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C5+1: Toward a New Direction

A strategic partnership reshaping Central Asia's geopolitical landscape

3 Main Points



- How is the U.S. leveraging the C5+1 to counter Russia and China's dominance in Central Asia?
- This year's C5+1 Summit elevated U.S. - Central Asia relations, with Washington advancing concrete economic initiatives to strengthen its position in a region long dominated by Moscow and Beijing.
- C5+1's future depends on the U.S. delivering meaningful results and Central Asian states perceiving the format as a viable pillar of their multi-vector foreign policy, rather than a geopolitical burden.

About the Authors

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Introduction

For decades, Central Asia has been viewed through the lens of multipolar conflict. A crossroad where Russian security dominance, Chinese economic expansion, and Western strategic



interests intersect. Yet amid this competition, the C5+1 has emerged as one of the region's most important diplomatic channels. Launched in 2015 as a joint platform between the United States and the five Central Asian republics, the mechanism has evolved into a venue of coordinated action on both economic opportunities and security threats. In this brief, the main focus is on the achievements of the C5+1 at the meeting on November 6th, 2025, and it further discusses what the future looks like for this cooperation initiative. Additionally, we examine the significance of the format to the Central Asian countries and why the U.S. is so eager to get involved in this region.

The C5+1 origins and evolution

Established in 2015, the [C5+1 format](#) is a diplomatic platform aimed at cementing ties between the United States and the five Central Asian republics, specifically Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. The platform emerged at a time of significant geopolitical developments. Namely, China's launch of the [Belt and Road Initiative](#) in 2013, followed by [Russia's annexation of Crimea](#) in 2014, and the gradual rollback of the U.S. in Afghanistan. Additionally, [internal economic challenges](#) faced by the Central Asian states during this period contributed to its creation.

In this context, on November 1, 2015, the [first ever C5+1 Ministerial meeting](#) took place in Samarkand, Uzbekistan. Here, the U.S. Secretary of State and the foreign ministers of the five Central Asian nations launched the basis for an enhanced cooperation between the United States and Central Asia, with the ultimate aim of delivering reciprocal prosperity in three main pillars: economy, energy, and security.

Since its establishment, the scope of the platform has undergone significant transformations. In 2023, the [first ever C5+1 Presidential Summit](#) took place on the sidelines of the 78th United Nations General Assembly, elevating the dialogue to heads-of-state level. In early 2024, the [Critical Minerals Dialogue](#) was launched, enhancing U.S.-Central Asia industrial coordination.



Hence, the growing importance of the C5+1 has been reflected in the evolution of the format itself, expanding into a more ambitious and multifaceted mechanism. Indeed, the high-level Summit held on November 6th, which gathered, for the first time, all five Central Asian presidents in Washington D.C., marked a turning point towards deal-oriented and sectoral cooperation engagements, unveiling the pursuit of concrete results by all parties involved. Remarkably, this shift occurring amidst growing geopolitical competition, underscores how Central Asia is [“asserting its role as a region of strategic agency”](#).

Results of the Summit

The 2025 C5+1 Summit has undeniably produced impressive immediate outcomes. One of the Summit’s main achievements regards the repeal of the remaining provisions of the [Jackson-Vanik amendment](#). The Jackson-Vanik amendment is a U.S. law from 1974 that restricts U.S. trade with the Soviet Republics, and the repeal of this law marks a new chapter in economic relations between the U.S. and Central Asia. This amendment still has an impact on four of the five Central Asian states. Timur Kogabayev, a teaching professor at Maqsut Narikbayev University International School of Economics, [highlights](#) the importance of a formal repeal of this “anachronism”. Kogabayev underlines in particular the case of Kazakhstan, [arguing](#) that “removing such a barrier could strengthen Kazakhstan’s image as a reliable partner and enhance predictability for investors”. The revocation of the amendment would allow simplified access for regional commodities to the U.S. market, creating a legal framework for investment protection agreements while unlocking new pathways for U.S. technology and capital to move in.

A crucial component of this summit was its focus on developing the critical minerals sectors of the Central Asian countries. Kazakhstan announced a [mineral deal](#) with the United States, where an American company will take a 70 percent stake in the development of the largest untapped deposits of tungsten in the world, located in Kazakhstan. The [negotiations](#) with Uzbekistan led to, among other things, Washington acquiring mining rights in Uzbekistan and an



agreement of up to \$400 million to strengthen U.S. companies' critical minerals and rare earths supply chains. The other Central Asian nations are also expected to translate their mineral wealth into stronger ties with the U.S. For most of the Central Asian countries, this is not necessarily bad, as they [suffer from technological limitations and insufficient specialized human capital](#) necessary for exploration, extraction, and processing operations. Thus, this mineral deal is crucial for both the United States and the C5. For the C5, this mineral deal diversifies economic dependence and imports the expertise required to utilize their mineral wealth. For the United States, this diversification weakens the PRC and Russia and ensures access to critical minerals necessary for the United States.

A New Era

For the Trump Administration, the Summit reflects a new form of engagement to secure the abundant wealth that Central Asian countries [possess](#). With China restricting rare-earth exports, Central Asia serves as an alternative source for raw materials while playing a stabilizing role in the supply chain. On top of that, it gives the U.S. the opportunity to regain its strategic leverage in the region after having [withdrawn](#) from Afghanistan in 2021, but this time with a predominantly economic role in a region that is no longer peripheral to Washington.

For Central Asian countries, the Summit offers a solidified partnership beyond Russia and China, particularly in economic matters, connecting Central Asia to the U.S. industrial, financial, and technological capabilities. The necessity of Central Asian states to carefully balance international partnerships has long been a central aspect of their foreign policies. Since gaining independence from the Soviet Union, Central Asian countries have sought to establish multiple partnerships (particularly Westwards) to maximise their national autonomy amidst a growing dominance of both Russia and China. Therefore, for Central Asia, Washington stands out as a particularly desirable partner as it is the only capable power to counterweight Moscow and Beijing in the region.



Hence, despite other Western partnerships, the C5+1 represents a fundamental cooperation format to mitigate potential risks associated with Central Asia's overreliance on its neighbours. Therefore, a more institutionalized partnership with the United States will enhance the region's economic security by incentivizing increased foreign direct investment (FDI) in a number of [projects](#) mainly concerning infrastructure, critical mineral, and energy deals.

The U.S. in Central Asia

The geopolitical situation in Central Asia is tense. Most Central Asian countries are following a [multi-vector foreign policy](#), trying to diversify economic and political dependence (e.g., through the European Union, Eurasian Economic Union, Collective Security Treaty Organization, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and the C5+1). But what are the actual interests of the United States in the region, and how are they projected?

In a Reuters commentary from 2016, the author [expresses](#) an opportunistic view on the C5+1, and specifically Kazakhstan, as being of strategic importance in the war on terror. He viewed the C5+1 as an important channel for this and should be given more priority in the U.S.'s foreign policy. Another point he makes that is yet to be realized is that a U.S. president should make a formal visit to a Central Asian country to formalize their commitment to being involved in the region.

However, a lot has changed since 2016, including the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan. New interests have emerged for the U.S., most notably countering Russian (especially after 2022) and Chinese influence, and acquiring a share of the mineral wealth in the Central Asian countries. Newly appointed U.S. ambassador to Kazakhstan, Julie Stuftt, [reaffirmed interest](#) in developing Central Asia's critical minerals sector. Moreover, she mentioned that almost [half the minerals](#) recognized by the United States Geological Survey (USGS) as vital to the United States' economy and security are located in Kazakhstan, as well as stating that U.S. investment could displace China's growing presence. However, the news channel Eurasia is [critical](#) of the commitment of the United States in the region, despite Central Asian states' generally positive view of US



investment in their economies. The reason is that U.S. strategic interests often get [prioritized](#) above the needs of the Central Asian economies by focusing less on the long-term economic development and more on beneficial sectors for the U.S., like oil, gas, and critical minerals (like we will see in the critical minerals deal). From that point of view, it could be argued that Chinese infrastructure investment and regional connectivity through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is more sustainable in the long-term if isolated to economic development.

Concluding Remarks

The 6th of November meeting in Washington marked a significant step for both Central Asia and the United States. We witnessed all five Central Asian presidents meet the U.S. presidents under the C5+1 framework, which marks a shift from mostly foreign minister or lower-level meetings, elevating the political importance of the format. The meeting wasn't merely about diplomatic rhetoric, but emphasized economic deliverables in mining, rare-earth minerals, infrastructure, and transport corridors. While many deals and announcements were made, implementation remains to be seen. The U.S. will now be entering a region with entrenched relationships with both Russia and China, and this will likely lead to competition. The future of the collaboration is dependent on both economic and strategic outcomes. For the U.S., the decisive factor will be whether it will be able to counter Russian and Chinese influence in the region while benefiting economically. For the C5 states, the focal point will be whether they see the United States as beneficial for its diversification ambitions, economy, and security, or whether it's a liability by creating an increasingly tense situation, limiting their space of action in regards to its diversification efforts.