

APPROVED
at the meeting of the Academic
Council of NJSC Al-Farabi Kazakh
National University
Protocol №14 dated 16.06.2026

Entrance Examination Program
for applicants to doctoral studies
for the group of educational programs
D064 – «International Relations»

I. General Provisions

1. The program is developed in accordance with the Order of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated October 31, 2018, No. 600 “On approval of the Standard Rules for admission to educational organizations implementing higher and postgraduate education programs” (hereinafter – the Standard Rules).

2. The entrance examination to doctoral studies consists of an interview, essay writing, and a subject exam in the profile of the educational program group.

Component	Points
1. Interview	30
2. Essay	20
3. Subject exam (program profile)	50
Total / Passing score	100/75

3. The duration of the entrance exam is 3 hours and 10 minutes, during which the applicant writes an essay and answers an electronic examination ticket. The interview is conducted at the university prior to the entrance exam.

II. Procedure for Conducting the Entrance Examination

1. Applicants to doctoral studies in the group of educational programs D064 – “International Relations” write a problem-based / thematic essay. The essay must be at least 250 words.

The purpose of the essay is to assess analytical and creative abilities demonstrated through the ability to construct independent arguments based on theoretical knowledge, social and personal experience.

Types of essays:

- motivational essay revealing incentives for research activity;
- scientific-analytical essay substantiating the relevance and methodology of the planned research;
- problem-based / thematic essay reflecting various aspects of scientific knowledge in the subject area.

2. The electronic examination ticket consists of 3 questions.

Topics for preparation for the subject exam of the educational program group:

Discipline: «**Theory of International Relations**»

Topic 1. Theoretical and conceptual foundations of the theory of international relations and main paradigms

Theoretical and applied levels of research. The concept of “theory,” logic of theory construction, its components and functions. The concept of hypothesis, its types and formation logic. Formation of theoretical understanding of international relations. Classical realism and idealism. Issues of international relations in the works of N. Machiavelli, T. Hobbes, E. de Vattel, C. von Clausewitz, H. Grotius, J. Locke, I. Kant. Key principles of realism and neorealism. Anarchy of the international environment, power and balance of power, national interest and security. Main ideas of liberalism and neoliberalism. International institutions, regimes, interdependence and cooperation. Marxism and neomarxism. World capitalism, world-system theory, the “North–South” problem.

Topic 2. Nature, patterns and modern theories of international relations

Nature of international relations and their main characteristics. Regularities of international relations. Interpretation of international relations from neorealist, neoliberal and neomarxist perspectives. Changes and trends in modern international relations. Institutionalism, transnationalism, pluralism, regime theory, neoliberal institutionalism. Critical theory.

Topic 3. Comparative analysis of main paradigms of international relations theory

Comparative characteristics of neorealism, neoliberalism and neomarxism. Nature of the international environment, actors of international relations and their interaction features. Key issues and development trends of modern international relations. Concepts of “world politics,” “international relations,” “foreign policy,” “geopolitics,” “security,” “conflict,” “crisis.” Features of scenario and forecasting analysis of international relations.

Topic 4. Methods of research in international relations

Concepts of “methodology,” “method,” “technique,” “research technology.” Formal and informal research methods. Statistical methods, modeling, factor and correlation analysis. Content analysis, event analysis, cognitive methods. Business and strategic games. Expert and forecasting methods, Delphi method, retro-alternative and alternative analysis.

Topic 5. Systems approach and levels of analysis in international relations research

Concepts of system, structure, function, external and internal environment. Concept of the international system and its features. Typology of international systems.

Works of M. Kaplan, R. Aron, and J. Derriendijk. Issues of levels of analysis. Contributions of K. Waltz, J. Singer, and M. Kaplan. Individual, state, and international system as levels of analysis.

Topic 6. Environment of international relations and geopolitical factors

Concept of the environment of international relations. Internal and external environment. Social, political and economic factors. Concept of geopolitics and its main theories. Role of geographical environment. Environmental factors and their influence on international relations. Structural changes in modern international relations.

Topic 7. Actors in the system of international relations

Concept of actors in international relations. The state as the main actor. Stratification of states: great power, superpower, middle power, small state, microstate. International organizations, transnational corporations, and other non-traditional actors. National interests, goals, and foreign policy instruments.

Topic 8. Foreign policy analysis

Concept and functions of foreign policy. Foreign policy process. Formation of state foreign policy. Theoretical foundations of foreign policy analysis. Comparative, structural, and psychological approaches. Individual, group, organizational structure, and macro-social level as objects of analysis.

Topic 9. International processes: conflict, cooperation and integration

Concept of international process. Conflict, cooperation and negotiation as main forms of politics. Causes, typology and stages of conflicts. Conflict resolution mechanisms. Integration theories: functionalism, neofunctionalism and federalism. Functions and types of international negotiations.

Topic 10. International world order and modern system of international relations

Concept of world order. Historical evolution of international systems. Features of the modern world order. Formation of a new system of international relations. Political and legal regime of modern international relations. Global issues: environment, resources, international terrorism, transnational crime, drug trafficking. Role of international organizations.

List of References

1. Waltz K.N. Theory of International Politics. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979.
2. Bordachev T.V., Zinovieva E.S., Likhacheva A.B. Theory of International Relations in the 21st Century. Moscow, 2015.
3. Introduction to the Theory of International Relations / ed. A.S. Mankin. Moscow, 2001.

4. Modern Theories of International Relations / ed. V.N. Konyshov, A.A. Sergunin. Moscow, 2013.
5. International Relations and World Politics / ed. P.A. Tsygankov. Moscow, 2015.
6. Tsygankov P.A. Theory of International Relations. Moscow: Yurait, 2026.
7. Lebedeva M.M. World Politics. Moscow: Knorus, 2016.
8. Borishpolets K.P. Methods of Political Research. Moscow: Aspect Press, 2010.
9. Medeubayeva Zh. M. Theory of International Relations: Study Guide. — Astana: L. N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, 2006. — 98 p.

Discipline: «Megatrends and Global Problems of World Politics»

Topic 1. Theoretical and methodological foundations of the international system and global megatrends

Descriptive-theoretical characteristics of the international system and its scientific directions. Modern theoretical approaches and paradigms. Concepts of trends and megatrends and their classification. The relationship between political development trends and law: methods of legal institutionalization of the new world order and related debates. Processes of divergence, convergence, integration, disintegration, and parallelism. Transformation of Western hegemony (“de-Westernization”) and the pluralization of world politics. The current state of democratization and alternative conceptual approaches. The impact of communication, information, and digital infrastructure on global political processes.

Topic 2. Multipolarity, new world order, and transformation of global hegemony

Formation of a new world order in the first quarter of the 21st century and the modern understanding of the state. Transition from a unipolar system to multipolarity and polycentrism as a megatrend. New global competition and strategic rivalry between the United States, China, the European Union, and Russia. Crisis of the hegemonic stability theory and conditions for international cooperation without a hegemon. Strengthening the role of middle powers and actors of the Global South (BRICS+, SCO). Ideological, cultural, and doctrinal contradictions. Changes in the balance of power and possible scenarios of a “new Cold War.”

Topic 3. Megatrend of regionalization, global security, and nuclear arms control

Concepts of regionalism and regionality in international relations: approaches and definitions. Global and regional security threats, their dimensions and risks. Disarmament issues under conditions of geopolitical instability. International systems of weapons of mass destruction control and their crisis. UN resolutions on nuclear non-proliferation and the creation of nuclear-weapon-free zones. Evolution of national security strategies and military doctrines.

Topic 4. Goeconomic blocs, de-dollarization, and sanctions geopolitics

The contraction of economic globalization (deglobalization) and competition for global leadership. Crisis of the effectiveness of international economic institutions (WTO, IMF, World Bank). Use of goeconomic instruments in state foreign policy. The megatrend of de-dollarization and the emergence of alternative digital currencies and settlement systems. Sanctions wars as an instrument of political pressure and fragmentation of global supply chains. Competition between transnational corporations and sovereign states.

Topic 5. Global demography, migration, and environmental geopolitics

Global demographic megatrend. Population aging in developed countries and population growth in developing countries and its impact on conflicts. International migration processes and their features. Mass population movements, urbanization, and climate migration (environmental refugees). Issues of political refugees, illegal migration, and cross-border regions. Climate change and environmental security. Competition for carbon neutrality and “green protectionism.” United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

Topic 6. Artificial intelligence, technological race, and cyberspace geopolitics

The role of science and technology in international relations. The global technological race in artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and semiconductor production as a key factor of competition. Strategic interests of states in new information technologies. Cyberspace as a new arena of political confrontation: cyberattacks, cyber espionage, and cybersecurity doctrines for critical infrastructure.

Topic 7. Digital transformation, new technologies, and information-cognitive warfare

Global megatrend of knowledge and innovation. The role of science and technology in international processes. The political and economic significance of AI and quantum technologies. Transformation of cyberspace into a conflict arena. Weaponization of media space and information warfare. Social media influence technologies on domestic politics and elections. Cognitive warfare and manipulation of consciousness.

Topic 8. Evolution of modern conflicts: hybrid threats and ethno-confessional processes

Features of modern conflicts. Evolution of the security concept and the combination of hard, soft, and smart power. Hybrid wars as a modern megatrend. International strategies to combat terrorism, extremism, and transnational organized crime. Ethno-confessional diversity and enclave formation processes. Morality, ethics, pacifism, and the problem of humanitarian intervention. The role of political elites in decision-making.

Topic 9. International institutions and institutionalization of regional complexes

Theoretical debates on international integration. Contemporary prerequisites of integration processes in regional studies. Crisis of legitimacy and effectiveness of international institutions (UN Security Council, OSCE, etc.). The problem of selective application of international law (“double standards”). Institutionalization of regional complexes in Europe and the Asia-Pacific region. Transformation of NATO and the creation of new security blocs (AUKUS, QUAD). Adaptation of Interpol and Europol to cybercrime.

Topic 10. Scenarios of regional megatrends and geopolitics of Central Asia

Features of major powers in the 21st century. Leadership in East Asia and China’s foreign policy. Scenarios of development in the inter-American space and the role of Latin America. Dynamics of international relations in the Middle East and post-Soviet space. Strengthening the geostrategic importance of Central Asia in a multipolar world. Multivector policies of regional states and the “Central Asia Plus” format. A new stage of regional integration (“Samarkand Process”). Geopolitical aspects of the Belt and Road Initiative and the Middle Corridor project. The role of CICA and the SCO in regional security. The strategic role of Kazakhstan as a balancing actor and mediator in diplomacy.

List of References

1. Megatrends: Main Trajectories of the Evolution of the World Order in the 21st Century. Textbook / Ed. T.A. Shakleina, A.A. Baikov. Moscow: Aspect Press, 2017.
2. History of International Relations in the Modern Period. Textbook.
3. Arystanbekova A.Kh. Globalization. Almaty, 2007.
4. Megatrends of World Politics and Their Development in the 21st Century. Textbook / Ed. M.M. Lebedeva. Moscow, 2019.
5. Current Issues of Integration and Globalization in Europe. Collection of scientific works. Almaty, 2008.
6. Kissinger H. Does America Need a Foreign Policy? New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001.
7. OSCE and Challenges of Regional Security. Almaty, 2009.
8. Laumulin M.T. Central Asia in the Era of Transformation. Nur-Sultan: KISI, 2020.
9. Ekimova N.A. Global megatrends and new technologies: challenges and threats to the post-industrial economy. Economic and Social Changes: Facts, Trends, Forecast, 2021.

Discipline: «**Global Security and Contemporary International Conflicts**»

Topic 1. Concept of “International and Regional Security” in the Context of a New World Order

Theoretical approaches to the concept of international security in the context of a new world order. Interpretation of security from the perspective of political realism. The liberal-institutionalist approach to understanding security. Interpretation of security within the liberal-idealistic paradigm. Transformation of the security concept under globalization. Comparative analysis of the main paradigms of security theory. The concept of collective security. Comprehensive security. The balance-of-threat theory.

Topic 2. Formation of the Modern International Security System

The contemporary international security agenda. Global problems in the new world order. The significance of new factors of global security. New approaches to defining regional and national security. Main dimensions of security. Analysis of new dimensions of security. Characteristics of “hard” and “soft” security. Reasons for the diversification of security issues. The economic dimension of security. The environmental dimension of security. Energy security as a factor in international relations. The political dimension of security. The evolution of approaches to information and cybersecurity issues.

Topic 3. Global Security: Non-Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction and the Role of the UN

International legal mechanisms for addressing nuclear non-proliferation. The content and significance of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The content and significance of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). The role of multilateral structures in the non-proliferation regime. The anti-nuclear policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan’s initiatives to strengthen the non-proliferation regime. Analysis of ways to achieve a nuclear-weapon-free status for Central Asia.

Topic 4. New Dimensions of Security: Economic, Energy, and Environmental Dimensions

The economic dimension of security. The role of environmental factors in the contemporary international system. Rational use of natural resources and environmental protection. The concept of “sustainable development” and its impact on international security. Issues of sustainable development and international security. Energy security as a factor in contemporary international relations. The functioning of collective security systems using the examples of the UN, NATO, and the SCO.

Topic 5. New Dimensions of Security: Political, Humanitarian, and Information Dimensions

Specific features of the political dimension of security. The concept of the information dimension of security. The impact of the global technological revolution on international security. The interaction between digitalization processes and transnational extremism. Cybersecurity challenges and forms of ensuring it. Features of demographic and humanitarian dimensions of security. Dynamics of migration processes in the context of international security. The role of non-state actors in international security.

Topic 6. Concept, Essence, and Features of International Terrorism and Religious Extremism

International terrorism as a threat to global and regional security. New approaches to the study of the concepts of “radicalism” and “extremism”. Factors contributing to the rise of radical ideas. Problems of countering international terrorism and extremism. Experience of leading countries in combating terrorism and radical extremism. Analysis of counter-terrorism and counter-extremism practices in Central Asia. Problems of drug trafficking and organized crime. Specific and common features of combating radicalism in Central Asian countries. The role of regional organizations in countering terrorism.

Topic 7. Strategies of Great Powers (USA, China, Russia, EU) Toward Central Asian Security in the 21st Century

Russia’s contemporary geopolitical position in ensuring regional security and doctrinal changes. The role of the United States in Central Asian security and its strategic priorities. China’s policy on regional stability and the security aspects of the Belt and Road Initiative. The European Union’s strategy toward security and sustainable development in Central Asia.

Topic 8. NATO’s Global Expansion and Security Dilemmas of Europe and the Asia-Pacific Region

NATO’s new strategic concept in the 21st century and its impact on European security. Intensification of military-political blocs in the Asia-Pacific region and new security dimensions. Modeling a new security system in Europe and transformation of national defense doctrines. The contemporary nature of Kazakhstan’s multilateral cooperation with European security structures.

Topic 9. Geopolitical Confrontation in the Middle and Near East in the 21st Century and the Impact of Afghanistan

Contemporary security challenges in the Middle East and a new phase of international conflicts. Great power competition in the regional security architecture of the Middle East. The impact of the political and humanitarian situation in Afghanistan on Eurasian security. Contemporary interests of external actors and local coalitions in conflict resolution.

Topic 10. The New Geopolitical Dimension of Contemporary International Relations

Problems of war and peace. Overcoming traditional geographical and economic determinism. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on world politics. Geopolitical models and categories of a polycentric world. The Afghan question. The Syrian crisis. The Russia–Ukraine conflict.

List of References

1. Arystanbekova A.Kh. Globalization. Almaty, 2007.

2. Introduction to International Relations / Ed. A.S. Manykin. Moscow, 2001.
3. Machiavelli N. The Prince. Moscow, 1990.
4. International Relations and World Politics. Textbook / Ed. P.A. Tsygankov. Moscow, 2015.
5. Tokayev K.K. Foreign Policy of Kazakhstan in the Context of Globalization. Almaty: "SAK", 2000.
6. Torkunov A.V., Malgin A.V. Contemporary International Relations. Moscow, 2017.
7. Alexeyeva T.A., Kazantsev A.A. Foreign Policy Process: Comparative Analysis. Moscow, 2012.
8. Baizakova K.I., Kukeyeva F.T. et al. Dynamics of the Balance of Power in the Geopolitical Environment of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Almaty, 2016.
9. International Security: Global and Regional Actors / Ed. M.M. Lebedeva, Yu.A. Nikitina. Moscow, 2020.
10. Christensen B.J., Kowalczyk C. Globalization: Strategies and Effects. Berlin, 2017.

Discipline: «Scenario-Analytical Forecasting of International Situations»

Topic 1. Object, Subject, and Features of Scenario-Analytical Forecasting of International Situations

General theoretical and methodological foundations of international situation analysis. Analysis and identification of key forecasting problems in international political relations. Comparative analysis of structural differences and key characteristics of short-term forecasting in diplomatic practice and scientifically grounded international forecasting. Justification of the applied significance and practical value of international forecasting in the process of foreign policy decision-making by states.

Topic 2. Concept, Structure, Levels, and Functions of the International Political Situation

Characteristics of structural elements and main levels of the international political situation. Analysis of key functions of situational analysis in international relations. Comprehensive assessment of the interconnection between foreign economic, social, and domestic political factors influencing foreign policy processes.

Topic 3. Evolution of Political Schools and Methodology of Analysis in Western Europe and the United States

History of formation and development trends of analytical centers and schools of international situation analysis in Western countries. Comparative analysis of major theoretical schools and systemic approaches to the study of world politics. Characteristics of modern directions in political analysis and specialized scientific methods.

Topic 4. Information-Analytical Work: Data Deficiency and Methods of International Information Collection

Analysis of the problem of data deficiency under conditions of insufficient foreign policy information. Justification of possible effective ways to overcome information uncertainty in international forecasting. Assessment of methodological difficulties and limitations in collecting reliable information in zones of international conflicts and crises.

Topic 5. Methodology of Scenario Analysis, Structure, and Basic Models

Theoretical content of the concept of multi-variant scenario analysis in international forecasting. Logic and characteristics of three basic scenarios of international processes development: optimistic, pessimistic, and realistic. Justification of methods for managing political risks and uncertainty factors in building scenario models.

Topic 6. Tools and Models of Forecasting: Linear Trends, Structural Matrices, and Causal Relationships

Comparative analysis of linear trend forecasting methods based on statistical data and scenario matrices. Analysis of the application of causal diagrams for modeling interdependence in complex international processes. The impact of time horizons on the accuracy and quality of short-term and long-term political forecasts.

Topic 7. Maintaining Analytical Objectivity, Cognitive Limitations, and Mechanisms for Checking Expert Errors

Assessment of methods for preventing subjectivity and eliminating analytical blindness of the researcher. Comparative analysis of “pre-mortem analysis” and the “devil’s advocate method” in reducing strategic uncertainty. Risks of confirmation bias in international forecasting. The importance of revising initial hypotheses underlying expert conclusions.

Topic 8. Expert Thinking Models, Quantitative Methods, and Scenario Verification Tools

Comparative analysis of “fox” and “hedgehog” analytical thinking styles and their impact on research outcomes. Assessment of the application of modern quantitative methods in international forecasting. The role of change indicators in monitoring and verifying scenarios.

Topic 9. Global Forecasting, Structural Factors, Leadership Decisions, and Systemic Shocks

The necessity of considering both individual leaders’ decisions and structural factors in international forecasting. Identification of unexpected events that radically transform the international system and analysis of their role. Mechanisms of chain reactions in the spread of regional crises to the global level and methods of forecasting them.

Topic 10. Geopolitical Dynamics of Central Asia, Strategies of Key Actors, and Foreign Policy Foresight of Kazakhstan

Forecast analysis of geopolitical interests and strategies of Russia, China, and the United States in Central Asia. Analysis of cooperation between Central Asian countries and the European Union and scenarios of its development. Assessment of the impact of the Russia–Ukraine crisis and the situation in Afghanistan on regional stability. The concept of multi-vector diplomacy and its influence on the balance of Kazakhstan’s foreign policy, as well as modeling future trends.

List of References

1. Arystanbekova, A. Kh. Contemporary Trends in International Relations. Almaty: Dyke-Press, 2010. 364 p.
2. Contemporary World Politics: Applied Analysis / Ed. A.D. Bogaturov. 2nd ed., rev. and enlarged. Moscow: Aspect Press, 2010. 592 p.
3. Laumulin M. Central Asia in Foreign Political Science and World Geopolitics. Almaty: KISI, 2009. 280 p.
4. Mannheim, J., Rich, R. Political Science. Research Methods. Moscow: The Whole World, 2010. 544 p.
5. International Relations: Theories, Conflicts, Movements, Organizations / Ed. P.A. Tsygankov, L.O. Ternovaya. Moscow: KNORUS, 2017.
6. Khrustalev M.A. Analysis of International Situations and Political Expertise: Textbook. Moscow: Aspect Press, 2015. 208 p.
7. Ozhiganov E.N. Modeling and Analysis of Political Processes. Moscow: RUDN University Press, 2020. 190 p.
8. Vasilenko A., Akhremenko A.S. Political Analysis and Forecasting: Textbook. 333 p.