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Kazakhstan Boosts Defense Spending Amid Ukraine Invasion – WSJ

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The 2S4 Tyulpan in Kazakh service. **Kalabaha1969 (CC BY-SA 4.0)**

Kazakhstan is significantly increasing its defense spending and seeking closer ties with China and NATO countries amid fears of Moscow's geopolitical ambitions spreading beyond Ukraine, The Wall Street Journal reported, citing a Kazakh official.

The Central Asian country will commit an extra 441 billion tenge ($918 million) to its defense budget, a nearly 1.5-fold increase over last year's budget of $1.7 billion, WSJ reported. Part of the additional funds will be spent on strengthening its military reserves.

While Russia deployed peacekeeping forces to Kazakhstan in early 2022 amid a series of deadly anti-government protests across the country, Moscow's war against Ukraine has complicated ties between Russia and its southerly neighbor and ally.

Kazakhstan has taken a neutral stance in the current war, declining to offer full support to either Russia or Ukraine.

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And speaking alongside Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin at June's St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev said his country would not recognize the sovereignty of the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk Peoples' Republics.

The comments were widely seen as a snub to Putin, who has named the "liberation" of the pro-Moscow separatist republics as a reason for sending troops into Ukraine.

Following Tokayev's comments, Russia halted Kazakh oil exports headed toward Europe via the Russian port of Novorossiysk, citing alleged environmental violations. The measure wich quickly canceled after Kazakh authorities threatened to block sanctions-dodging parallel imports to Russia via their customs checkpoints.

The weakening of ties with Russia has seen Kazakhstan draw closer to China, the United States and NATO member Turkey in recent months, WSJ reported.

A senior official from a Central Asian country told The Wall Street Journal that unease is rising across the region over Moscow's aims beyond Ukraine.

"Imagine if they [Russia] don't have Ukraine to abuse. Are we going to be next?" the unnamed official told WSJ.

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