

US–Central Asia summit: raw materials and declarations

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On 6 November President Donald Trump received the presidents of the five Central Asian states at the White House. This was the second summit of the C5+1 format, established in 2015, to be held at the level of heads of state and the first to take place in Washington. During the event and the meetings preceding it, a number of bilateral agreements, as well as trade and investment arrangements, were signed, particularly those concerning critical raw materials important to the US economy. According to information released by the Central Asian states, in addition to raw-material issues, the agreements also covered US investment in the region as well as cooperation in water management, transport, new technologies, and artificial intelligence. At the summit, President Trump stated that Kazakhstan would join the so-called Abraham Accords (initiated in 2020 and aimed at normalising relations between Israel and several Arab states). However, since Kazakhstan has maintained diplomatic relations with Israel since 1992, this move should be regarded as symbolic and as having no effect on relations between the two countries.

The United States is seeking to enhance its relations with the Central Asian states primarily because of the region's abundant natural resources. Imports of their critical raw materials could enable the US to reduce its dependence on more problematic partners, chiefly China. For Central Asia, closer ties with Washington offer an opportunity to diversify their trade relations and the prospect of substantial US investment.

Commentary

- **The growing interest of the Central Asian states in strengthening relations with the United States forms part of a broader effort to diversify their foreign policies following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.** This applies particularly to economic cooperation, as the region seeks to reduce its dependence on its historically dominant partners, above all Russia, which is increasingly regarded not as a key ally but as a security threat. Another factor encouraging intensified contacts is the current US administration's abandonment of pressure to democratise local political systems and its withdrawal of demands to limit cooperation with Russia and China. The desire to enhance relations with the US, evident in the policies of all the region's states, is most pronounced in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Tashkent has recently signed, among other documents, an agreement for the purchase of Boeing aircraft worth over \$8 billion for its national airline, and has also decided to lift visa requirements for US citizens from 2026. Meanwhile, the value of Kazakh–American trade increased from \$3.1 billion in 2022 to \$4.2 billion in 2024.

- **The C5+1 meeting signals increased US engagement in the region.** Opening the summit, President Trump stressed that Central Asia had been unjustly marginalised in US policy until now. Secretary of State Marco Rubio announced that he would visit all five countries in 2026. Meanwhile, Uzbekistan's President Shavkat Mirziyoyev invited Trump to visit his country – which would be the first-ever trip by a sitting US president to Central Asia.
- **The shift in the US approach to the region stems above all from the growing need to diversify sources of critical raw materials** – particularly rare – earth elements, tungsten, and uranium – held by the Central Asian states. This has become especially important in the context of mounting tensions in relations with China and the export restrictions it has introduced, as well as the increasing significance of Central Asia as a key transport route.
- **Another reasons for Washington's heightened interest in the region is its aim to curb the dominant position of Moscow and Beijing there.** Earlier this year, the leaders of the Central Asian states met both with Chairman Xi Jinping (16–18 June) and with President Vladimir Putin (9 October). US engagement is also driven by a desire to join the group of the region's key partners. Washington is currently devising a strategy towards Central Asia aimed at securing the greatest possible gains, based primarily on trade. It should be noted, however, that despite this clear shift in the US approach, it remains above all the Central Asian states – especially Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan – that are taking the initiative in enhancing cooperation with the United States.