

# Regional Overview: Central Asia and the Caucasus 5-11 January 2020

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## ACLED

Bringing clarity to crisis

Last week in Central Asia and the Caucasus, the number of reported civilian fatalities continued to rise in Afghanistan; elections in Abkhazia, Georgia were annulled following violent demonstrations; civil society pressured Kazakhstan to grant asylum to two ethnic Kazakhs from China's Xinjiang region; and riots broke out on the Kyrgyz-Tajik-Uzbek border. Meanwhile, though ceasefire violations between Armenia and Azerbaijan continued at a lower level last week, there were reports that forces from both sides incurred casualties for the first time since early November 2019.

Last week in **Afghanistan**, there was a drop in the total number of events reported compared to previous weeks. This is likely due to the severe winter weather that has struck Afghanistan with heavy snow and rainfall ([Reuters, 12 January 2020](#)). However, despite the winter lull, fighting was particularly lethal, with hundreds of civilians and combatants reported killed. In one of the deadliest events of the week, a US drone strike that killed a Taliban splinter-group commander in Herat province also led to dozens of civilian casualties; local sources claimed that at least 40 civilians were killed in the strike ([TOLO News, 9 January 2020](#)). Furthermore, two American soldiers were killed when their convoy hit a Taliban-planted IED in the southern province of Kandahar, marking the first deaths among US forces in Afghanistan in the new year. In another development, pro-government forces reported to have regained territory in the provinces of Ghor, Herat, and Farah after three weeks of ground and air operations. This includes the recapture of Kamenj valley, which, according to the Afghan Ministry of Defence, has housed a key Taliban command center since the group seized control of the area two years ago ([Ministry of Defence, 11 January 2019](#)).

On 9 January, in **Georgia's** breakaway province of Abkhazia, hundreds of opposition demonstrators stormed the presidential administration building in Sukhumi. The demonstrators reportedly broke windows and doors to enter the building, demanding the resignation of the *de facto* president, Raul Khajimba ([Reuters, 9 January 2020](#)). Following the incident, legislators in Abkhazia annulled the last election results and scheduled new elections for 22 March. Election-related unrest has been ongoing since mid-2019 in Abkhazia as the opposition believes Khajimba's win was unfair and accuses his government of failing to address corruption and economic instability ([TASS, 13 January 2019](#)).

In **Kazakhstan**, multiple protests took place in Zaysan, Zhanaozen, and Almaty in support of two ethnic Kazakh men who were accused of illegally crossing the border from China's Xinjiang region in October 2019. A hearing for the case was set for 6 January in Zaysan, with a number of activists rallying to support the two asylum seekers in front of the courthouse. Kazakhstan's government has not taken a strong stance against the reported persecution of ethnic minorities in Xinjiang region, mostly due to its deep economic ties to China ([Vision Times, 6 January 2020](#)). With the court hearing expected to resume on 21 January, the case will likely remain in limbo as most asylum seekers from Xinjiang are refused refugee status yet given permission to stay in Kazakhstan ([The Diplomat, 7 January 2020](#)).

Violence on the volatile borders between **Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan** continues. On 6 January, a brawl took place between Uzbek guards and Kyrgyz citizens whose livestock were spotted grazing on the disputed borders. On the border between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, violence targeting civilians was reported on 10 January as unknown assailants from the Tajik side of the boundary stoned cars belonging to Kyrgyz villagers near Kok-Tash village. Following the event, Kyrgyz and Tajik villagers reportedly attacked each other's cars and houses with stones ([Kaktus Media, 10 January 2020](#)).

Clashes between **Armenia** and **Azerbaijan** resulted in casualties last week. On 7 January, a serviceman of the Azerbaijani Border Service was killed by sniper fire in the Gazakh district of Azerbaijan. On 11 January, an Armenian soldier was wounded by Azerbaijani sniper fire in Armenia's Tavush region. Overall, however, ceasefire violations continued at slightly lower levels compared to weeks prior, as Azerbaijan's Ministry of Defence reported 52 armed engagements along the Artsakh-Azerbaijan Line of Contact and 21 armed engagements along the Armenia-Azerbaijan Line of Contact.



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