The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Nazarbayev Denies Split Among Kazakh Elite, Says Tokayev Has 'Full Power' in First Post-Protest Comments

By Pjotr Sauer

January 18, 2022

Former Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev. **Yevgeny Biyatov / POOL / TASS**

ALMATY – Former Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev said Tuesday that there was "no conflict or confrontation" among Kazakhstan's elite in his first appearance since deadly protests rocked the former Soviet country earlier this month.

Nazarbayev, 81, has not been seen in public since the worst unrest since Kazakhstan's independence broke out earlier this month, leading to widespread speculation over his whereabouts and his relationship with current President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev.

Tokayev "has full power," Nazarbayev said in Tuesday's video address. "He is the chairman of the Security Council...There is no conflict or confrontation in the elite. Rumors on this subject are absolutely groundless."

The largest and deadliest protests in Kazakhstan's history broke out on Jan. 2 in the western oil city of Zhanaozen over a hike in fuel prices, soon devolving into wider unrest over corruption, economic inequality and public discontent. Hundreds of deaths have been reported and over 10,000 people were detained during the protests.

Related article: Kazakh President Fires Rare Criticism at Predecessor After Unrest

Before his retirement from the presidency in 2019, Nazarbayev had led the energy-rich Central Asian nation for nearly 30 years — and many believed he still held considerable power after his resignation.

In the video, Nazarbayev described himself as a "pensioner since 2019" — when he handed the presidency to Tokayev — despite heading the Security Council until early January and holding the formal title of Leader of the Nation.

"I am currently on a well-deserved rest in the capital of Kazakhstan and have not left anywhere," Nazarbayev said.

Nazarbayev's address comes amid growing signs that Tokayev appears to be tightening his grip on power at the expense of the former president following the protest, including by reshuffling the government.

On Jan. 8, former national security committee chief Karim Masimov — a key Nazarbayev ally — was arrested on treason charges in connection with the unrest. Tokayev has also appeared to move against Nazarbayev's family, ordering on Monday the dismissal of Nazarbayev's nephew Samat Abish as first deputy head of the influential National Security Committee, while earlier vouching to end the private recycling monopoly linked to Nazarbayev's daughter Aliya.

In his address, Nazarbayev urged Kazakhs to support a new series of populist measures introduced by Tokayev.

"The president put forward a new reform program aimed at improving the welfare of the people. This program needs to be supported," Nazarbayev said.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/01/18/nazarbayev-denies-split-among-kazakh-elite-says-tokayev-has-full-power-in-first-post-protest-comments-a76073