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DEPT FOR SCA/CEN (M. O'MARA)

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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: AUTHORITIES PURSUE RAKHAT ALIYEV

REF: ASTANA 1415

Classified By: A/DCM Deborah Mennuti, reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

1. (C) Summary: In the wake of the May 23 announcement of a criminal investigation involving presidential son-in-law Rakhata Aliyev, Kazakhstani authorities have moved quickly to curtail Aliyev's ability to maneuver and to influence public opinion. President Nazarbayev fired Aliyev from his ambassadorial post in Vienna, an international warrant has been issued for his arrest on kidnapping charges, and a team of Kazakhstani law enforcement officials is in Austria to seek his return to Kazakhstan. Aliyev's KTK television station and the weekly Karavan newspaper have been suspended for three months. More of Aliyev's allies, including the



head of the Almaty Financial Police and a relative, have been questioned by the authorities. Aliyev continues to fight back in public, issuing statements on May 26 and 28 implying that he was being persecuted for his political activities and accusing Nazarbayev of "repressions." End summary.

Aliyev Fired, Arrest Warrant Issued

2. (U) After opening a criminal investigation on May 23 against Rakhat Aliyev and two associates in the mid-January kidnapping of two Nurbank officials (reftel), the Kazakhstani authorities quickly moved to strip him of his official position and seek his arrest. President Nazarbayev signed an order firing Rakhat Aliyev from his post as ambassador to Austria and the OSCE on May 26. On May 28, Ministry of Internal Affairs spokesman Kozhakhmetov announced that an international warrant had been issued for Aliyev's arrest, and that a team led by a deputy procurator general and including Kazakhstani Interpol representatives was in Vienna to pursue the matter. Kozhakhmetov said that an Interpol "red notice" had been issued in case Aliyev attempted to flee Austria.

3. (C) Serzhan Abdykarimov, director of the MFA's Europe and North America Department, called A/DCM on May 29 to ensure that the U.S. was aware that Aliyev had been fired and was the subject of an Interpol warrant. He added that the MFA understood that before being fired Aliyev had requested a meeting with unspecified U.S. officials in Vienna. "In light of those developments," Abdykarimov said, "we would ask that you weigh carefully the expediency of such a meeting." He reported that Deputy Foreign Minister Kairat Abdrakhmanov had gone to Vienna to personally supervise the operations of the embassy. (Note: Abdykarimov, the son of former State Secretary Oralbay Abdykarimov, has close ties to Aliyev; he

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worked for Aliyev in Vienna and received his current position when Aliyev became Deputy Foreign Minister in 2005. He nevertheless delivered the message firmly. End note.)

Media Outlets Closed

4. (U) Late on May 24, the KTK television channel was pulled from the air, and publication of the weekly newspaper Karavan was suspended for three months. Aliyev's Kazakhstan Today news agency reported that the suspensions were based on violations of the Language Law, which requires mass media to report 50/50 in Russian and Kazakh. The Ministry of Interior had previously warned Aliyev's news outlets not to publish information related to the Nurbank case. KTK is still off



the air and Karavan did not publish on May 25 as it normally would, but Kazakhstan Today continues to operate and the gazeta.kz website has posted statements from Aliyev.

Relatives and Associates Under Scrutiny

5. (U) MVD spokesman Kozhakhmetov confirmed to the press on May 28 that an MVD team had searched Aliyev's house in Almaty as well as the house of his father, Mukhtar Aliyev. Kozhakhmetov stressed that the searches were legal, were carried out under the supervision of the procuracy, and were witnessed by Aliyev's relatives and associates. Although he would not disclose what had been discovered during the searches, Kozhakhmetov said that Aliyev is suspected of running an organized criminal group that had carried out a

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series of economic crimes and kidnappings. Using extortion and fake documents, the group had taken administrative buildings, land, and businesses, Kozhakhmetov said.

6. (U) The head of the Almaty department of the Financial Police, Vladimir Kurbatov, was detained for questioning by the Procuracy and the Committee for National Security (KNB) on May 24. On May 26, the press reported that Kurbatov had been questioned about the Nurbank case and then released, but would be questioned further.

7. (SBU) An individual who identified himself as a Lebanese-American and "Rakhat Aliyev's best friend" (and the brother of Aliyev's brother-in-law) contacted post's duty officer on May 26 to report that the Ministry of Internal Affairs had asked him to come in for questioning. He asked if an Embassy representative would accompany him. (Note: We informed him that consular access is generally afforded only to those in custody, and that it would be advisable to be accompanied by a lawyer at the questioning. End note.)

Aliyev Implies Political Persecution

8. (SBU) Thus far Aliyev is not backing down. On May 26 he posted a statement on gazeta.kz and other internet sites he controls saying that "I will always be in politics. I will make every effort to prevent the country from turning back to the totalitarian Soviet past. I know that I have a huge number of supporters in my country. I am sure that the future will be ours." In what was widely described by the media as an attempt to attribute political motives to the charges against him, Aliyev claimed that "several months ago



I told Nursultan Abishevich (Nazarbayev) that I had decided to run for president in 2012." Aliyev followed that up with a lengthy posting on the geo.kz website on May 28 in which he accused Nazarbayev, Interior Minister Mukhamedzhanov, and Almaty mayor Tasmagambetov of orchestrating the actions against him. "The president has stopped being the guarantor of the Constitution," Aliyev alleged; "repressions are under way." Claiming that no true political opposition exists in Kazakhstan, Aliyev said that the country needs a political movement with supporters adhering to ideas rather than a single leader. "But if the Constitution can be changed as it was last week -- without prior public discussion, unanimously after only a few minutes -- then there is no guarantee that there will be elections in 2012."

Comment

9. (C) Comment: The actions of the Kazakhstani authorities come as no surprise and have clearly been sanctioned by President Nazarbayev himself. While most of the steps taken by law enforcement appear justified by the charges against Aliyev, the GOK crossed a line by shutting down two major media outlets without due process or clear grounds. When asked for comment by Reuters and Kazakhstan Today, post replied that "we are disappointed in the decision by an Almaty court ordering the independently owned television station KTK and newspaper Karavan to cease publishing for three months. The right to freely communicate ideas and opinions is fundamental to democracy. The public has the right to hear diverse points of view, even if those views differ from those of the government or may be considered offensive by some. We call on the Government of Kazakhstan to honor its commitments to democratic reform and freedom of speech." End comment.

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