

[Kazakhstan, United Kingdom](#)

# Astra Mining aims to lead UK rare earths exploration drive in Kazakhstan

**British company Astra Mining, which is looking to get into the much sought-after rare earths market and is currently active in Kazakhstan, aims to forge closer links with the UK government.**

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The British government, in an effort to meet its need for rare metals as quickly as possible, has recently been in contact with companies operating in Central Asia. On 11 March, according to information gathered by Intelligence Online, representatives of British firm Astra Mining turned up at meetings organised with the staff of Kazakh vice-minister of industry Iran Sharkhan. These meetings were organised to coincide with the signing of a roadmap for strategic cooperation on critical minerals by Sharkhan and British industry and economic security minister Nusrat Ghani.

## Extensive support network

Astra Mining, which indicates on its website that it is looking for investments in nickel, cobalt, platinum and gold mining projects being carried out by three subsidiaries registered in the Karaganda Region in central Kazakhstan, has a number of backers. Among them is Eldwick Law, a London-based law firm with good connections in Kazakhstan, and which was present at the 11 March meeting.

Astra Mining director Gani Abaidildinov also has the position of general counsel at Eldwick, specialising in the Russian and Kazakh energy sector. One of Astra Mining's advisers, Waleed Tahirkheli, is also a partner at Eldwick. The law firm regularly organises events in Kazakhstan on such subjects as the tracing of assets considered to have been unlawfully acquired by government.

Eldwick Law is also a member of the law group of the British-Kazakh Society, which brings together people looking to do business in the Central Asian country. It is headed by Rupert Goodman, co-founder of the strategic advisory company Equilibrium Global (IO,15/06/22).

To develop its network of contacts in Kazakhstan, Astra Mining first relied on Afzal Amin, a former British Conservative Party parliamentary candidate, who resigned in 2015 following allegations in the British media that he had secretly concluded an electoral agreement with the far-right English Defence League organisation.

Amin was one of the directors and majority shareholders in Astra Mining from 2017 to 2020. According to the latest listing of shareholders, published last November, he remains a minority shareholder with a 3% stake. He is also head of London Expertise, a consulting company registered in 2020 that specialises in mining projects, particularly in Central Asia, and infrastructure. Among London Expertise's advisers is former British ambassador in Riyadh William Patey, who is also an international affairs adviser to investigations and private security operator Control Risks Group (IO, 28/06/23).

## Plenty of competition

London is currently training all its intelligence-gathering resources, whether in the business world or, via the Critical Minerals Intelligence Centre, the intelligence community, on the rare earths sector (IO, 27/02/23). To position itself in this much sought-after market, Astra Mining is having to jostle with other companies. According to our sources, two other British companies met Sharkhan on 11 March: Ferro-Alloy Resources Group, which produces vanadium in southern Kazakhstan; and Pensana, an Australian-British company listed on the London Stock Exchange and which is mainly active in Africa.

Meetings were also organised with Britain's TechMet and Maritime House, Canada's Mkango Resources and Australia's Ionic Rare Earths (IonicRE), all international operators, mainly active in Africa. Consulting company Haig Barrett Partners was also present on 11 March.