmament programme did not arrive to Kazakhstan in the form of financial resources, but was transferred to the accounts of American contractors, who either looked for subcontractors in Kazakhstan or carried out the projects themselves. It is no coincidence that a business handbook on Kazakhstan's military industry was timely published in the United States for the use by corporations, firms, and non-profit organizations planning to participate in the process [42].

The next step in joint security cooperation after the elimination of nuclear weapons and materials was Kazakhstan's accession to NATO's Partnership for Peace program. The accession agreement was signed in 1995, and the North Atlantic Alliance envisioned Kazakhstan as an important player across Eurasia, whereas Uzbekistan - which had always attracted the U.S. with its military strength - focused its security on the regional scale [43].

Overall the bilateral cooperation that occurred between 1991 and 1995 has benefited both sides. By April 1996 all nuclear weapons had been successfully removed from Kazakhstan for their reprocessing in Russia (1,040 warheads had been removed from ICBMs and 370 warheads from cruise missiles), after which the conversion and elimination of SLBMs remained to be handled. In addition, the United States built mutually beneficial relations with the largest and richest hydrocarbon country in Central Asia, and agreements also enabled the U.S.

corporations to start successfully work in the largest oil fields in Kazakhstan. Finally, from 1991 to 1995 - when the Democratic Party dominated Congress and the White House - the U.S. was relatively sympathetic to the idea of close cooperation between Russia and Kazakhstan to maintain control and stability in Central Asia. Russia was perceived by the democrats as the legal successor to the USSR, with its close ties to all the republics of the region, while Kazakhstan was viewed as a stable and strong secular state with a Muslim population capable of supporting Russia in this mission.

Kazakhstan could not complain either as its bilateral cooperation with the U.S. has allowed the country to successfully dismantle and remove its nuclear legacy (that otherwise would be costly to maintain and protect) and to present itself as a new and reliable participant in the international system. This bilateral cooperation also enabled Kazakhstan to attract investment in the oil and gas sector under production-sharing agreements and to develop business cooperation with Western entrepreneurs.

Liberal-democratic values for Kazakhstan during Clinton's second term

In 1996 a new milestone in the history of U.S.-Kazakhstan relations had begun. After the removal of all nuclear weapons from the territory by 1996 the U.S. interest in Kazakhstan has somewhat declined. If 1995 was the period where at least a couple dozen international agreements were signed, in 1996 there were none. Yet, despite the decrease in the intensity of the dialogue with the United States, Kazakhstan was actively expanding its cooperation with China, Iran, and Russia in the energy sphere. For instance, China won a tender to privatize 55% of JSC Uzenmunaigas, the Uzen field operator, whose oil reserves were estimated at 150-200 million tons [44]. Iran, as part of a ten-year agreement, began

to receive Kazakh oil from the Tengiz field, which was beneficial to both sides, but this activity was soon discontinued due to the U.S. law “On Sanctions Against Iran and Libya” (D’Amato-Kennedy Act), which prohibited companies associated with the U.S. to invest more than 40 million dollars a year in the oil and gas industry of Iran or Libya [45]. With regard to partnership with Russia - Kazakhstan was one of the founders of the new Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC) that directed additional flows of oil from the Tengiz field towards Russia.

In 1996 a new narrative had emerged in the U.S. criticising in the U.S. President Clinton’s failure of liberal-democratic reform programme in Central Asia and Russia. In particular, Moscow did not become a reliable ally and ‘policeman’ in the region as Washington had envisioned it. The criticism amplified when the Republicans won the November 1996 Congress elections, after which the U.S. turned from a “pro-Russian” policy to strengthening the U.S. direct presence in the region. The movement was led by the new U.S. Secretary of State M. Albright, who was the student of the well-known conservative political scientist Zbigniew Brzezinski.

As a result of new policy directions the Clinton administration had to re-evaluate its Central Asian strategy. The basic provisions of the new policy were formulated in the summer of 1997 in a speech by Deputy Secretary of State S. Talbot at Johns Hopkins University. In his speech, Talbot explicitly stated that the countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia have been under the foreign power’s oppression of foreign powers for most of their history and today they have a chance to put their ‘pawn’ role behind them, and the U.S. would support them in that.

The Talbot Plan consisted of the idea that democratic reforms put in motion through the internal mechanisms of the Caucasus

and Central Asian countries would spur the economic development of the newly independent states and bring stability to a region that stretched from the Black Sea to Pamir Mountains. This, in turn, would create new trade routes from Asia to Europe and provide American energy companies with business opportunities [46].

In other words, Washington has declared the region to be an area of strategic interest. However, there was never any talk of a strategic U.S. presence: the reforms were to be carried out by Central Asian governments themselves, supervised locally by NGOs or by international organizations from abroad.

The new U.S. foreign policy approach was accompanied in the second half of the 1990s period by the intensification of bilateral diplomatic activity. This includes the signing of numerous bilateral security and economic agreements including the Agreement on Cooperation in the Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy, (which strengthens the IAEA’s role in controlling Kazakhstan’s nuclear complex) and the Action Program for Kazakhstan-U.S. Economic Partnership (supplement to the Charter on Democratic Partnership). During her visit to Kazakhstan in the fall of 1997, first Lady Hillary Clinton reaffirmed that Kazakhstan remained a strategic partner of the United States in Central Asia. Although such diplomatic activity did not bring the partnership to a fundamentally new level, the signing of the aforementioned agreements remained an important element in demonstrating U.S. interest in Kazakhstan.

The oil and gas cooperation did a solid job in cementing bilateral relations, however, Washington still did not express interest in areas other than the transit of hydrocarbons and the elimination of the Soviet nuclear legacy. As before it perceived Central Asia as a region gravitating towards Russia and was not prepared to invest substantial resources in the democratisation or economic development

of the region due to the ambiguity of the long-term impact. Such attitude was not only applicable to Kazakhstan, but also relevant to other Turkic republics of Central Asia: Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Kyrgyzstan, where the United States generally sought to support the development of democracy and free markets, although cooperation with authoritarian regimes of Karimov or Niyazov was perceived rather painfully by the liberal democratic circles. Hence, in the late 1990s the U.S. supported the nation-states verbally and through limited financial transfers and did not intend to intervene deeply in the life of the region. This signified a significantly reduced American presence and influence in Central Asia.

Nevertheless, the established decade-long U.S.-Kazakhstan trade and economic ties have continued to develop (Figure 1). The observers point to the fact that since 1991 not a single U.S. company has curtailed its activities in Kazakhstan. In the late 1990s bilateral trade was somewhat disrupted by the negative impact of the 1997-1999 Russian economic crisis that caused the trade turnover between Kazakhstan and the United States to fall from \$353 million (1997) to \$272 million (1998) [47].

The U.S. Congress also widely supported the administration's new policy of transforming Central Asia into a free-market and democratic region. Fearing the increase of influence of Russia, Iran, and China in the region on March 10, 1999 the lawmakers passed their own Silk Road Strategy Act, in which they noted the need to support the development of political, economic, and security cooperation between Central Asian states, the South Caucasus and the West. With proper funding (the text of the act did not specify the amount and timing) the implementation of the bill, according to initiator Samuel Brownback, should ensure security of Caspian hydrocarbons supply and reduce the dependence of the United States on

the unstable exporters of oil from the Middle East [48]. Kazakhstan's role in the project was not explicitly mentioned, but the importance of the country was evident due to the mention of regional oil projects. American Atlantic Council think tank stated that the combination of economic reforms and abundant natural and human resources supported Kazakhstan in becoming a regional leader in economic and political dimensions, back in 1996 [49].

The fourth visit of President Nazarbayev to the United States that took place on December 17-21, 1999 turned out to be quite successful in bringing political dividends. In the course of four days the Kazakhstani leader met with President Clinton, Vice President Gore, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, the head of the Foreign Relations Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives Benjamin Gilman, and President of the World Jewish Congress Edgar Bronfman [50].

President Clinton praised democratic reforms in Kazakhstan and the republic's role in stabilizing the situation in Central Asia. On the meeting with Vice President Gore, a "Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Government of the United States on Cooperation on Consular Cooperation" was signed, and the outcomes of the sixth meeting of the U.S.-Kazakhstan Joint Commission has been reviewed [59]. In addition, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems awarded the Kazakhstani President a diploma for "Outstanding Contribution to the Promotion of Democracy" [60]. In addition, some financial issues were also resolved i.e. an agreement was reached on an IMF loan of USD 140 million to the energy company KEGOC, and several American private companies agreed to invest in the Astana hotel complex, in particular in the reconstruction of Hotel Esil [50].

Toward the end of the 1990s, however, Kazakhstan's steady economic growth and

successful international initiatives have simultaneously led not only to the strengthening of the political position of the country and the decrease in the dependence on sentiment in the United States. Meanwhile, Washington continued to insist that the economic liberalisation process is incomplete without appropriate political reforms, otherwise any positive changes would be undermined by rampant corruption. On this basis American politicians and diplomats - while continuing to praise bilateral cooperation - began to criticize the Kazakhstani government on human rights violations and passive political competition (citing the events of 1995 when Nazarbayev extended his own term until 2000 without holding a presidential election). Such principle stance brought some tension to the relationship between the two countries. Still, Kazakhstan's negative reaction to the criticism did not affect the practical implementation of large-scale projects in the economic and security sphere, although it did somewhat limit the opportunities for further development.

In particular, as analyst of the Atlantic Centre Sean Roberts notes the U.S. was unwilling to defend Kazakhstan's established political order in the international community,

fearing a wave of discontent and criticism for supporting an authoritarian government and the pursuit of short-term profits. Meanwhile, Kazakhstan was reluctant to get actively involved in the U.S. transcaspians initiatives, limiting its activity to signing declarations and expressing the willingness to consider project documentations i.e. on the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline [51]. Kazakhstan began making a gradual U-turn towards its nearest neighbours, Russia and China, by building new pipelines and joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in 1999. As a result, by 2001 the United States did not play a similarly influential role in determining Kazakhstan's foreign policy as it was the case in the early 1990s [49].

In early 2000, the U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright went on a tour of the three Central Asian countries - Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan - to support the U.S. Central Asian policy that emerged from the proclamation of the "Talbot Doctrine". Albright's visit to Astana (now Nur-Sultan) was the only significant political event in the U.S.-Kazakhstan cooperation during that period.

The agenda of talks in Astana was primarily related to the economic aspects

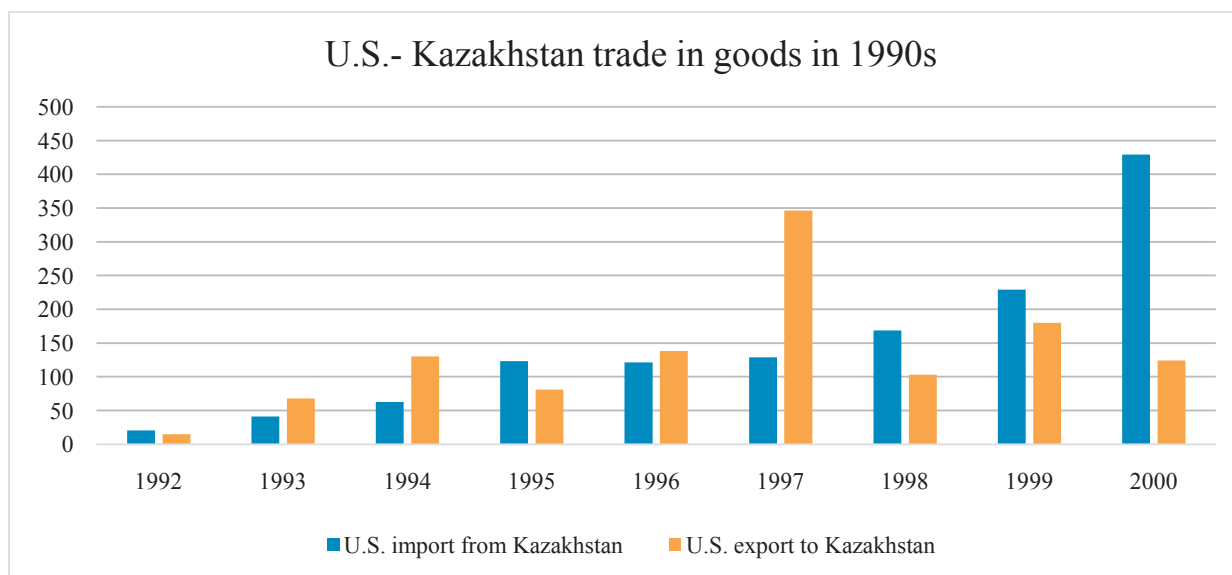


Figure 1 – U.S. Kazakhstan trade in goods in 1990s in mln. dollars (based on official statistical data from the U.S. Census Bureau census.gov)

of the construction of the Baku-Ceyhan oil pipeline and human rights issues in the country. The Americans continued to draw a clear correlation between the development of democracy and the stability of the investment climate, which in their opinion was especially important in a country with widespread capital investment from U.S. oil corporations.

The narrative in Washington was that over the past ten years the President of Kazakhstan had transformed from the leader of the nation into a dictator who suppressed any manifestation of opposition activity [52]. This was vividly expressed by U.S. congressmen during a session in the House of Representatives on “Democracy in the Central Asian Republics” on 12 April 2000 [53]. The Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee Benjamin Gilman even sent a letter to Secretary of State Albright, suggesting that President Nazarbayev should be encouraged to engage in dialogue with the opposition, allocating them time on federal television channels and providing printing capacity [54].

Gilman’s proposals were almost entirely implemented during Albright’s visit to Astana, where she met with representatives of opposition parties. At the insistence of the Kazakhstani authorities, not only radicals, but also leaders of parliamentary fractions loyal to the president were invited to the meeting, but the very fact of such a meeting with the highest US official demonstrated how far Washington was willing to go in demanding liberal-democratic reforms in Kazakhstan. Without a doubt that the interference of the U.S. in the internal affairs of Kazakhstan was deemed unacceptable, as President Nazarbayev readily mentioned during a press conference following the meeting [55]. In response the American side responded by expressing its disappointment over the illegal sale of a batch of Kazakhstani MiG-21 aircrafts (about 30 pieces) to North Korea, for which the Americans felt the responsible

officials and businessmen were punished too mildly [56].

Nevertheless, both sides realised that blaming each other was not productive for building strong and mutually beneficial relations, and that efforts should be pointed at finding common interests. One of the key reasons for Albright’s trip was the threat of the spread of Islamic extremism throughout the region, which was clearly demonstrated in the summer of 1999 during the attempt of militants to penetrate into Uzbek Ferghana through Kyrgyzstan’s territory - where Kyrgyz law enforcement agencies were completely helpless in the face of a massive attack. Despite the fact that Kazakhstan is unlikely to be directly involved in potential hostilities on the territories of Uzbekistan or Kyrgyzstan, its role in ensuring stability and security in the region was unequivocally acknowledged in the U.S. Not coincidentally, shortly before the Secretary of State’s visit, CIA Director George Tenet and FBI head Louis Freeze also visited Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan [56].

The topic of Kazakhstan’s foreign relations is an interesting case, not least because of the unique geopolitical framework that the country exists in. The dynamics of the new Great Game framework and challenges associated with the multivector policy represent an integral part of Kazakhstan’s path to development, affecting all spheres - from energy sector to education [57]. The focal point of this article is to closely examine the initial path of U.S.-Kazakhstan relationship based on factual information in the period of 1990s.

Conclusion

Overall, it can be noted that bilateral relations between the U.S. and Kazakhstan have stepped into the new millennium at a fairly mature level. Ever since Kazakhstan’s independence both countries have not only committed to each other verbally but have

also built strong ties on the political and economic planes. In the early 1990s the U.S. mainly focused on the elimination of the Soviet nuclear legacy and the positioning of American business in the country's oil and gas sector. Towards the end of the decade the focus shifted to increasing the role of Kazakhstan in the democratisation of the region, not least because the country was regarded by U.S. analysts as one of the most politically stable in Central Asia. In order to pursue the goal of spreading democratic values in the region, the U.S. established its own legal framework in the form of the New Silk Road Act, but due to geographical remoteness of the region, significant cultural differences, and the practical problems of opposing the influence of Russia, China or Iran, Washington was not prepared to spend truly significant resources

on the liberal-democratic development of Central Asia.

Kazakhstan, in turn, has gained considerable dividends from its partnership with the United States: investments from Western corporations have nurtured its oil and gas complex, while the joint cooperation in the Nunn-Lugar programme helped to save considerable funds for the country (in eliminating the nuclear complex), simultaneously raising country's prestige on the world arena. As a result of economic development and the formation of a successful multi-vector foreign policy Kazakhstan has been perceived not only as one of the former Soviet republics, but as a full and authoritative participant in the international system that has faithfully fulfilled its obligations.

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