

## NOTES AND RELECTIONS

### THE IMPACT OF SMALL STATES ON INTERNATIONAL PROBLEMS: THE POWER OF KAZAKHSTAN IN THE UNITED NATIONS DECISIONS

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#### Introduction

We see that small states are generally not effective in international relations and power struggles. From past to present, big states have directed international relations and problems, but some features and positions of small states from other states have made them countries with privileges and influence in some areas. As we examined in the article, Kazakhstan is an example of such countries. Kazakhstan used its experience and knowledge of nuclear weapons remaining in the Soviet era to limit and control these weapons. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, although Kazakhstan had a large number of nuclear weapons, It left them completely on its own will. For more than thirty years, Kazakhstan has played an active role in various organizations and initiatives, especially the United Nations, on the limitation and control of nuclear weapons, and has been both a supporter and a pioneering country. The findings we have obtained at the end of the research show that small states can also be an powerful and influential country in international relations, thanks to the features that distinguish them from other countries in some issues.

For centuries, the leadership of the great-superpowers and their conflicts of interest have always been the main focus on the international scene. Small states, on the other hand, generally tried to provide their own security by acting jointly with one or more of the big states or to indirectly influence by keeping good relations. However, especially with the end of the 20th century and the 21st century, it has been seen that small states have a say and influence in international relations by following certain policies and stages. In this regard, he can cite Sweden's influence in the European Union in establishing restrictions on the Green Environment and on chemicals that harm its forests and lakes. (Kronsell, 2002) Kazakhstan, which was one of the states that declared its independence with the dissolution of the Soviet Union at the end of the Cold War, has always been one of the leading or supporting countries in the limitation of nuclear power since then. The article analyzes the period from Kazakhstan's declaration of independence in 1991 up to 2018. It specifically examines Kazakhstan's proactive stance and influential role in



international relations, particularly in the domain of nuclear disarmament. The discussion underscores Kazakhstan's significant contributions within the United Nations and other global platforms, showcasing how its policies and initiatives have shaped discussions and decisions regarding nuclear weapons control. The article provides a comprehensive overview of Kazakhstan's strategic efforts and achievements in this critical area over nearly three decades. Since a plan, action or idea does not constantly emerge every year and every month, it was deemed more appropriate to examine it within such a period.

Due to its Soviet heritage, Kazakhstan had the opportunity to emerge as a new nuclear power in the international arena. However, the founding President of Kazakhstan thought that this could be the beginning of many problems. Moreover, the administration of independent Kazakhstan would not have wanted to acquire such power, despite popular objections, which had suffered over the years from nuclear tests. The Kazakh people had suffered a great deal from nuclear tests over the years. Indeed, the central location of the Soviet nuclear tests was the territory of Kazakhstan. From 1947 to 1991, 456 tests were carried out on the territory of Kazakhstan, mainly at the Semipalatinsk Nuclear Test Site. Of these nuclear explosions, 30 were detonated above ground, 86 in the air and 340 underground. These tests are nuclear tests with hundreds of times more devastating effects than the bombs dropped on Japan at the end of the Second World War. These nuclear tests are the main reason for some of the ongoing environmental problems and low birth rates since the establishment of Kazakhstan. As a result, after calculating the profit and loss, the founding President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev decided to give up nuclear weapons. Kazakhstan not only gave up on nuclear weapons, but later became one of the leading countries in nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. (Yermilov, 2006)

Nursultan Nazarbayev, who took a leading role in nuclear disarmament, made great contributions to Kazakhstan's becoming an important central country in Asia, and its acceptance as a mediator and a respected country in international politics. At the event held on June 18, 2009 to mark the 20th anniversary of the cessation of nuclear tests, Nazarbayev proposed to declare August 29 as the day of cessation of nuclear weapons all over the world. As a result of long negotiations, it was presented to the First Committee of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly as a draft resolution on August 29, International Day for Combating Nuclear Weapons Testing, as a joint proposal of 26 states, including Kazakhstan. The proposal was unanimously adopted at the 64th session of the UN General Assembly on 2 December 2009. The decision was presented by Kazakhstan in commemoration of the closure of the Semipalatinsk Nuclear Test Site on August 29, 1991. Adopted by the UN General Assembly, this resolution specifically calls for raising awareness of the harmful effects of nuclear weapon test explosions or other nuclear explosions, and for stopping them as one of the means to achieve the goal of a nuclear weapons-free world. (Demirtürk, 2020)

It is stated that the closure of the Semipalatinsk Nuclear Test Site on August 29, 1991 was a symbolic decision for both Kazakhstan and the international community, and the said decision inspired the signing of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) in 1996. In the case of Kazakhstan, Nazarbayev has been nominated several times for the Nobel Peace Prize. In 2017, Alyn Ware, Director of the Peace Science and Research



Institute in Switzerland, nominated Kazakhstan President Nazarbayev for the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts in nuclear disarmament. (Aliyeva, 2017)

### **A brief overview of structuring lines of Kazakhstan's foreign policy about nuclear disarmament**

Kazakhstan's emergence as a global advocate for nuclear disarmament is rooted in its painful past as the primary testing ground for Soviet nuclear weapons. From 1947 to 1991, the Semipalatinsk Nuclear Test Site witnessed 456 nuclear tests, leaving a devastating legacy of environmental degradation and health risks for the Kazakh people. In 1991, under the pioneering leadership of President Nursultan Nazarbayev, Kazakhstan decided to close the Semipalatinsk test site and declared August 29 as the International Day Against Nuclear Tests. President Nazarbayev's decision to renounce nuclear weapons positioned Kazakhstan as a key player in advancing global disarmament efforts. Kazakhstan's initiatives have significantly influenced the progress of non-proliferation measures at the United Nations. For instance, Kazakhstan played a crucial role in the adoption of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) in 1996 and has been actively working towards its universalization. Kazakhstan's efforts have been recognized and supported at the international level. The adoption of August 29 as the International Day Against Nuclear Tests by the UN General Assembly, proposed by Kazakhstan, is a significant step demonstrating Kazakhstan's diplomatic influence. Additionally, President Nazarbayev's nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize signifies the global acknowledgment of Kazakhstan's leadership in nuclear disarmament. Kazakhstan advances its disarmament agenda through strategic partnerships and multilateral platforms. Collaborations with international organizations such as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and regional initiatives like the Central Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone underscore Kazakhstan's commitment to regional security and global disarmament. Looking ahead, Kazakhstan continues to strengthen its role in global disarmament efforts. Challenges such as opposition from nuclear-armed states and geopolitical complexities persist. However, Kazakhstan's proactive stance, supported by scientific expertise and diplomatic competence, positions it as a strong advocate for a nuclear-free world. In sum, Kazakhstan's foreign policy on nuclear issues at the UN is shaped by its historical responsibilities, strategic vision, and proactive diplomacy. By advocating for disarmament, promoting dialogue, and strengthening international cooperation, Kazakhstan continues to shape the global agenda on nuclear security and disarmament.

### **How can a Small State impact on the United Nations Agenda**

The Nuclear Weapons Ban Treaty, approved by the UN General Assembly on July 7, 2017, is one of Kazakhstan's most important diplomatic achievements. Because this agreement was boycotted by the nuclear powers in the UN such as the USA, Russia, China, France and the UK. However, the agreement was accepted with the approval of 122 countries. It is stated that although it does not have any sanction or binding feature, it is aimed to abolish nuclear weapons in the future. It constitutes one of the most valuable examples that small states can have an impact in international relations despite the objections of large states. (Kimball, 2022) We can say that the biggest factors in Kazakhstan's ability



to have this effect are undoubtedly the fact that it is a member of the United Nations, and that it has been damaged by nuclear tests in the past and banned them in its own country, and its efforts to limit and ban it globally.

Based on all these issues, we will examine the impact of Kazakhstan on the United Nations' policies on the restriction and prohibition of Nuclear Weapons by listing them under four headings. These; (1) **Reputation and expectation on behavior**, (2) **Expertise and knowledge as an important resources in the environmental policy process**, (3) **The importance of national policies as examples of success**, and (4) **Successful coordination of national interest**.

### **Reputation: Kazakhstan as a Forerunner State in Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and Tests Issues**

Caution is required when making causal links between reputation and behavior because they are subjective and interpretive. While we proceed carefully on this issue, we will come to the conclusion that the work done by the United Nations member states due to Kazakhstan's attitude is positively interpreted. In international relations, previous past experiences, historical events, negotiations, previous attitudes and behaviors determine the conditions and future of the environment between the sides. The sides hold talks taking into account their previous attitudes. We will defend the reputation it has earned for the commitments it has made and fulfilled in work on nuclear disarmament and limitation of nuclear testing in Kazakhstan. So much so that Kazakhstan has taken an active role in international negotiations, cooperation and organizations since 1991, when it gained its independence. On August 29, 1991, with a historical decree of the Founding President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev, it was decided to close the Semey (Semipalatinsk) Nuclear Test Site, one of the largest nuclear test sites in the world. Other countries followed, which ended the work of their nuclear test sites, and as a result, the adoption of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) in 1996 paved the way. (Report, 2022) 29 August, which is a historical day, was accepted as the "Day of Combating Nuclear Weapons Testing" by the decision of the United Nations (UN). This year, the world celebrates the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the day in question. Thanks to the Founding President Nursultan Nazarbayev, Kazakhstan has emerged from the status of the world's fourth nuclear weapons arsenal and quickly became one of the leading countries in nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. (Ashimov, 2020) Thanks to all these political and diplomatic activities, it has the reputation of being an "activist and "pioneer" on nuclear disarmament and its limitation.

Many policy makers, heads of international organizations, country leaders, in the negotiations on nuclear disarmament, say that Kazakhstan's international initiatives provide them with a great advantage and assistance in the work done in the United Nations and other organizations. For example, ex-UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, who visited the Semipalatinsk test site in April 2010, called on the world to stop nuclear testing, exemplary for the country's international visibility. In his speech at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Leaders' Summit in 2010, Moon used the following statements: "The President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, stopped the Semipalatinsk tests thanks to his distinguished visionary



leadership. Kazakhstan, which was once a center for nuclear armament, has now set an example to the whole world and the countries in the region as a nuclear-free zone. Kazakhstan's performance shows that reputation and past relations in international relations-studies support the suggestion that it can become important resources for small states and show their effects. (Halper, 2010)

### **The importance expertise and knowledge**

The need for experts on nuclear disarmament comes to the fore and the studies to be carried out on this subject are based on expert opinion. What we commonly refer to as nuclear weapons and power concerns are highly complex and detailed issues that often require input from technical and scientific experts. In this regard, Kazakhstan has been training both diplomats and scientists on nuclear weapons and disarmament for 30 years. It is one of the leading countries in terms of Uranium, which is the basic building block of nuclear power, it also acts cautiously on uranium. With the decision to disarm, Kazakhstan has also cleared the Central Asian region from possible dangers. In this context, with the agreement signed on September 8, 2006, five Central Asian countries created a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone in the region. Kazakhstan's founding President Nazarbayev succeeded in making this issue an effective tool of Kazakhstan's original foreign policy and still maintains its advantageous position today. On August 27, 2015, Kazakhstan and the International Atomic Energy Agency signed an agreement to establish an Enriched Uranium Bank in Kazakhstan to provide fuel supply in this area. The opening of the said organization took place on August 29, 2017 at the Ulba Metallurgy Factory with the participation of Nursultan Nazarbayev. According to the International Atomic Energy Agency, a nuclear fuel bank could only be established in a country that did not have nuclear weapons. Kazakhstan has already built this trust with the work it has carried out since 1991. This proposal envisaged that all countries wishing to benefit from nuclear energy would be able to obtain energy safely and legitimately from a single center. According to this, any state that wants to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes will be able to apply to Kazakhstan for the uranium fuel it needs if it has problems with its other resources. As a matter of fact, Kazakhstan has 12 percent of the world's uranium resources and managed to produce 43 percent of the world's uranium in 2019. The state company Kazatomprom operates in the world's legitimate uranium production area, with operations in six states. (Oxford Analytica, 2017)

Scientific knowledge about nuclear power and weapons, that is, what is required to become a nuclear power, materials to be used, what elements and minerals are required, what are their chemical compositions, what are their dangers and advantages are essential. At the same time, a good knowledge of cost-benefit analysis and determination of financial instruments should be obtained while choosing policy, economic equipment and technology. With these considerations in mind, Kazakhstan has a broader level of national expertise than any other non-nuclear-powered country, and has more extensive experience in the abolition and prevention of nuclear weapons than any other United Nations member state. Similarly, Kazakhstani diplomats play an active role in decision-making processes, especially in institutions such as the United Nations General Assembly and International Atomic Energy. Despite the objections of the member states of the UN Security Council, we see the great role played by Kazakhstan in the success of the



General Assembly to pass a resolution. As can be seen, Kazakhstan's knowledge, experience and expertise on nuclear disarmament and limitation are at a sufficient level both in the context of foreign policy and in the context of trained manpower. In this case, it enables Kazakhstan to act as both a playmaker and a shaper in the resolutions and resolutions to be taken at the United Nations General Assembly. We can conclude that the experience gained from scientific sources, policies, and certain technologies can be an important factor in determining the United Nations agenda. Such knowledge and experience can serve as a source of legitimating influence in UN work or can be used as a supportive-reinforcing element in actual negotiations.

### **National policies as examples of what can be done**

Another way of influencing United Nations policies and resolutions is to try to "upload" national policy to the United Nations level. Up-loading can be described as a way of successfully convincing the United Nations General Assembly, its members, and commissions on the relevant issue that a particular national policy should be accepted and adopted as a standard or a policy applicable in all member states. (Kronsell, 2002)

Although the term "uploading" can be used within the European Union or other institutions and organizations, it is also valid at the United Nations (UN) level and refers to efforts to transfer national policies to the UN level or to be accepted as UN standards or policies. This article is also expressed in terms of influencing the United Nations and its policies. This process involves efforts by a member country or group of countries to support or promote policies and standards proposed for adoption by the UN Secretary-General or other bodies of the UN. National policies of member states can be influential in the preparation of UN policy recommendations, especially on issues of global importance such as the environment, human rights and health. For example, a country's environmental policy or health policy may form the basis for policies of UN agencies such as the UN Environment Program (UNEP) or the World Health Organization (WHO). At the UN level, the "uploading" strategy is used to increase the influence of member countries or non-governmental organizations in UN policy processes and to ensure the adoption of national policies at the global level. This process aims to have national policies accepted as the UN's general policy framework or international standards. For example, Kazakhstan's abandonment of nuclear weapons and its national policies in this direction have affected the United Nations policy and the attitude of the member states. As a case study, in the statement made by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan regarding the decision adopted at the General Assembly in March 2018, it was emphasized that it actively participated in the creation and adoption of the agreement. It was also stated that the main provisions of the agreement meet the principled stance of Kazakhstan, which has come a long way in transforming from the fourth most nuclear-armed country in the world to the leading country in the field of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. (TRT Avaz, 2018)

Conducting various national studies on nuclear disarmament and its delimitation issues can serve as important background information. This type of expertise is not only used to influence real negotiations or help persuade opposing countries, but can also provide important inputs and contributions to the strategy and policies of the United Nations. It



is clear that the strategies proposed in studies on nuclear weapons control and the expertise in institutions produce important factual information, experiences and calculations that can be used successfully both in the United Nations General Assembly and its relevant bodies, and when discussing and planning policies. When countries like Kazakhstan attribute the steps they have taken regarding nuclear disarmament in domestic politics to the United Nations strategies, they get more successful results and gains than other small countries. Most importantly, they can affect United Nations resolutions, strategies and plans, and prevent complications that may occur in the process of translating and implementing United Nations resolutions and directives into their own domestic law and strategies. However, all this "uploading" and plans can also have undesirable disadvantages. "Policy mismatches" can create problems of compliance and acceptance with United Nations measures and strategies. Such mismatches arise because they are incompatibilities between different policy styles and instruments in different member states. National studies focusing on common opinion and adapting to the common attitudes and views of the United Nations and its member states are generally accepted. It is essential to get the support of the international community rather than the Security Council. With the pressure of the international community, countries with nuclear power can thus raise issues such as disarmament or limitation. (Maitre, 2018)

### **Negotiating from an undisputed national interest**

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is the most powerful decision-making body of the United Nations. It is responsible for maintaining security and peace among member states. While all resolutions taken by other organs of the United Nations are advisory, UNSC resolutions are binding on all member states. This bindingness stems from the United Nations Charter, to which the member states are party and signed. It cannot be claimed that every issue that comes to the agenda of the Security Council is easily resolved. The main reason for this is that the permanent members of the Security Council, unlike the General Assembly, have veto voting rights and can use this right when there is a situation contrary to their national interests or if they have a different opinion about the international system. There is no limitation or regulation in which situations the permanent members can use their veto power, in other words, they can cast negative votes; they are free to cast any vote they want in line with their own opinions. The duties of the General Assembly are to make recommendations on disarmament and arms control, to hold talks that will affect peace and security, to make suggestions on all issues, and to make suggestions for the peaceful solution of problems that disrupt good relations between countries. Although it is an advisory decision-making body, it is also a suitable arena for states to develop common attitudes and behaviors. Based on all these, the organ that small countries like Kazakhstan can exert influence on is the General Assembly, the United Nations organ. While the decisions taken are not binding, national interests are still an important consideration in this decision-making space, as votes are discussed and decided on many issues and decisions are taken by absolute majority or with the approval of two-thirds of the number of members present. When negotiating in such a context, it is extremely important to present arguments against the national position in a clear and integrated manner and to convince the other party. When a



member state is seen as having no national interest in the issue, divided or unreconciled, rival parties in the negotiation process can use it as a strategy to undermine that country's proposed arguments and suggest the opposite. (Omarov, 2017)

Theoretically, there should be a collaboration and division of labor between agencies, media, NGOs and government. While actors such as NGO representatives and media organizations take part in influencing the international community, government representatives and diplomats participate in the work of the General Assembly, providing expertise and trying to create a consensus. Scientific actors such as politics, social science and communication form a scientific ground. It seems that experts and government representatives, however technical or superficial, have a common understanding of nuclear weapons control and disarmament in the interests of Kazakhstan. As a supporting power to Kazakhstan, Turkey and Central Asian Turkish states' NGOs and experts-diplomats are also helping. There is also a social consensus in Kazakhstan regarding the control and limitation of nuclear weapons. Agencies, NGOs and government work on the same page. The parties have frequent and informal contacts with each other, exchange ideas and facilitate each other's work. Since Kazakhstan has a relatively smaller state administration than the nuclear power states, the working networks of government and private organizations are close to each other and communication is easier. When a plan against nuclear proliferation is prepared, the opposition and the media react to it very little, and there is a national tendency to act together on this issue. "Kazakhstan's national interests" are at the forefront. It is not always a good thing to have such close relations between experts, NGOs, agencies and government representatives. While beneficial results are obtained when it comes to nuclear proliferation, it can have detrimental effects on corruption, bribery and the transparency of the political process.

### **Concluding remarks**

This article is based on the argument that small states can have an impact on international relations and have the ability to influence the policies of other states. Kazakh policy makers, diplomats, and those working in NGOs have proven themselves in international relations, especially the United Nations, on nuclear disarmament and control of nuclear weapons since Kazakhstan became independent and have been pioneers in this regard. The results obtained from these experiences over thirty years bring us to four important factors. The first of these is the image that Kazakhstan and its policy makers have drawn over the years, because the perception they created and the image they drew on all issues related to nuclear disarmament since the 1990s gave them the ability to exert power and influence. Since gaining its independence and becoming a member of the United Nations, Kazakhstan has both supported the work on nuclear disarmament and presented new proposals and plans in the General Assembly. Secondly, the role of expertise and knowledge in the policy and strategy-making process, which is striking about nuclear disarmament and its inspection, was examined and it was seen that Kazakhstan's expertise and experience in this field from the Soviet period gave it an advantage. Kazakhstan, which was the test site of the Soviets' nuclear weapons, influenced the decisions of the UN General Assembly on the control of nuclear weapons with years of experience and expertise and gained the support of other countries. Activities such as having 29 August accepted as the International Day for Combating



Nuclear Weapons Testing in the UN General Assembly, leading the establishment of the Organization for the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, and clearing the Central Asian geography from nuclear weapons are examples of Kazakhstan's achievements in this regard. Third, national policies and compliance of these policies with the expectations of the international community have been seen as a good example and supportive feature in the decision-making process between UN member states and themselves. Well-developed domestic policy and relevant experience provide important inputs to negotiations at the UN. Fourth, small states enjoyed a better position and persuasive power through smaller governance institutions than nuclear states. A clear, stable and fully unified national position and policy, which is necessary to persuade other states in the negotiation processes in the UN and other institutions, is a persuasive element for countries that are smaller such as Kazakhstan and have close networks compared to large states, because the government of Kazakhstan, agencies, NGOs and the media have a common stance on nuclear disarmament and its control, their position is strengthened against other states and representatives working against them. We can expect that Kazakhstan will continue to be a leading and supportive country and one of the countries that have a say in the field of nuclear disarmament in the future. Some reservations should be made, as it is only an example of nuclear disarmament that has been studied. The subject will gain depth and clearer information with further studies on the effects of small states on international relations. The results we present here can be used as a case study for further research.

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#### **How to cite this note**

Dedeoğlu, Murat (2026). The Impact of Small States on International Problems: The Power of Kazakhstan in the United Nations Decisions. *Janus.net, e-journal of international relations*. VOL. 17, No. 1, May 2026, pp. 685-694. DOI <https://doi.org/10.26619/1647-7251.17.1.05>

