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# Small state as order-maker: the case of Kazakhstan's Eurasian Union project

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## ABSTRACT

This paper conceptualizes a small state as an order-maker. As specified by international relations theory, a small state is an order-taker rather than an order-maker because it is the privilege of great power to be an order-maker. However, this paper argues that small states can behave as order-makers. The case of Kazakhstan's Eurasian Union (EAU) project announced in 1994 is an example of how post-independent Kazakhstan undertook order-making in the absence of great power after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Crucially, the EAU initiative meant not to challenge or oppose post-Soviet integration but to correct the course of regional integration from "disintegration" toward a new regional integration in the post-Soviet regional context. Thus, this paper concludes that when there is no great power, small states can behave as order-makers in a specific issue area and in the role of issue-corrector.

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## Introduction

Can small states behave as order-makers? The conventional wisdom would say "no." They cannot because this privilege belongs to great powers. In international relations (IR) theory, a great power has gained the most attention because it "creates and manages orders" (Mearsheimer 2019, 9). Great powers maintain order through leadership, institution creation, and setting rules and norms of behavior, whereas other small states follow and obey the rules of the game set by great powers (Bull 1977; Keohane 1969; Krasner 1978; Mearsheimer 2019, 9; Morgenthau 1948; Waltz 1979). In the regional interaction, "initiating" belongs to great powers only (Brecher 1972, 15–16). According to Breslin (2013, 71), "weak states 'bandwagon' in regional projects with dominant powers," with "regionalism as a function of hegemonic preferences."

This attitude of downgrading small states in favor of great powers had a history of negative connotations and prevailed in IR theory. It began with Thucydides, who famously wrote that "the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept" (cited in Lobel, Ripsman, and Taliaferro 2009, 4). This view continued with twentieth-century IR scholars such as Kenneth Waltz, who have taken a similar view that "strong states or great powers are in effect 'power-makers'; they can change the behavior of other states, whereas weak states are in effect 'power-takers,' having no choice but to follow the great powers" (cited in Hobson 2000, 23). In the twenty-first century, the situation remains the same, with small states acting as "order-takers." In contrast, liberal institutionalism (Ikenberry 2011, 28) views more powerful states as "order-makers" and "norm-makers" from the constructivist school of thought (Björkdahl et al. 2015). Thus, the

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analysis of major IR theories demonstrates how they position small states in relation to the dominance of great powers. Such an attitude toward small states even influenced scholars from small-state studies to acknowledge that “[i]n external relations, the consequence of limited capability is exacerbated by power asymmetry, leaving small states to struggle with being price and policy takers” (Baldacchino and Wivel 2020, 7). As a result, small states in the various perspectives within IR have been given a lower value in their ability to act as a “maker.” Thus, order-making has always revolved around great powers, which formed the foundation for the conventional wisdom that great powers are order-makers, while small states are order-takers. From the above, it has been clear that great powers hold the area of order-making as a privilege not achievable for small states.

However, this study would answer the question posed at the outset with a “yes.” Small states can behave as order-makers if we consider the possibility that great power can be absent. Traditionally, IR would not reflect on this because its analyses usually envision the presence of great power, and cannot conceive of its absence. Even small-state studies cannot imagine it, due to the persistent presence of great power (Fox 1959; Handel 1990; Keohane 1969; Long 2022; Rothstein 1968). However, recent history shows that the collapse of the superpower the USSR led to the absence of great power, and no great power emerged to replace it and order the post-Soviet region at that time (Olcott 2005, 21–22). Therefore, this study argues that the absence of great power creates an “opportunity moment” for small states to behave as order-makers in specific issue areas and in the role of issue-correctors. Post-independence Kazakhstan is an ideal candidate for a case study to test this theoretical proposition. Specifically, Kazakhstan’s Eurasian Union (EAU) project, which then-President Nursultan Nazarbayev proposed in 1994, is a perfect example of this phenomenon, because it captured the consequences of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the opportunities that followed.<sup>1</sup>

Researchers have studied post-Soviet Kazakhstan as a small state that emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Elman 1995, 171), weak and underdeveloped but with a large territory rich in natural resources such as oil and gas, a heavy industry built during the Soviet era, and a multi-ethnic population (Starr and Dawisha 1997). Like other post-Soviet states, Kazakhstan faced challenges in the 1990s regarding state-building and economic and political adjustment to a new international environment, transitioning from one order (Soviet) to another (a US-led international liberal order) (Garthoff 1997, 22–23). By the mid-2000s, Kazakhstan had emerged as stable domestically and more prosperous than many other former Soviet states, a visible state in the international system. It had become a reliable energy supplier to the world market, demonstrating political stability to foreign investors and showing itself as a reliable partner for trade and security cooperation. These characteristics suggest that Kazakhstan is a powerful state and not a small state, but in practice it is merely powerful compared with other post-Soviet states. Despite its relative economic successes, Kazakhstan defines its smallness through its self-perception, which is shaped by the presence of nearby major powers, Russia and China. Because of this, scholars of post-independent Kazakhstan did not even engage in defining Kazakhstan as a small (or large) state because they were confident that Kazakhstan is a small state surrounded by great powers (Clarke 2015; Cohen 2008; Cooley 2012; Cornell 2007; Legvold 2003; Weitz 2008). However, this study applies a relational approach as more appropriate in defining post-independent Kazakhstan as a small state, because it may simultaneously be a great power in relation to its immediate neighbors and small in relation to others (Baldacchino and Wivel 2020, 6). Therefore, in this paper, Kazakhstan is defined as a small state in relation to the presence of Russia and China.

It is due to the presence of these powers that post-independence Kazakhstan has pursued a balanced multi-vectoral foreign policy, demonstrating the ability to manage and conduct such a policy in an environment of great power politics (Clarke 2014). Considerable scholarly attention, therefore, has been devoted to Kazakhstan’s multi-vectoral foreign policy. Nazarbayev has stated that the “balance of our foreign policy means the development of friendly and predictable relations with all states that play a significant role in world affairs and are of practical interest to Kazakhstan” (Nazarbayev 2012). As a result, three major powers – Russia, China, and the US –

were explicitly given priority (Cohen 2008; Hug 2011; Legvold 2003; Weitz 2008) and became engaged in Kazakhstan's energy and security sectors. Hanks (2009, 265) has determined that the multi-vector approach has served Kazakhstan well, providing leverage in negotiating suitable terms with companies from the West, Russia, and China in the energy sector and, at the same time, in engaging in security cooperation with these powers through the framework of the NATO Partnership for Peace, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

However, this study is interested in another somewhat overlooked foreign policy issue. In 1991, the failure of efforts to reorganize the Soviet Union within the framework of a new Union treaty was followed by the collapse of the USSR. Soon thereafter, a priority for a number of the post-Soviet states, and especially Kazakhstan, were attempts to forge a new regional organization. Erland Idrisov, a Kazakh Foreign Minister, has observed that "one of the main priorities of the foreign policy course is Eurasian integration" (Akorda 2013). In 1994 Kazakhstan proposed the establishment of the Eurasian Union (EAU) as a new form of regional integration. Initially, scholars were somewhat skeptical concerning the prospects for the organization. Olcott (1996, 55), for example, observed that "the prospects for this union are fading as time goes on" and Rywkin (2006, 196) emphasized that "Eurasian integration, initially advocated by Kazakhstan's President Nazarbayev and subsequently endorsed by Russian President Putin, is a concept on paper only." Later, from 2000, others argued for the sudden rise of Eurasian regional integration and the need for its systematic analysis (Dragneva and Hartwell 2021, 208; Dragneva and Wolczuk 2013; Anceschi 2014; Khitakhunov, Mukhamediyev, and Pomfret 2017; Moldashev and Hassan 2017, 225). Although Kazakhstan has been analyzed in the context of Eurasian integration in chapters by the Kazakh scholars Sultanov (2015) and Kassenova (2013), they left the formation of the Eurasian Union proposal, its implementation tactics during the 1990s, and its governance since 2000 largely unexplained.

This paper addresses this gap by exploring Kazakhstan's EAU proposal as an order-making initiative to reintegrate the former Soviet states into a new regional organization. It seeks to answer two sub-questions. How has order-making been done. And in what ways has order-making been done? It employs a qualitative case study approach to investigate the EAU initiative between 1994 and 2014. Qualitative research is applied because it treats context as important, can be experimental and critical, and uses all sorts of data (Braun and Clarke 2013, 20–21). The case study method "is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the 'case') in depth and within its real-world context" (Yin 2014, 16). Content analysis of text and documents related to the EAU was used "as a technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts to the contexts of their use" (Krippendorff 2013, 24); it requires extensive reading to identify text characteristics and extracting key passages and quotes from documents and categorization (Herman 2008, 151; Lamont 2015; Tight 2019).

By employing the above methods, this study presents a novel approach to analyzing small states as order-makers, a topic that previous research has not widely explored. It seeks to contribute to small-state studies, IR, and post-Soviet affairs by demonstrating that small states can practice order-making within a regional context when no great power is present. Kazakhstan's Eurasian Union project offers, therefore, a unique case to put an end to small states' marginalization as regional order-takers.

The paper is structured as follows. First, I focus on the small-state literature to argue its inability to think of small states as order-makers (due to the presence of great power), and propose the need to think about instances in which great power is absent. Second, to detect the absence of great power, I critically challenge key concepts such as great power, asymmetry, and power. In doing so, I lay the conceptual foundation for understanding the absence of great power as a key condition to explore small-state order-making. Third, I demonstrate how order-making has been done in the absence of great power using the case of Kazakhstan's EAU

initiative. Fourth, the paper discusses and explains why order-making has been possible using three analytical perspectives.

### Small-state studies and the presence of great powers

Why have small-state studies not considered small states as order-makers? It is mainly because of the presence of great power. As noted, “states having powerful capabilities will inevitably use them and are thus the states most worthy of examination” (Neumann and Gstohl 2006, 3). Due to the presence of great powers, small-state scholars were concerned with the survival of small states during the Cold War (Fox 1959). However, despite the considerable research on small-state influence and the importance of studying small states after the end of the Cold War, scholars are still concerned with their survival since vulnerability, resistance, and constraints are major challenges in the context of the presence of great power (Baldacchino and Wivel 2020; Maass 2009, 65; Steinmetz and Wivel 2010, 10).

Thus, the presence of great powers has undoubtedly influenced the development of small-state studies and has also been the key obstacle to thinking of small states as order-makers. For instance, it is due to the presence of great powers that small-state scholars engage in their attempts to define a state as small. For instance, due to the presence of great powers, Vandenbosch (1964, 294) defines a small state as “a state which is unable to contend in war with the great powers on anything like equal terms.” Barston (1971, 41) makes it even more explicit that “Great Powers are distinguished from small states by criteria such as resources, economic development, military capability and the success of their foreign policies, pursued either alone or in association with others, on a wide range of issues.”

The presence of great powers leads to using an absolute approach to defining a state as small. For instance, Vital (1967, 8) provided criteria based on population size: a state is defined as “small” with a population of under 10–15 million in cases of economically advanced countries and under 20–30 million for underdeveloped countries. Barston (1973, 15) defines a small state as having a population with an upper limit of between 10 and 15 million. Some international institutions, like the Commonwealth Secretariat, define states as small if their population is 1.5 million and below, according to the World Bank (Commonwealth Secretariat 2003; World Bank 2003).

Due to the presence of great powers, a perception-based approach also emerged. Hey (2003, 3) proposed that “if a state’s people and institutions generally perceive themselves to be small, or if other states’ people and institutions perceive that state as small, it shall be so considered.” Hey developed her approach based on Rothstein’s view of a small power as a state that recognized it cannot gain security by use of its own capabilities and should therefore rely on the aid of others, and on Keohane’s view of “a small power as a state whose leaders believe that it can never, acting alone or in a small group, make a considerable impact on the system” (Keohane 1969, 291). One prominent response to the relational approach, not without the presence of great powers, is found in Bjøl’s work (Bjøl 1971, 22), where the author stated that the concept of a small state means nothing and that a state is small only in relation to a greater one. In her example, Belgium may be small in relation to France, but Luxemburg is small in relation to Belgium, and France itself is a small state in relation to the US. According to her, a small state should be considered “a state in its relationship with greater states.” In defense of small states, Knudsen (1988, 119) pointed out that smallness is relative: “Relative to Russia, Poland is a small state,” but “relative to Lithuania, Poland is in a position of a great power.” Goetschel (1998, 14) similarly writes that “the concept of a small state has always been a relative term. The qualification of a state as small only makes sense in relation to large states.” Steinmetz and Wivel (2010, 7) stress that “smallness is defined through the relation between the state and its environment.” Archer, Bailes, and Wivel (2014, 8) propose moving from quantifiable power possession to qualitative and relational. Thus, defining a small state in relation to the presence of great powers has dominated the discussion among small-state scholars to date.

In another respect, great powers play a crucial role for small states because they provoke particular behavior on the part of small states, for example, in the formation of foreign policy. As exemplified by Cold War scholars (Elman 1995; Fox 1959; Handel 1990; Keohane 1969; Rothstein 1968; Vital 1971), the presence of great powers motivates small states to adopt specific foreign policy behavior such as neutrality, band-wagoning, or balancing. Small-state studies emerged as a consequence, focusing on small states and their survival in the context of the presence of great powers during the Cold War. Small states were “victims, proxies or pawns” of great powers (Long 2022, 2). This analytical framework continued in small-state studies despite the disappearance of one of the superpowers – the USSR – and the subsequent improvement in the condition of small states following the Cold War.

The presence of major powers influences whether a small state is successful or not. For instance, great power forces small states to “subordinate themselves to dominant states” and, therefore, choose between band-wagoning and balancing (Thorhallsson and Steinsson 2017). Due to the presence of great powers, small states may seek a hiding strategy to avoid choosing sides in the struggle between great powers (Wivel and Thorhallsson 2018). Small states also adopt shelter-seeking strategies to “seek economic, military and societal shelter from great powers” (Thorhallsson, Steinsson, and Kristinsson 2018). Wivel (2016, 25) suggests that “political initiatives from small EU member states should avoid conflicting with existing EU initiatives or political proposals from any of the big EU member states” and “ideally, they should be presented as specific contributions to a general development, not as a change of policy or an attempt to slow it down.” For instance, the concept of binding has been developed not without the presence of great powers. It shows how small states, through institutions and shared rules, can limit the action space of larger states (Wallace 1999; Wivel 2005). Schoeller (2022, 1) found that “small states profiting from the existing system may fear that the hegemon is distracted from keeping the system stable.”

In addition, it all comes down to the point that smaller states could have preferences and strategies acting in the shadow of hegemony (Schoeller and Falkner 2022). Radoman (2018, 185) adds that “small states seek recognition from big powers by claiming their, albeit small, share in maintaining international peace and stability.” The presence of great powers is so essential to some Western allies that small European states seek a bandwagon for status “that helps them improve their status or consolidate their reputation as either loyal allies or partners” in the eyes of one particular great power, the US (Pedersen 2018, 235). De Carvalho and Neumann demonstrate the influence of great powers in their study of the case of Norway; according to them, “status is a key driver in the policies of small states”, but “small states achieve status through making themselves useful to greater powers,” especially the US (Carvalho and Neumann 2015, 2). Jakobsen and Møller (2012, 108) found that Denmark’s military engagement in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya was “not to win wars or even battles but to support the right cause and the right allies in order to gain goodwill, prestige, security and influence” in the context of US-led wars. The same is true for Central Asian states; due to the presence of great power, they were able to reach the US and be helpful in the war against the Taliban. In addition, Thorhallsson and Vidal (2022, 40) argue that “small states gain moral authority through helping the great power maintain the existing international order, such as through mediation service, peacekeeping and humanitarian mission.” Radoman (2018, 194) reminds us that “small states are expected to favour multilateral frameworks . . . and show more support for international norms and institutions that will protect them from whims and intentions of more powerful states.”

Thus, small-state studies involuntarily accept the presence of great power in their analysis. Hence, scholars derive today’s concepts and theories of small-state behavior in response to the presence of great power. As a result, small-state studies have not done much to consider small states as order-makers due to the presence of great power. Therefore, in the following section, I introduce a conceptual framework to understand the absence of great power in order to explore small-state order-making.



## The absence of great power and small-state order-making: conceptual foundation

In IR, thinking about great power generates a “thought process” in favor of great power because scholars justify great power’s superiority over the small states with concepts such as asymmetry and power, in which a small state is weak in an asymmetrical relationship and, therefore, powerless. However, if we begin thinking about the absence of great power, then we also generate a “thought process” to detect the absence of great power in favor of small states. In this case, the same concepts of asymmetry and power must be revised, including the concept of great power, to understand the absence of great power. By doing this, we remove the key obstacle – the presence of great power – and consider small states as order-makers.

### Great power

When it comes to the definition of great power, it is clear and straightforward: a great power is a state that possesses the ability to use its military, economic, and political resources to influence events on a global scale (Hastedt and Felice 2020). However, we must divide the concept of great power into near and distant great power. For instance, after gaining independence, Kazakhstan adopted a rare foreign policy. It has pursued a balanced multi-vectoral foreign policy, demonstrating the ability to manage and conduct such a policy in an environment of great power presence: Kazakhstan faces Russia in the north and China in the east and, at the same time, has developed substantial relations with Western states, including the US. As a result, Kazakhstan has avoided any move to antagonize major powers and has turned them instead into strategic partners in its foreign policy strategy (Hey 2003). Thus, it is reasonable to suggest terming the presence of major powers as near and distant powers since the relations of a small state with neighboring near-powers could be more critical than with distant great powers, or it could be the reverse. For instance, in the post-Soviet setting, Belarusian and Kazakh relations with a near-great power, Russia, are more important than with the US. In contrast, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine are strengthening their relations with a distant great power, the US. Also important, Russia, as a near power, has applied a concept of “unfriendly countries” to those who distance themselves from Russia (Oliker et al. 2009); the US, in contrast, had applied a “rogue state” doctrine to those who distance themselves from the US. The consequence of this is well known: the US invasion of Iraq and the Russian war with Ukraine (Roehring 2022). Kazakhstan escaped the fate of others because it applied a friendly and strategic relationship with both near and distant powers.

The analytical value here is that relations with near and distant great powers can lead to success if the principle of friendship has momentum; if not, it could lead to failure. For example, Long’s (2022) study demonstrates how small states deal with near and distant great powers. Success and failure, therefore, could be defined by how a small state views its relationship with a powerful one, whether in a friendly manner or not. Long has shown this with several countries categorized as successful states: Djibouti, El Salvador, Bhutan, Estonia, Rwanda, Bolivia, and Malaysia. In contrast, the failure category includes Gabon, Honduras, Nepal, Moldova, Zambia, Paraguay, and Myanmar. What makes all these countries similar in facing common concerns is the presence of a near and distant great power, but they differ in their attitudes towards near and distant great powers. Mali’s relationship with the distant power of France is an example. Here, even though France does not share a border with Mali, the presence of French interests in the region as a distant power brings it closer to the African country from the outside. However, Mali adopted an unfriendly stance towards France, for which it paid, when France invaded Mali due to instability in that country. By contrast, the “successful” states accepted the reality of the presence of a near and distant great power and created an atmosphere of friendly relations. So, the difference between success and failure is a choice between a friendly or unfriendly position towards a stronger state.

In addition, internal preferences and conditions determine whether policy will be carried out in a friendly or unfriendly manner. The stability or instability of the domestic order in small states

cannot be ignored over other domestic factors (Gvalia et al. 2013; Thorhallsson 2000) because this plays into the hands of regimes in different ways. Rwanda, after the massacre in 1994, used this to its advantage in obtaining foreign aid. Instability in Mali involved France, instability in Moldova favored Russia, and instability in Nepal turned it towards India (Long 2022).

Ultimately, a country can be successful when it considers the presence of a larger state and tries not to aggravate relations with the larger state. Therefore, small states must consider the consequences of forming positions on recognizing or not recognizing the interests of a great power (near or distant). This is the terrible reality of relations between a small and a great power. Relations with other states are not limited to the neighboring near power but, on the contrary, are aimed at diversifying relations. Here, Long (2022) again points out the successful attempts to pursue diversification and the failures of those who failed to achieve it. Ultimately, everything comes down to how a state forms its relationship with a great power, on which it can justify its right to seek relations with other powers. For example, despite the presence of the United States military, Djibouti stationed Japanese and Chinese military representatives on its territory. This was within the framework of the fight against piracy, given the vital location of Djibouti. Similarly, Central Asian states, in the context of the fight against international terrorism, have located military bases on their territories. In contrast, India, at one time, also expressed its position towards Nepal; the latter tried to build a relationship with China but paid for it when India intervened in the internal affairs of Nepal and applied economic sanctions (Long 2022). Since we have now clarified that small states may face near or distant powers, it is important to understand why near and distant powers may not act as a great power. For this reason, we need to question the asymmetry that defines the relationship between small and great power.

### **Asymmetry**

Scholars believe that within the framework of such relations, small states usually lose out due to asymmetry, while large states gain more from the power imbalance (Archer, Bailes, and Wivel 2014, 8; Long 2022). This is because the small state is “the weaker part in an asymmetric relationship,” in which it is “unable to change the nature or functioning of the relationship on its own, and it is tied to a specific spatio-temporal context” (Archer, Bailes, and Wivel 2014, 8; Steinmetz and Wivel 2010, 7), with small states, therefore, being “takers” rather than “makers” (Baldacchino and Wivel 2020).

However, what if the large state is weak, too? Could it be considered an opportunity for a small state to act as an order-maker? It could be, because being a weak part of an asymmetrical relationship does not mean that a small state is inactive and cannot behave as an order-maker. The opportunity emerges when those near or distant powers may not feel responsible or weak for acting as an order-maker in a given time and context. For instance, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, distant powers around Kazakhstan, such as Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan, were invited to the region. However, they could not act as potential order-makers in the regional context (Clawson 1997, 149), and even the near powers of Russia and China were reluctant to act in such a way when needed in the 1990s (Olcott 2005, 21–22). Therefore, neither near nor distant powers took on the role of order-makers and corrected the course of regional integration towards their benefit. Thus, it is reasonable to argue that the presence of power asymmetry does not always mean we should expect the strongest power to behave as a “maker.” Therefore, we detect the absence of great power. This begs the question: can great powers be said to possess power if they cannot use it for order-making? Indeed, great powers have power over others, but not consistently over a specific issue.

### **Power**

The presence of major powers is usually associated with the possession of military and economic power and “the ability to persuade others to do something that they would not do otherwise” (Keohane and Nye 1977, 11). Waltz (1979, 192) offered a simple notion that “an agent is powerful to



the extent that he affects others more than they affect him.” The above thoughts were skillfully summarized as hard and soft power by Joseph Nye (2004). Accordingly, “power is the ability to influence the behavior of others to get the outcomes one wants” (Nye 2004, 16) through coercion, persuasion, or leadership (Nye 2011). Thus, scholars have always viewed power as a “power over others” due to the possession of resources not available to small states. As a consequence, “states with greater material resources are better able to use power both to influence the regional and international environments, whereas states without power, that is, small states, are both unable to secure their security and vulnerable to external influence” (Reeves 2014, 256).

However, suppose the strongest power is too weak to pursue order-making. In that case, its possession of greater power loses meaning because it is only suitable for the stronger power but not when needed in a specific time and context. In this context, what kind of power can a small state develop? Since the nature of power is changing, we should talk about other types of power that small states could adopt in opposition to hard and soft power, such as the “power over the issue” but not over others. This proposition aligns with previous observations. Lindell and Persson (1986, 93) have argued that a state might be relatively weak in some areas of international conduct but stronger in others. For instance, Norway and Switzerland are both weak militarily but strong in their respective international shipping and banking areas. This phenomenon, in their view, is called “issue-specific power.” Similarly, countries like Sweden, Denmark, and Belgium have developed their issue-specific power in environmental, gender, and finance, respectively (Jakobsen 2009, 86–87). However, their issue-specific powers were developed within the US-led international order, while this paper suggests considering power over the issues when there is no great power. In this case, it “shifts the analytical focus from the power that states possess to the power that they exercise” (Archer, Bailes, and Wivel 2014, 8). Thus, this paper proposes that a small state may develop non-material power such as “power over the issue” simply being the first to propose what is needed because other great powers were absent. This paper will show that Kazakhstan has developed its power over the regional integration issue simply because no other powers were inclined to suggest something that could unite the former Soviet republics. Thus, the strongest near or distant power in an asymmetrical relationship may not always dominate specific issues and may fail to initiate ideas. As a result, the absence of great power becomes evident in such situations. This shift justifies moving away from the analytical focus on the presence of great power and allows us to envision a reality without great power. This suggests that theorizing about the absence of great power is possible, and hence it is possible to explore small state order-making when there is no great power.

Drawing on the conceptual perspective above, this study explores the EAEU initiative to explain how small states engage in order-making in the absence of great power. I have approached this study from the qualitative and case study perspective to understand Kazakhstan’s order-making phenomenon. The aim was to inductively search for order-making intentions from within the proposed idea of the EAU in 1994. I focus on secondary data that cover Eurasian integration between 1994 and 2014, such as official documents and text related to the EAEU proposal, to look for the communication pattern within the case (Lamont 2015, 91; Tight 2019). After an intense reading of all related documents and text, I identified three key documents that indicate order-making intentions (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Key documents of order-making intentions.

Key document	OMS	Purpose
“On the Formation of the Eurasian Union of States” (Nazarbayev 1994d, 38–50)	Scenario 1	All in one
“Integrationism. Based on Equality, Voluntary and on Pragmatic Interest – This is a Decent Future for Eurasia” (Nazarbayev 1996, 42–44)	Scenario 2	Core only
“A New Reading of the Eurasian Idea in the 21st Century” (Nazarbayev 2011b)	Scenario 3	Open to others

I categorized the key documents as order-making scenarios (OMS) one, two, and three. In the process of data analysis, three themes emerged from each scenario. I labeled them separately according to their purpose: thus, the first scenario, “*all in one*,” intended to bring all former Soviet republics into one regional organization but failed. The second scenario only focused on “*core states*” and was more successful. The third scenario later followed and aimed to make Eurasian integration “*open to others*” for Non – Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries. Thus, this methodology helped to uncover the EAU initiative and identify its three key order-making elements, each of which had the goal of correcting the course of post-Soviet integration towards a new type of regional reorganization. Having outlined the methodological approach, the following section explains small-state order-making in the absence of great power. I begin with the precondition to understand Nazarbayev’s shift to integration issues. Then, I present the case of Kazakhstan’s EAU project to demonstrate small-state order-making with its three order-making scenarios.

### The case of small-state order-making: Kazakhstan’s EAEU project

Prior to formally proposing the concept of the EAU in 1994, Nazarbayev undertook two strategic moves. First, in 1992, Nazarbayev published his first foreign policy document titled “Strategy for the Formation and Development of Kazakhstan as a Sovereign State” (Nazarbayev 1992). The document shows Nazarbayev’s disinterest in integration and his interest in coordination instead. This is because Nazarbayev was frustrated with a lack of support and responsibility from other former Soviet republics, and therefore, coordination was the basis of his unification effort (Nazarbayev 1992, 41).

However, Nazarbayev later quickly changed Kazakhstan’s position from “coordination” to “integration.” This interest was evident in Nazarbayev’s trips to the capitals of major powers in 1994. Second, in 1994, when visiting Columbia University in New York, on 16 February 1994, Nazarbayev stated, “I have been and remain a supporter of the preservation of historically-established relations of friendship, cooperation, and understanding, all the best that connects our peoples for centuries with a common history” (Nazarbayev 1994a, 20). Regarding the CIS, he stated that the “CIS is not a state, not a national entity, but the normal mechanism of regional interaction in the current conditions, comparable to the European Union” (24). However, in that speech, Nazarbayev implicitly hints at the immaturity of the CIS compared with Europe. Later, during a visit to London on 22 March 1994, Nazarbayev (1994b, 26) made the following statements focusing on the post-Soviet region at Chatham House:

Two trends determine the development of the post-Soviet space to date: on the one hand, the formation of national statehood is taking place, and on the other, the tendency towards integration of the CIS countries is strengthening.

However, the interesting part of his speech is that:

Current conditions dictate that we must abandon the desire to retain all states within the CIS. In our opinion, it is advisable to build a real working union of states based on the core of countries, with the possible name Euro-Asian Union.

Thus, the London speech outlines Nazarbayev’s initial vision. The above extract from the speech indicates that Nazarbayev understood that the reintegration of all post-Soviet states was impossible, and his solution was to focus on its core states instead. Nazarbayev (1994c, 25) explained why:

There is the undeveloped system of responsibility for the fate of the Commonwealth, which adequately considers the changes in the interests of the participating states, on the one hand, and the dynamics of the development of the post-Soviet space as a whole.

Finally, in a speech at Moscow State University on 29 March 1994, Nazarbayev began with a critical view on the development of the CIS and stated that “we could start unification in the EAU from

Kazakhstan and Russia” (Nazarbayev 1994c, 32–33). The above speeches, therefore, reveal why Nazarbayev wanted to see a new regional order and how he intended to bring about his version of that order. Thus, the EAU project as an order-making initiative became an official Eurasian strategy after 1994. Despite a lack of material power, Nazarbayev nevertheless set a goal to achieve it through the following three order-making scenarios.

### ***Scenario one: all in one***

Discontented with the development of the CIS but not challenging it, Nazarbayev made his initial order-making initiative by proposing the EAU project idea. Nazarbayev signed the document titled “On the Formation of the Eurasian Union of States. Draft document, Almaty, 3 June 1994” (Nazarbayev 1994d, 38–50). The document’s content sets out a problem statement and proposed solution statement in two parts. In the problem statement, Nazarbayev (1994d, 41) remarked:

Considering the differences between countries in the levels of development of the market economy and democratization of political processes, we propose the formation of an additional integration structure—the Eurasian Union—combined with the activities of the CIS. This gives grounds for an urgent need to form a new economic order in the CIS.

The problem statement highlighted issues generated by the socio-economic and political crisis that all the CIS states faced after the collapse of the Soviet Union and showed the needed policy responses.

In the solution section, Nazarbayev (1994d, 38) revealed the content of the Eurasian Union project. First, it starts with the statement, “Economic interests determine the basis for the rapprochement of independent states. The political institutions of the EAU should adequately reflect these interests and promote economic integration.” Second, the solution section falls into two significant parts. The first (A) is concerned with clear principles and mechanisms for forming the EAU, such as entry requirements and their conditions, participation in other integration institutions, and exit conditions. The primary emphasis, however, has been on the formation of supranational bodies and the coordination of joint policies (B). After the publication, Nazarbayev moved to convince others and defend the idea of the project but faced a lack of support from other CIS member states. However, despite the others’ reservations, Nazarbayev considered their comments and, in response, tried to clarify but stayed firm on significant aspects of the project. In an interview with the Russian newspaper *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* on 11 June 1994, Nazarbayev (1994e, 60) stressed the following:

I do not want to say that the CIS is not fulfilling its role and should be dissolved. However, the CIS goes in one direction and life in another. ... I propose to have normal supranational coordinating bodies. Let them not be afraid that sovereignty will be lost, and so on. It is believed that general sovereignty is higher than the separate private sovereignty of each state; it is more useful.

To ease further concern, the Kazakh government organized a conference in Almaty on 20 September 1994, titled “Eurasian Space: Integration Potential and its Implementation.” Nazarbayev started with the criticism that “during the existence of the Commonwealth, 400 documents were adopted, but no significant results have yet been achieved,” and despite having commonality, “we are fenced off from each other by borders and customs.” He claimed that “the whole world today is striving for integration,” such as the European Community or Arab League. Therefore, “with a collective effort” and “having a powerful unifying potential formed over decades” during the Soviet Union should make it easy to enter into the world community (Nazarbayev 1994f, 94–95). He clarified that “the EAU ... aims at solving economic problems in the Commonwealth space, including through the creation of supranational bodies that contribute to the implementation of agreements and treaties reached” (96).

### **Scenario two: core only**

Dissatisfied by the reaction and lack of support for the EAU project from CIS member states, Nazarbayev made the following move in order-making: he was quick to advance an idea that he first mentioned at Chatham House in March 1994. Nazarbayev considered that “it is advisable to build a real working union based on the core of states,” in which Kazakhstan is at the core along with Russia (Nazarbayev 1994b, 26). He returned to this idea in the report “Integrationism. Based on Equality, Voluntary and Pragmatic Interest – This Is a Decent Future for Eurasia,” presented in Moscow on 16 February 1996. Nazarbayev (1996, 42–44) stated the following:

Integrating all post-Soviet spaces into a more constructive formation than the Commonwealth in the nearest historical perspective is problematic. At present, the actual values were laid down two years ago in the EAU project of the ideas of two-speed and multi-tier integration., although I suggest using another term—integration cores.

He clarified further that: “Today, the integration core can be formed precisely through the mechanism of the triple Customs Union.”

These quotations introduce the concept of core states and economic interests above political ones. Nazarbayev (1996, 44), in the same document, called for the need for a clear strategy and goals in integration and its “recognition as a priority direction in the foreign policy of interaction of states of the Commonwealth” (Nazarbayev 1996, 47). Thus, the February 1996 speech in Moscow was a follow-up attempt towards integration after Kazakhstan and Russia signed the Customs Union Treaty on 20 January 1995 (Kembayev 2011). However, the Treaties on the Customs Union and the Common Economic Space dated 26 February 1999, according to Mansurov, needed to be fixed (Mansurov 2014).

It was only after 2000 that real integration began to emerge, when five CIS member states prioritized their interest in integration (Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Russia) and met in Astana on 10 October 2000, to create the Eurasian Economic Community (EEC), an “international organization, having a clear functional structure, effective mechanisms of work, and clear and understandable goals: the creation of the Customs Union (CU) and the Common Economic Space (CES) and integration into the global trade and economic system” (Mansurov 2014). In Nazarbayev’s (2004, 228) assessment, “the EurAsEC is a viable, developing organization. Cooperation between the ‘Eurasian Five’ countries is constantly being adjusted, and new tasks are set for the transition to higher levels of interaction.” Indeed, the interaction continued with the core countries of Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia to shape the Custom Union and the Common Economic Space (KISI 2019). Nazarbayev (2011a), in his annual 2011 state address, emphasized that “Kazakhstan will remain committed to the rapid and efficient development of the Customs Union of Russia, Kazakhstan, and Belarus.” Moreover, the confidence and control of the integration led Nazarbayev to state that “our immediate goal is to create the Eurasian Economic Union” (Akorda 2012).

### **Scenario three: open to others**

Finally satisfied with progress toward Eurasian integration, Nazarbayev quickly proposed another order-making move. In an article published on 25 October 2011 titled “Eurasian Union: From Idea to History of the Future” (Nazarbayev 2011b), under the subsection of “A New Reading of the Eurasian Idea in the 21st Century,” Nazarbayev stated that “we view the Eurasian Union as an open project. It cannot be imagined without broad cooperation, for example, with the European Union and other associations.” In order to avoid misunderstanding, Nazarbayev also used the article to highlight that “there is no ‘restoration’ or ‘reincarnation’ of the USSR and never will be. These are just phantoms of the past, speculation and speculation. And in this, our views completely coincide with the leadership of Russia, Belarus, and other countries” (Nazarbayev 2011b). With the signing of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) treaty scheduled for 2014, Nazarbayev was determined to make the

following corrections as early as possible. The Eurasian Economic Union, according to Nazarbayev, “should initially be created as a competitive global economic association; as a strong link linking the Euro-Atlantic and Asian areas of development; as a self-sufficient regional financial association, which will be part of the new global monetary and financial system” (Nazarbayev 2011b). He emphasized that “the geo-economic and, in the long term, geopolitical maturation of Eurasian integration should proceed exclusively evolutionarily and voluntarily” (Nazarbayev 2011b).

However, Nazarbayev has implemented the Eurasian Union only in terms of its economic aspects. On 29 May 2014, the core members of the Eurasian Economic Community (EEC) met to sign an agreement on creation of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEC 2021). While Nazarbayev had advanced his important task, after the inauguration of the EAEU, he stated that “if the rules that were established in the agreement are not followed, Kazakhstan has every right to refuse membership in the Eurasian Union. Astana will never be part of organizations that threaten Kazakhstan’s independence” (Argynov 2014). This statement followed the escalation of the conflict between Ukraine and Russia over the latter’s annexation of Crimea (Oliphant et al. 2015, 15). Although such a comment from Nazarbayev was unexpected, he remained positive and committed to implementing the new regional association and to showing its openness to outside countries (Prime Minister 2020).

This section shows that Kazakhstan conducted small-state order-making using three scenarios between 1994 and 2014. The following discussion will interpret these findings through three analytical perspectives – formation, implementation, and control – to better understand and explain order-making.

## Discussion and analysis

### Formation

Nazarbayev’s call for a meeting of former Soviet republics in Almaty on 21 December 1991, to set up a new regional order by expanding the CIS, illustrates the team dynamics involved in reorganizing into a new structure to address further integration issues. However, the CIS did not serve to bring order but facilitated disintegration instead (Kubicek 2009). Mostafa and Mahmood (2018, 163) assessed that “the CIS was ultimately an ineffective and inefficient organization amid regional wars, political and ideological tensions, and conflicts among its member states; it also faced a lack of mutual trust and commitment among those states.” In the Caucasus, the interstate war between Armenia and Azerbaijan started over Nagorno-Karabakh, and Georgia was at war with the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. A civil war erupted in Tajikistan, while Uzbekistan faced an Islamic threat from within (Shoemaker 2010, 81).

Thus, the post-Soviet region was in disorder, and no power was willing to take responsibility, as IR scholars might have expected. Indeed, the collapse of the Soviet Union left the post-Soviet region without great power; no great powers emerged to replace the USSR, and no other distant powers emerged to act as order-makers. Russia, as the strongest near-power in the region, was defined, perhaps paradoxically, as a weak power due to “weak social, cultural and political popular mobilization” (Snyder 1999, 153). The track record of Russia since independence shows that it has gone through similar conditions experienced by all former Soviet states after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Dawisha and Starr 1995). Cooper (2013, 15) explains that “during the 1990s, for Russia and the other new nations of the ex-Soviet Union, the principal concerns were post-communist transformation and state-building.”

Under these conditions, Russia abandoned two critical instruments of Soviet financial leverage over others: the ruble zone and the energy supply (Dawisha and Parrot 1994, 172–175). This Russian move pressured the other republics to force economic reform and introduce national currencies (Schroeder 1996, 37–38). Thus, Kazakhstan began an independent monetary policy by introducing its currency in November 1993 (Nazarbayev 1996, 165–168; Schroeder 1996, 31). This also led to the

independent energy policy of Kazakhstan and other republics, which aimed to reduce dependence on Russia (Hancock and Libman 2016, 212). Moreover, in the case of the creation of the Free Trade Zone among CIS member states in 1994, Russia refused to ratify the plan (Mostafa and Mahmood 2018). Thus, the absence of order-making incentives from Russia to keep and expand the monetary system made the Russian candidacy for order-making bleak in that specific time and context. Moreover, Russia, under a peacekeeping mission, was involved in “hot spots” (Brzezinski and Sullivan 1997, 59) but contributed instead to “frozen conflicts” in the cases of Moldova and Georgia (Kazantsev et al. 2020). Even the Russian initiative for the creation of the CIS Collective Security Treaty in 1992 was part of collective efforts with others, while three other CIS member states (Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova) refused to join (Moldashev and Hassan 2017, 228).

Nazarbayev (1997c, 198–199) explicitly pointed out the lack of integration results stemming from Russia’s inability to offer a clear integration program and blamed Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine for Eurocentrism, stating that they “isolated themselves from the general circle of interrelated problems” (Nazarbayev 1997d, 18). This explains Nazarbayev’s shift from “coordination” to a new type of “integration” in 1994 due to the lack of team dynamics and the continued absence of great power to initiate regional integration. On this issue, Nazarbayev (1997b, 335) concludes that:

I did everything possible and impossible to keep Kazakhstan in a single currency and technological space with Russia and other states of the Commonwealth. But the vector of Russia’s development was set in the other direction. The Russian leadership missed the chance to become the center, the core, the natural backbone of the Commonwealth.

This is a critical statement about Russia’s role in the region. It indicates that Russia lost an opportunity and showed a lack of responsibility when it was needed. Thus, Russia was economically weak and faced the same post-independence problems of post-Soviet state-building and foreign policy orientation as other CIS member states. Therefore, it could not act as an order maker when needed in specific issue areas such as regional integration. This confirms the absence of a great power proposition in the conceptual framework. Thus, despite the presence of asymmetry and power over others, Russia did not act as an order-maker and was absent in important issue areas.

Thus, the key factors for forming the EAU idea were the ineffective CIS, lack of team dynamics, and a weak Russia. However, despite this, on 3 June 1994, President Nazarbayev signed the document “The Project of the Formation of the Eurasian Union of States” and sent it to the CIS member states (Nazarbayev 1994d, 38). The document aimed to be the initial order-making scenario to bring all former Soviet states together: all in one. However, what Nazarbayev faced subsequently was its implementation, which did not proceed as envisioned.

## **Implementation**

Indeed, the implementation of the EAU project also depended on other CIS member states and Russia. However, while Nazarbayev succeeded in gathering other republics in Almaty to expand the CIS, he could not do it again with his Eurasian project (the EAU). Despite Nazarbayev’s attempts to convince others that the project was not meant to recreate the USSR, others perceived it as such. The CIS member states eventually split into those who supported and those who questioned the project’s motives. For instance, Nazarbayev emphasized politics first to solve economic issues. On the other hand, the President of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, reacted by pointing out, “I have always said that politics is secondary, and economics is primary.” Specifically, Karimov questioned Nazarbayev’s proposal for a single parliament when he asked, “Will Russia agree that this so-called single parliament should have an equal number of deputies from Kazakhstan and Russia? Naturally, no” (Portnikov 1994). On another occasion, Karimov stated, “Much is left unsaid when the term Euro-Asian is used. If this implies a single parliament, single supranational structures, and even single citizenship and a single constitution, it means the restoration of the old union, no matter what it is called” (Brzezinski and Sullivan 1997, 335).



At that time, Saparmurat Niyazov, the President of Turkmenistan, questioned whether the new interstate association would repeal the CIS but admitted the novelty of centralization and power of supranational bodies in the project (Azia 1994). Here, it is relevant to mention Martha Brill Olcott, who argued that Central Asian leaders viewed Nazarbayev's proposal as "an unacceptable surrender of sovereignty" (Olcott 1996, 140). However, Armenian Foreign Minister Vahan Papazian, on the other hand, stated that "the idea of President Nazarbayev is being seriously studied in Armenia. We consider it one of the options for further developing mutual relations between CIS members" (Topchyan 1994, 80). The key interesting position, however, was from the Russian side. Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev demonstrated the Russian policy and attitude toward Nazarbayev's EAU when he stated, "We would like to avoid a situation in which the promotion and discussion of such ideas [Eurasian Union] would hinder, say, or divert attention from the solution of specific problems" (Kazakhstanskaya 1994). However, he continued to suggest that:

N. Nazarbayev's initiative on the Eurasian Union should be viewed not as a distraction but, on the contrary, as focusing attention on a far-reaching, promising idea designed to focus attention on the specific issues that are now before us.

However, what underlies this statement is the assertion by Aleksandrov (1999, 181), who found that "Yeltsin could not accept someone other than himself as the author of an initiative as important and potentially historic as the Eurasian Union." This demonstrates an inability to accept that Russia was not the first to propose such an idea as the Eurasian Union, with Russia trying to brush aside an idea that would brand Russia as an order-taker rather than an order-maker. However, despite Russia's attitude toward Nazarbayev's activism for order-making, Nazarbayev's view of Russia as a near-power with whom he needed to make a deal was essential for Eurasian integration to be possible. Therefore, Nazarbayev was always optimistic about Russia since, "in the integration of our countries, the road can be Russia" (Nazarbayev 1997a, 31).

In sum, the formation of the EAU in 1994 was caused by the lack of collective incentive for regional integration within the CIS structure, and, importantly, by the absence of a stronger power to take order-making initiatives. However, the implementation of the EAU, according to the first scenario (all-in-one), faced the same challenges: the lack of team dynamics, insufficient support from the CIS member states, and the absence of backing from the nearby power, Russia. The second scenario (core only) then became central to placing Russia among other core states and advancing the EAU idea with a new order-making formula. Thus, the implementation of the EAU based on the "core only" concept moved Eurasian integration forward: the dynamics of the core states – Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia – were central to the core-only concept, which facilitated the continued team dynamic in the formation of the Eurasian Economic Community (EEC) in 2000, the Customs Union (CU) in 2007, the Single Economic Space (SES) in 2012, and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) in 2014 (Kirkham 2016; Libman and Vinokurov 2012). The problem of implementation, characterized by a lack of team dynamics and the absence of a stronger power, was resolved with the core states – only concept. Finally, this approach helped bring Nazarbayev's Eurasian project to its conclusion in 2014 with the formation of the EAEU.

## Control

Continuity of regional integration based on core states has given Kazakhstan a central position in the EEC, CU, and EAEU decision-making bodies. It allowed Kazakhstan to control Eurasian integration as an institutional designer, decision-maker, and corrector of Eurasian integration's content from within and influence its future shape. Nazarbayev referred to regional integration as a global trend by pointing to examples such as the European Community and the Arab League (Nazarbayev 1997a, 95). He has constantly referenced the EU model as a method that could be applied to the CIS region. According to Tair Mansurov,

a former Kazakh ambassador and former Secretary-General of the Eurasian Economic Community (EEC) from 2007 to 2014, “the EAU project is based on the classical integration model of American economist B. [Bella] Balassa, who singled out five stages of international economic integration: a free trade area, a customs union, a common market, an economic union, and complete economic integration” (Mansurov 2014, 102). Mansurov (2014, 103) also emphasizes that “the project on the creation of the EAC was envisaged to use the EU experience in the creation of the EEC, the CU, and the SES, which made it possible to form and apply a number of new methodological solutions.”

As a result, the sequence of new institutions since 2000—e.g. EEC, CU, SES – has been viewed as evidence of successful integration compared with development in the 1990s (Dutkiewicz and Sakwa 2015). Laruelle (2019, 398) noted that “one of Nazarbayev’s greatest victories was the launch of the EEC,” when the Presidents of the core countries of Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia met in the Kazakh capital, Astana, on 10 October 2000 to sign the treaty establishing the EEC (Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan were also signatories). Nazarbayev notched another victory with the launch of the Customs Unions (CU) in 2007 with the core states of Belarus and Russia (Cooper 2013, 21). This core continued to form the Single Economic Space (SES) in 2012 and finally led to the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) in 2014 (Dutkiewicz and Sakwa 2015).

This is consistent with Nazarbayev’s vision, set out in Moscow in 1994 (Kassenova 2013) and according to his second scenario (speech in February 1996). Thus, Nazarbayev’s implementation of the EAU was accomplished after a significant adjustment to focus on the regional economic order based on the core regional states of Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia. First, this construct allowed Kazakhstan to control the path of integration from within, by being a core member of the EEC. It ensured its position vis-à-vis others via the principle of equality that Nazarbayev forcefully inserted into the EEC. This has proved a key asset for him in controlling the organizational structure from the inside (e.g. Nazarbayev was selected as the first president of the EEC). In addition, from the Kazakh side, Tair Mansurov was appointed as the Secretary-General of the EEC in 2007 and held this position until 2014, when the EEC dissolved in favor of the EAEU (Cooper 2013, 21). Data acquired from the EEC webpage, which has served as the official archive of the organization since 2015, shows 36 meetings of the Interstate Council of the Eurasian Economic Community and two summits (EEC 2015). Kazakhstan organized and hosted 7 meetings, following Russia’s 21 hosted meetings, whereas Belarus, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan hosted 6, 3, and 1 meeting, respectively (EEC 2015).

Second, such activity results from Kazakhstan’s position in the decision-making system. According to Evgeny Vinokurov of the Eurasian Development Bank (EADB), the current EAEU contains three critical elements outlined in Nazarbayev’s Moscow speech in 1994: the principles of voluntariness and equality, the prioritization of economic policy, and the creation of a system of supranational bodies (Vinokurov and Nurseitova 2020). Initially, the decision-making body of the Customs Union Commission formed the weighting system, with Russia dominating with 57% of the votes compared to 21.5% each for Kazakhstan and Belarus (Kassenova 2012, 25). However, this was not an obstacle for Kazakhstan in expressing its position on specific issues. For instance, Kazakhstan advocated for the title “Eurasian Economic Union” in response to Russia’s proposal for “Eurasian Union” (Popescu 2014, 21).

On another issue, Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko complained that Kazakhstan insisted on sticking to the agreed 2015 agenda (launch date for EAEU), delaying the signing of the treaty on the transformation of the EEC (Newsru 2012). The following example of how the EAEU treaty was discussed between the core states in its initial stage is revealing. Samat Ordabayev (Tengrinews 2014) reported that:

First, a vast draft treaty was proposed, almost 2,000 pages long. An attempt was made to include in it such provisions that, in fact, regulate all aspects of the life of our states. First of all, attempts were made to include such issues as political cooperation, common citizenship, migration policy, visa policy issues, and security issues.

This latter account reveals how Kazakh diplomats' standing regarding the treaty was significant in its initial stage to ensure that its content did not expand beyond economic integration. Thus, Kazakhstan succeeded in defending its position and continued its efforts even after the treaty's signing and under the new decision-making model. The CU Commission weighting system was replaced by that of the Eurasian Economic Commission, which specified an equal distribution of votes among member states (Kassenova 2012, 25). On this issue, Nazarbayev (2014), on state television, responded to domestic concern over the violation of Kazakhstan's interests in the EAEU and explained that:

This is not true. When the presidents of Kazakhstan, Russia, and Belarus gather to resolve issues, a decision is not made if one person is against it. This is called consensus. If I do not like their decision, I will speak out against it, and it will not be accepted. This means that we all have the same rights.

The web page of the Ministry of Trade and Integration of the Republic of Kazakhstan also states the consensus aspect: "The Treaty on the EAEU contains a clear consensus mechanism for making strategically significant decisions at all levels, which excludes any possibility of domination by any state" (Government of Kazakhstan n.d.). However, other institutions, such as the Eurasian Economic Commission Collegium, do not apply the consensus, where "Russia's informal means of influence coexist with formal equality" (Dragneva and Wolczuk 2017, 13). Nazarbayev (2013) himself commented during the meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council in October 2013 that:

I cannot fail to note that the Russian members of the Board take part in meetings of the Russian government and receive the appropriate instructions, although, according to our agreement, the Commission, the members of the Board are not accountable to any of our governments.

Similarly, Kazakhstan's President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev noted at a Supreme Eurasian Economic Council meeting in May 2020: "Representatives of the Commission recently announced the adoption of the strategy by the heads of state. This is an inappropriate jump ahead" (Tengrinews 2020).

These remarks from high officials such as Nazarbayev and Tokayev illustrate the continued Russian attempts to influence the content of meetings. Thus, a rising challenge from within has been evident since 2014. Cohen (2008, 4) raised concern over Putin's idea that "The formation of a Eurasian Union is the next in a series of Russian initiatives to reassert control over the former Soviet Space." It is interesting that in 1999, the Kazakh scholar Murat Laumulin noted the possibility of Russian interest in a Eurasian idea and suggested that "Russia will attempt to intercept our weakening idea of integration" and "It is not excluded of the loan of Eurasian ideas but in pro-Russian interpretation" (Laumulin 1999, 73). Indeed, Russia sees the integration of the Eurasian region as an opportunity to expand its power and control over others. However, Kazakhstan adopts an independent position to correct internal issues that are not agreed upon or acceptable within the framework of the EAEU. For instance, in the post-Maidan context, Kazakhstan opposed "the notion of the EAEU as a closer political union or a block with an anti-Western agenda" (Graney 2019, 164). We must understand Russia's actions as an attempt to free itself from the order-taker role it assumed due to its inability to act as an order-maker when needed in the 1990s. As Russian President Putin admitted when he met with Nazarbayev in late 2021 (Caravan 2021):

Whenever my colleagues and I get together on almost any issue related to the development of the EEC, we remember that this idea belongs to you. We are all very grateful to you for initiating this union.

Nonetheless, Russia persists in efforts to act as an order-maker by proposing political integration as the next stage. However, this ultimately will not be feasible since Kazakhstan is committed only to economic integration. Overall, Kazakhstan adopted this stance based on its power over the integration issue since 1994, its control of Eurasian integration since 2000, and its position within the EAEU, which allows Kazakhstan to set the future direction of the EAEU and make it open to others according to the third scenario ("*open to others*"). Most importantly, it allows Kazakhstan to resist the Russian idea of political integration.

In summary, this section demonstrates that no distant or near-great powers were interested in taking the lead in ordering the post-Soviet region in the 1990s. Therefore, Nazarbayev's proposal of the EAU to order the post-Soviet region as the first order-making initiative was in response to the absence of order-making incentives from near and distant powers. Second, unfavorable factors such as the lack of team dynamics from fellow members within the CIS and a weakened Russia turned out to be supportive in the formation and later implementation of the EAU. Thus, Kazakhstan's concept of core states as its second scenario has played an important role in forming a renewed team dynamic with core states (Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia), pushing regional integration forward. Third, being the first to propose the EAU has given Kazakhstan power over integration issues. From the start of 1994 throughout 2000 and until the signing of the EAEU treaty in 2014, Kazakhstan, within initial institutions and decision-making bodies, had influenced the path and corrected the content of Eurasian integration and its future according to the third scenario. This power over the integration issue has been central to emphasizing the economic direction of the EAEU and resisting Russian politicization of the organization from within. So while small states lack power in material terms, they can develop other forms of power that can help them sustain their independence and even practice order-making.

## Conclusion

This paper began with the question: can small states behave as order-makers? This question arose in response to mainstream IR theory that posits that small states are order-takers rather than order-makers. The study aimed to refute such an attitude and argues that if we consider the absence of great power, then small states can behave as order-makers, but in specific issue areas and in the role of issue-corrector. This research aimed to test this proposition with the case of Kazakhstan's EAU initiative proposed in 1994, when no great power appeared to behave as an order-maker after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

A qualitative case study approach was applied to understand the phenomenon while exploring two sub-questions. How has order-making been done? And in what way has it been done? Detailed analysis revealed that small states can behave as order-makers when there is no great power. In response to the first sub-question, the study revealed that order-making was carried out in three different scenarios. Member states of the CIS rejected the initial idea for the Eurasian Union. As a result, the first scenario (*all in one*), which aimed to unite all former Soviet states, failed. However, the second scenario (*core only*) proved to be the most effective, forming the core group of Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia to initiate Eurasian integration. This scenario helped compensate for the absence of great power and led to regional integration, ultimately culminating in the creation of the EAEU in 2014. The third scenario aimed to direct the future of Eurasian integration by making it *open to others*. Thus, the regional context is best suited for small-state order-making when there is no great power.

Regarding the second sub-question, it was found that order-making was not intended to challenge or oppose post-Soviet integration, but rather to correct the course of regional development towards a new form of regional integration. This reflects the ability of a small state to correct the course of a specific issue and move toward a preferable outcome. Therefore, order-making by correcting a specific issue should be considered a new direction for future research on small states and order-making.

Overall, this research was possible from the point that this study acknowledged the presence of great power as a key obstacle for small-state studies to engage in small-state order-making. The IR preoccupation with the presence of great power has limited the thinking about small-state order-making. The study solved this problem by proposing a conceptual foundation for thinking about the absence of great power and how to detect it. Therefore, small-state scholars need to search for the absence of great power in a specific issue area and look for a response on the part of small states.

Also, while this study is concerned with small-state order-making in the regional context, it calls other scholars to focus on it in the international context as a new research area. Ultimately, order-making can no longer be considered an area of great power privilege alone. Order-making is an enterprise open to small states, too.

## Note

1. Throughout this article, the term “Eurasian Union” (EAU) will be used to signify the broader (economic and political) regional integration initiative originally conceived (1994) by Nazarbayev. The more limited (economic only) regional integration organization that eventually materialized (2014) as a result of his initiative is the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU).

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