

## **Kazak Reshuffle**

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The heirs of the KGB in Kazakhstan are believed to have enhanced their power in ministerial changes carried out earlier this month

A government reshuffle in Kazakhstan on May 4 has been widely viewed as boosting the power and influence of the National Security Committee, NSC, which in its heyday was a version of the feared KGB.

Some see the choice of new ministers as a reflection of the former KGB's resurgence in Russia. It could indicate that the NSC is about to spring back as a powerful tool with much greater clout in the nation's public and political life.

The NSC's reputation suffered in previous years from the alleged involvement of its officers in suppressing opposition.

Political analysts say the appointment of Marat Tajin as chairman of the NSC signals the government's intention to give the body a more attractive image. Tajin was secretary of the Security Council, a body largely devoted to mapping out government policies.

Observers note that Tajin had boosted the profile of the Security Council among Kazakhstan's government institutions, turning it from a vaguely defined entity into an efficient and authoritative agency.

Tajin also gained valuable experience as chief of the Information and Analysis Centre where he specialised in implementing the strategic ideas of President Nazarbaev.

The former NSC chief, Alnur Musaev, was moved over to become head of the less influential Presidential Security Service. Tajin's old job as Security Council head went to Altynbek Sarsenbaev who, as Minister of Culture, Information and Public Accord for the past eight years, earned a reputation for cracking down on freedom of the press.

President Nazarbaev assured the public that the skills these officials developed in their former offices will now be used more effectively for the national benefit.

Kazak analysts commented that the government had shifted its emphasis from economic and legal ministries to the security services.

According to one analyst, Dulat Musataev, the president is particularly interested in the "power" ministries dealing with security and defence. Member of opposition Nurbolat Masanov assumed that, as a result of the new appointments, the NSC may once again emerge as a serious political player rather than a strictly functional and secondary governmental institution.

Masanov commented, "Having lost its power during the last years of Kazakhstan's Soviet government, the Kazak NSC has now got its second wind and removed old-school KGB functionaries from the top. It has found new patrons to replace them, such as the President's son-in-law Rakhat Aliev."

Some observers believe that the NSC structure will be used to boost the power of Rakhat Aliev or his wife, the president's daughter Dariga Nazarbaeva, rather than to popularise NSC. In this view, the NSC is destined to become a political tool that will help the presidential family retain its power and property holdings.

One widely read Kazak newspaper, Vremya PO, says Altynbek Sarsenbaev and Marat Tajin are "people who have nothing to do with any of competing government factions". It concludes that the new appointments are the president's way of "rising above the battle between these rivals".

Tensions surrounding the upsurge in religious fanaticism in neighbouring Central Asian nations are cited as the most likely cause of the latest government reshuffle.

In this context, information services become more important to national security. The presence at the top of the Security Council of a man familiar with this sort of work is regarded as crucial.

Analysts also believe an increased emphasis on ideology is behind the new appointments. This, they say, is why a man like Tajin with proven skill in promoting the president's strategic plans was put in charge of the NSC.

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