

The Geopolitics of Kazakhstan in an Emerging Multipolar World

By [Kester Kenn Klomegah](#)

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Kazakhstan, one of the Russian neighbours and former Soviet republics, opens its doors for a broader external expansion. Given its geographical location and combined with current political reforms aim at transforming the its economic from the Soviet system to a more modernized system infused with western culture of life, President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev has chosen multi-vector policies.

Reforms have begun to be implemented after the election of Kassym-Jomart Tokayev in June 2019. Tokayev has consistently advocated for more openness and improving necessary conditions for attracting foreign business and investors to participate in the various economics sectors and including the cultural and educational sectors.

“I believe that given our geopolitical situation, given the fact that we have over \$500 billion involved in our economy, given that there are global companies operating in our market, we simply have to pursue a multi-vector, as they say now, foreign policy,” Tokayev said in the context of growing confrontations, contractions and emerging new world order.

The 69-year-old Tokayev took office in 2019 after Kazakhstan's previous president resigned amid protests. After surviving unrest in January triggered by fuel price rises, Tokayev unveiled reforms - including constitutional amendments and a hike in the minimum wage - and called snap elections.

Amid popular demand for sweeping change, he has recently accelerated plans to increase the amount of Kazakh oil exported west across the Caspian Sea, avoiding Russia to the north. It currently relies heavily on the Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC), one of the world's largest pipelines that crosses Russia to the Black Sea port of Novorossiisk. Out of total exports of 68 million tonnes a year, 53 million tonnes of Kazakh oil move through it.

In addition, late October, Tokayev said that in the coming years the authorities of the republic plan to launch a network of border trade and economic centers with Russia, China,

and Central Asian countries. In September, Tokayev emphasized that Kazakhstan would make every effort to further develop allied relations with Russia, an eternal strategic partnership with China, and comprehensive cooperation with brotherly Central Asian states.

Declaring that the creation of a fair Kazakhstan as its main goal, Tokayev has emphasized that the foreign policy course must also aim at protection of national interests, strengthening of mutually beneficial cooperation with all interested states, international peace and security.

In pursuit of sharing fresh experience of nation building, the president noted the importance of better quality education and the implementation of best global practices in domestic higher educational establishments at a meeting with Almaty students and young researchers, according to the presidential press service.

“Academic cooperation with the leading foreign universities is increasing on my orders. Branches of higher educational establishments from the UK, Germany, Canada, the Netherlands, South Korea and the United States will open in Kazakhstan shortly. The integration into the global education space will bolster the competitiveness of our higher educational establishments and will raise the appeal of Kazakh higher education,” the press service quoted Tokayev as saying.

Interestingly, English language is gaining popularity among younger generation since the collapse of the Soviet Union. It however projected that the people of Kazakhstan in the future will speak three languages (Kazakh, Russian and English). As part of promoting multicultural and friendly society, Kazakhstan has seriously made in-bound tourism as one of its priority spheres, so it has established a visa-free regime for citizens of 54 countries, including the European Union and OECD member states, the United States, Japan, Mexico, Australia and New Zealand.

Even long before the war, Kazakhstan had resisted significant leverages, including a push by Moscow in 2020 for a single currency and joint parliament within the post-Soviet Eurasian Economic Union, as part of a five-year strategic plan.

Noteworthy to reiterate here that during the discussions in St. Petersburg Economic Forum held in June where Tokayev shared the stage with Putin, he explicitly said his government did not and would not recognize Russian-controlled regions in eastern Ukraine and that Kazakhstan upheld the inviolability of internationally recognized borders.

Kazakhstan government has noticeably pushed back publicly against territorial claims made by Russian President Vladimir Putin in Ukraine, souring relations between the former Soviet republic and Moscow. Russia and Kazakhstan share the world’s longest continuous land border, prompting concern among some Kazakhs about the security of a country with the second-biggest ethnic Russian population among ex-Soviet republics after Ukraine.

Kazakhstan has a GDP of \$179.332 billion and an annual growth rate of 4.5%. Per capita, Kazakhstan’s GDP stands at \$9,686. It’s increased role in global trade and central positioning on the new Silk Road gave the country the potential to open its markets to billions of people. Further to this, it joined the World Trade Organization in 2015.

According to some reports, Kazakhstan has an abundant supply of accessible mineral and fossil fuel resources. Development of petroleum, natural gas, and mineral extractions has

attracted most of the over \$40 billion in foreign investment in Kazakhstan since 1993 and accounts for some 57% of the nation's industrial output (or approximately 13% of gross domestic product).

On 6 March 2020, the Concept of the Foreign Policy of Kazakhstan for 2020–2030 was announced. The document outlines the following main points:

- An open, predictable and consistent foreign policy of the country, which is progressive in nature and maintains its endurance by continuing the course of the First President – the country at a new stage of development;
- Protection of human rights, development of humanitarian diplomacy and environmental protection;
- Promotion of the country's economic interests in the international arena, including the implementation of state policy to attract investment;
- Maintaining international peace and security;
- Development of regional and multilateral diplomacy, which primarily involves strengthening mutually beneficial ties with key partners – Russia, China, the United States, Central Asian states and the EU countries, as well as through multilateral structures
- the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Commonwealth of Independent States, and a few others.

Kazakhstan is the world's largest landlocked country, located in Central Asia and partly in Eastern Europe. It declared independence on 16 December 1991, thus becoming the last Soviet republic to declare political independence. Nursultan Nazarbayev became the country's first President. Records show that he was replaced by Kassym-Jomart Tokayev.

It was the last Soviet republic to declare independence after Soviet's collapse in 1991. With approximately 20 million population, Kazakhstan strictly recognizes its political freedom, national interest and territorial sovereignty, and is a member of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

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Kester Kenn Klomegah, who worked previously with Inter Press Service (IPS), is now a regular contributor to Global Research. As a versatile researcher, he believes that everyone deserves equal access to quality and trustworthy media reports.

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