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WHO MOVED? KAZAKHSTAN AND RUSSIA IN UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY VOTES, 1992-2022

Bakytbek Yerkezhan
International Astana English School, Astana, Kazakhstan

Bakytbek Yerkezhan — Grade 10 student, International Astana English School, Astana, Kazakhstan.

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Abstract: Kazakhstan describes its foreign policy as multi-vector. This study uses the roll-call votes of the UN General Assembly from 1992 to 2022 to ask how often Kazakhstan votes the same way as Russia, China, the United States, Turkey and two European Union members, and whether it has moved away from Russia. Excluding resolutions on Ukraine, Kazakhstan voted with Russia in 78.6% of votes in 2005-2013, 63.8% in 2014-2021 and 57.7% in 2022, while agreement with China stayed at 76.6-84.6%. The fall began before 2014: 79.4% in 2011, 73.3% in 2012, 68.3% in 2013. It is concentrated in resolutions on nuclear weapons, where the two countries had long disagreed and where the gap widened in 2012-2013 as Russia voted yes less often; on other topics agreement with Russia changed little until 2014. Kazakhstan's agreement with the Assembly majority rose to about 91%. On the resolutions on Ukraine in the dataset, Kazakhstan voted with Russia on the 6 on human rights in Crimea and abstained on the other 4. The results support the author's expectation that Kazakhstan votes closest to China and has moved away from Russia, but show that the distance appeared before 2014, largely on nuclear disarmament, where Russia's votes changed.

Keywords: United Nations General Assembly, voting, Kazakhstan, Russia, China, multi-vector foreign policy

1. Introduction

Since independence, Kazakhstan has described its foreign policy as multi-vector: keeping good relations with Russia, China, the United States, Europe and the Muslim world at the same time. Words are easy to compare, but votes are harder to fake. In the UN General Assembly every member votes yes, no or abstain on dozens of resolutions each year, and the share of votes in which two countries vote the same way is a simple and widely used measure of how close their positions are, although changes in the agenda over time can affect it [1].

This study asks with which of five partners Kazakhstan votes most often, how this has changed since 1992, and whether a change in agreement with Russia reflects a change in Kazakhstan's votes or in Russia's.

2. Hypothesis

Before seeing any data, the author wrote (10 October 2026): "Before 2022 Kazakhstan's votes most often coincided with China, followed by Russia and Turkey; there will be fewer coincidences with the USA. After 2022, against the background of the war in Ukraine and growing international polarisation, the coincidence of Kazakhstan's and Russia's votes may have decreased, especially on international conflicts. At the same time Kazakhstan keeps its multi-vector foreign

policy: it did not clearly support one side and continued to balance between the great powers" (original in Russian).

3. Data and methods

The data are the UN General Assembly roll-call votes compiled by Voeten and colleagues [1, 2] (Harvard Dataverse, version 32), which cover 2,752 recorded votes from 1992 to 2022 (for 2022, the 77th session); no votes of Kazakhstan or Russia are recorded for 2019. For each pair of countries, agreement is the share of votes in which both cast a vote (yes, abstain or no) and cast the same one; absences are left out. Kazakhstan was compared with Russia, China, the United States, Turkey, Germany and France, and with the majority position of the Assembly in each vote (which includes Kazakhstan's own vote). Resolutions on Ukraine and Crimea were analysed separately. The dataset classifies resolutions by topic, including nuclear weapons, which was used to split the votes. Votes of the emergency special session on Ukraine (2022-2026), which are not in the dataset, were read from the UN Digital Library [3].

4. Results

4.1. With whom Kazakhstan votes

Excluding the resolutions on Ukraine, Kazakhstan voted most often with China after 2004 and with Russia before (Table 1). In 1992-2004 agreement was 74.3% with Russia, 72.0% with Turkey and 69.3% with China; in 2005-2013 84.6% with China and 78.6% with Russia; in 2014-2021 77.9% with China, 64.7% with Turkey and 63.8% with Russia. Agreement with the United States stayed between 22.6% and 26.4%. Agreement with the majority of the Assembly rose from 76.9% to 91.4%.

Table 1. Share of UN General Assembly votes in which Kazakhstan voted the same way as each country or the Assembly majority, %, resolutions on Ukraine excluded [2]

Period	Russia	China	United States	Turkey	Germany	France	GA majority	Votes with Russia
1992-2004	74.3	69.3	26.4	72.0	68.4	59.5	76.9	1003
2005-2013	78.6	84.6	23.0	74.3	65.8	55.0	90.2	799
2014-2021	63.8	77.9	22.6	64.7	58.2	50.5	91.4	641
2022	57.7	76.6	25.6	58.7	47.4	47.4	85.9	78

4.2. When the distance from Russia appeared

Agreement with Russia did not fall first in 2014 or 2022. It was 77.9% in 2010 and 79.4% in 2011, then 73.3% in 2012 and 68.3% in 2013, while agreement with China stayed between 83.0% and 87.2%. The dip is modest and the yearly samples are small (60 votes in 2013); agreement had also been low in 2008 (75.8%). The fall comes from resolutions on nuclear weapons, where the two countries disagreed long before (76 different votes in 1992-2004): Kazakhstan voted with Russia in 60.6% of votes in 2005-2010, 44.2% in 2011-2013 and 21.2% in 2014-2021, while on all other topics agreement was 84.8%, 82.6% and 74.9%. Of the 63 votes in 2011-2013 in which the two countries voted differently, Kazakhstan voted with the Assembly majority in 57, and 29 were on nuclear weapons. On nuclear resolutions Kazakhstan's share of yes votes rose from 73% in 2008 to 100% in 2010 and stayed near that level, while Russia's fell from 63.2% in 2011 to 16.7% in 2013 (Table 2). Part of this change comes from new nuclear resolutions introduced in these years, so the yearly shares compare partly different texts.

Table 2. Votes on nuclear-weapons resolutions and overall agreement with Russia, 2008-2015 [2]

Year	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Kazakhst	73	79	100	100	91	100	100	100

an, yes on nuclear resolutions, %								
Russia, yes on nuclear resolutions, %	38	58	62	63	38	17	21	21
Agreement with Russia, all topics, %	76	82	78	79	73	68	68	62

4.3. Resolutions on Ukraine

The dataset contains 10 votes on Ukraine and Crimea in which Kazakhstan voted, from 2014 to 2022. On the 6 resolutions on human rights in Crimea, Kazakhstan and Russia both voted no. On the resolution on the territorial integrity of Ukraine (2014) and on the resolutions on the militarization of Crimea, Kazakhstan abstained while Russia voted no. In the emergency special session on Ukraine, from March 2022 to February 2026, Kazakhstan abstained on nine of the ten resolutions and voted against one, the suspension of Russia from the Human Rights Council in April 2022 [3].

5. Discussion

The first part of the author's hypothesis is supported: since 2005 Kazakhstan has voted most often with China, followed by Russia and Turkey, and least often with the United States. Before 2005, however, Russia was its closest partner. The second part is supported only in part: agreement with Russia did fall, and on most resolutions about the war in Ukraine Kazakhstan abstained rather than voting with Russia, which fits her idea of balancing; but the fall started earlier than she expected, in 2012-2013, and the 2022 level is similar to that of 2015-2017, so no separate fall after 2022 is visible in one year of data. Her expectation that the change would be strongest on international conflicts could not be tested, because the dataset has no such topic. In 2012-2013 the change was largest on nuclear disarmament, where Kazakhstan voted yes consistently while Russia voted yes less often, and Kazakhstan moved closer to the Assembly majority.

When she saw that the fall began before 2014, the author explained (23 October 2026) that "in 2012-2013 Kazakhstan began to develop relations more actively not only with Russia but also with other countries, so it began to keep more to its own position", connected with the strengthening of its multi-vector policy and the wish to keep its independence in foreign-policy decisions (original in Russian). The votes partly fit this: Kazakhstan's agreement with the Assembly majority rose to over 90%. But most of the votes where the two countries differed in 2011-2013 were on nuclear issues, where Russia's votes changed more than Kazakhstan's. After 2014 agreement on other topics also fell, which is closer to her earlier suggestion (17 October 2026) that after Crimea Kazakhstan began to vote more on its own interests.

Limitations. Agreement counts all votes equally, although some votes matter far more than others. The topic codes of the dataset are broad. Kazakhstan's votes for 2019 are missing, and the dataset ends in 2022, so only the emergency-session votes on Ukraine cover the later years.

6. Conclusion

In the UN General Assembly Kazakhstan has voted closest to China since 2005 and has moved away from Russia, from about four in five shared votes to about three in five. The distance first appeared in 2012-2013, largely on nuclear disarmament, where Russia voted yes less often while Kazakhstan kept voting with the Assembly majority. On Ukraine it voted with Russia against the resolutions on human rights in Crimea but abstained on the others, including almost all votes of the emergency session after 2022.

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Data availability

The voting data are public [2, 3]. The analysis script and the yearly tables are available from the author or her mentoring team on request.

Author contributions and use of AI tools

The author chose the research question from three proposed by her mentor, proposed the hypothesis quoted in Section 2 before any data were analysed, and proposed the explanations discussed in Section 5. The data were analysed and the text was drafted by her mentor with the help of a generative AI assistant (Claude, Anthropic). Every number was computed by the analysis script from the voting data.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest. No funding was received for this study.

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