

Azerbaijan: Newspaper Editor sentenced over article about possible US attack on Iran

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Editor sentenced over article about possible US attack on Iran

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Eynulla Fatullayev, an Azerbaijani newspaper editor was sentenced to 8½ years in prison. He sent to the press an article asserting that the ex-Soviet nation could support a U.S. attack on neighboring Iran.

The Court for Grave Crimes convicted Eynulla Fatullayev, the founder and editor of the Russian-language weekly Real Azerbaijan and the Azeri-language daily Everyday Azerbaijan, on charges of making a terrorist threat and inciting interethnic conflict.

Fatullayev denounced the court's verdict as politically driven. "That's evidence of political pressure on me as a journalist," he said.

Fatullayev's case is the latest in a series of prosecutions of independent media figures in the oil-rich Caspian Sea nation that have raised concerns in the West.

The charges against Fatullayev were filed in response to the article in Real Azerbaijan which claimed that Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliiev could support a U.S. military action against Iran.

The article, written under an alias, listed sites in Azerbaijan that could be attacked by Iran if Baku were to support Washington in the event of military action against Iran.

Aliiev's government has cultivated close ties with Washington and contributed troops to the U.S.-led coalition in Iraq, and charges against Fatullayev reflected official concerns about angering Iran.

Tehran has feared a U.S. attack and threatened to strike back at any country that cooperates with it. The Azerbaijan government has pledged its territory won't be used for military action against Iran, but people living along the border were nervous, pointing to a U.S.-built radar facility and the upgrading of an airport near the border with Iran. Both projects are U.S.-financed.

Both Fatullayev's newspapers were forced to suspend publication in the spring after authorities had evicted them from their offices.

Fatullayev has been in prison since April when he was sentenced to 2½ years in prison on charges of disseminating false information related to the country's six-year war with Armenia over the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Previously, Fatullayev had received a two-year suspended sentence for libeling a top law enforcement official.

Aliev, who took over from his father in a 2003 election denounced by opponents as a sham, has faced persistent criticism over the heavy-handed treatment of independent media and opposition parties.

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