

Central Asia News Update

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MIDDLE
EAST
STUDIES
FORUM
HOSTED BY THE ALFRED DEAKIN
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Recent Developments

Economic

Azerbaijan and Tajikistan [signed](#) a cooperation agreement in Baku following a meeting between the heads of the two countries' chambers of commerce.

Kazakhstan formally [joined](#) the World Trade Organisation (WTO) on 27 July following 20 years of talks.

The Kazakh State Agency for Geology and Mineral Resources [held](#) an auction on July 23 for the subsoil use license at the "Kuylyu" graphite mine on the Arpa-Takyr II site.

The new Kazakh airline, Qazaq Air JSC, was [unveiled](#) on July 6 at Astana's international airport.

Kazakhstan's national oil and gas company KazMunaiGas [signed](#) a contract for the exploration and production of the Dead Kultuk site (Ustyurt) in the Caspian Sea.

Trading volumes at the Kazakhstan Stock Exchange (KASE) [increased](#) across all sectors to 47.741 trillion tenge (US\$257.989 billion) between January and June 2015, 2.4 times higher than the same period in 2014.

The Max Petroleum Oil and Gas Company [resumed](#) production at East Kyzylzhar I field in Kazakhstan in July.

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) [brokered](#) a US\$300 million private loan to fund the modernisation and restructure of the Kazakh rail operator, Kazakhstan Temir Zholy.

A New York court [ruled](#) that the US Justice Department was permitted to seize US\$300 million linked to a Russian-Uzbek bribery scandal that involves an unidentified close relative of the Uzbek President, Islam Karimov.

The Kyrgyz Prime Minister and his Kazakh counterpart [agreed](#) to build the Almaty-Cholpon-Ata highway on July 21.

Analysts [predict](#) that the Iranian nuclear agreement will cause global oil prices to decrease sharply.

Kazakhstan [signed](#) a contract to provide India with 5,000 tons of Kazakh uranium over the next five years.

Politics

New Tajik media laws [require](#) the country's news outlets to only use information provided by the state-run news agency when reporting official news.

Uzbek authorities arrested a former-Uzbek security official that was involved in investigating allegations that the president's daughter had been involved in corrupt practices.

A Kazakh court [held](#) a preliminary hearing for the corruption case against former-Prime Minister, Serik Akhmetov, on 27 July.

The Kyrgyz President Almazbek Atambaev [announced](#) that the next parliamentary elections will be held on October 4 2015.

Amnesty International [urged](#) the EU to take action against Uzbekistan to end torture and abuse.

Historic Iran nuclear deal reached

Iran and the P5+1 finally [reached](#) the historic nuclear deal on July 14. The deal commits Iran to implementing the IAEA's additional protocol and limiting its nuclear programme in exchange for the lifting of international sanctions.

The lifting of sanctions in particular is [expected](#) to have significant implications for the region by opening up the large and resource-rich Iranian economy to regional investors. However, some of Iran's neighbours have expressed [concern](#) that Iran's newfound economic might could empower it to implement a more provocative regional foreign policy.



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The Kyrgyz president [defended](#) his decision to end the Kyrgyz-US cooperation deal, accusing the US of trying to provoke ethnic discord. The cancellation appeared to have been [prompted](#) by Washington's decision to give its 2014 Human Rights Defender award to jailed Kyrgyz activist, Azimjan Askarov.

The Afghan parliament [rejected](#) President Ghani's second nominee for the still-vacant Defence Minister position.

Kazakhstan [plans](#) to offer visa-free travel for citizens of countries in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), as well as Malaysian and Singaporean nationals from the start of 2017.

The Russian President Vladimir Putin [hosted](#) a joint meeting of BRICS and SCO member states at the SCO Summit in Ufa on 9-10 July.

The Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said that SCO meetings [provide](#) a good platform for Tehran to explain its views "on important regional and international issues."

Afghan lawmakers [rejected](#) Afghanistan's first female Supreme Court nominee on July 8.

Security

Turkish media [reported](#) that Turkey has detained forty-five foreigners trying to enter Syria to join ISIS. Those arrested were mainly Tajik citizens.

A Popular Kyrgyz Imam in southern Kyrgyzstan was [tried](#) for Islamic extremism and inciting religious discord.

The State Department [defended](#) its decision to provide Uzbekistan with armoured vehicles, despite widespread concerns about Uzbekistan's human rights record.

Pakistan [hosted](#) the first Afghanistan-Taliban peace talks on July 7. Both parties agreed to continue talks with a view to achieving reconciliation.

SCO expands its membership, but at what cost to the Central Asian republics?

The SCO held its annual summit on July 9-10 in Ufa, Russia. The Organisation agreed to make changes to its membership, including [beginning](#) the long-awaited accession process for India and Pakistan. The SCO also announced that Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cambodia and Nepal had joined as "dialogue partners," while Belarus' status was upgraded to "formal observer." Iran, Mongolia and Afghanistan [retained](#) their observer status, although the SCO had previously [indicated](#) that Iran might be considered eligible for an upgrade to full membership status if the nuclear deal was finalised.

However, the SCO's broadened membership has not been universally welcomed, with some [analysts](#) expressing concerns that the new members might overshadow the role placed by the Central Asian republics in the organisation, and change the organisation's regional and international power balance.

Tajik authorities [arrested](#) two ISIS-affiliated men who were alleged to have been plotting 12 attacks across the country.

The Afghan Taliban leader, Mullah Omar, and the Afghan president, Ashraf Ghani, [backed](#) peace talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government.

Two drone strikes [killed](#) between 25 and 49 insurgents loyal to ISIS in Afghanistan on July 7.

A former-Kyrgyz lawmaker was [detained](#) at Bishkek airport after being accused of supplying weapons to ISIS militants.

An Afghan army general was [arrested](#) on charges of trafficking almost 19 kilograms of heroin in Baghlan Province in northern Afghanistan.