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MILITARY AND DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS OF THE SENIOR KHAN OF THE KAZAKH KHANATE ABILMAMBET WITH THE DZUNGARS

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Abstract. *Introduction.* Relations with the Dzungar state occupy a crucial place in the history of the Kazakh Khanate. Over a significant historical period, this specific aspect of foreign policy largely determined the historical development of the Kazakh state. *Goals and objectives* of the study are to examine the socio-political activities of the prominent statesman Abilmambet Khan regarding Kazakh-Dzungar relations (based on scholarly works and archival materials). *Materials and methods.* The study employs source-critical and historical-systemic methods, enabling an analysis of existing research and primary sources (archival materials) relevant to the topic. *Results.* A distinctive feature of Abilmambet Khan's foreign policy was the particular attention he paid to relations with the Dzungar state, which at the time occupied a central place in the system of international relations in the region. This focus is evident throughout his tenure in power during the 1720s–1750s. Notably, this period was characterized by a complex political situation for the Kazakh Khanate, which faced pressure from the Dzungars on one side and the Kalmyks and Bashkirs – on the other. Furthermore, the state's geographical proximity to two empires – the Qing and the Russian – posed a constant threat to its very existence. *Conclusion.* The study concludes that between the 1720s and 1750s, Abilmambet played an active role in both military campaigns against the Dzungars and diplomatic initiatives, distinguishing himself as a prominent military commander, diplomat, and statesman.

Keywords: Abilmambet Khan, Eastern sources, Dzungars, trade, Russian Empire, Qing China, sultans, war, Chinese historiography, truce, hostages (amanats), Galdan-Tseren

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ҚАЗАҚ ХАНДЫҒЫНЫҢ АҒА ХАНЫ ӘБІЛМӘМБЕТТІҢ ЖОҢҒАРЛАРМЕН ӘСКЕРИ, ДИПЛОМАТИЯЛЫҚ ЖӘНЕ САУДА ҚАТЫНАСТАРЫ

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Аңдатпа. *Kіріспе.* Қазақ хандығының тарихында Жоңғар мемлекетімен болған қарым-қатынастардың маңызы зор. Ұзақ уақытқа созылған тарихи кезеңдегі сыртқы саясаттың нақты осы бағыты көбінесе қазақ мемлекетінің тарихи дамуын айқындайды. *Зерттеудің мақсаты мен міндеттері* – осы кезеңді зерттеуші авторлардың еңбектері мен мұрағат материалдары негізінде көрнекті мемлекет қайраткері Әбілмәмбет ханның қазақ-жоңғар қатынастарына қатысты қоғамдық-саяси қызметінің мәселелерін зерделеу. *Материалдар мен әдістер.* Зерттеу барысында тақырып бойынша жүргізілген зерттеулер мен дереккөздерді (мұрағат материалдарын) тиісті талдауға мүмкіндік беретін деректанулық және тарихи-жүйелік әдістер қолданылды. *Нәтижелері.* Әбілмәмбет ханның сыртқы саяси қызметіне тән ерекшеліктердің бірі – сол кезеңде Орталық Азиядағы халықаралық қатынастар жүйесінде маңызды орын алған Жоңғар мемлекетімен қарым-қатынастарға ерекше көңіл бөлуі. Бұл бағытты оның 1720–1750 жылдардағы бүкіл мемлекеттік қызметі барысынан анық байқауға болады. Сонымен қатар, белгілі болғандай, бұл кезең Қазақ хандығы үшін жалпы алғанда күрделі саяси жағдаймен сипатталды. Қазақ мемлекеті бір жағынан жоңғарлардың, екінші жағынан олармен туыстас қалмақтар мен башқұрттардың қысымына ұшырады. Бұған қоса, Цин мен Ресей сияқты екі ірі империямен географиялық көршілес болудың өзі мемлекеттің өмір сүруіне тұрақты қауіп төндірді. *Қорытынды.* Жүргізілген зерттеу негізінде 1720–1750 жылдар аралығында Әбілмәмбеттің жоңғарларға қарсы әскери жорықтарға да, дипломатиялық іс-шараларға да белсенді қатысқаны және осы Кезеңде өзін көрнекті қолбасшы, дипломат әрі саясаткер ретінде танытқаны туралы қорытынды жасауға болады.

Түйін сөздер: Әбілмәмбет хан, шығыс дереккөздері, жоңғарлар, сауда, Ресей империясы, Цин империясы, сұлтандар, соғыс, қытай тарихнамасы, бітім, аманаттар, Галдан-Церен

Алғыс айту: Мақала Қазақстан Республикасы Ғылым және жоғары білім министрлігінің ЖТН: AP23488522 «Қазақ-жоңғар қатынастары тарихының жаңа беттері: XVII ғасырдың екінші жартысы – XVIII ғасырдың 50-жж.» атты гранттық қаржыландыру жобасы аясында дайындалды.

Дәйексөз үшін: Тылахметова А., Байдалы Р. Қазақ хандығының аға ханы Әбілмәмбеттің жоңғарлармен әскери, дипломатиялық және сауда қатынастары// Asian Journal “Steppe Panorama”. 2026. Т. 13. № 5. 1339–1352 бб. (Ағыл.). DOI: 10.51943/3135-8055_2026_13_5_1339-1352

ВОЕННЫЕ И ДИПЛОМАТИЧЕСКИЕ ОТНОШЕНИЯ СТАРШЕГО ХАНА КАЗАХСКОГО ХАНСТВА АБИЛМАМБЕТА С ДЖУНГАРАМИ

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Аннотация. *Введение.* Взаимоотношения с Джунгарским государством занимают важнейшее место в истории Казахского ханства. На протяжении достаточно долгого исторического периода именно данное направление внешней политики во многом определяло историческое развитие казахского государства. *Цель и задачи исследования* – на основе работ авторов и архивных материалов осветить вопросы общественно-политической деятельности видного государственного деятеля Абилямбет-хана, связанной с казахско-джунгарскими отношениями. *Материалы и методы.* В работе использованы источниковедческий и историко-системный методы, позволяющие провести соответствующий анализ существующих исследований и источников (архивных материалов) по теме. *Результаты.* Специфической чертой деятельности Абилямбет-хана во внешней политике было его особое внимание на отношения с джунгарским государством, занимавшим на тот момент центральное место в системе международных отношений в регионе. Это можно наблюдать на протяжении всей его государственной деятельности в 1720-1750-х гг. При этом, как известно, данный период был охарактеризован в целом сложной политической обстановкой для Казахского ханства, испытывавшего давление от джунгаров с одной стороны, калмыков и башкир – с другой. Кроме того, географическое соседство с двумя империями – Цинской и Российской несло постоянную угрозу существованию государства. *Заключение.* На основании проведенного исследования можно сделать вывод, что в период 1720-1750-х гг. Абилямбет принимал активное участие как в военных кампаниях против джунгар, так и дипломатических мероприятиях, зарекомендовав себя при этом в качестве видного военачальника, дипломата и политика.

Ключевые слова: Абилямбет-хан, восточные источники, джунгары, торговля, Российская империя, Цинский Китай, султаны, война, китайская историография, перемирие, аманаты, Галдан-Церен

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Introduction. From the mid-17th century and for nearly a century thereafter, the Dzungar Khanate – a nomadic state – held a leading position in the system of international relations in the region (Moiseev, 2000). This state maintained active contacts with neighboring countries, including Russia, Qing China, and other Central Asian states, as well as the Kazakh Khanate under Khan Abilmambet.

Relations with the Dzungars constituted a distinctive aspect of the foreign policy of the Kazakh Khan Abilmambet. This issue remained a priority for him throughout his active career in state affairs – first as a sultan and later as the Senior Khan of the Kazakh Khanate – during the 1720s through the 1750s. The situation was further complicated by the fact that the Kazakh steppe faced intense pressure from the Kalmyk Khanate (which was ethnically related to the Dzungars) and the Bashkirs, all while being caught in a vice between the two major powers of the era: the Russian Empire and Qing China. Given these circumstances, we deemed it appropriate to examine specific aspects of Kazakh-Dzungar relations as they pertain to the life and activities of Khan Abilmambet.

Materials and Methods. The work makes extensive use of materials from Russian archives (Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire, State Archive of the Orenburg Region, Historical Archive of the Omsk Region, United State Archive of the Orenburg Region, Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts). Given the nature of the work, the article employs source-critical and historical-systemic methods, enabling an analysis of existing research and sources (archival materials) relevant to the topic.

Discussion. Various aspects of Kazakh-Dzungar relations – a context in which Abilmambet Khan played a significant role – have been examined in the works of N.G. Apollova (Apollova, 1948), K.Sh. Khafizova (Khafizova, 2019), K.Zh. Nurbay and G.A. Zhuman (Nurbay, Zhuman, 2019), A.I. Levshin (Levshin, 1996), B.S. Suleimenov and V.Ya. Basin (Suleimenov, Basin, 1981), V.A. Moiseev (Moiseev, 1983), and other researchers.

Results. It should be noted that Abilmambet distinguished himself as a brave warrior and commander during the numerous wars against the Dzungars, beginning in the arduous ‘Years of the Great Disaster’ (1723–1727) (Apollova, 1948: 139). As was customary for individuals of Sultan lineage, Abilmambet’s upbringing was traditional: from childhood, he mastered horsemanship as well as the use of edged weapons and firearms. Like other Sultans, he participated in numerous military campaigns and battles – a prerequisite for attaining the rank of ‘batyr’. Achieving this rank was an essential condition for gaining the right to aspire to the title of Khan. He earned this vital title precisely through his military service and command experience, particularly through his many armed clashes with the Dzungars.

The earliest known archival document mentioning Abilmambet dates to 1723, coinciding with the height of the Kazakh-Dzungar conflict. Abilmambet’s involvement in the military and political life of the Kazakh Khanate spanned nearly half a century – from 1723 until his death in 1769 – a duration rarely seen in either domestic or world history (Khafizova, 2019: 37).

K. Khafizova, a famous specialist in this field, draws upon Eastern sources to authoritatively state that Abilmambet fought against the Dzungars as late as 1730 and 1734 (Khafizova, 2019: 35).

The 1730s were marked by a relative lull in relations between the Kazakh Khanate and the Dzungars, set against the backdrop of escalating military conflicts between the Dzungars and the Qing Dynasty, as well as a deterioration in relations between the ‘Khuntaiji’ and Uzbek rulers. For instance, a report dated November 10, 1731, submitted to the Russian envoy L. D. Ugrimov by Izmail – a merchant from Tobolsk who had arrived in Omsk from Dzungaria – contains information regarding the war between the Dzungars and the Qing Empire (AFPRE. F. Relations between Russia and China. Inv. 62/1. C.1731. P. 24–24 rev.).

Indeed, during the reign of Galdan-Tseren and under subsequent Dzungar rulers, there were many proponents of an alliance or peaceful coexistence with the Kazakhs – primarily to jointly

contain the expansion of neighboring powers, Russia and China. In the 1730s, relations between the Dzungar Khanate and the Middle and Junior Hordes gradually strengthened: marital ties were established between influential Kazakh and Dzungar leaders, prisoners were exchanged, trade developed to some extent, and diplomatic contacts took place (Nurbay, Zhuman, 2019: 1482).

The Russian Empire closely monitored these events. On November 10, 1731, Izmail – a merchant from Tobolsk who had arrived in Omsk from Dzungaria—informed the Russian envoy L. D. Ugrimov about the war between the Dzungars and the Qing Empire, a conflict that also affected the Kazakhs: "During my stay in Urga in the autumn of 1730, Galdan-Tseren dispatched his 'zaisan' [commander], Menshoi Tseren-Donduk, with a force of fifteen thousand Kalmyks to defend against Chinese troops' (AFPRE. F. Relations between Russia and China. Inv. 62/1. C. 1731. P. 24–25 rev.). The confrontation ended with the Dzungars routing the Qing forces and capturing approximately 1,000 prisoners; these captives were sent to Urga with orders that they be sold exclusively to Russians. At the same time, the Dzungars maintained detachments along the Kazakh border to guard against surprise attacks by the Kazakhs.

In the 1730s, a number of cities in Southern Kazakhstan – including Turkestan, where Abilmambet Khan primarily resided – remained under the rule of the Dzungars. The Dzungars possessed a large, well-trained army, a fact evidenced by the Senate decree issued on May 1, 1734, to I.K. Kirilov, head of the Orenburg Expedition, regarding policy toward the Dzungar Khanate: 'The Dzungar Kalmyk ruler Galdan-Tseren – who is the most powerful among the local leaders and commands a force of up to 80,000 men equipped with firearms... exercises autocratic-like authority over his subjects... [and] has seized the aforementioned provinces and prominent cities – Turkestan, Tashkent, Sairam, and others – from the Kirghiz-Kaisaks' (PSZRI 1, 1830: 311–312).

On the whole, Abilmambet was quite loyal and showed a marked inclination toward the Dzungars – a stance attributable to several factors and circumstances. First, the southern regions – traditionally under the authority of Abilmambet and his ancestors – had not yet sworn allegiance to Russia and had been particularly vulnerable since the onset of the 'Years of Great Disaster', having been occupied by the Dzungars and forced to pay them tribute. Consequently, Abilmambet was unwilling to lose his traditional lands and cities.

Secondly, the Senior and Middle Hordes were located in close proximity to the Dzungar nomadic territories (Levshin, 1996: 203). Consequently, Abilmambet was guided primarily by the fate of his subjects; he knew that the Dzungars exacted brutal vengeance in response to disobedience: 'Such a reminder was all the more necessary for Abulmagmet, Khan of the Middle Horde, who lived in the neighborhood of the Dzungars and had recently experienced just how cruelly they retaliated for offenses committed against them' (Levshin, 1996: 205 – 206). Looking ahead, it should be noted that in 1743 – 1744, while handing over his son Abilfeis as a hostage to the Dzungars, he requested administrative control over the entire southern region. In this context, in a highly confidential report to the College of Foreign Affairs dated November 18, 1742, Neplyuev wrote that 'it is necessary – not only for the present but also for the future – to secure Abilmambet's son by every feasible means; for if the Dzungar ruler retains the other son (since he has two sons, and the eldest remains at home with him), then the Khan – even if not bound by perfect loyalty – will at least be held in check by this means and prevented from aligning himself solely with the Dzungar side; and no other measures are foreseen, except this ultimate expedient' (Kazakh-Russian Relations –1, 1961: 270).

Following his final massive campaign into Kazakh territory, the Dzungar ruler proposed terms for peace to the Kazakhs. One of the conditions was a truce with the Upper (Volga) Kalmyks. Negotiations took place in 1742, attended by forty representatives from each side. Participants on the Kazakh side included Abilmambet, Sultan Barak, the batyrs Iset and Zhanibek, Tole Bi, and other prominent Kazakhs from the three zhuzes (hordes). The large number of participants suggests that Khan Abilmambet sought the consent of the majority of the tribal elders. At the same time, the negotiations themselves reflect the Khan's growing stature and his recognition of the link between ensuring security along the Kazakh khanate's western and eastern borders. Khan Abilmambet saw the benefits of the amanat system (the practice of holding hostages as security for agreements); in private conversations, he remarked that hostages living in Russia 'not only suffer no hardship, but when they

appear in public, they are dressed in velvet and other fine clothing; furthermore, they receive a valuable education and enjoy a life of comfort and pleasure – things they could find nowhere else – a situation that he, Abilmambet Khan, greatly envies' (Suleimenov, Basin, 1981: 174–175). He made no secret to the Russians of the fact that he had sent his own son as a hostage to Galdan-Tseren.

However, the situation between the Kazakhs and the Dzungars began to deteriorate – due to the resumption of mutual raids – only towards the end of the 1730s; this is evident from a report sent by the Siberian Chancellery to the Senate on December 4, 1739, regarding Galdan-Tseren's preparations for an invasion to Kazakh khanate. This information was obtained from Bukharans – subjects of the Khuntaiji – who were present in Siberian towns for trade purposes: 'A report from the Tobolsk Provincial Chancellery to the Siberian Department stated that on August 20 of the year 739 [1731], Second Major Nelyubov reported to the Chancellery from Yamyshevskaya Fortress: ...that while they were in their homeland – the domain of Galdan-Tseren – Bukharan and Kalmyk troops numbering three thousand horsemen were mobilized and armed for a military campaign against the Cossack Horde; furthermore, one thousand men had set out into the steppe the previous month to scout Cossack trails and routes, though their specific destination was unknown' (RSAAA. F. 248. Senate. Inv. 113. C. 108. P. 346–347 rev.). Thus, a new invasion of Kazakh territory was being prepared.

It is well known that in 1739, having concluded peace with the Qing Empire, the Dzungars renewed their military expansion against their neighbors, the Kazakhs.

In the summer of 1741, a council of Kazakh nobility led by Abilmambet Khan took place in the territory of the Middle zhuz; there, a virtually unanimous decision was reached regarding the need to conclude an urgent truce with their bellicose neighbors. For his part, Galdan-Tseren stipulated – as a key condition for halting the military escalation – that the children of influential Kazakh rulers be sent to him as hostages (amanats), accompanied by their yurts, families, and livestock (Nurbay, Zhuman, 2019: 1481; Kazakh-Russian Relations-1, 1961: 270). Clearly, the khans and sultans—including Abilmambet Khan – were compelled to take this forced step and comply with the Khuntaiji's demands, acting out of a deliberate fear that new military invasions would otherwise ensue (Moiseev, 1983: 191).

It is evident that the Russian Empire was deeply wary of intensifying Kazakh-Dzungar contacts; consequently, the primary objective of Russian diplomacy was to categorically prevent any rapprochement between the Dzungars and the Kazakhs, or the adoption of dual citizenship by the latter (Moiseev, 1991: 161).

Observing the increasingly complex situation between himself and Russia, Abilmambet made a shrewd diplomatic move by requesting military assistance from Russia. He likely knew in advance that such aid would not be forthcoming. Evidence of this is found in a letter dated January 27, 1742, from Abilmambet Khan to Empress Elizabeth Petrovna, requesting aid against the Dzungars: 'We have primarily been ravaged by the Kalmyks, and should they ravage us again, I most humbly request that you provide us with forces' (AFPRE. F. 122. Inv. 1. 1742. C. 5. P. 5–5 rev.). Evidently, anticipating that he would eventually have to move toward rapprochement with the Dzungars, he began requesting military aid – assistance in which, in all likelihood, he himself did not believe. Later, his ally Abylai – who was well aware of Abilmambet's own unsuccessful attempts – also repeatedly but unsuccessfully sought military aid from Russia (SAOR. F. 3. Inv. 1. C. 176. P. 187–187 rev.).

In 1741, the Dzungars launched another campaign into the territory of the Kazakh Khanate, resulting in the capture of Ablai, an influential sultan of the Middle zhuz. Later, the sultan's release was largely facilitated by the conclusion of peace with the Dzungar state, the handing over of amanats (hostages), and the skillful diplomacy of Kazakh leaders – including Abilmambet Khan, Barak Sultan, Kazybek Bi, and others.

Abilmambet played a major role in establishing peaceful relations with the Dzungars. In April 1742, Lieutenant D. Gladyshevwh – who had visited Abulkhair of the Junior zhuz in January of that year to assess the relationship between the Kazakhs and Dzungaria – reported to the Orenburg Commission's chancery: 'The Kirghiz-Kaisak Middle Horde had previously caused such hostility toward the Dzungars that, in retaliation, the Dzungar ruler sent a force of thirty thousand troops under

Sary-Manzha against that horde in the past year, 1741, and they ruined it' (Kazakh-Russian Relations, 1961: 194–195).

Seeking to halt the war between the two peoples, Abilmambet and other representatives of the steppe nobility sent a message to Galdan Tseren to put an end to the bloody conflict: 'Abilmambet Khan, Barak Sultan, and Zhanbek Batyr, together with prominent chieftains, sent a letter to the Dzungar ruler asking that their people no longer be devastated and proposing – if he so desired – that he take their children into his custody as hostages.' '...the very reason why they, the Kalmyks, have now come to the Kirghiz-Kaisaks' (Kazakh-Russian Relations, 1961: 195–196).

The Russian Empire possessed cross-verified information from its informants indicating that 'Abulmamet Khan, Barak Sultan, and Batyr Sultan of the Middle Horde are engaging in actions and harboring intentions contrary to the supreme interests of His Imperial Majesty, and are seemingly submitting to the rule of the Dzungar ruler Galdan-Tseren... In particular... Abulmamet Khan – a subject of His Imperial Majesty – has actually handed over hostages to the aforementioned Dzungar ruler and pledged to pay tribute' (AFPRE. F. 122. 1742. C. 2. P. 1–4 rev.; Kazakh-Russian Relations - 1, 1961: 199). Accepting this second – Dzungar – allegiance could have resulted in the loss of Russian influence over the Kazakhs.

When the Russian side objected (arguing that the Middle and Junior Hordes were already subjects of the Russian Empire and that the Dzungars had no right to take hostages (amanats) from them) the Dzungar envoys countered that these measures were intended to halt frequent raids: 'Upon the arrival of Abulkhair and the Dzungar envoys in Orenburg, Neplyuev informed the latter that the Khan of the Junior Kirghiz-Kazakh Horde, being a subject of Russia, had no right to enter into any dealings with foreign rulers, let alone provide them with hostages. He stated the same regarding the Middle Horde and Khan Abulmagmet. The Dzungars objected that the Kirghiz-Kazakhs were constantly attacking their lands; that without taking hostages, they could not rest easy; and that, moreover, the Kazakhs had themselves volunteered to meet this demand – much like the Senior Horde, which, being subject to the Dzungars, had long provided not only hostages but also tribute, and enjoyed peace in return' (Levshin, 1996: 204).

The Russian Empire did not rule out direct military aggression by the Dzungars. Consequently, a Senate decree issued to the College of Foreign Affairs on May 20, 1742, regarding a potential Dzungar attack, stipulated that 'great caution is required there, and to avert any adverse consequences that might arise from this, appropriate measures must be taken in advance to ensure that the supreme interest of His/Her Imperial Majesty remains unharmed.' 'Namely: it will be necessary to enter into correspondence with the said ruler – or, to the extent possible, protect the subjects of the khans and sultans along with their people – while regarding that ruler as the source of the greatest danger to the fortresses and the entire frontier, and thus increasing the number of regular troops, especially dragoons' (AFPRE. F. 122. 1742. C. 2. P. 1–4 rev.; Kazakh-Russian Relations – 1, 1961: 199).

Available Russian archival sources indicate that in the summer of 1742, I.I. Neplyuev – head of the Orenburg Commission – planned to detain influential Chinggisids (such as the pro-Dzungar Abilmambet Khan, Sultan Barak, and other sultans) as hostages should they visit the area of the Orenburg and Orsk fortresses, just as had been done with the family of Abulkhair. At the same time, the Tsarist government feared a potential mass migration of Kazakhs toward the zone of Dzungar influence and the loss of total control over its new subjects. Based on these considerations, a decree issued by the College of Foreign Affairs on August 8, 1742, strictly ordered the Orenburg governor not to detain Abilmambet Khan or the others under any circumstances (Izvtcheniya, 1938: 140).

As we can see, Russian authorities made significant efforts to prevent Abilmambet Khan from sending his son, Sultan Abulfeis, to the Dzungars as a hostage; however, as later events would show, they ultimately failed to dissuade the Khan – over whom they held little control – from this venture, which posed a danger to Russia.

Despite strong pressure from the Orenburg administration, the Khan did send his son Abulfeis to Dzungaria as an honorary hostage, a fact confirmed by a communication sent to I. Neplyuev by the College of Foreign Affairs on November 18, 1742: 'Abulmambet Khan has already sent his son to the Dzungar ruler' (Abuev, 2006: 91). It is noteworthy that Sultan Abulfeis – who was sent as a hostage

with a white yurt (aq üyli amanat) to Galdan-Tseren's headquarters to secure Abylai's release – was accompanied by his mentor, Niyaz Atalyk (tutor), a prominent 18th-century statesman (Artykbaev, 2023).

In the available written sources, the name Abulfeis first appears in connection with late autumn 1742. On October 27, 1742, I. Neplyuev, head of the Orenburg Commission, reported to the College of Foreign Affairs regarding the relations between Abulmambet and Galdan-Tseren; he noted the Khan's intention to accept Dzungar suzerainty and his desire to send his son as a hostage. However, information available at the time from a Bashkir arriving 'from the Kirghiz-Kaisaks' – claiming that the Khan had 'already dispatched his son, along with certain gifts, to the aforementioned Dzungar ruler' – was still considered unreliable (Kazakh-Russian Relations, 1961: 264). Yet, in a report dated November 18, 1742, Neplyuev informed the College that Abilmambet had indeed 'already sent his son to the Dzungar ruler' (Kazakh-Russian Relations – 1, 1961: 269). A second document from the same date provided further details: Abulfeis had been sent in the company of 'Dzungar envoys and certain Kirghiz chieftains.' At the same time, as the document indicates, Abulmambet himself regarded the decision to send his son as a hostage (amanat) as a forced measure; he explained it by a desire to avert the war threatened by the 'Dzungar ruler' should the demand for hostages go unmet, and to 'establish peaceful relations between the Kirghiz-Kaisaks and the Dzungars and expand the territory available for nomadic pasturage.' Furthermore, by sending his son, he hoped to 'secure possession of the Turkestan province from the Dzungar ruler – who seemingly promised it to him – and... to reside in the city of Turkestan... Galdan-Tseren was returning the city of Turkestan, along with thirty-two other towns, to their former possession, whereas if he failed to send his son, the Dzungar would destroy them...' (Kazakh-Russian Relations –1, 1961: 270).

According to another source – the 'Log' of Major Miller, who was dispatched from Orsk Fortress to Galdan-Tseren – an entry dated December 14 reveals that 'the Kalmyk envoy Bazar (who had been sent to the Middle Horde to Abulmambet Khan and Barak Sultan) returned, bringing with him Abulmambet's son as a hostage, as well as envoys from Barak – a group totaling about two hundred people, many of whom had come to ransom their own children and relatives' (Log, 2007: 112–113).

As subsequent events demonstrated, Galdan-Tseren did not send his distinguished hostages back home empty-handed: 'Upon their release, Galdan-Tseren gifted each of them a suit of armor, a helmet, and a gilded saber, as well as a belt embroidered with silver' (HAOR. F. 1. Inv. 1. C. 7. P. 9). Clearly, such lavish offerings were not made by chance or without purpose: the distinguished captives were given a clear and unequivocal hint regarding the need not only for peaceful coexistence with the Dzungars but even for a military alliance with them: 'They were released back to the Kaisak Horde under an agreement stipulating that, both now and in the future, we – along with them, the Dzungars – are to live in harmony and neighborly friendship, never initiating quarrels among ourselves, and not abandoning one another in times of need' (HAOR. F. 1. Inv. 1. C. 7. P. 9 rev.).

The situation changed somewhat after the death of Galdan-Tseren in 1745. Above all, a fierce struggle for the throne erupted among his heirs within Dzungaria itself. Abilmambet, along with Kazakh sultans and batyrs, readily took part in the internecine conflicts of the Dzungar nobility, as this offered them an opportunity to weaken their adversaries and reclaim some of the southern and southeastern Kazakh lands. Dzungar claimants, too, were interested in forging alliances with influential Kazakh rulers.

By alternately supporting various claimants to the throne and the title of khuntaiji, the Kazakhs managed to secure significant territorial concessions from the Dzungars.

At the same time, Chinese rulers were closely monitoring the situation in Dzungaria and preparing for the complete conquest of the country. Years of fierce warfare between China and Dzungaria ensued, and in 1755, the Qing emperor deployed substantial forces into Dzungaria.

As is well known, the traditional domains of Abilmambet and his ancestors comprised Southern Kazakhstan and the cities along the Syr Darya – including, at times, the city of Tashkent. However, the interests of Abilmambet's influential family were also directly linked to Eastern Kazakhstan, which was governed by his son, Sultan Abulfeis. During the 'Years of Great Disaster', the southern regions of Kazakhstan were overrun by the Dzungars; it is therefore reasonable to assume that one of

the reasons the Khan spent so much time in the south of the Kazakh Khanate – and sought to establish close ties with the Dzungars – was to prevent the Dzungars from gaining total control over his native region, where the headquarters of the Senior [Senior Horde] Kazakh Khanate was located. Incidentally, his main rival, Abulkhair Khan, faced virtually no such threat, as he was situated far from the actual and potential theaters of the Kazakh-Dzungar conflict (Levshin, 1996: 203).

Drawing on Chinese and Russian sources, the famous specialist K. Khafizova writes: 'Turkestan served as the seat of rule for Abilmambet's famous grandfather, Tauke Khan.' In his efforts to retain control of the city, Abilmambet repeatedly made political concessions – ranging from acknowledging temporary vassalage to the Dzungar khans to ceding a portion of the revenues from the city and the Turkestan Vilayet to internal rivals and Central Asian rulers. Moreover, in our view, all the priorities of Khan Abilmambet's foreign and domestic policies were centered on the word 'Turkestan'. Despite their various advantages, the Khan's rivals and avowed adversaries never succeeded in eliminating him from the country's political life. Abilmambet's position in the international arena also remained secure; the Oirat and Central Asian khanates, as well as the Russian and Qing empires, never questioned his status as khan – recognizing it a priori and dealing with him on that indisputable basis (Khafizova, 2015: 75). Thus, as the direct successor to the senior Khan Tauke, Abilmambet sought not only to preserve the state but also to hold onto its principal city and capital: Turkestan.

One must also consider the fact that, amidst the deteriorating relations between the Kazakhs and the Dzungars, Abulkhair – a rival of Abilmambet – sought to strengthen his own position within the Kazakh Khanate, including in the Syr Darya region, where the influence of Abilmambet's clan and ancestors had traditionally predominated. Abulkhair petitioned the Russian Empire to build a fortress for him on the Syr Darya, as evidenced by his memorandum dated September 17, 1741: 'To build a new fortress on the Syr Darya River, so as to be safe from enemies – the Persians and the Dzungar Kalmyks' (AFPRE. F. 122. Inv. 1741. C. 2. P. 22). In reality, there was no threat from the Iranians, and it was Abilmambet, not Abulkhair, who should have been requesting the fortress's construction. It appears Abulkhair was more concerned with bolstering his position with Russia's help than with defending against the Dzungars.

By early 1742, negotiations began to conclude a truce between the two peoples, sealed by commitments regarding the Kazakhs providing hostages and the arrangement of dynastic marriages (AFPRE. F. 122. Inv. 1742. C. 4. P. 3–4 rev.). According to testimony given in May 1742 at the Orenburg Provincial Chancellery by the English merchant Hawk – who had returned from Kazakhstan – Galdan Tseren demanded that the Kazakhs nomadize in the Turkestan region, pay tribute, and treat his subjects with courtesy: 'On April 14, an envoy from the Dzungar ruler Galdan Tseren – accompanied by two others and bearing a modest gift – arrived to see the Kirghiz-Kaisak Sultan Batyr (Sultan Batyr who died in 1771 was the son of Khan Kaip and led Alshyn tribal groups in the Junior Zhuz – author). They brought a written decree from the ruler, which was delivered to Abulkhair Khan; Hawk himself later saw the document, which stated the following. First: Galdan Tseren orders Abdumamet Khan, Sultan Batyr, and other rulers and leading elders to come and reside near Turkestan. Second: He demands their children as hostages, specifically including the son of Abulkhair Khan associated with the 'white kubitka' (royal tent). Third: He demands that one korsak (steppe fox) be collected from every kubitka (household) in the Middle and Junior Hordes; centurions are to be appointed to oversee this and send the pelts to him as tribute. Fourth: He asks for the reason why Sultan Batyr and Karasakal traveled to and ravaged the ulus settlements along his borders. Fifth: he firmly affirms that merchants traveling from Russia to Khiva and Tashkent – and from there back to Russia – of whatever status, shall suffer absolutely no harm at the hands of the Kaisaks... should the Kaisaks fail to comply with this, then he, Galdan-Tseren, will dispatch two zaisangs with his troops – one to the Middle Horde and the other to the Lesser Horde – and order them to lay waste to everything...' (AFPRE. F. Kirghiz-Kaisak Affairs. 1742. Inv. 122/1. C. 4. P. 70–70 rev.).

The Dzungars actively sought to pull the Kazakhs of the Junior and Middle Hordes over to their side, compelling them to accept Dzungar suzerainty, pay tribute, and provide hostages. Russia monitored these events closely, wary of any strengthening of either the Dzungars or the Kazakhs, and

was particularly concerned by the prospect of a rapprochement that might result in the Kazakhs becoming Dzungar subjects. Consequently, Major Miller was dispatched to Dzungaria in 1742; upon his return, he reported the results of his diplomatic mission to the College of Foreign Affairs on May 23, 1743, via the Governor of Orenburg, I. I. Neplyuev: 'In the Kalmyk uluses, a multitude of people have perished from smallpox, and the Dzungar ruler is bogged down in an unfortunate war... An entire people known as the Mingats have defected from him... the cities of Tashkent and Turkestan have broken away from his rule... in their current state, the Dzungars harbor great apprehension regarding Russia. Furthermore, upon traveling among the Kazakhs, Miller heard that after his departure, the Kazakh captives – Ablai-Sultan and his retinue – had been released and were reportedly returning home together with the son sent by Abulmamet Khan' (AFPRE. F. Dzungar Affairs. Inv. 113/1, 1742–1744. C. 3. P. 13–13 rev.).

Indeed, in 1743, Abylai was released from honorable captivity; he was exchanged for Sultan Abulfeis, the son of Abulmambet Khan. Abulmambet Khan as well as other Kazakh rulers considered the decision to send his son as a hostage (amanat) to be forced upon him. He explained it by a desire to avoid escalating the Kazakh-Dzungar war – with which the 'Dzungar ruler' had threatened them should the hostage demand go unmet – and to secure 'peaceful coexistence between the Kirghiz-Kaisaks and the Dzungars, and to expand the areas available for nomadizing.' Furthermore, by sending his son, he hoped to 'obtain possession of the Turkestan province from the Dzungar ruler – who seemed to promise this to him – and to live in the city of Turkestan... Galdan-Tseren was ceding the city of Turkestan, along with thirty-two other towns, back to their control; yet if he did not send his son, the Dzungar would destroy them...' (Kazakh-Russian Relations - 1, 1961: 270).

Sultan Abulfeis remained in Dzungaria as a hostage. On September 22, 1743, the Bashkir T. Baltasev – who had traveled to the Middle Zhuz to ascertain the nature of the relations between Khan Abulmambet and Sultan Barak on the one hand, and Galdan-Tseren on the other – cited in his report the words of the Dzungar ruler. The latter was convinced that 'by the handing over of Abulmambet's son to him, he already possessed proof that the Kaisaks had become his subjects' (Kazakh-Russian Relations -1, 1961: 297; Moiseev, 1991: 132, 145). Incidentally, Sultan Abulfeis – who was sent as a hostage, accompanied by a white yurt, to Galdan-Tseren's headquarters to secure the release of Abylai – was escorted by his mentor, Niyaz Atalyk (an advisor to the khans). Niyaz was a prominent 18th-century statesman who had maintained order in Turkestan under Abulmambet (Artykbaev, 2023). The presence of Niyaz as an escort for the Kazakh delegation and a guarantor of the khan's heir's safety undoubtedly testifies to the delegation's very high status.

In the following year, 1744, Abulfeis was in turn replaced by Sultan Shigai (Syghai), the son of Sultan Barak (Kiyat, 2015: 68). Indeed, in the spring of 1744, Sultan Abulfeis – the son of Abulmambet – was released by Galdan Tseren; a year later, Sultan Barak's son, Shigai, was also released. Upon their release, Galdan Tseren gifted each of them a suit of armor, a helmet, a gilded saber, and a silver-embroidered belt. Furthermore, Galdan Tseren gave the daughter of a prominent noyon (nobleman) in marriage to Barak's son. They were sent back to the Kazakh Horde under an agreement stipulating that 'both now and in the future, we – the Kazakhs and the Dzungars – shall live in harmony and neighborly friendship, initiating no quarrels whatsoever and not abandoning one another in times of need' (HAOR. F. 1. Inv. 1. C. 7. P. 9–9 rev.). The Dzungar Khongtaiji also took hostages from Khan Abulkhair. It appears that these and other obligations undertaken by the Kazakhs contributed to the further de-escalation of the Kazakh-Dzungar military conflict.

Indeed, following Ablai's release from Dzungar captivity and the provision of new, high-ranking hostages, relations between the Kazakhs and Galdan Tseren improved markedly. This is evident from a report submitted to the chancellery of the Ust-Kamenogorsk Fortress commandant on January 1, 1745, by Karga, a leader (bashlyk) of the Uriankhai people: 'They are currently on good terms with the Kirghiz-Kaisaks. Ablai-Sultan has collected tribute (alman) from his Kirghiz-Kaisak subjects and sent it to their ruler, Galdan-Tseren. Ablai-Sultan and the Kaisaks are currently nomadic in the Char-Gurban region, and people frequently visit them to barter for grain and other goods. Their ruler, Galdan-Tseren, sends millet and flour to Ablai-Sultan, since the Kirghiz-Kaisaks possess no

grain of their own...' (USAOR. F. Orenburg Provincial Chancellery. Inv. 1. 1744–1745. C. 6. P. 106–106 rev.).

On September 11, 1745, a report submitted by Major General Kh. Kh. Kinderman – commander of the regular and irregular troops along the Siberian frontier lines – to the Governing Senate, the War and Foreign Affairs Colleges, the Governor of Orenburg I. I. Neplyuev, and the Siberian Provincial Chancellery noted the participation of 5,000 Kazakhs (subjects of Abulkhair and Abylai) in the Dzungar Khanate's campaigns into Central Asia without the Russian Empire's authorization; this demonstrated the merely nominal nature of their subject status: 'Previously, a Dzungar army of thirty thousand marched toward the Bekarym lands. And now, in addition to that, another ten thousand have been dispatched – a deployment that includes five thousand Kirghiz-Kaisaks [Kazakhs] belonging to the domains of Abulkhair Khan and Abylai Sultan. The noyon [commander] leading this force – formerly known as Septen, but now called Byzvedey – ... Abulkhair Khan and Abylai Sultan are in league with the Dzungar ruler, having provided a force of five thousand men to assist him' (HAOR. F. 1. Inv. 1. C. 2. P. 339 rev.–340).

In August 1745, the Dzungar ruler Galdan Tseren died. In accordance with his will, power was inherited by his youngest son, the thirteen-year-old Tseben-Dorji-Namji (HAOR. F. 1. Inv. 1. C. 7. P. 123–123 rev.). Lama Dorji's twenty-year-old son could not inherit his father's authority because he was illegitimate – a circumstance that sparked a series of internal conflicts among the Dzungars (HAOR. F. 1. Inv. 1. C. 2. P. 377–377 rev.). Following a palace coup on May 27, 1750, Lama Dorji ascended the throne and subsequently sent a letter to the nobility of the Junior Zhuz announcing his accession to the position of Khontayiji of Dzungaria (AFPRES. F. Kirghiz-Kaisak Affairs. Inv. 122/1. 1750, C. 3. P. 163 rev.).

Dissatisfied with these events, the influential noyons Davachi and Amursana migrated to the Kazakhs – seeking the protection of chieftains such as Kaip Batyr and Kozhabegen Batyr – with the intention of reaching Sultan Ablai (USAOR. F. 3. Inv. 1. C. 30. P. 82–82 rev.). Ablai maintained friendly relations with the noyons, a bond forged during his earlier captivity. When envoys arrived from the Khuntaiji demanding their return, Sultan Ablai flatly refused. This circumstance was specifically highlighted in a report dated September 19, 1752, from Colonel F. Sukhatin – commander of the Yamyshevskaya Fortress – to Brigadier I. I. Kroft, commander of the regular and irregular troops along the Siberian frontier lines: 'Ablai-Sultan is currently located about eight days' journey from Yamyshevskaya. With him are the fugitives from Dzungaria, the noyons Davachi and Amursana. Envoys were repeatedly sent from Urga to demand their handover, yet they are not being surrendered' (HAOR. F. 1. Inv. 1. C. 29. P. 533–533 rev.).

The Russian Empire, wary of a rapprochement between the Kazakhs and these two noyons – who were close relatives of the ruling house and opposed to the Khuntaiji – attempted to neutralize them and transport them to Kazan (HAOR. F. 1. Inv. 1. C. 30. P. 65–65 rev.). Russian intelligence gathering revealed that these distinguished fugitives enjoyed the support of virtually the entire Kazakh steppe elite – including Ablai-Sultan, Abulmambet-Khan, the batyrs Bogenbay Kabanbay, and Kozhabergen, Tole-bi, and other prominent figures (HAOR. F. 1. Inv. 1. C. 29. P. 588–597 rev.). The Kazakh nobility was well aware that one of these noyons – close relatives of the late Galdan-Tseren – was destined to become the ruler of the Dzungar state.

This situation led to a deterioration in relations with the new ruler of Dzungaria. Small Dzungarian scouting parties were dispatched into the Kazakh steppe, where they ravaged Kazakh auls (settlements). By early October 1752, the number of Dzungarian troops sent into the Kazakh steppe totaled approximately 15,000 men (HAOR. F. 1. Inv. 1. C. 29. P. 644–644 rev.).

Overall, throughout his socio-political career, Abilmambet's relations with representatives of the Dzungar Khanate fluctuated. At times, they deteriorated. For instance, S. Sobolev, a Russian representative returning from Dzungaria in the spring of 1746, reported that 'the Kirghiz-Kaisak rulers Abulkhair Khan and Abulmambet Khan do not maintain cordial relations with their Dzungar counterpart, and the Kirghiz-Kaisaks do not travel into their domains' (Moiseev, 1991: 186). In 1752 and 1755, Abilmambet Khan convened major councils of the Kazakh nobility. These gatherings addressed a crucial question: whether or not to intervene in the internecine conflicts among the heirs

of Galdan-Tseren. In this context, it is worth noting that between the 1730s and 1760s, Kazakh sultans refused to surrender prominent Dzungarian figures to any party demanding them – including the rebel leader Karasakal; members of the nobility such as the future khans Davachi and Amursana; as well as Banchzhur, Kazak-Sary, and Kazak-Balan. Regardless of the personal interests that guided the Kazakh rulers, this was a far-sighted and politically sound decision.

At the beginning of this period, battles of great consequence for the people took place against the Dzungars; in these conflicts, Abilmambet’s son, Abulfeis, proved to be a reliable ally to both his father and Sultan Ablai. Following the collapse of the Dzungar state, Sultan Abulfeis led the migration of Kazakh tribes and clans to the east and remained the permanent leader of the ulus (territorial domains) of Eastern Kazakhstan until his death.

At the same time, Abulfeis pursued his own agenda: while allied with Ablai, he did not fully support the alliance between Ablai and Amursana, as he was keen to drive the Oirats out of Semirechye. During the military campaign of 1757–1758, Abulfeis’s detachments attacked the Oirats, seizing livestock and property (Khafizova, 2007: 39). Ultimately, however, Amursana was neither handed over nor even captured by the rulers of the Middle Zhuz; he served as a useful asset in the Kazakhs’ diplomatic maneuvering with the Qing, despite their formal status as subjects and the stern directives issued from Beijing. Undoubtedly, he coordinated his actions with his father, Abilmambet, and Sultan Ablai.

Conclusion. Thus, during the 1720s–1750s, Abilmambet Khan played an active role in the military and diplomatic confrontation with the Dzungars (Kiyat, 2015: 70). As the research findings demonstrate, during the 1720s–1750s – a period marked by a complex foreign policy environment for the Kazakh Khanate, shaped by its proximity to two major powers (the Qing Empire and Russia) and escalating tensions with the Dzungar Khanate—Abilmambet Khan emerged as a pivotal political figure who largely defined the Kazakh state’s foreign policy. His interactions with the Dzungars, in particular, serve as a recurring, central theme throughout his political career. Abilmambet Khan was an active participant in virtually all major foreign policy events of the first half of the 18th century involving the Dzungar Khanate. Furthermore, an examination of his life and activities offers insight into the specific nature of the Kazakh Khanate’s foreign policy during this era, a time when the practice of *amanat* (the exchange of hostages), marital alliances, and personal relationships among the nobility played a decisive role in interstate relations.

Undoubtedly, studying various facets of the life and work of a major 18th-century Kazakh political figure like Abilmambet Khan provides a more comprehensive understanding of how international relations were structured between the region’s last remaining major nomadic states – the Kazakh and Dzungar Khanates – both of which faced intense pressure from the great empires of the time. Given that Abilmambet Khan remains relatively little-known – especially when compared to other khans and batyrs of the same period – despite his significant contributions to preserving and strengthening the Kazakh Khanate and his direct involvement in key political processes, research focused on him is highly relevant to the field of historical studies in Kazakhstan.

Sources

AFPRE — Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire
SAOR — State Archive of the Orenburg Region
HAOR — Historical Archive of the Omsk Region
USAOR — United State Archive of the Orenburg Region
RSAAA — Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts

Источники

АВПРИ — Архив внешней политики Российской империи
ГАОО — Государственный архив Оренбургской области
ИАОО — Исторический архив Омской области
ОГАОО — Объединенный государственный архив Оренбургской области

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