

Diplomatic and Geopolitical Aspects of U.S. Strategy in Central Asia: The Case of Kazakhstan

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper was to comprehensively examine the diplomatic and geopolitical aspects of U.S. policy towards Kazakhstan in order to identify the key factors determining the effectiveness of U.S. strategy in Central Asia. The results of the study revealed three key phases in U.S. policy towards Kazakhstan: the nuclear disarmament period (1991–2001), the phase of anti-terrorist cooperation (2001–2014), and the current phase of containing the influence of Russia and China (2014–2024). It is found that energy policy remains the most successful area of American strategy in Kazakhstan, while in the sphere of democracy promotion and military-political cooperation, the results are limited. It is revealed that the C5 + 1 format, initiated by the U.S. in 2015, has become a key tool for strengthening American influence in the region, allowing Washington to coordinate its policies with Central Asian countries without the involvement of Russia and China. The study found that the effectiveness of the U.S. strategy varies depending on the specific area: the U.S. has been most successful in the energy sector, with U.S. investment in Kazakhstan's economy exceeding \$65 billion and trade between the countries reaching a record \$4.1 billion in 2023. It was found that Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy, aimed at maintaining a balance between the interests of the United States, Russia and China, creates additional challenges for the implementation of the U.S. strategy, including support for projects to diversify energy export routes as a counterbalance to Russian and Chinese initiatives.

Keywords

foreign policy, regional security, energy cooperation, nuclear disarmament, anti-terrorist cooperation

Introduction

Central Asia, being at the intersection of geopolitical interests of the world powers, is becoming increasingly relevant in the modern system of international relations. Kazakhstan, the largest state in Central Asia with significant natural resources and a strategic geographical location, occupies a special place in this region. In the context of global competition for influence in the region, U.S. policy towards Kazakhstan is an important subject of study for understanding broader geopolitical processes. The study of this topic is particularly relevant in light of the changing balance of power in the region, where China and other regional powers are playing an increasing role alongside Russia's traditional influence. U.S. policy towards Kazakhstan reflects broader trends in U.S. strategy in Central

Asia and allows us to assess the effectiveness of Washington's diplomatic tools and geopolitical approaches.

In contemporary academic literature, there is a growing interest in geopolitical processes in Central Asia and the role of the United States in the region. Geopolitical dynamics in Central Asia is becoming the subject of close attention of researchers. In this context, the work of [Hiernan \(2024\)](#) is a comprehensive examination of geopolitical processes in the

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region. The author examines the interaction of various actors and their influence on the formation of the regional security architecture. In parallel, the study by [Tolipov \(2015\)](#) focuses on a specific aspect of the American strategy in Central Asia – the C5 + 1 initiative. This format of cooperation between the U.S. and the five Central Asian states is analysed in terms of its effectiveness and development prospects.

Of particular interest is the study of the influence of other global players on the geopolitical situation in the region. In this context, the work of [De Jesus and Duarte \(2022\)](#) in which the authors explore the geopolitical aspects of Sino-Russian regionalism in Central Asia using Kazakhstan as an example, is also noteworthy. This study provides a better understanding of the complex dynamics of interactions between major powers in the region and their impact on the policies of individual states. The concept of the ‘New Great Game’ in Central Asia was developed in the work of [Fatima and Zafar \(2014\)](#). The authors analyse the interests and strategies of key players in the region, which allows for a deeper understanding of the context in which U.S. policy towards Kazakhstan is formed. At the same time, the study by [Vasa \(2020\)](#) draws attention to the role of the European Union in Central Asia, providing an opportunity for a comparative analysis of the approaches of different Western actors to the region.

Geopolitical aspects of energy policy in Central Asia are discussed in the work by [Behboudi Nejad \(2021\)](#). The author focuses on Kazakhstan and analyses the implications of energy geopolitics for relations with China. This work provides a better understanding of the economic factors influencing the geopolitical situation in the region. The concept of balancing in Central Asia is developed in the study of [Onel \(2022\)](#). The author analyses the strategies of small and medium-sized states in the region in the context of competition between great powers. This work is particularly relevant for understanding Kazakhstan’s position in relations with the United States and other global players.

A significant contribution to the understanding of Kazakhstan’s foreign policy strategy was made by [Vanderhill et al. \(2020\)](#). Their study of the concept of multi-directionality in Kazakhstan’s foreign policy allows us to better understand the context in which relations between Kazakhstan and the United States are formed. The work of [Mendis and Uralbayev \(2021\)](#) provides a valuable perspective on the Biden administration’s new foreign policy in Central Asia. This study is particularly valuable for understanding current trends in U.S. strategy in the region and its potential impact on relations with Kazakhstan.

Despite the considerable amount of research on various aspects of geopolitics and diplomacy in Central Asia, a number of unresolved problems remain. In particular, the mechanisms for implementing American strategy in Kazakhstan at the practical level, as well as the influence of domestic political factors on the formation of U.S. foreign policy in the region, have not been sufficiently studied. In addition, there is a need for a more in-depth study of the

relationship between the economic, political and security aspects of U.S. strategy in Central Asia. This study aims to fill these gaps and offer a comprehensive analysis of the diplomatic and geopolitical aspects of U.S. strategy in Central Asia, using Kazakhstan as an example.

The aim of this study was to identify and analyse the key factors determining the effectiveness of the diplomatic and geopolitical aspects of the U.S. strategy towards Kazakhstan in the context of the overall policy in Central Asia. In order to achieve the set goal, the following tasks were solved:

- (1) Analysing the main stages in the evolution of U.S. policy towards Kazakhstan in the context of the overall strategy in Central Asia.
- (2) Examining key instruments of U.S. diplomatic influence in Kazakhstan and assessing their effectiveness.
- (3) Identifying U.S. geopolitical interests in Kazakhstan and determining their place in the overall U.S. strategy in Central Asia.

The original contribution of this study is a comprehensive understanding of the U.S. strategy in Central Asia. The analysis focuses on the evolution and multifaceted nature of relations with the Republic of Kazakhstan. Unlike many previous studies that focus mainly on the early 1990s or events after 2001, this paper covers the full 30 years of U.S. foreign policy dynamics. The author demonstrates the shift in emphasis from nuclear disarmament to economic cooperation and countering the influence of Russia and China. The author also shows support for Kazakhstan’s multi-vector foreign policy.

Materials and Methods

The methodological basis of the study was grounded in the principles of historicism, objectivity and systematicity. This ensured a comprehensive approach to analysing the U.S. strategy in Central Asia, using Kazakhstan as a case study, with attention to the dynamics of its development and its interrelation with the broader geopolitical context. The historical method is used to analyse the evolution of U.S. policy towards Kazakhstan. This method was used to trace the main stages in the development of U.S.-Kazakhstan relations from 1991 to 2024, and to identify changes in priorities and tools for the implementation of the U.S. strategy. Particular attention is paid to the analysis of key documents that determined the directions of cooperation at different stages, such as the [Lisbon Protocol \(1992\)](#), the [Agreement on trade relations between the United States of America and the Republic of Kazakhstan \(1992\)](#) and [Memorandum of understanding \(2007\)](#).

Structural and functional analysis is used to identify key instruments of U.S. diplomatic influence in Kazakhstan. Such mechanisms as the Nunn-Lugar programme, the C5 +

1 format, economic cooperation and the promotion of democratic reforms are considered. Official documents and statements are analysed, including the [United States strategy for Central Asia 2019–2025: Strengthening sovereignty and economic prosperity \(2020\)](#) and the U.S. State Department's annual reports on human rights in Kazakhstan ([Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2019, 2023](#)). In order to assess the effectiveness of the U.S. policy in various spheres, the stated goals and achieved results were compared. Statistical data on trade turnover and investments ([Trade turnover between..., 2024](#)), information on the implementation of joint projects in the energy sector ([Kazakhstan 2022 – Energy sector review, 2022](#)) and security sphere were used.

U.S. geopolitical interests in Kazakhstan are analysed using a systematic approach. Energy policy, countering the influence of Russia and China, regional security issues and promotion of democratic reforms are considered. Materials of official speeches and statements of American and Kazakhstani politicians were used, including the speech of the President of Kazakhstan at the 77th session of the United Nations General Assembly ([President of Kazakhstan..., 2022](#)). Data on hydrocarbon reserves and production, and information on major oil and gas projects with the participation of American companies were used to analyse the U.S. energy policy in Kazakhstan. Materials on the development of alternative export routes for Kazakh energy resources, in particular, the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline project, were reviewed. The study also used materials of international organizations, in particular, reports of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) on the implementation of programmes in Kazakhstan ([USAID competitiveness, trade..., 2020](#); [Power the future..., 2022](#)).

The complex application of the above methods and materials allowed conducting a comprehensive study of diplomatic and geopolitical aspects of the U.S. strategy in Central Asia on the example of Kazakhstan, determining the main trends and problems in the implementation of American policy in the region.

Results

Evolution of U.S. Policy Towards Kazakhstan

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991, the United States quickly established diplomatic relations with the newly sovereign Republic of Kazakhstan. This period was characterized by the active development of bilateral ties based on several key priorities of American foreign policy in the region. Firstly, the U.S. was extremely interested in the issues of Kazakhstan's nuclear disarmament. The main priorities of American diplomacy during this period were to promote Kazakhstan's denuclearization and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons ([Shenin &](#)

[Raimzhanova, 2021](#)). After the collapse of the USSR, Kazakhstan inherited the fourth-largest nuclear arsenal in the world, which was a serious concern for Washington. As part of the implementation of this priority, the [Lisbon Protocol \(1992\)](#) to the START I Treaty was signed on 23 May 1992, under which Kazakhstan committed itself to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) as a non-nuclear-weapon State. This agreement was a crucial step towards Kazakhstan's nuclear disarmament.

In the early 1990s, the U.S. actively promoted the ideas of market reforms and democratization in Kazakhstan, seeing it as a potential model of liberal-democratic transformation for the entire Central Asian region. This approach allowed the U.S. to realize its own economic, political and geopolitical interests in this part of the post-Soviet space ([Roberts, 2011](#)). An important milestone in the development of bilateral relations was the documents signed in 1992, which laid the foundation for economic cooperation between the two countries. Of particular importance were the [Agreement on trade relations between the United States of America and the Republic of Kazakhstan \(1992\)](#) and [Investment treaty with the Republic of Kazakhstan \(1992\)](#). These documents not only created a legal basis for the development of trade and economic relations, but also demonstrated the seriousness of the United States' intentions regarding a long-term partnership with Kazakhstan.

The Nunn–Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Programme was a key mechanism for implementing U.S. policy towards Kazakhstan in the 1990s. This initiative was aimed at providing comprehensive assistance in dismantling the nuclear arsenal and related infrastructure that Kazakhstan inherited from the USSR. The scale of the task was truly impressive: the Ust–Kamenogorsk plant contained significant amounts of nuclear materials of varying degrees of enrichment, some 187 kg of highly enriched (up to 98%) uranium metal, 25 kg of uranium oxide, 170 kg of uranium-beryllium alloy fuel rods, and 156 kg of miscellaneous nuclear waste ([Shenin & Raimzhanova, 2021](#)). The successful elimination of these hazardous materials was one of the most significant and concrete results of U.S.–Kazakh cooperation in nuclear non-proliferation, demonstrating the effectiveness of joint efforts in addressing global security challenges. In December 1993, Kazakhstan ratified the NPT, and in 1994 the practical implementation of the nuclear disarmament programme began. By 1995, all nuclear warheads had been removed from Kazakhstan to Russia ([Budjeryn, 2022](#)). This was the biggest achievement of American diplomacy in the region in the 1990s.

In parallel with nuclear disarmament, the United States paid great attention to the development of economic cooperation with Kazakhstan. American companies, primarily oil companies, actively invested in the country's economy. A key event was the signing in 1993 of the Agreement between Kazakhstan and the American company Chevron

on the development of the Tengiz oil field (Javaid et al., 2021). At the same time, by the mid-1990s, certain contradictions had emerged in U.S.–Kazakh relations. The U.S. was concerned about the strengthening of authoritarian tendencies in Kazakhstan's political system. The U.S. was particularly critical of the 1995 referendum on extending President Nazarbayev's powers until 2000 (Nazarbayev and five U.S. presidents, 2018). The U.S. feared that its most critical partner in Central Asia would turn from a fledgling democracy into an authoritarian country (Roberts, 2011).

Despite the disagreements that arose, the United States continued to view Kazakhstan as a key strategic partner in the Central Asian region. An important stage in the formation of a new concept of U.S. policy in this part of the world was the speech of U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Talbott (1997). In his speech, delivered at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies, S. Talbott presented an updated vision of U.S. approaches to engagement with the countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus. This policy statement, which later became known informally as the Talbott Doctrine, outlined the key priorities and principles of U.S. strategy in the region for the coming years. S. Talbott's speech was evidence that the U.S. does not intend to diminish its attention to Central Asia and Kazakhstan in particular, despite the emerging difficulties in bilateral relations.

According to this approach, the U.S. was to promote democratization and economic reform in Central Asian countries in order to ensure stability in the region and access to its energy resources. In his presentation, Talbott (1997) emphasized: 'Our goal is to help the countries of the region move towards political and economic freedom and national and international reconciliation. As long as they move in that direction, we will be with them'. He also noted the importance of resolving regional conflicts and countering the resurgence of the 'Great Game' – the geopolitical rivalry of the great powers in the region. In general, the early post-Soviet period was characterized by the active development of U.S.–Kazakh relations. The U.S. managed to achieve its key goals – nuclear disarmament of Kazakhstan and ensuring access of American companies to its energy resources. At the same time, by the end of the 1990s, certain contradictions emerged due to differences in the understanding of Kazakhstan's political development paths.

The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 led to a radical revision of U.S. foreign policy, which could not but affect U.S.–Kazakhstan relations. Central Asia has gained strategic importance for the U.S. in the context of the initial operation in Afghanistan (Sheikh, 2018, 2025). The U.S. also intensified its military assistance programmes to Kazakhstan. Under the Foreign Military Financing (FMF) programme, Kazakhstan received funds to modernize its armed forces and strengthen border security. The U.S. sought to strengthen Kazakhstan's defence capabilities and reduce its security dependence on Russia (Roberts, 2011). Energy cooperation remained an important aspect of bilateral relations during this period. The

U.S. supported projects to diversify Kazakhstan's energy export routes, in particular the construction of the BTC oil pipeline (Labardini, 2021; Pata, 2025). In 2006, Kazakhstan joined this project, which was a crucial step in strengthening its energy independence. At the same time, certain contradictions remained in U.S.–Kazakh relations. The U.S. continued to criticize the situation with human rights and democratic freedoms in Kazakhstan. The U.S. was particularly concerned about restrictions on the activities of the opposition and independent media (mass media) (Reyaz, 2020).

In the early 2000s, Kazakhstan's foreign policy course acquired a pronounced multi-vector character. Kazakhstan sought to balance its relations with the key global players – the United States, Russia, and China. This period was marked by a gradual shift in emphasis towards strengthening ties with its closest neighbours. Kazakhstan intensified cooperation with Russia and China in the energy sector, participating in the construction of new pipelines. In addition, the country's accession to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in 2001 was a significant step, signalling Kazakhstan's desire to play a more active role in regional integration processes (Shenin & Raimzhanova, 2021). However, despite this trend, Kazakhstan continued to develop relations with the U.S. An important milestone in bilateral cooperation was the signing of a trilateral Memorandum of Understanding between the governments of the U.S., Switzerland, and Kazakhstan on 2 May 2007 in Washington (Memorandum of understanding, 2007). This document confirmed the United States' interest in continuing its strategic partnership with Kazakhstan. It also demonstrated a willingness to implement joint projects involving third countries, reflecting the growing complexity and multifaceted nature of U.S.–Kazakhstan relations. This memorandum identified key programmes of cooperation: Programme for Public Financial Management Review (PFMR) and Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) programme.

This document was an essential step in strengthening cooperation between the United States and Kazakhstan, as well as in promoting transparency and social development in the country. Since 2014, new trends have emerged in U.S.–Kazakhstan relations due to both changes in the global geopolitical situation and internal processes in both countries. An important factor was the 2014 Ukrainian crisis and the subsequent deterioration of relations between Russia and the West. The U.S. began to focus more on strengthening its position in Central Asia in an effort to limit Russia's influence in the region. In this context, in 2015, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry toured Central Asia and visited Kazakhstan. This visit resulted in the creation of a new co-operation format, the C5 + 1, which brings together the five Central Asian countries and the United States. The C5 + 1 format allows the U.S. to strengthen its influence in the region and counter the growing influence of Russia and China (Ziegler, 2021).

Another key focus of U.S. policy during this period was to counter China's growing influence in the region. In 2019, a new U.S. strategy for Central Asia was adopted, which emphasized economic cooperation and support for the sovereignty and independence of the countries in the region (United States strategy..., 2020). As part of this strategy, the U.S. has intensified economic cooperation with Kazakhstan. The USAID competitiveness, trade, and job creation project brief (2020) programme was launched to support small and medium-sized businesses in Kazakhstan. U.S. investment in Kazakhstan's economy reached \$45 billion by 2020 (More than \$ 45 billion..., 2019). At the same time, the U.S. continued to focus on democratization and human rights protection in Kazakhstan. In 2019, the U.S. State Department expressed concern about restrictions on freedom of assembly and harassment of activists in Kazakhstan (Country reports on human..., 2019). These issues were regularly raised during bilateral negotiations.

The visit of Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev to the United States in September 2019 was a landmark event in bilateral relations. The visit was particularly significant due to the fact that it took place shortly after Tokayev took office, which emphasized the continuity of Kazakhstan's foreign policy course. The programme of the visit was intense and began with a meeting with leading American politicians and experts, organized with the support of the authoritative think tank Atlantic Council. This platform provided Tokayev with an opportunity to detail his vision of the prospects for Kazakh-American cooperation, as well as to outline the key areas of Kazakhstan's foreign policy and its economic potential. Tokayev outlined Kazakhstan's readiness to further expand cooperation with the United States in various spheres (President of Kazakhstan..., 2019). In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic made adjustments to U.S.–Kazakhstan relations. The U.S. provided significant humanitarian assistance to Kazakhstan to combat the pandemic. According to the U.S. Department of State, total assistance totalled more than \$6.2 million (U.S. Assistance to Kazakhstan..., 2020). This support included medical equipment, personal protective equipment, and technical assistance in the development of the health care system. Economic cooperation remained one of the priority areas of bilateral relations (An et al., 2024; Iurchenko et al., 2024). In 2023, trade turnover between Kazakhstan and the United States reached a record \$4.1 billion, demonstrating a 30% increase over the previous year (Trade turnover between..., 2024). This indicates a significant strengthening of trade ties between the two countries. During his speech, Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev emphasized the importance of economic cooperation with the United States (Nazarbayev and five U.S...., 2018). He noted that the United States is a leader among foreign investors in Kazakhstan's economy, with total direct investment exceeding an impressive \$65 billion. Tokayev also drew attention to the wide presence of American business in the country, pointing out that more than

600 companies from the United States are successfully operating in Kazakhstan.

Over the three decades of Kazakhstan's independence, bilateral relations with the United States have gradually transformed into a comprehensive strategic partnership encompassing multiple spheres (Ivanchenkov et al., 2024; Storozhenko & Petkun, 2021). In contrast to previous studies that primarily emphasize security cooperation or energy interests, this article draws attention to the evolving emphasis on economic modernization as a shared priority. Trade and investment, along with collaboration in the areas of democratic governance and human rights, have been identified as key pillars of the partnership. In his public statements, President Tokayev underscored Kazakhstan's commitment to enhancing its investment climate, liberalizing the economy, and stimulating industrial growth elements often underrepresented in earlier analyses. These priorities reflect Kazakhstan's strategic intent to deepen cooperation with the United States as part of its broader modernization agenda (Trade turnover between..., 2024). Furthermore, while prior research has acknowledged U.S. geopolitical interests in countering Russia and China, this study places particular emphasis on recent developments such as the Biden administration's renewed engagement in Central Asia. Specifically, the United States' support for Kazakhstan's diversification of hydrocarbon export routes especially through the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR), or "Middle Corridor" illustrates a shift toward more infrastructure-oriented and connectivity-based strategic tools (Kenderdine & Bucsky, 2021). This multifaceted approach marks a departure from earlier phases of U.S. policy, and signals a recalibrated engagement aligned with both geopolitical interests and Kazakhstan's domestic economic agenda.

For the U.S., the TITR is not only of economic interest, but also of geopolitical interest. The U.S. sees this route as a strategic alternative to the transport initiatives promoted by Russia and China in the region. Supporting the Middle Corridor allows the U.S. to strengthen its influence in Central Asia while helping to reduce the dependence of the region's countries on traditional transport routes controlled by Moscow and Beijing. The development of the TITR is also consistent with long-term U.S. goals of ensuring Europe's energy security and diversifying energy supplies to world markets. Thus, support for this project reflects the U.S. comprehensive approach to realizing its geopolitical and economic interests in Central Asia and the Caspian region. In the area of democratization and human rights, the U.S. continued to exert pressure on the Kazakh authorities. The U.S. State Department's annual human rights report for 2023 noted problems with freedom of speech, assembly, and religion in Kazakhstan (Country reports on human..., 2023). However, the U.S. has to balance promoting democratic values with maintaining a strategic partnership with Kazakhstan.

At the present stage, U.S.–Kazakhstan relations are developing against the backdrop of intensified geopolitical competition in Central Asia (Zhukorska, 2024). The United

States, Russia, and China are actively struggling to strengthen their influence in the region, which significantly affects Kazakhstan's foreign policy course. Washington is taking active steps to counter integration projects promoted by Moscow and Beijing, in particular the Russian initiative of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and the Chinese megaproject 'One Belt, One Road'. In this complex geopolitical environment, Kazakhstan demonstrates its commitment to the principles of a multi-vector foreign policy. Kazakhstan seeks to maintain a balance in its relations with key global players, maximizing the benefits of cooperation with each of them (Vojtyk & Mazii, 2022). This strategy allows Kazakhstan not only to diversify its economic and political ties but also to strengthen its position as a critical regional actor.

Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy is manifested in the country's participation in various international formats and initiatives, including both projects supported by the United States and integration associations initiated by Russia and China. This allows Kazakhstan to retain a certain degree of autonomy in making foreign policy decisions and contributes to strengthening its role as a 'bridge' between various centres of power in Eurasia. In 2022, Kazakhstan took a neutral position on the Russian–Ukrainian conflict, which was favourably received in Washington. The U.S. welcomed Kazakhstan's refusal to recognize the independence of the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics, as well as its decision not to violate international sanctions against Russia (Media: Kazakhstan refused..., 2022). In September 2022, Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev visited the United States to participate in the 77th session of the UN General Assembly. In his speech from the UN rostrum, Tokayev emphasized the importance of multi-lateral cooperation and called for strengthening the role of the UN in addressing global challenges. He also highlighted Kazakhstan's growing role as an important transit corridor between Asia and Europe, which could be of interest to the U.S. in the context of its strategy in Central Asia. Tokayev reiterated Kazakhstan's willingness to cooperate with all stakeholders, including the U.S., 'in a spirit of inclusiveness, multilateralism, and goodwill' (President of Kazakhstan..., 2022). This statement reflects

Kazakhstan's desire to balance between major geopolitical players while maintaining its independent foreign policy.

Counterterrorism and extremism cooperation, previously a crucial aspect of bilateral relations, has changed. The joint counterterrorism exercise Steppe Eagle between the U.S. and Kazakhstan, held annually from 2003 to 2019, has been suspended. According to Kazakhstan's Defence Ministry, the Steppe Eagle exercise was not scheduled to take place in 2022 and 2023. Officially, the reasons for the cancellation of the exercises were not explained, although some experts attribute it to changes in the geopolitical situation and possible Russian influence on Kazakhstan's military cooperation policy ('Steppe Eagle' will not..., 2023). Despite the generally positive dynamics of relations, certain problematic aspects remained. The U.S. continued to express concern about restrictions on political freedoms in Kazakhstan, particularly the persecution of opposition activists and journalists. These issues were regularly raised during bilateral human rights consultations. Kazakhstan, in turn, sought to maintain a balance in its relations with key geopolitical players. As noted by L. De Jesus and P.A.B. Duarte (2022), 'the U.S. has to compete with Russian-Chinese regionalism in Central Asia, which limits the effectiveness of U.S. strategy in the region'.

In general, the current stage of U.S.–Kazakhstan relations is characterized by a desire to deepen strategic partnership while retaining certain disagreements on democratization and human rights issues. The U.S. continues to view Kazakhstan as a key partner in Central Asia, seeking to strengthen its position in the region in the face of growing competition with Russia and China. An analysis of the evolution of the U.S. policy towards Kazakhstan allows us to identify several key stages, each of which is characterized by its own priorities and tools for implementing the U.S. strategy. For a clearer presentation of changes in the U.S. approach to cooperation with Kazakhstan, let us consider a comparative characterization of the main periods of bilateral relations (Table 1).

Table 1 reflects the dynamics of changes in U.S. priorities and approaches to building relations with Kazakhstan over the course of three decades. It is evident that the U.S. strategy has evolved from an initial focus on nuclear disarmament to a more comprehensive approach that takes into

Table 1. Comparative Characterization of the Stages of U.S. Policy Towards Kazakhstan

Characterization	1991–2001	2001–2014	2014–2024
Key focus	Nuclear disarmament	Counter-terrorism cooperation	Containment of Russia and China
Basic tools	Nunn–Lugar programme	Military assistance, transit to Afghanistan	C5 + 1 format, economic cooperation
Contact intensity	High	Medium	Average with an upward trend
The role of energy	Growing	Stably high	High with a focus on diversification
Democratization	Priority	Secondary	Renewed focus
Key challenges	Authoritarian tendencies	Competition with Russia	Kazakhstan's multi-vectorism

Source: created by the author.

account geopolitical competition in the region. Despite the change in emphasis, aspects such as energy cooperation and the promotion of democratic values have remained constant elements of U.S. policy, although their prioritization has varied depending on the international context and the domestic situation in Kazakhstan.

Thus, the historical evolution of U.S. policy toward Kazakhstan demonstrates a dynamic and adaptive strategy shaped by global geopolitical shifts, regional power competition, and internal transformations in Kazakhstan itself. Although the priorities and instruments of cooperation have changed over the decades—from nuclear disarmament to counterterrorism and, more recently, to balancing Russian and Chinese influence—some structural elements have remained unchanged. Among them, energy cooperation stands out as a sustainable and strategically important dimension of bilateral relations. Against this backdrop, it is important to provide a focused analysis of the geopolitical interests that underlie the United States' engagement with Kazakhstan. Particular attention should be paid to the role of Kazakhstan's vast energy resources in shaping U.S. foreign policy goals, as well as the broader mechanisms by which Washington seeks to assert its influence in the region.

U.S. Geopolitical Interests in Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan, with its significant hydrocarbon reserves, is a key player in the U.S. energy strategy in Central Asia. According to [Kazakhstan 2022 – Energy Sector Review \(2022\)](#), Kazakhstan has proven oil reserves of 30 billion barrels, making it the 12th largest oil producer in the world. Natural gas reserves are estimated at 2.7 trillion m³. The U.S. energy policy in Kazakhstan is a comprehensive strategy aimed at achieving three interrelated goals. Firstly, Washington seeks to provide American companies with access to Kazakhstan's rich energy resources, which allows them not only to gain economic benefits but also to strengthen their geopolitical influence in the region. In parallel, the U.S. actively supports the diversification of Kazakhstan's energy export routes, which is designed to increase the energy security of both Kazakhstan and the consuming countries. These efforts are inextricably linked to the broader geopolitical objective of reducing Kazakhstan's dependence on Russia in the energy sector. In the long term, this should contribute to strengthening Kazakhstan's sovereignty and weakening Russian influence in Central Asia. U.S. energy policy in Kazakhstan is thus an integral part of a broader strategy to strengthen the U.S. presence in the region and forge a new balance of power in Central Asia.

Since gaining independence, Kazakhstan has become a key focal point for U.S. energy diplomacy in Central Asia ([Işık et al., 2025](#); [Niyazbekova et al., 2021](#)). While earlier studies have broadly noted the entry of American oil companies into the Kazakhstani market, this article

contextualizes these developments within a long-term strategic framework that links investment to geopolitical positioning. A pivotal milestone was the 1993 agreement between the government of Kazakhstan and Chevron for the development of the Tengiz oil field widely recognized as the largest foreign investment in the post-Soviet space at the time ([Javaid et al., 2021](#)). Although the discovery of the Kashagan field in 2001 reinforced Kazakhstan's role in global energy markets, this study draws attention to the operational setbacks and environmental complications that have slowed progress and tempered early expectations ([Kalehsar, 2021](#); [Additional Inflow of Kazakhstan, 2013](#)). Unlike much of the existing literature, which focuses primarily on resource extraction, this analysis highlights the strategic significance of export route diversification as a consistent U.S. objective. The U.S. has actively promoted alternatives to Russian-controlled routes, most notably through its support for the Baku Tbilisi Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline, which offers a direct channel for Caspian oil to reach global markets without passing through Russian territory ([Labardini, 2021](#)). Kazakhstan's formal participation in the BTC project in 2006 was heralded in Washington as a geopolitical win. However, this study underscores that, despite rhetorical commitment and U.S. encouragement, the actual volume of Kazakh oil transported via BTC remains limited. As of 2023, the Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC) route through Russia still dominates Kazakhstan's oil exports ([Akhmedov, 2023](#)), indicating structural constraints on the realization of U.S. strategic ambitions in the region.

In recent years (2022–2024), the U.S. has also shown interest in green energy development in Kazakhstan. In 2022, USAID launched the Power the Future programme to support renewable energy development in Central Asia, including Kazakhstan ([Power the future..., 2022](#)). One of the key geopolitical interests of the United States in Kazakhstan is to contain the growing influence of Russia and China. This task became particularly urgent after the 2014 Ukrainian crisis and the subsequent deterioration of relations between Russia and the West. The U.S. strategy to counter Russian and Chinese influence in Kazakhstan is implemented through a comprehensive approach that combines three key areas. Washington actively supports Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy, seeking to preserve its independence in making geopolitical decisions ([Kassymzhanova et al., 2022](#); [Klynnina & Isaikina, 2023](#)). This is closely linked to the second direction – the development of alternative transport and energy routes, which allows Kazakhstan to diversify its economic ties and reduce dependence on traditional partners. Strengthening military and political cooperation serves as a tool to strengthen the strategic partnership between the United States and Kazakhstan, while at the same time limiting the military capabilities of Russia and China ([Ketners, 2025](#); [Zaiets et al., 2024](#)). All these areas mutually reinforce each other, forming a coherent policy aimed at preserving and

strengthening U.S. influence in the region, while giving Kazakhstan more room for manoeuvre in the international arena (Othmeni, 2024).

While previous studies have acknowledged U.S. support for Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy as a means of limiting Russian and Chinese influence, this article offers a more nuanced interpretation by framing such support as an institutionalized and strategic element of long-term American engagement in the region. The C5 + 1 cooperation format, launched in 2015, is not merely referenced as a diplomatic initiative, but is analysed here as a structured platform that enables the U.S. to exert influence across Central Asia in the absence of Russia and China. In contrast to earlier literature that treats C5 + 1 as symbolic, this article highlights its operational significance in sustaining bilateral dialogue and multilateral coordination. In the politico-military domain, the U.S. has sought to deepen ties with Kazakhstan through the NATO Partnership for Peace programme (Bağbaşloğlu, 2024). This cooperation remains constrained by Kazakhstan's membership in the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) a limitation often overlooked or underdeveloped in prior analyses. A relevant element of U.S. policy is opposition to China's One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative. In 2019, the U.S. launched the Blue Dot Network initiative, aimed at creating an alternative to the OBOR. Kazakhstan, which occupies a key geographical position along the route of the OBOR, is seen by the U.S. as an important partner in the implementation of this initiative (Ashbee, 2021).

A particular strength of this study lies in its treatment of declining U.S. military engagement in Kazakhstan, exemplified by the suspension of the Steppe Eagle joint military exercises, which had been held annually between 2003 and 2019. Unlike earlier works that merely note the discontinuation of these exercises, this article interprets the halt as a reflection of shifting regional power dynamics and the growing influence of Russia on Kazakhstan's defence policy ('Steppe Eagle' will not..., 2023). The article places greater emphasis on the United States' increasing reliance on soft power instruments. For instance, the Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre (CARICC), previously understudied in the literature, is identified here as a strategic node in U.S. regional influence. Through the provision of technical assistance and training to Kazakhstani security agencies (Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, 2018), the United States not only contributes to regional security but also expands its intelligence-gathering capacities, cultivates pro-American networks within Kazakhstan's security apparatus, and offsets the influence of Russia and China. In this way, cooperation in the field of counternarcotics is reframed not as a narrow law enforcement activity but as a vital component of U.S. geopolitical strategy in Central Asia (Elzinga, 2021; Rowe, 2021).

U.S.–Kazakhstan nuclear non-proliferation cooperation represents not only a global security success, but also a

powerful geopolitical tool. Kazakhstan's voluntary renunciation of its nuclear arsenal and subsequent U.S. assistance in dismantling its nuclear infrastructure through the Nunn-Lugar programme allowed Washington to strengthen its position in the region, weakening Russia's potential influence (Shenin & Raimzhanova, 2021). This cooperation created the basis for a long-term strategic partnership, giving the U.S. leverage over Kazakhstan's policies and strengthening the U.S. presence in Central Asia. Thus, under the guise of a disarmament programme, the U.S. has successfully pursued its geopolitical interests, setting a precedent for strengthening its influence in other post-Soviet republics. Promoting democracy and market reforms in Kazakhstan remains a key element of U.S. geopolitical strategy in the region (Miller, 2024). This multifaceted policy encompasses support for civil society institutions, the development of independent media and the fight against corruption, forming a comprehensive approach to transforming the country's political and economic system. However, these noble goals mask the U.S. desire to strengthen its influence in Central Asia, creating a counterbalance to the Russian and Chinese presence (Bakalbaev et al., 2025). By supporting civil society and independent media, the U.S. is actually shaping a pro-Western elite and public opinion, while the fight against corruption is becoming an instrument of pressure on local authorities. Under the guise of democratization and liberalization, the U.S. is pursuing its geopolitical interests, seeking to turn Kazakhstan into a springboard for promoting American influence in the region.

Continuing this strategy, the United States, through USAID and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), is actively investing in the development of Kazakhstan's civil society. In 2023, USAID is focussing on several key areas: strengthening dialogue between the government and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), developing a Civil Society Organization (CSO) Law Academy to improve the legal literacy of activists, and supporting independent media. Special attention is paid to cooperation with the Supreme Court of Kazakhstan in the area of judicial reforms (Democracy, human rights..., 2023). These initiatives, while aimed at democratization, also serve as a tool of U.S. soft power. Cooperation with the judiciary can be seen as an effort to create a more favourable legal environment for the opposition and U.S. interests. These efforts should not be assessed exclusively negatively. The development of civil society and independent media can contribute to greater transparency and accountability of the authorities, which may be beneficial for Kazakhstan in the long run. Judicial reforms, even if undertaken with U.S. support, may increase the country's investment attractiveness (Tsyrfä et al., 2024). Thus, the geopolitical interests of the U.S. in this case may coincide with the interests of Kazakhstan's modernization and development, creating the potential for mutually beneficial cooperation. Nevertheless,

the effectiveness of this policy is limited by Kazakhstan's established political system. The U.S. regularly expresses concern about restrictions on political freedoms and harassment of opposition activists. The U.S. State Department's annual human rights report for 2023 noted problems with freedom of speech, assembly, and religion in Kazakhstan ([Country reports on human..., 2023](#)).

To summarize the analysis of U.S. geopolitical interests in Kazakhstan, several key aspects can be highlighted. Energy policy, countering the influence of Russia and China, ensuring regional security and promoting democratic reforms form a comprehensive U.S. strategy in the region. Each of these areas has its own peculiarities, instruments of implementation and faces certain challenges. To better illustrate the effectiveness of U.S. policy in Kazakhstan in each of these areas, let us consider a comparative assessment of their success ([Table 2](#)).

The data presented in [Table 2](#) shows that the U.S. has been most successful in the energy sector, where its influence is rated as high. At the same time, in the areas of democracy promotion and regional security, U.S. influence remains limited. This demonstrates the need to adjust U.S. strategy in the region to local realities and the growing competition from other global players. In the long term, the success of U.S. policy in Kazakhstan will depend on the U.S. ability to adapt its approaches to the changing geopolitical situation in Central Asia.

Although Kazakhstan is consistently regarded as the key U.S. partner in Central Asia, Washington's policies toward other regional states – particularly Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan – are also indicative of broader strategic logics underpinning American engagement in the region. In the case of Kyrgyzstan, U.S. policy has primarily focused on security and democracy promotion. Following the events of September 11, 2001, the United States secured access to the Manas Air Base, which served as a critical logistical hub for operations in Afghanistan. This cooperation was time-bound and came to an end in 2014, reflecting the volatility of U.S. presence in a country sensitive to Russian geopolitical pressure. The U.S. actively supported civil

society development, human rights initiatives, and independent media in Kyrgyzstan – particularly in the wake of the 2005 and 2010 revolutions – positioning the country as a 'laboratory of democracy' in the region. These efforts did not result in stable democratic consolidation, partly due to institutional fragility and pervasive corruption.

Uzbekistan, by contrast, remained more isolated and authoritarian for an extended period, especially under the leadership of Islam Karimov. Despite this, the U.S. cooperated with Uzbekistan on security matters, particularly through the establishment of a Northern Distribution Network for Afghanistan-bound supplies. Bilateral relations deteriorated sharply after the 2005 Andijan events and associated human rights violations. Only after 2016, with the advent of new political leadership, did the U.S.–Uzbekistan dialogue begin to normalize. Since then, the U.S. has intensified support for economic modernization, educational programming, and judicial reforms as part of the broader C5 + 1 strategy. Yet, compared to Kazakhstan, American influence has remained limited due to both geopolitical constraints posed by Russia and China and the Uzbek government's cautious domestic policies.

Against this backdrop, Kazakhstan stands out due to its relative openness to external engagement, greater institutional stability, and active participation in global initiatives. While Kyrgyzstan has largely been perceived as a locus for democratic experimentation, and Uzbekistan as a strategically significant but less permeable actor, Kazakhstan has combined geopolitical importance with long-term potential for multidimensional cooperation. The U.S. has consistently prioritized Kazakhstan in terms of economic, energy, and institutional engagement, whereas its relations with other Central Asian countries have remained more episodic and constrained.

U.S. geopolitical engagement with Kazakhstan reveals a multidimensional and adaptive strategy that seeks to balance normative commitments with pragmatic regional objectives. While energy cooperation continues to serve as the cornerstone of U.S. influence, efforts to counterbalance Russia and

Table 2. Comparative Assessment of the Effectiveness of U.S. Geopolitical Interests in Kazakhstan

Direction	Level of influence	Key achievements	Key challenges	Prospects
Energy policy	High	Participation in major oil and gas projects	Continued dependence on Russian routes	Development of 'green' energy
Countering Russia and China	Medium	Creation of the 'C5 + 1' format	Strong positions of Russia and China in the region	Strengthening economic cooperation
Regional security	Medium-low	Cooperation in combating drug trafficking	Suspension of the military exercise "Steppe Eagle"	Focus on non-military aspects of security
Advancing democracy	Low	Support for civil society	Limited progress in political reforms	Long-term strategy for the development of institutions

Source: created by the author.

China, enhance regional security, and promote democratic reforms constitute vital, albeit uneven, components of a broader strategic framework. The analysis demonstrates that U.S. success has been most pronounced in the energy sector, whereas attempts to influence Kazakhstan's domestic political trajectory and regional security posture have encountered significant limitations due to structural constraints and geopolitical competition. The sustained investment in civil society, infrastructure diversification, and soft power instruments underscores Washington's long-term commitment to shaping Kazakhstan's regional orientation. Future U.S. policy effectiveness will depend on its ability to reconcile strategic interests with evolving domestic and international dynamics, ensuring that its engagement remains both credible and responsive to local realities.

Discussion

The analysis of the evolution of U.S. policy towards Kazakhstan revealed three key phases: the period of nuclear disarmament (1991–2001), the phase of anti-terrorist cooperation (2001–2014) and the current phase of containing the influence of Russia and China (2014–2024). The study showed high U.S. effectiveness in the energy sphere, limited success in countering the influence of Russia and China, declining intensity of military-political cooperation, and low effectiveness in promoting democratic reforms.

The results of the study partially coincide with the findings of Yazdani (2020) regarding U.S. priorities in Central Asia. According to author, the main objectives of U.S. policy in the region include ensuring energy security, countering terrorism, and containing the influence of Russia and China. This is in line with the evolution of U.S. priorities in Kazakhstan identified in this study. However, this article does not give due attention to the role of nuclear disarmament at the initial stage of U.S.–Kazakhstan relations, which, according to the findings, was a key factor in the 1990s. Moreover, the analysis shows that the effectiveness of anti-terrorist cooperation in 2001–2014 was lower than E. Yazdani (2020) suggests, as evidenced in particular by the limited scope of the joint military exercise Steppe Eagle and its subsequent suspension.

To ensure a more balanced and critically reflective framework, it is important to consider diverging scholarly interpretations regarding the geopolitical competition in Central Asia. Bhat (2020), for instance, emphasizes the continuity of the so-called 'Great Game', arguing that the rivalry among global powers for regional influence has remained structurally unchanged since the 19th century. While this perspective provides a valuable *longue durée* context for understanding present-day dynamics, it risks overlooking the substantive shifts in the instruments, actors, and geopolitical objectives that have emerged over the past three decades. The findings of this study challenge Bhat's claim of strategic stasis by illustrating how U.S. engagement

in Kazakhstan has evolved from an initial focus on nuclear disarmament and democratic institution-building in the 1990s to more complex policies aimed at counterbalancing Chinese infrastructural expansion and Russian military influence in the 2020s. The flexibility and recalibration of U.S. policy contradict the assumption of historical determinism inherent in Bhat's argument.

A second set of claims warranting critical engagement can be found in the work of Thornton (2020), who asserts that China has effectively 'won' the contemporary iteration of the 'Great Game' in Central Asia through its dominant economic presence. Although China's infrastructural and financial initiatives particularly under the Belt and Road Initiative are undeniably influential, this assertion underestimates the resilience and continuing relevance of U.S. strategic and economic engagement in Kazakhstan. As shown in this study, U.S. foreign direct investment in Kazakhstan remains robust, exceeding \$65 billion by 2023, while bilateral trade reached a record \$4.1 billion in the same year. U.S. backing for transport corridor diversification, such as support for the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR), demonstrates a sustained commitment to strategic competition in the region. These data complicate Thornton's thesis of Chinese primacy and suggest a more nuanced geopolitical landscape characterized not by unilateral dominance but by ongoing multipolar competition. At the same time, this study supports Thornton's broader observation about the intensification of U.S.–China rivalry in Central Asia, especially in sectors such as energy infrastructure, transit logistics, and digital governance.

The analysis by Bisley (2020) of U.S. security policy in Asia from Obama to Trump provides an interesting perspective for assessing the effectiveness of U.S. strategy in Central Asia. N. Bisley notes a tendency to 'autopilot' or even neglect regional issues in U.S. policy. This observation is partially confirmed by the decline in the intensity of military-political cooperation between the U.S. and Kazakhstan revealed in this study, as evidenced by the suspension of the joint exercise Steppe Eagle from 2020. However, the conclusion about the general neglect of regional problems seems exaggerated. The U.S. continues to actively pursue its interests in Kazakhstan, especially in the energy sphere and in the context of countering the influence of Russia and China. Moreover, the creation of the 'C5 + 1' format in 2015 demonstrates the U.S. desire for more active involvement in the region, which contradicts the thesis of N. Bisley about the 'neglect of regional issues'.

The study by Tjia (2022) on Kazakhstan's economic diversification in the context of Chinese initiatives provides a significant perspective for understanding the economic aspects of geopolitical competition in the region. The findings on Kazakhstan's desire to diversify its economic ties are consistent with the findings of this study on U.S. support for Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy. However, Tjia,

focussing on Chinese initiatives, underestimates the role of the U.S. in this process. The analysis shows that the U.S. actively supports projects to diversify the export routes of Kazakhstan's energy resources, in particular, through the development of TITR. Moreover, the U.S. initiative Blue Dot Network, aimed at creating an alternative to the Chinese project 'One Belt, One Road', demonstrates the active participation of the U.S. in the formation of the economic architecture of the region, which is not fully reflected in this study. Therefore, while [Tjia \(2022\)](#) correctly identifies Kazakhstan's diversification efforts, the study underestimates the extent of U.S. agency in this process. By foregrounding the proactive dimension of American economic diplomacy, this research contributes a more balanced view of the competitive interplay between global powers in Central Asia. It also challenges the implicit assumption in some parts of the literature that China enjoys a near-monopoly on infrastructure-led regional integration, emphasizing instead the emergence of multipolar, contested development frameworks.

[Wilson \(2021\)](#) analyses the deepening tensions between Russia and China in Central Asia, which provides an important context for understanding the complex geopolitical dynamics in the region. The findings on the growing competition between Moscow and Beijing are in line with the results of this study, showing the U.S. desire to use these tensions to its advantage. However, Wilson underestimates the role of the U.S. as an active player in this 'triangle'. The analysis shows that the U.S. is not just observing the Russia–China rivalry, but is actively shaping its strategy with this dynamic in mind. In particular, U.S. support for Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy and the development of the C5 + 1 format can be seen as an attempt to create an alternative to Russian and Chinese integration projects in the region. This indicates a more complex picture of trilateral competition in Central Asia than is presented in the work of Wilson.

The findings of this study challenge [Wilson's \(2021\)](#) portrayal of the U.S. as a passive observer of Sino–Russian tensions in Central Asia. Instead, the evidence suggests that the U.S. is a strategic actor actively recalibrating its engagement in response to regional dynamics. Support for Kazakhstan's multi-vector policy and the institutionalization of the C5 + 1 format reflect deliberate efforts to counterbalance Russian and Chinese influence through multilateral diplomacy. This study thus presents a more nuanced view of trilateral competition, where the U.S., Russia, and China each pursue strategies to reshape regional alignments. By highlighting the proactive role of the U.S., the analysis offers a corrective to Wilson's framework and calls for more complex models of regional geopolitics that reflect asymmetry, strategic adaptation, and institutional innovation.

A study by [del Sordi and Libman \(2020\)](#) on the potential of Kazakhstan as a future authoritarian 'centre of attraction' provides an interesting perspective for analysing the effectiveness of U.S. policy in promoting democracy in the

country. The authors' conclusions about the persistence and potential strengthening of authoritarian tendencies in Kazakhstan are consistent with the results of this study, which show the limited effectiveness of U.S. efforts to democratize the country. However, authors do not fully consider the complexity and contradictory nature of U.S. policy in this area. The analysis shows that despite regular criticism of the human rights situation in Kazakhstan, the U.S. has to balance between promoting democratic values and preserving strategic partnership. This contradiction, which is not reflected in this paper, is the key factor explaining the low effectiveness of American policy in the sphere of democratization in Kazakhstan.

Finally, the work of [Sharma \(2021\)](#) on geopolitics in Central Asia provides a broad overview of regional dynamics. The conclusions about the complex intertwining interests of different powers in the region are consistent with the findings of this study, demonstrating the multifaceted nature of U.S. policy in Kazakhstan. However, Sharma underestimates the importance of the energy factor in the U.S. strategy. The analysis shows that energy policy remains a key element of the American approach to Kazakhstan, as evidenced by the high level of investment in the country's oil and gas sector and support for projects to diversify export routes. Moreover, Sharma does not fully take into account the evolution of American strategy in the region, in particular the shift in focus to countering Chinese influence in recent years.

Thus, comparing the results of this study with the findings of other authors allows for a more complete picture of U.S. policy in Kazakhstan. The identified discrepancies and additions to existing studies emphasize the need for further in-depth study of the long-term implications of U.S. strategy in Central Asia, especially in the context of the changing balance of power in the region.

Conclusions

This study allows drawing a number of important conclusions regarding the diplomatic and geopolitical aspects of U.S. strategy in Central Asia on the example of Kazakhstan. An analysis of the main stages in the evolution of U.S. policy towards Kazakhstan reveals three key periods: nuclear disarmament (1991–2001), anti-terrorist cooperation (2001–2014), and the modern stage of containing the influence of Russia and China (2014–2024). Each of these phases was characterized by its own priorities and tools for implementing the U.S. strategy. While at the initial stage the key task was to ensure Kazakhstan's nuclear disarmament, later the focus shifted to regional security and economic cooperation. At the current stage, countering the growing influence of Russia and China in the region has become a priority.

The study of key instruments of U.S. diplomatic influence in Kazakhstan has shown their diversity and evolution. From the Nunn–Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Programme in the 1990s to the creation of the C5 + 1 format

in 2015, the U.S. has used a wide range of diplomatic, economic and military-political instruments to pursue its interests. An assessment of the effectiveness of these instruments has revealed a mixed picture: while the U.S. has made significant progress in the energy sphere, results remain limited in the area of democracy and human rights promotion. The analysis of U.S. geopolitical interests in Kazakhstan has shown their multifaceted nature. The key aspects are ensuring access to energy resources, countering the influence of Russia and China, supporting regional security and promoting democratic reforms. The study revealed that energy policy remains the most successful area of U.S. strategy in Kazakhstan, while there has been a decline in military and political cooperation. In the context of the overall U.S. strategy in Central Asia, Kazakhstan is seen as a key partner in ensuring stability and countering the influence of other global actors.

The results of the study demonstrate that the U.S. strategy towards Kazakhstan is characterized by a difficult balance between geopolitical interests and the promotion of democratic values. The U.S. has to adapt its policy to changing regional dynamics, given the growing influence of Russia and China, as well as Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy. The effectiveness of the U.S. strategy varies depending on the specific area: the U.S. has had the most success in the energy sector, while results remain limited in the areas of democratization and political-military cooperation. The study shows that the U.S. goal of strengthening its influence in Central Asia, using Kazakhstan as an example, has been partially achieved. On the one hand, the U.S. has managed to establish strong economic ties and become a significant player in Kazakhstan's energy sector. On the other hand, U.S. influence in the political sphere remains limited and military-political cooperation has declined in recent years.

The limitations of this study are related to its focus on one country (Kazakhstan) and its limited time period. For a more complete understanding of U.S. strategy in Central Asia, it is necessary to expand the geography of the study to include other countries in the region. In addition, the rapidly changing geopolitical situation requires constant updating of data and analyses.

Prospects for further research include: a comparative analysis of U.S. policy towards other Central Asian countries; an in-depth study of the relationship between the economic and political aspects of U.S. strategy in the region; a study of the influence of domestic political factors in the U.S. on policymaking in Central Asia; and an analysis of the long-term implications of U.S. strategy for regional stability and the balance of power. Of particular interest is the study of the potential of trilateral cooperation between the United States, Russia, and China in Central Asia as an alternative to geopolitical competition.

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