

Why Kazakhstan joined the Abraham Accords despite longstanding Israel ties

written by Joseph Rozen | 03.12.2025

When US President Donald Trump announced recently that Kazakhstan, the largest and most influential country in Central Asia, was joining the Abraham Accords, some were quick to welcome the development, pointing to the many benefits of establishing relations between Israel and Kazakhstan, emphasizing the rapprochement of a large Muslim nation with Israel.

However, there's one small problem – Israel and Kazakhstan have already maintained full diplomatic relations since 1992.

Moreover, relations between Israel and Kazakhstan are warm and diverse – though still far from realizing the enormous potential that exists between the two countries. Kazakhstan is Israel's senior partner in the Central Asian region, with ties spanning energy, security, economics, healthcare, agriculture, and more.

Condemning Hamas

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visited Kazakhstan in December 2016 (I prepared the agenda for that historic visit in my role at the National Security Council) and breathed new life into bilateral relations, which also led to Israeli participation in the Expo held in Astana in 2017.

Unfortunately, this momentum in relations did not translate into extensive business activity, and the volume of trade between the countries remained low at around \$200 million. At the same time, Kazakhstan is a major supplier of oil and wheat to Israel, and over the years has purchased various defense technologies from Israel.

Following October 7, Kazakhstan was the only country in Central Asia to condemn the Hamas attacks and call for the release of all hostages. Conversely, it provided aid to Palestinians worth \$1 million and even saw some pro-Palestinian demonstrations on its territory. Although Kazakhstan's secular character, a legacy of its Soviet heritage, managed to prevent the rise of extremist Islamist elements in the country, the model of its moderate Islam is enduring.

If things were so bright, what led to this surprising move by Trump's administration?

Several months ago, US Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff and his

team announced their intention to expand the Abraham Accords. Alongside natural candidates like Saudi Arabia and Indonesia, they also mentioned Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan. All three of the latter countries have good relations with Israel, and one of them - Armenia - isn't even a Muslim country, making its inclusion in the Abraham Accords puzzling, to say the least.

Foreign interests

There's a simple explanation for this move, and it has nothing to do with Israel. Trump is leveraging US foreign policy to serve the MAGA (Make America Great Again) idea and benefit American companies, while competing with Russia and China.

Trump recognizes the enormous economic potential in Central Asia, particularly in Kazakhstan, and decided, given that it's a Muslim republic, to leverage the Abraham Accords to expand American influence in a region traditionally under greater influence from Russia and China.

Similarly, the US brokered an agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia that will benefit American companies in operating the Zangezur Corridor - the proposed transportation route connecting Azerbaijan to its exclave, Nakhchivan, without passing through Iran - and reduce Russian and Iranian influence in the Caucasus region.

In the case of Kazakhstan, the geopolitical circumstances favored the American move, as Astana was already making efforts to draw closer to the West to balance the broad Chinese and Russian influence.

Moreover, deepening relations with Kazakhstan opens the door for closer US ties with other Central Asian republics.

Trade relations

Indeed, the announcement of joining the Abraham Accords was made during a summit of Central Asian leaders with Trump at the White House. The summit was designed to expand US trade relations with the Central Asian region, focusing on minerals critical to key industries such as electronics, automotive, and aviation.

The Kazakh economy is still largely based on exporting raw materials like oil and metals. As of 2023, Kazakhstan exported critical minerals worth \$3 billion to China, nearly \$2 billion to Russia, and only about \$500 million in mineral exports to the US. Trump is working to change this, such as reforming outdated legislation in Central Asian countries to facilitate mutual investments and American business activity in the region.

During the summit, several significant deals worth billions of dollars were signed in mining, aviation (Boeing), agriculture, and finance – and even Elon Musk’s Starlink company signed a major deal with Kazakhstan.

Creating momentum

The bottom line is that this is a very positive step for the US, certainly in the context of competition with China and Russia – one that also benefits American industry but doesn’t dramatically impact Israel.

Conversely, using the Abraham Accords framework to promote bilateral business activity with countries that already maintain relations with Israel could end up harming the value of this unique framework.

To be clear, Kazakhstan is an important country, and the American rapprochement with it and Central Asia should be welcomed, but this could have been advanced without using the Abraham Accords.

At the same time, US rapprochement with Kazakhstan and the entire Central Asian region may give renewed momentum to these countries’ relations with Israel as well, in a way that reflects the region’s long-standing friendship with Israel and the Jewish people.

Furthermore, against this backdrop, one can hope that the momentum will continue with countries worthy of inclusion in the Abraham Accords, such as Saudi Arabia and Indonesia.

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