

Car Explosion Kills 2 in Kazakhstan Capital

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ASTANA, Kazakhstan — An improvised explosive device blew up a car in Kazakhstan's capital on Tuesday, killing its two occupants, in the second fatal blast within a week close to Kazakh security service buildings.

Analysts said the blast could signal an intensifying power struggle among security forces in Kazakhstan or a spillover of violence from neighboring countries.

The Interior Ministry issued a statement within hours of the explosion denying any link to terrorism. It said the explosive device appeared to have detonated automatically inside a red Audi-100 parked on waste ground.

The blast shattered the windows of nearby houses.

The ministry said the two people killed were male and of European appearance. Local news agencies quoted witnesses as saying they had seen body parts scattered at the scene. No other injuries were reported.

A local newspaper reporter, visiting the scene several hours after the blast, said windows had been blown out in two buildings flanking a remand center run by the National Security Committee, the local successor to the KGB.

On May 17, a man blew himself up at the local security police headquarters in the northwestern city of Aktobe, wounding two bystanders. The Prosecutor General's Office denied any link to terrorism on that occasion, identifying the bomber as a 25-year-old suspected of several crimes who used a low-powered device to kill himself.

Political analyst Dosym Satpayev said authorities were reluctant to label either incident an act of terrorism for fear of destroying the country's stable image.

"If the authorities conclude that this is a terrorist act, it will be an admission that problems exist inside Kazakhstan," Satpayev said.

The Interior Ministry did not identify the car's occupants but said police had found documents belonging to a 48-year-old native of Kyrgyzstan and a 26-year-old citizen of Kazakhstan.

Both men lived in the northern Kazakh town of Ekibastuz, the ministry said. The Kazakh citizen had previously been convicted of theft and possession of stolen property, the ministry said.

Adil Mukashev, an independent security analyst, said he believed that both explosions could be part of an internal campaign to discredit the leadership of the National Security Committee and, by extension, President Nursultan Nazarbayev.

"It's an act against the old guard," he said.

The explosion occurred at 3:37 a.m. The newspaper reporter said there appeared to be bloodstains at the scene, but the car and other evidence of an explosion had been cleared away.

"The given circumstances indicate the absence of any signs of a terrorist act," the ministry said on its web site. It said the explosive device did not contain shrapnel.

But Satpayev said any perceived threat to security, whether publicly admitted or not, could prompt the authorities to adopt tougher measures against potential opponents.

"Kazakhstan, like its neighbors, is unfortunately now on the list of countries where terrorism is not just a word," he said.

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