

# Central Asia News Update

December 2015

## Recent Developments

### Economics

The Kazakh Prime Minister, Karim Masimov, [said](#) that Kazakhstan will sign an expanded cooperation deal with the European Union next month.

Kazakhstan's national currency [continued](#) to lose value against the dollar.

The Kazakh President, Nursultan Nazarbaev, [met](#) the British Prime Minister, David Cameron. The leaders signed deals on a steel production facility and four new gas plants in Kazakhstan, worth \$4.6 billion.

Norwegian police [arrested](#) Jo Lunder, the former CEO of the Norwegian telco, VimpelCom, as part of a corruption investigation linked to the Uzbek president's daughter.

A World Bank report [said](#) on November 17 that the Tajik economy will slow to 4.2 percent growth this year.

The Kazakh government will [remove](#) bread subsidies in an effort to rein in government expenditure.

The Kazakh Energy Ministry [announced](#) that it will increase renewable energy generation to reach a target of 3 percent of total electricity volume by 2020.

Uzbekistan will [continue](#) to privatise state resources, despite the volatile economic climate.

Kazakhstan is due to [become](#) a full member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) on December 15.

The Kazakh government [announced](#) that it will review the Nurly Zhol economic stimulus package, as the country's 2015 growth forecast was downgraded further to 1.3 percent.

### Politics

Nursultan Nazarbaev, who has reigned in Kazakhstan since 1989, [said](#) that "all of us" must prepare successors.

The Afghan President, Ashraf Ghani, [met](#) Nazarbaev on his first official visit to Kazakhstan. The leaders discussed their countries' economic and security relationships.

Kazakhstan formally [designated](#) the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria group (ISIS) as an extremist organisation.

Afghan investigators [blamed](#) weak leadership and Afghan security forces' misuse of resources for Kunduz city's fall to the Taliban in September.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) [urged](#) Pakistan to stop the "rampant police harassment, threats, and violence" against Afghan migrants living in Pakistan.

Kyrgyzstan's new parliament [reappointed](#) Temir Sariev as Prime Minister after he successfully formed a governing coalition following last month's parliamentary election.

Thousands of Afghans [marched](#) in Kabul protesting the beheading of seven ethnic Hazaras by Islamic militants.

The presidents of Turkmenistan and Afghanistan [launched](#) the construction of the TAPI pipeline, which once complete will pump natural gas from Turkmenistan to India, through Afghanistan and Pakistan.

A group of Tajik parliamentary deputies [put forward](#) a draft bill that would designate the Tajik President, Emomali Rahmon, as the "leader of the nation." The implications of the new title are not yet clear.

Tajikistan's Asia-Plus news website [reported](#) that Russian troops withdrew unexpectedly from their base in the southern Tajik city of Kulyab.

The Kyrgyz president [called](#) for the country's political system to be changed from a mixed system to a parliamentary system. A parliamentary system would benefit his Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan (SDPK).

A Kazakh citizen was [sentenced](#) to 'de-facto house arrest' for inciting religious hatred.

## Security

A Kazakh citizen was [sentenced](#) to five years in jail after being found guilty of encouraging separatism on the Internet.

The social networking site LiveJournal was [allowed](#) to resume operating in Kazakhstan, four years after being blocked for “propagating terrorism and extremism.”

Kyrgyzstan arrested a 19-year-old man that they [accused](#) of recruiting fighters for ISIS.

A Tajik man was [sentenced](#) to three years in jail in the Russian city of Arkhangelsk on “terrorist propaganda” charges.

Unknown assailants [stabbed](#) to death two officers from the Tajik military commission responsible for conscription.

Tajik authorities [initiated](#) an unprecedented crackdown on members of the newly-banned Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT).

[Yury Zhukovsky](#), a suspect in the 2012 shooting of a prominent Uzbek went on trial in Sweden.

An Uzbek court [sentenced](#) Muhammad Abdullaev to 13 years in prison after he confessed to fighting with ISIS in Syria.

The Taliban [claims](#) to have captured at least 15 Afghan army personnel following a helicopter crash in Faryab Province in northern Afghanistan on November 24.

The Taliban [stoned](#) a woman to death in Ghor Province on October 25, drawing the condemnation of Afghan officials.

The Mayor of Astana, Adilbek Dzhaksybekov, [claimed](#) that security services had neutralised a terror plot the Kazakh capital.

## US Secretary of State John Kerry visits Central Asia

The US Secretary of State, John Kerry, [toured](#) the five Central Asian republics last month. The Central Asian states expressed concern about the security and economic consequences of a potential US withdrawal from Afghanistan. Although Kerry prioritised security and economic concerns during his travels, he was under significant pressure from activists to address Central Asia’s poor human rights record. The highlights of the trip include:

**Kyrgyzstan:** Kerry began his tour of the region in Kyrgyzstan, where the US operated the Manas airbase until last year. Kerry met with the Kyrgyz President, Almazbek Atambaev, and expressed his support for the recent Kyrgyz parliamentary elections.

**Uzbekistan:** Kerry [met](#) with the Uzbek President Islam Karimov, who has ruled the country since 1990. Kerry also met the foreign ministers of the five Central Asian republics in Samarkand, where he raised the region’s human rights record. He told the ministers that, “We should have no doubt that progress in democratic governance leads to gains in every other field about which we’re talking.”

**Kazakhstan:** Kerry [thanked](#) the Kazakh president for the leading role that Kazakhstan is playing in confronting Islamic extremism. However, he warned that the fight against terrorism is not an excuse for curbing democratic freedoms.

**Tajikistan:** Kerry [arrived](#) in Tajikistan on 3 November, and quickly set about reassuring Tajik authorities that Washington remains committed to the Central Asia nation’s security. Tajikistan shares a long border with Afghanistan, and last month President Rahmon expressed serious concerns about the threat of extremism, particularly in light of the Taliban’s recent gains in northern Afghanistan.