

# Center of the World: This Week in Astana, Kazakhstan

The SCO summit, the opening of EXPO 2017 and Syrian peace talks are bringing the world to Kazakhstan.

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Central Asia has rarely found itself in the center of geopolitics, even though it is quite literally in the center of the world.

This week however, the world arrives in Astana, Kazakhstan. Russian President Vladimir Putin, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Indian Prime Minister Modi will be joined by nearly two dozen fellow world leaders for the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. That summit will happen concurrently with the opening of World EXPO 2017 where over 100 countries are presenting their pavilions to millions of visitors over the next three months, as well as the next round of Syrian peace process talks. All within just a week!

This dizzying diplomatic pace has only been amplified by Kazakhstan assuming an increasingly important role on the global stage, including on the UN Security Council where they'll soon take their spot as rotating president. At the historic heart of the Silk Road that the Chinese now describe as the "buckle" of their "One Belt, One Road" initiative, Kazakhstan is leading not just for itself but on behalf of a broader regional and international community.

Kazakhstan's rapid rise is not just seen from the halls of power in Beijing and Washington, it's evident at home as well. Astana's transformation into a capital city 20 years ago can be seen across its architecture and landscape. As visitors walk across the grounds of the EXPO exploring the sources of "Future Energy," Kazakhstan's enormous natural resource wealth and ingenuity will be on display. Always looking ahead, Kazakhstan will turn these grounds into the Astana Financial Center which is preparing to launch its unique business venture to attract further investment into the country.

The dynamism on display here in Astana is being welcomed by the international community and particularly by the American business community. As personified in our USA Pavilion at the World EXPO 2017, the United States has been a friend to Kazakhstan since its founding a quarter of a century ago and continues to grow deeper with every interaction. Today, according to the latest U.S. State Department numbers, there are more than 300 Kazakhstani-American joint ventures registered in Kazakhstan, and about 100 American companies on the Kazakhstani market.

By comparison, in 1994 there were no more than 50 American firms here. That's a remarkable period of growth and it shows how attractive

Kazakhstan is, in part because of its human resources. The people here are smart, they're well educated, and they seek out the innovative, quality products produced in the United States.

The USA Pavilion is sponsored by the American business community that believes strongly in investing in the future of Kazakhstan and the U.S.-Kazakh relationship.

Towards this end, visitors will have the chance to see the connections and similarities between America and Kazakhstan while meeting our 40 Student Ambassadors that have come from across the United States to spend the summer in Astana greeting the world. They truly represent the source of our infinite energy and the future as next generation leaders.

As a small part of this week's incredible diplomatic milestones for Kazakhstan and the region, we at the USA Pavilion are excited to be at the center of the world throughout this summer applauding Kazakhstan for its leadership in the international community.

*Dr. Joshua W. Walker is CEO and President of the USA Pavilion at EXPO 2017.*