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**KAZAKHSTAN'S BEHAVIOR AS A MIDDLE POWER STATE IN TRANSITION  
OF WORLD ORDER: DOES SOFT POWER MATTER?**

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This research focuses on the role of “soft power” as a core ability to create a positive image of Kazakhstan as a rising middle-power state in international affairs. The main issue derived from the contradictions of scholars’ views on the accurate perception of Kazakhstan as a failed state because of its internal economic stagnation or middle power state because of its ability to reinforce its regional stance in international relations with the help of its soft power.

Comparing the controversial views, the author reflected on the pros and cons of the current foreign policy of Kazakhstan. On the one hand, its economic insolvency despite natural wealth and overdependence on an external actor that gives reason being a failed state; on the other hand, its diplomatic authority among Central Asian countries, its actions as a negotiating body during conflict-generating processes (ex.: Ukrainian crisis), country’s humanitarian assistance to the states in need thus creating favorable conditions for the projection of its soft power.

From the aforementioned polemics, the author has found a problem on non-existence or a weak organization of the soft power institute of Kazakhstan, for instance, USAID acts in the United States, Russkiy Mir Foundation acts in Russia, etc. That’s why, having tried to systemize all the humanitarian initiatives of Kazakhstan, the author tests the hypothesis about whether it is possible to claim that Kazakhstan’s soft power can contribute to the rising of the country’s position in the international arena as a middle power state.

In the scientific environment the policy of “soft power” has been studied quite widely. Since the moment when the idea of influence without coercion on external actors took place as a separate concept, many countries that used the tools of “soft power” have demonstrated its viability. The theoretical reflections of scientists who tried to construct a model of the foreign policy of middle power states by applying a “soft power” strategy with a constructivist approach are also widely known. The scientific novelty of the problem lies in the controversy between economists who consider Kazakhstan a failed state for economic reasons and scientists who dispute the idea of Kazakhstan’s potential to become a rising middle-power state. If we refer to KPMG data, 96.6% of the adult population of Kazakhstan, having a wealth of up to \$10,000 per year, do not fall under the definition of “middle class”, which indicates the low well-being of Kazakhstanis, more than half of whom live below the poverty line [1]. Is it advisable to propose the idea of forming a “soft power” and the possibility of its influence on the status of the state in the international arena with such internal economic stagnation? Every state’s development in the capitalist world depends on its economic well-being. In confirmation of this, the reflections of the American scientist Joseph Nye enter the discourse. His interviews often cited China’s economic growth and cultural peculiarity, undoubtedly demonstrating the possibilities and strength of Chinese attractiveness [2,3].

Further in the same direction are scientists Peter Rutland (USA, Wesleyan University) and Andrey Kazantsev (Russia, MGIMO), who, using the example of Russia, tried to explain the difficulty of creating a positive international image of the country due to its raw materials economy and the use of hard power in Georgia and Ukraine [4].

In contrast to the above, a significant contribution to the discussion about the importance of “soft power”, despite economic hardships, was made by scientist Vera Ageeva (Sciences Po Paris) [5], as well as PhD doctor Darzhan Kazbekova (Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan) [6], who agree that the true art of the soft influence of the state on a foreign audience is undoubtedly promotes a positive image of the country.

However, despite a large number of studies on the affected issues, there is a lack of knowledge in the discussion about the buildup of Kazakhstan’s soft power, the political and historical prerequisites for its formation, and the prospects for its institutionalization. The author hopes to fill this gap.

It is important to consider the critical analysis of Joseph Nye’s later research revealed new views on the matter of soft power. According to him, even though promoting positive images of one’s state is not a new phenomenon, the conditions for the manifestation of soft power policy have dramatically changed in recent times. Today more than half of countries live in a democratic regime, and the Cold war model is no longer a guide for implementing public diplomacy. In this sense, credibility is the most valuable asset in the arsenal of the state’s foreign policy, where the actions sound louder than the words and the government scores points in the face of a foreign audience. In terms of credibility, Kazakhstan nowadays makes maneuvers between Russia, China, CIS countries and the Western partners, acting as a negotiating body to find diplomatic compromise. It seems that such a situation gives reason to believe that Kazakhstan is cultivating middle power diplomacy with the help of niche diplomacy, focusing on solving several narrow problems.

This paper reflected a middle power vision to research Kazakhstan’s capability from the standpoint of diplomatic authority and its influence on the evolution of world politics. It was possible by analyzing Kazakhstan’s initiatives since the independence and entering the world community, indeed. Due to comprehensive analysis, we have identified three indicators substantiating the position of Kazakhstan as a middle power state: i) diplomatic authority; ii) high integration into international communities; iii) providing humanitarian assistance to states in need.

Generally, we think that such soft diplomatic actions of Kazakhstan to contribute to mediation efforts between the liberal world and the illiberal world give reason to believe in its soft power viability.

### **Literature**

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## **FACTOR OF NUCLEAR WEAPON IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

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At the moment, the word "peace" does not correspond to the term international relations. The escalating crisis in Eastern Europe, as well as the recent statement of Russian President Vladimir Putin on the use of a nuclear arsenal, gives a clear picture of the possible escalation of the conflict. Solutions will no longer be authorized peacefully, but by the use of weapons of mass destruction.

Almost 75 years have passed since the creation of this type of weapon, and humanity has been on the verge of their use more than once. With the progress of technology, nuclear weapons have progressed, and world politics has undergone many changes, both minor and full-scale. If earlier in clashes, states used soft power, now heavy force, including the threat of mass destruction, is now a priority.

Since the beginning of 2022, all the attention of the media and political discussions lies on the conflict between Ukraine and Russia taking place in the east of Europe. A war that lasts in one region attracts increased attention and cannot be ignored by any country in the world due to its influence on international relations. And the recent statement of the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin about the threat of using the nuclear arsenal also played a key role. The United States, which is a longtime enemy of Russia, has expressed a desire to use nuclear weapons in the event of a possible aggression against Ukraine and NATO countries. The above indicates that the two superpowers are ready to terminate the nuclear disarmament treaty and continue their proliferation for security purposes. The whole world is now close to the events of the Caribbean crisis, where a nuclear war almost came true. At first glance, it may seem that the real mutual vulnerability of the United States and Russia excludes the possibility of using nuclear weapons. Since, in any realistic scenario, both sides are capable of inflicting colossal damage on each other, many experts doubt that such a weapon could ever be used. However, nuclear weapons are not really just a symbol of the political importance of their owner, they play an important role in relations between the US and Russia, and this role may even be growing.