

# Diplomacy Flurry as Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan's Leaders Meet

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The coming weeks will see a flurry of regional diplomacy in Central Asia as the leader of Uzbekistan visits Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan's president heads to Uzbekistan.

Uzbek president Shavkat Mirziyoyev will be dropping in on his Kyrgyz counterpart Almazbek Atambayev next week.

"We have very good relations with him," Atambayev told a crowd in the southern Kyrgyz town of Uzgen. "Two weeks ago the prime ministers of our countries met and drew up a document on the [demarcation] of 84 percent of our borders. That was the first visit from an Uzbek prime minister in 26 years."

Much of the heavy lifting appears to have been done in that historic [encounter](#), leaving Atambayev and Mirziyoyev to bask in the satisfying positive press that will accompany their upcoming talks.

Ambitions have been reasonably contained so far, extending to improving conditions for cross-border traffic and increasing opportunities for trade. But the most ardent proponents of the thaw have visions of a proliferation of Kyrgyz-Uzbek joint companies, settlement of long-standing disputes about how to properly share the region's water resources and the resolution of other thorny topics.

Recent developments in the electricity market serve as a useful illustration of the benefits that more amicable relations can bring.

Starting from June 16, Kyrgyzstan began delivering low-price electricity to Uzbekistan. As Uzbek officials have explained, this has been done to give their own power sector spare capacity to upgrade their own generation and distribution system. A side benefit is that by releasing water to generate electricity at its hydropower facilities, Kyrgyzstan is also favoring its neighbor's agricultural sector too, as the head of state power company Uzbekenergo's strategic development department, Eso Sadullayev, told a press conference earlier this month.

Sadullayev spoke at the same press conference about efforts being undertaken by Uzbekistan to "broaden and strengthen" utilization of Central Asia's unified power grid. This is somewhat disingenuous phrasing since Tashkent has been in practical terms one of the main factors in leading to the [decline](#) of the regional grid over recent years, but the sentiment is encouraging.

On another front, Uzbekistan should in the "near future" be expecting a visit from another neighbor, Kazakhstan's President Nazarbayev.

As is the case with Kyrgyzstan, resolving formalities over borders has served as a springboard for longer-term cooperation, and the agenda is broad.

During talks in Tashkent last week, a Kazakhstani delegation headed by the deputy minister for investment and development, Yerlan Khairov, discussions were strictly focused on business. A fair showcasing Kazakhstan's industrial sector coming up soon in the Uzbek capital will serve as a platform for the two nations' business representatives to talk shop.

There are already developments to talk about.

Final touches are now being put to an arrangement whereby Kazakhstan's AllurGroup will assemble knock-down kits of GM Uzbekistan's Ravon Nexia R3 salon car. That set-up, which will see the cars being put together in Kostanay, a city close to the Russian border, will enable the Uzbek carmaker to get under the tariff net imposed by the Eurasian Economic Union.

Incidentally on the car-making front, Nazarbayev's announced his imminent trip to Tashkent while visiting the Uzbek pavilion at the EXPO-2017 fair in Astana, where he noted approvingly that Uzbekistan has been making worthy advances in developing electric-powered automobiles and alternative sources of energy. Nazarbayev was particularly taken by a prototype for a solar-panel powered car and a model industrial plant powered entirely by solar and wind power.

And for the first time in history, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan have committed to deepening bilateral military cooperation. Kazakhstan's Defense Minister Saken Zhasuzakov met in Astana on August 25 with the secretary of Uzbekistan's Security Council, Viktor Makhmudov, to discuss the prospects for the bolstering of defense ties. Some manner of formal agreement is expected later this year, according to multiple media reports.

This surely cannot but cause a little unease in Russia, which views itself as very much the leading party on all defense-related matters in Central Asia. Except, that is, when it comes to Uzbekistan, which has largely spurned Moscow's attempts to co-opt it into regional security structures. Uzbekistan suspended its membership in the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization in 2012 and has resisted, so far, overtures intended to reverse that decision. The idea that Uzbekistan may be seeking to cultivate regional defense cooperation, without Russia playing a direct role, hints at a whole new geopolitical trend.