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KAZAKHSTAN: TAX OFFICIAL MADE DEPUTY DEFENSE MINISTER

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Just a few days after the former head of the tax service in Kazakhstan was appointed to serve as deputy to the chief of the security services, another senior tax official has been handed a top job in the defense ministry.

The presidential administration announced on December 1 that Abylkair Skakov would be moving from his post as head of the tax inspectorate in the capital, Astana, to become deputy defense minister.

Both appointments appear to stem from the governments ongoing efforts to reduce graft and optimize financial efficiency, both key priorities as the economy faces the prospect of indefinite stagnation amid depressed prices for oil.

When Daulet Yergozhin was named as the new deputy head of National Security Committee, or KNB, even his colleagues were candid about the sense of the move.

Daulet Yergozhin has shown himself to be an effective manager everywhere he has worked. He is a very upstanding person. I hope that [he] will also be effective in the fight against corruption, which is the main threat to our national security, former deputy tourism and sports minister Bahytzhan Shengelbayev said on his Facebook account.

It is customary for top officials in the former Soviet space to speak notionally about corruption posing a security threat, but this is as concerted an effort to address the issue as the region has seen for a long time.

The twin KNB and Defense Ministry reshuffles look like a pincer movement on the armed forces. The KNB has not been heavily invested in investigating financial crime in recent years, and has

focused more on antiterrorism or, in some cases, going after prominent figures in the opposition.

The Defense Ministry has been periodically been hit by graft scandals, so the symbolism of Skakovs appointment will be lost on nobody.

In August, five defense and finance ministry officials, along with four businesspeople, were detained as part of a corruption investigation led by the KNB. Officials said at the time that they had intercepted a major criminal gang engaged in gross embezzlement of state funds earmarked for military expenditures.

One key suspect named as being involved in the scheme was the deputy chief of logistics in Kazakhstans army, Lt. Col Tulemis Zhumkaziev. In mid-November, officials said they had identified more suspects, bringing the total number of people under investigation to 12, among them five state employees.

No details have been disclosed about the specific nature of this corruption scheme, but procurement is usually a fruitful area for insiders looking to cream money off the top.

More petty forms of bribe-taking among military personnel are also commonplace.

In the second half of November, a court in Karaganda sentenced two military personnel for trying to cover up the fact that civilians were living in apartments earmarked for soldiers in exchange for bribes.

Kaynak/Source: