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DIPLOMACY AND PERSONALITY IN RELATIONS BETWEEN KAZAKHSTAN AND SAUDI ARABIA (to the 130th anniversary of Nazir Tyuryakulov)

Kazakhstan attaches great importance to the development of bilateral cooperation with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), one of the most influential and wealthy countries in the Middle East. It owns two-thirds of the world's hydrocarbon reserves, has enormous economic potential, financial and investment opportunities, and is the most important actor in the international Organization of Islamic Cooperation. These factors heighten the role of the Middle East in the foreign policy interests of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in turn, pays great attention to Kazakhstan. KSA became one of the first countries in the Arab and Muslim world to recognize Kazakhstan's independence and establish diplomatic relations in 1994. While bilateral relations are largely pragmatic, they also extend to the spheres of culture and education, spirituality, and religion, with the role of Islam growing in importance. International and regional instability in the world highlights the necessity of having a responsible leader in the role of Head of State and of effective diplomacy. One noteworthy example of modern diplomacy is Nazir Tyuryakulov, the first Kazakh plenipotentiary representative (ambassador) of the Soviet Union in Saudi Arabia in the late 20s and early 30s of the twentieth century. Even though there is a wide array of archival documents about Nazir Tyuryakulov's mission to Saudi Arabia, the topic is still highly relevant in Kazakh academia. The purpose of this article is to consider some of the historical and modern stories on the example of iconic personalities who have made a significant contribution to the development of Kazakh-Saudi relations.

Key words: Kazakhstan, Saudi Arabia, spheres of cooperation, diplomacy, Nazir Tyuryakulov, Islamic factor.

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Қазақстан мен Сауд Арабиясы арасындағы қарым-қатынастағы дипломатия және жеке тұлға (Нәзір Төрәқұловтың 130 жылдығына орай)

Қазақстан Таяу Шығыс аймағындағы ең ықпалды және бай елдердің бірі Сауд Арабиясы Корольдігімен (САК) екіжақты ынтымақтастықты дамытуға үлкен мән береді. Ол дүниежүзіндегі көмірсутегі қорының үштен екісіне ие, орасан зор экономикалық әлеуеті, қаржылық және инвестициялық мүмкіндіктері бар және халықаралық Ислам ынтымақтастығы Ұйымындағы ең маңызды актор. Бұл факторлар Қазақстан Республикасының сыртқы саяси мүдделеріндегі Таяу Шығыстың рөлін арттырады. Сауд Арабиясы Корольдігі өз кезегінде Қазақстанға үлкен көңіл бөліп отыр. САК 1994 жылы Қазақстанның тәуелсіздігін мойындап, дипломатиялық қарым-қатынас орнатқан алғашқы араб және мұсылман мемлекеті болды. Прагматизмнің үлкен үлесіне ие екіжақты қарым-қатынастар мәдениет пен білім саласын, рухани саланы, діннің рөлі мен ислам факторын да қамтып отыр. Әлемдегі халықаралық және аймақтық тұрақсыздық мемлекет басындағы жауапты тұлғаның рөлін және дипломатияның рөлін өзектендіруде. Қазіргі дипломатияның нанымды мысалдарының бірі – ХХ ғасырдың 20-шы жылдарының соңы мен 30-шы жылдарының басында Кеңес елінің Сауд Арабиясындағы тұңғыш қазақ өкілетті өкілі (елшісі) Нәзір Төрәқұлов тұлғасы. Нәзір Төрәқұловтың Сауд Арабиясына сапарына қатысты мұрағат құжаттарының қомақты жинағы болғанымен, бұл тақырып қазақ ғылымында әлі толық зерттеліп біткен жоқ. Бұл мақаланың мақсаты – қазақ-сауд қарым-қатынасының дамуына елеулі үлес қосқан тұлғалар мысалында кейбір тарихи және заманауи оқиғаларды қарастыру.

Түйін сөздер: Қазақстан, Сауд Арабиясы, ынтымақтастық салалары, дипломатия, Нәзір Төрәқұлов, ислам факторы.

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**Дипломатия и личность в отношениях
между Казахстаном и Саудовской Аравией
(к 130-летию Назира Тюрякулова)**

Казахстан придает большое значение развитию двустороннего сотрудничества с Королевством Саудовская Аравия (КСА), одной из самых влиятельных и богатых стран Ближневосточного региона. Ей принадлежат две трети мировых запасов углеводородов, обладает огромным экономическим потенциалом, имеет финансовые и инвестиционные возможности, является важнейшим актором в международной Организации Исламского Сотрудничества. Эти факторы повышают роль Ближнего Востока во внешнеполитических интересах Республики Казахстан. В свою очередь, Королевство Саудовская Аравия уделяет большое внимание Казахстану. КСА стало первой арабской и мусульманской страной, признавшей независимость Казахстана и установившей дипломатические отношения в 1994 году. Обладая большой долей прагматизма, двусторонние отношения охватывают также сферу культуры и образования, духовную сферу, придавая большое значение роли религии и исламского фактора. Международная и региональная нестабильность в мире актуализирует роль ответственной личности, стоящей во главе государства, и роль дипломатии. Одним из убедительных примеров для современной дипломатии является высокообразованная личность Назира Тюрякулова, первого казахского полномочного представителя (посла) советской страны в Саудовской Аравии в конце 20-х – начале 30-х годов XX века. Несмотря на то, что имеется значительный массив архивных документов о миссии в Саудовской Аравии Назира Тюрякулова, в казахстанской науке эта тема далека от завершения. Целью данной статьи является рассмотрение некоторых исторических и современных сюжетов на примере знаковых личностей, которые внесли значительный вклад в развитие казахстанско-саудовских отношений.

Ключевые слова: Казахстан, Саудовская Аравия, сферы сотрудничества, дипломатия, Назир Тюрякулов, исламский фактор.

Introduction

Since gaining its independence, Kazakhstan has attached great importance to developing bilateral relations with the Arab world. Diplomatic relations between Kazakhstan and Saudi Arabia entered a new, more active phase in the 21st century. The dimension of international dialogue received a special impetus. Over the years of rapprochement and development of cooperation, unique relationships have been formed. While possessing a large degree of pragmatism, these relations also cover the spheres of culture, education, spirituality, and religion. A confidential dialogue has opened the way to expanding the interests of the Saudi leaders in Kazakhstan to joint economic and investment projects.

The relevance of energy, transportation, and logistics is increasing with the development of modern international relations. This phenomenon and the opportunities it manifests open the door to the development and renewal of cooperation between the republic of Kazakhstan and Saudi Arabia.

Political and diplomatic relations between Kazakhstan and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are unique in nature. Each has its own approach to the various problems of foreign policy and its own in-

terests specific to its region. This imposes a special responsibility on both sides. Such a conception of the topic underscores the problems of bilateral and multilateral relations of the Republic of Kazakhstan with the rest of the world. It is essential to understand how two states, different in form and political system, geographically distant from each other, have come closer on many positions.

Against the backdrop of mutual understanding that has developed over many years and the absence of friction in the spiritual sphere, new trends are emerging in bilateral communication between new leaders—the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia Mohammed bin Salman and the President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev—and interest in expanding the content of cooperation is growing. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia focuses on the character of the leader of the federal government and on personal trust in him in order to further build closer ties. The President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, as the head of state, is considered the figure who can serve as a vector for the entry of the Arab East into the Central Asian region.

On the 130th birthday of the renowned Kazakh diplomat Nazir Tyuryakulov, his contribution to diplomacy, especially the topic of the role of the

individual in international politics, is being re-evaluated. Today, the historical experience of the diplomatic mission in Saudi Arabia is important for modern diplomats working in the Arab region. Despite external resistance, Tyuryakulov managed to establish diplomatic, trade, economic, scientific, humanitarian ties between the Soviet state and the newly-formed Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The study of the role of the individual in diplomacy and foreign policy in Kazakh-Saudi relations is substantiated by the fact that bilateral relations in this context are unique and far from being fully understood.

It is often accepted that the internal challenges faced by Soviet Russia and Saudi Arabia in their formative years are comparable in terms of complexity in dealing with internal and external problems to the challenges of modern Kazakhstan over the last 30 years. According to this view, it is possible to consider this hypothesis, especially in the context of a comparative study of the role of personality and diplomacy in different eras with respect to the situation in Kazakhstan. This makes the question of diplomatic responsibility of those defending national interests abroad especially relevant.

Goals and objectives

The purpose of this article is to consider individual historical and contemporary examples of iconic figures who have made a significant contribution to the development of Kazakh-Saudi relations. One task in particular is to demonstrate the role of Nazir Tyuryakulov, the first Kazakh diplomat, thanks to whom Soviet-Saudi relations developed. Another aim of this article, which also indicates its scientific and practical significance, is to identify new prospects for the rapprochement of both countries.

Methods and Materials

Main methods. In the process of research, the authors used a discursive, systematic, comparative analysis, as well as a descriptive and historical approach. These methods help to reveal the official position of countries in relation to each other and how they play out in international processes. In general, the methodological orientation of the study is based on the most important works on international topics by representatives of the realist school of thought.

Literature and source Review. The question of the role of the individual in international relations,

foreign policy, and diplomacy has been and remains one of the most important in the development of relations with Saudi Arabia. The nature and content of the topic, primarily the versatility of relations between Kazakhstan and Saudi Arabia, requires the involvement and study of the following various documentary sources.

First is the seminal set of sources on the topic, known as the *archival heritage of Nazir Tyuryakulov*, the envoy to the USSR in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This is the most important source for studying the international situation in the Arab East. Unique documents on the foreign policy activities of Nazir Tyuryakulov in the distant Arab country from 1928 to 1935 were published in collections of documents, which are preceded by a historical sketch of the Ambassador Tair Mansurov of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the Russian Federation. For the first time in these books, documents of a political and diplomatic nature are presented in a complete volume. The documents include political reports, certificates, records of conversations, letters, memos of Plenipotentiary Tyuryakulov, and various types of official documents. Thanks to the efforts of T. Mansurov, previously unpublished documents are now available. The first books, "Nazir Tyuryakulov – Plenipotentiary of the USSR in Saudi Arabia" (Nazir Tyuryakulov, 2000) and "The Arabian epic of the plenipotentiary Nazir Tyuryakulov" were published in the form of collected documents, along with a historical essay on his Arabian period of life and work written by T. Mansurov (Mansurov, 2001). Here we are presented with documents that characterize the diplomatic mission of N. Tyuryakulov in the Arab East.

The next set of sources characterizes the diplomatic level of the modern leaders of Kazakhstan. In this regard, the works and memoirs of the leaders of independent Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev and Kasim Tokayev, are important. In President Nazarbayev's book, "The Strategy for the Transformation of Society and the Revival of the Eurasian Civilization," he described the mechanisms for attracting foreign investment, including in relations with wealthy Arab countries (Nazarbayev, 2000). In his book, "On the Threshold of the 21st Century," he formulates the results of Kazakhstan's political and economic reforms, its "civilizational deployment," with the aim of rapprochement with the Arab region (Nazarbayev, 2003). President Tokayev in his writings analyzes the international policy of Kazakhstan and highlights the Middle East as an important vector of a multi-vector foreign policy. He highly appreciates the special role of Saudi Arabia in the

modernization of the Arab East in his books, “The diplomacy of the Republic of Kazakhstan” (Tokayev, 2002), “Overcoming. Diplomatic Essays” (Tokayev, 2003: 334-335; 149-154), and “Light and Shadow” (Tokayev, 2008).

Documents of a political and diplomatic nature—protocols, agreements, and memorandums—are also indicated in the sections of this article, which deal with modern relations with Saudi Arabia. Relations between the leaders of the two states are maintained during official visits, negotiations, and during the hajj to the holy places of Islam, for example. We find information about this on the websites of the Foreign Ministry and the embassies of the two countries, as well as in the media.

Currently, there is no full-fledged work among domestic and foreign authors covering all areas of bilateral interaction between Kazakhstan and Saudi Arabia. However, there are some features of various sources that reflect certain aspects of Kazakhstan and Saudi Arabia’s cooperation, and it is possible to point out some works devoted to Saudi-Central Asian relations, such as “Asia and the Arab Countries 1917-1960” (SSSR i arabskiye, 1989). Melkumyan E.S., Naumkin V.V., and others have written works on the foreign policy issues of Saudi Arabia, while “The Evolution of Saudi-Asian Relations in the Context of World Politics (1926-2007)” (Abdel-Aziz, 2007) is devoted to Central Asian-Arab relations, in which all important events are listed in chronological order. The international context of relations between Saudi Arabia and the CIS countries is described in a number of works by the Saudi researcher At-Turki Majid bin Abdel Aziz in “Restoration of Saudi-Soviet Relations: mutual rapprochement and its International Context” (Turki, 2007). The works of foreign researchers such as Matthew R. Simmons, Rachel Bronson (Bronson, 2006), Andrej Kreutz, and others published in English, help to consider alternative perspectives, which differ from the view of domestic and Saudi researchers concerning Saudi-Central Asian relations. In addition, the monographs of Simon Henderson, “After King Abdullah. Succession in Saudi Arabia” (2009) is one of the most authoritative modern histories of Saudi Arabia. The work of the German authors Werner Ende and Udo Steinbach, “Islam in the Modern World,” has been reprinted many times since the book was written, using original sources, many of which are rare archival documents. Here we receive reliable data on the modern political role of Islam in Saudi Arabia (Ende/Steinbach, 2005).

Discussion and Result

Nazir Tyuryakulov: historical and diplomatic story.

The current character and outlook of Kazakh-Saudi relations have a historical basis. The state that first recognized the independence of Saudi Arabia, and its King – Ibn Saud, was the Soviet Union.

Nazir Tyuryakulov was the first Kazakh diplomat in his role as the Soviet envoy to the Kingdom of Hejaz (later Saudi Arabia). The remarkable character of this diplomat deserves the attention of academia. The events recorded in his diplomatic biography, are a distant history, which is recorded in archival documents. Publications and documents about Tyuryakulov’s activities became known relatively recently, in the 21st century. In this article we will only touch on some episodes of his mission in the Middle East (Mazhidenova, 2020:64). N. Tyuryakulov, Kazakh by origin, was a well-educated person of his era. He spoke several oriental languages and wrote equally well in both Kazakh and Russian. During his diplomatic mission, Tyuryakulov learned Arabic, which he spoke with the local population. His success as a diplomat was due partly to the fact that he respected the culture and customs of the Arab locals.

Interest in the Arab countries at that time was mainly focused on the development of trade and diplomatic relations with the Middle East. It is no coincidence that he was sent on a diplomatic mission to a troubled region to establish ties with the new Arab states. At that time, British, French, Soviet and other interests clashed in the region, which was going through a challenging period of new state formation after the collapse of Ottoman Empire. The Versailles system of international relations took shape around this time and a new state, the Kingdom of Hijaz and Najd, was created.¹

Very soon, N. Tyuryakulov earned the trust and respect of the local Arab nobility and ordinary people with whom he interacted. The fact that Nazir Tyuryakulov was elected doyen testifies to the respect and high level of trust in him from the diplomatic corps in Jeddah.

¹ In 1916, the state of Hijaz declared independence from the Ottoman Empire, but in the mid-1920s, it was conquered by Nejd, after which the United Kingdom of Nejd and Hejaz was created. On September 23, 1932, the Kingdom of Hejaz and Nejd and other territories were united into one state – the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Negotiations: trade and oil issues

Tyuryakulov had to establish trade with the Arab countries. Pointing out the need to promote trade relations, he reported to the “center” [to Moscow – M.G.] about the reasons for the failure of trade cooperation between the government of Gejas and the Soviet Middle East Trade representative (“Gedjas” is an early transcription of writing Hijaz – M.G.). The difficulty was that the Gejas closed access to Soviet trade for a long time. He explained the reason in terms of the political circumstances: “Gedjas is afraid and is avoiding irritating England.” The other country, Yemen, according to him, “is interested in Soviet trade for political reasons. In addition, Yemen considers itself more independent.” And further, “Gedjas and Yemen in this respect are two opposites.” Tyuryakulov met, negotiated well, and achieved results from opposite sides, defending his country’s interests the Middle East.

As mentioned, among the Arabs there was a struggle for power between representatives of several dynasties. Foreign traders and merchants competed in this region. Many foreigners used political methods to put pressure on the Arab nobility. Tyuryakulov, in contrast, acted very skillfully—he preferred a diplomatic approach. Tyuryakulov’s trade negotiations are evidenced by archival documents revealing how he sought to benefit his position. “...I have never shied away from discussing with [the Gejas government] any specific proposal of the Gejas’ side in order to complete our negotiations... I believe that the Gejas Government, by eliminating the exclusive regime and concluding a corresponding agreement with us, could provide itself with very significant benefits.” “The profitability of transactions with our trade organizations can be seen from the fact that in the presence of an exceptional [Soviet] regime, the adviser to the governor, Abdullah Fadl, at least ordered a batch of Soviet cement.” “If the Gejas government had wanted to make a deal with us, we could have offered them better conditions” (Tyuryakulov, 2000:317).

He analyzes trade competition and the political situation in Arabia in a note marked “Top Secret No. 1/c 1/III-29”, which was sent from Jeddah to the People’s Commissariat of Foreign Affairs (N.K.I.D.) to the Middle East Department (incoming doc. №872, 21/III – 29). The reason for the renouncement “of a permit to trade in Gejas means the political formalization of the boycott, which was officially characterized as a private initiative... In general, our trade in Gejas, for sure, is closely related to our political situation; nevertheless, it is already permissible to raise practical questions. Now it is impossible to

take into account the situation of the next trading season. In this regard, the issue of a mixed Soviet-Turkish society is of great importance for us” (dated March 1, 1929) (Tyuryakulov, 2000:54-60).

A year and a half later, on August 2, 1931, in the presence of N. Tyuryakulov and Prince Faisal, an agreement was signed on the supply of Soviet gasoline and kerosene on credit for 150 thousand dollars (50 thousand boxes of gasoline and kerosene each). For Hijaz, this step was an attempt to escape get out of the English influence. Nazir Tyuryakulov personally supervised the implementation of the famous “gasoline deal”. This was a period when the Arabians had not yet found and produced oil. Therefore, it was a very vital treaty for the Arab country and very important for the Soviet side.

Nazir Tyuryakulov nevertheless achieved mutual trade between the two countries after a few years. In 1932 he reported the following to N.K.I.D¹: “Finally, I agreed with Ab. Suleiman, negotiated, bargained, talked as much on the issue to the extent that the King could actually negotiate with me. The King declared that Soviet trade was equal to trade with other countries. The King is ready to establish a friendly trade agreement.” In this way, the legal status of Soviet trade was essentially accepted.

The King thanked the Soviet government and asked to settle the oil debt as follows: 1) the agreement would be guaranteed by the King; 2) one-third of the debt of the Arab government would be covered by January, February, and March 1934, and the remaining two-thirds by the beginning of 1935; 3) the calculation of the gold basis would be established for the duration of the agreement by a firm exchange rate of the dollar per gold pound. Fifty percent of the loss that occurred from the fall of the dollar, the King would personally cover. Tyuryakulov promised to continue trade negotiations, but stated that “I will still bargain for it, but Ibn Saud will not be able to make significant concessions due to the Assyrian events, and because the treasury has dried up.” (Tyuryakulov, 2000:360-361).

“Oil Front”

Tensions regarding oil policy in the Middle East escalated with the advent of Soviet oil and its derivative, kerosene. Intense competition continued for several years.

Tyuryakulov faced several difficult tasks. One of the tasks was to break through the “oil front” against Soviet Russia. The boycott of Soviet oil products on

¹ NKID USSR or People’s Commissariat of Foreign Affairs of the USSR, the state body of the USSR responsible for the foreign policy of the Soviet state in 1923-1946.

the world market was organized in 1922 by the leaders of the three largest oil companies – Standard Oil of New Jersey, Royal Dutch-Shell, and Branobel. The main product of oil exports in pre-revolutionary Russia was kerosene, which was sent mainly to Europe (45.3%) and to the Middle East (35.3%) (*Simmons, 2005*).

Tyuryakulov was faced with the difficult task of re-establishing existing contacts to organize the export of kerosene to the new countries of the Arab region. In a short time, he was able to find a profitable solution, and he took advantage of the contradictions and competition of the Anglo-American oil giants.

In March 1926, two American corporations that were part of the Standard Oil group almost simultaneously reached a deal to purchase unprecedentedly large shipments of Soviet petroleum products: Vacuum Oil Company acquired 800 thousand tons of crude oil and 100 thousand tons of kerosene in the USSR for sale in Egypt, and Standard Oil of New York bought 500 thousand tons of kerosene. The following year, these American firms signed an agreement to purchase almost a quarter of all Soviet oil exports (*Sovetskiy, 2019:48*). In 1927, these American firms entered into an agreement to buy almost a quarter of all Soviet oil exports. The agreement on the market division put major British oil companies operating in the Middle East in a difficult position and provoked protests on their part. The management of the companies expressed their concern about the accelerated promotion of Soviet oil products to the domestic English market. The head of Royal Dutch Shell, G. Deterding began an active campaign against Soviet oil exports.

Thus, the signing of the agreement validated the status of the USSR as a full participant in the world oil market since the late 1920s. Such international recognition was the result of close cooperation of Soviet foreign trade bodies with foreign companies. The oil market of the late 1920s and early 1930s is reminiscent of modern global speculation in the energy market.

The behavior of the states and the largest companies of that time, which directed their activities in the Middle East, was accurately characterized by Nazir Tyuryakulov when he stated, “Market prices are abnormally high. This is mainly caused by speculation by representatives of Shell and the Standard Oil Company. They are in a contractual relationship and prices for petroleum products are maintained at a certain level all the time” (*Tyuryakulov, 2000*). He was convinced that “the difference in the prices of oil products in Egypt and in Gejas should be includ-

ed in the fees at the Suez Canal and transport costs from Alexandria to Jeddah. The Gejas government is addicted to the false benefit of the high duties it levies on oil products. The government does not take into account the losses incurred by the country” (*Tyuryakulov, 2000*).

It is possible that Tyuryakulov understood well the strategic importance of oil revealed by the First World War. He also understood the dependence of the young Arab states on the leading Anglo-American oil trusts (Standard Oil and Royal Dutch-Shell). This knowledge is evidenced by his dispatches, in which he tried to consolidate the oil policy of Soviet Russia in Saudi Arabia. Perhaps his warnings were not understood by Moscow. Archival documents now confirm that Chevron, on the advice of its spokesman Harry St. John Philby, took the lead in the oil proposals for King Saud quickly and for a long time thereafter.

In 1932, Standard Oil, on behalf of Socal Oil Company of California (now known as Chevron), employed the efforts of Philby, a close friend of Saudi King Ibn Saud, to obtain permission for Socal Oil to conduct a geological survey in the eastern parts of the Saudi Peninsula. Crude oil exports started in the same year. The oil was piped from the well to the makeshift port of al-Khobar and from there was transported by sea to the Bahrain refinery. The following year, the now prolific Ras Tanura export terminal was used for the first time by Socal’s tanker (*Saudi Arabian Oil Company, 2003:3*).

With emphasis on the strategic importance of oil revealed by World War One and the dependence of the Arab states on major Western firms (Standard Oil and Royal Dutch Shell), we highlight the following key goals of Saudi Arabia’s oil policy in the 1920s.:

1) diversification of import flows; 2) search for oil sources; 3) consolidation of foreign (primarily Western) business interests in the field of oil policy and penetration into Saudi Arabia. As Tyuryakulov put it, “Strategic factors and business interests cannot be separated from each other within the framework of oil policy” (*Saudi Arabian Oil Company, 2003:2-4*).

It was a time when not only a breadth of knowledge was required but also a high level of diplomatic and human qualities to agree with the emerging new state of Saudi Arabia. N. Tyuryakulov is an example of a brilliant diplomat working in the most difficult international conditions of political and economic confrontation with the leading states of that time—England, France, etc. The diplomatic mission of Nazir Tyuryakulov in the 1920s and

1930s was difficult for him personally, but successful for the Soviet state. The fate of this talented statesman turned out to be tragic; he became a victim of political repression. The Saudi political elite still honors the contribution and memory of Nazir Tyuryakulov, which is essential for promoting further ties in the present day between the two states (Tokayev, 2003). The results of Nazir Tyuryakulov's activities in the Middle East are not only a bridge linking historical eras—most importantly, Tyuryakulov paved the way for modern relations with the countries of the Arab Peninsula, and above all with Saudi Arabia.

Republic of Kazakhstan – Saudi Arabia: political and diplomatic aspects

30 years ago, the first steps were taken towards rapprochement between Kazakhstan and Saudi Arabia. The implementation of the tasks facing Kazakh diplomacy is evidenced by international documents on political and diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia (*Protocol on the establishment, 1994; General Agreement, 1995*). Later, agreements on trade and economic cooperation were concluded in 1995 in the investment, oil, and technical fields. These documents reveal cooperation in all sectors of the economy including industry, the production of oil and minerals, petrochemicals, agriculture, animal husbandry, and health care; information exchange on scientific and technical research; technical expertise preparation and exchange required for individual cooperation programs. In order to deepen bilateral relations between states and create a legal basis for the further development of economic relations between Kazakhstan and Saudi Arabia, an inter-governmental convention for the avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of tax evasion on capital was signed in 2009 (*Convention, 2009*).

Trade, economic and investment cooperation.

Kazakhstan, like other states, found external loans and foreign investments to solve the current problems of economic development, including loans and investments from Saudi Arabia. Attention should be paid to investment support for the construction of the new capital of Kazakhstan, Astana, and investment in the construction of administrative institutions; for example, the construction of the Parliament Building of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the USD \$5 million construction of a hospital in Kazakhstan, the financial agreement for the repair of the Karaganda-Astana motorway, etc. (*Memorandum of Understanding, 1999; Agreement between the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Saudi Develop-*

ment Fund on attracting a loan to finance the project for the reconstruction of the Karaganda-Astana Road in 2001 (MIA Kazinform, 2022).

Foreign investors mainly came for the oil industry in Kazakhstan. Saudi Arabia and other countries of the region are among the potential donors to the Kazakh economy. Financial assistance from Saudi Arabia and other countries of the Persian Gulf was provided to Kazakhstan in two forms. Grants that require independent political decisions and preferential loans provided by these countries to foreign countries are usually in the form of financial assistance for projects of national economic value by the relevant “list of friendly states” that Kazakhstan compiled after President Nursultan Nazarbayev's visit to Saudi Arabia in 1994. The concessional loans of the Saudi government are carried out through the institution of the Saudi Development Fund, specially created for this purpose (*Amreev, 2003:15*). As a result, by 2022 there were many vital projects in the fields of education, healthcare, culture, and infrastructure worth more than \$120 million that have been implemented in Kazakhstan with the support of Saudi Arabia. Among them are the poultry plant in the South Kazakhstan region and food production in the Akmola region. Seventeen enterprises with Saudi Arabia are already operating in Kazakhstan (*Astana times, 2016*).

An interesting fact is that both oil-producing countries are expanding energy cooperation through the use of nuclear power for peaceful purposes (*Agreement between the Government, 2016*). The “Saudi Vision 2030” program and “Kazakhstan 2050” strategy aims to achieve national progress through economic diversification, reducing dependence on commodities, investing in human capital and, ultimately, joining the group of the most developed countries” (*Sputniknews, 2022*).

The Islamic factor

The Islamic factor plays an important role in the foreign policy of almost all countries that actively interact with the Muslim world. Kazakhstan is interested in cooperation with Saudi Arabia as the leader of the Islamic world and as one of the richest leading countries of the world economy and global politics. In turn, the Islamic world believes that Kazakhstan is an integral part of the Muslim Community.

Pre-OIC. It should be noted that during the period of Nazir Tyuryakulov's mission in the Arab East, the process of organizational consolidation of Islamic states was already happening. Saudi leaders were especially active. From Jeddah, Tyuryakulov reported this in his writings.

He knew well the peculiarities of the Muslim world and the Arab Middle East. He repeatedly performed the major and minor hajj and adhered to the norms and traditions of Islam. He raised the issue of the annual transit of 10 to 15 thousand pilgrims to Mecca through Soviet territory. In his opinion, such a humane step would make “a very good impression and would ward off accusations of oppression of Islam.” In one of his first letters to the “Center” in Moscow. Tyuryakulov proposed to send students of the Institute of Oriental Studies, who studied the Arabic language, to the Hijaz for a one-year language training program. He wrote: “In the language of the Koran, it is impossible even to buy a box of matches here. Meanwhile, in our educational institutions, figuratively speaking, they train not Arabists, but Koranists who can communicate only with the dead and angels” (*Tyuryakulov, 2000:73,79; 161-162*).

Thus, Tyuryakulov saw in Islam above all an educational function, but the religious component of Islam was also spiritually important to him. In the early years there were many contradictions among Muslim countries and peoples because of purely political issues such as territorial claims, although the avowed purpose and aims were the safeguarding of the Holy Places, improved conditions for pilgrims, and religious liberty for all Muslim sects.

The World Islamic Conference, which was opened by King Abdul Aziz ibn Saud in Mecca in 1926, is well known. From 1926 onward, numerous meetings and conferences were held, during which the ideas of Muslim-dominated states, the opposing views of the leaders of these states and religious Muslim figures were united. “Delegates were drawn from Palestine, the Beirut Society, Syria, Sudan, Nejd, Hijaz, Asir, Egypt, as well as the Soviet Union, Afghanistan, Turkey and Malaysia. The Conference went on to meet throughout the 1930s, famously in 1931 in Jerusalem”. It should be noted that the “diplomatic breakthrough to Arabia” brought the Soviet Union closer to the countries of the Middle East. However, the successes of diplomacy were not sustainable. Intra-party and bureaucratic disagreements in the country’s leadership on foreign policy issues and its priorities in Arabia slowed down the promotion of the country’s interests in the Islamic world (*Naumkin, 2018*).

However “Leadership in the Islamic world is diffused, but if there could be said to be a symbolic seat for the center of Islam, it would be Saudi Arabia, because of its custodianship of the two holy mosques, Mecca and Medina...Saudi Arabia and the head of state of Saudi Arabia will continue to be where the

Islamic world turns for guidance, leadership and defense of Islamic interests” (*Akhtar, 2002:4*).

Cooperation with the OIC

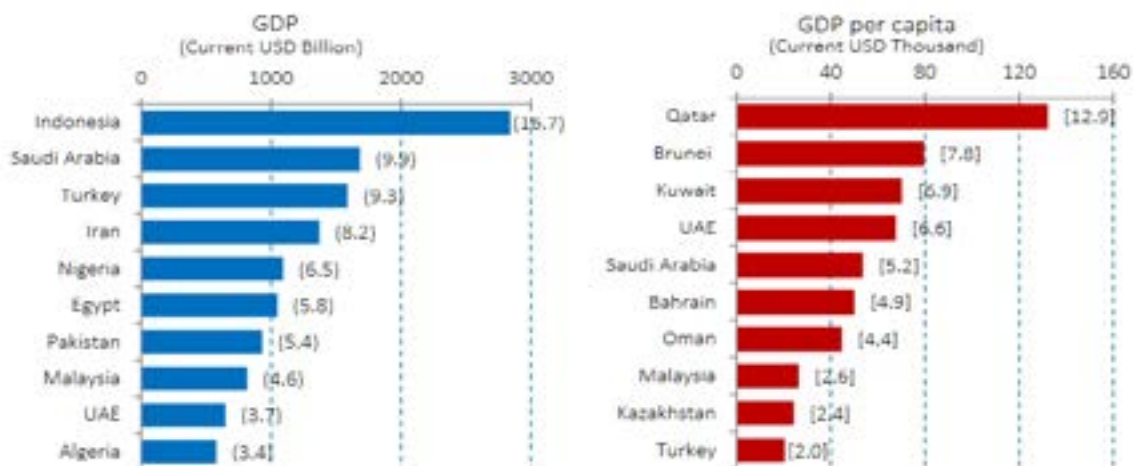
Saudi Arabia played a key role in the founding of the OIC as an organization and in the Muslim world in general. Today, Saudi Arabia provides by far the largest mandatory and voluntary contributions, which brings with it a key symbolic role in shaping the course of the OIC.

The entry of Kazakhstan into the OIC in 1995 within the framework of the 50th session of the UN General Assembly as a full member of the Islamic community was welcomed by the UN General Secretary Azzeddine Laraki from Morocco. He noted the importance of Kazakhstan: “Kazakhstan with its natural, economic, cultural and intellectual potential, and balanced domestic and foreign policy makes an invaluable contribution to the common treasury of Muslim peoples, as well as the world community” (*Amreev. 2003*). There are several reasons why Kazakhstan is a member of this organization. Kazakhstan supports the idea and policy of Islamic unity and solidarity. In this regard, the OIC is an important mechanism of the Islamic world. New opportunities for Kazakhstan were opened by the chairmanship of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in 2011.

Since the Eighth OIC Summit, which took place in December 1997 in Tehran, not a single major event of this organization has been held without the participation of Kazakhstan. Meanwhile, trade, economic, and investment ties with the OIC member countries have been strengthened at these conferences.

One of the reasons for this is Kazakhstan’s orientation towards the richest country in the Arab world – Saudi Arabia. Such member states of the Organization as Turkey, Iran, the United Arab Emirates, and Malaysia are significant exporters in the OIC space, developing close trade and economic relations with Kazakhstan, not to mention its neighbors in Central Asia. In general, Kazakhstani exports go to these OIC member states. In addition, within the framework of the OIC, cooperation with the Islamic Development Bank, and other financial and consulting companies in various sectors, are vital.

Kazakhstan, as we can see, is in the top ten in terms of GDP per capita among the OIC countries. The numbers in round (square) brackets on left (right) hand side indicate the share (ratio) of the related country’s GDP (GDP per capita) to the overall GDP (to the average GDP per capita) of the OIC countries as a group.



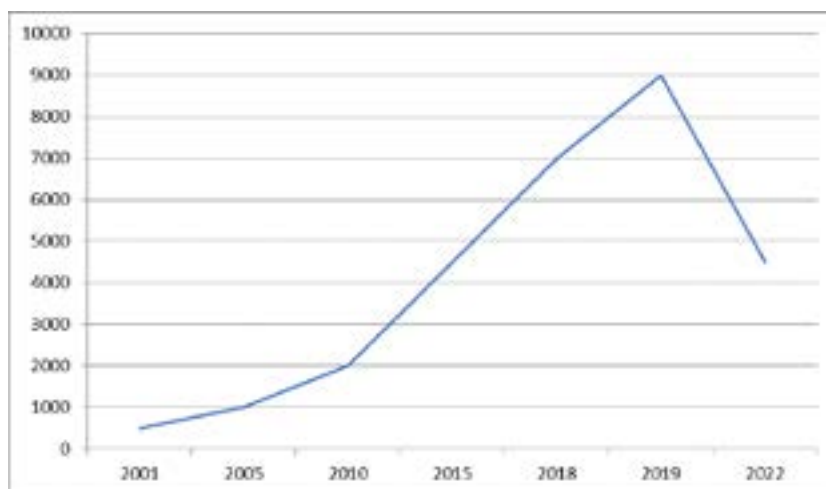
Source: IMF WEO Database April 2016 and SESRIC BASEIND Database. 2016 OIC Economic Outlook. Part I Recent Economic Developments in the World and OIC Countries. Transforming the potentials into impact Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. 2016 Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC), pp.17-18 (142 p.): <https://www.comcec.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/32-IS-SESRIC-O.pdf>

Figure 1 – Top 10 OIC Countries by GDP and GDP per capita (2015)

Pilgrimage

The organization of the Hajj is considered one of the most important elements in Saudi-Kazakh relations. The number of Kazakhstanis performing Umrah and Hajj is growing every year. The 2001 Hajj season raised the question of the need to make significant adjustments to the organization of pilgrimage for Kazakh Muslims. The Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan has responded positively to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs proposal

to regulate the organization of pilgrimage from Kazakhstan (*Sputniknews*, 2019). In January 2002, during a visit to Jeddah, the Minister of Information, Culture and Public Accord of Kazakhstan M. Kul-Mohammed signed an agreement with the Minister for the Hajj of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on long-term cooperation in the area of pilgrimage. The delegation of the Republic of Kazakhstan was accompanied by Chief Mufti of Kazakhstan Absattar kazhy Derbisali.



Source: data from various sources, including Sputniknews (2019; 2022); *The Congress of Leaders*, 2021, etc. (Calculated and compiled by the author – Korlan Tleubekova)

Figure 2 – Number of quotas allocated for pilgrimage for Kazakhstan

Before the pandemic, up to 10,000 Muslims from Kazakhstan performed the hajj annually. However, due to the global pandemic, no one from Kazakhstan was able to go on a pilgrimage for two years. In 2022, the Ministry of Hajj and Umrah of Saudi Arabia reduced the number of Muslims invited from around the world to 45.2% of applicants, and this year only one million people have been invited to make the pilgrimage. Thus, this year Kazakhstan is allotted 4,527 spaces for pilgrimage (*Sputniknews*, 2022).

Conclusions

This article examined the bilateral relations between Kazakhstan and Saudi Arabia, showing the evolution from diplomatic recognition in the 1990s and gradual increase in activity, as well as the establishment of the bilateral relations in the spheres of trade and economics, infrastructure projects, investment, oil, and culture.

The growth of mutual interests between these nations is largely due to the positive contributions of effective personal attributes of Kazakh diplomats, among whom a convincing example is found in the character of Nazir Tyuryakulov. In complex international conditions of political and economic confrontation, he managed to establish diplomatic, trade, economic, scientific, and humanitarian ties between the Soviet government and the new government of

Saudi Arabia. Thanks to his extraordinary efforts, as T. Mansurov wrote, “normal partnership relations developed between the Soviet Union and Saudi Arabia, which later developed into a strategic cooperation” (*Mansurov*, 2001, 2003, 2004).

Particular attention is paid to the Islamic factor in relations between Kazakhstan and Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is a key member in one of the organizations which is important for the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (*Tokayev*, 06 June 2022), as well as one of its key partners in the Arab and Islamic world generally.

As a result of the political and diplomatic activities of the first Soviet mission in the Arab region and the versatile activities of the first Kazakh diplomat Nazir Tyuryakulov, the foundations for modern relations between Kazakhstan and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia were created.

Over the years of cooperation between modern Kazakhstan and Saudi Arabia, special bilateral ties have developed, especially in the political, trade, economic, investment, as well as cultural and humanitarian areas.

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