The daughter of Kazakhstan's president used well-connected Washington private security consultants to gather information on a U.S. bribery probe involving her father that has stymied the nation's access to $84 million in disputed funds.

The efforts of Dariga Nazarbayeva, the Kazakh president's daughter, to learn more about the probe shines a light on the role of such private consultants, often former intelligence, military and law-enforcement officials, who monitor government activities for potential risk on behalf of clients. It also highlights the sensitive situation this could create for government officials.

In a filing last year in a Manhattan federal court, federal officials alleged that the $84 million stems from bribes paid by U.S. companies to Kazakhstan's president and other top officials for access to Kazakhstan's rich energy reserves. The government has ordered the money frozen in Swiss bank accounts while the investigation continues. The government of Kazakhstan hasn't contested the claim and signed a settlement agreement containing the allegations.

Last week, Justice Department officials warned that they might veto a proposal to release the $84 million for social programs in Kazakhstan. U.S. officials said one group seeking to disperse the funds has too many connections to the Kazakh government.

Through a company she controls called World Media Corp., Ms. Nazarbayeva deployed consultants to learn details of the Justice Department bribery probe. Ms. Nazarbayeva controls a wide swath of the Kazakh media and is viewed by some analysts as the likely successor to her father, Nursultan Nazarbayev, a former Communist Party boss who has ruled Kazakhstan since it gained independence 17 years ago. Neither she nor World Media could be reached.

The effort underscores how concerned Kazakh leaders are with the bribery investigation, which has been an impediment to broader ties with the U.S. The Kazakh ambassador to the U.S. declined to comment.

One of the firms involved in the effort to gather information about the bribery case was GlobalOptions Management, an affiliate of Washington consulting firm Global Options Group Inc. A constellation of top Washington players has worked with GlobalOptions Group, including former Central Intelligence Agency Director R. James Woolsey and former FBI Directors William Webster and William Sessions. The three men said they weren't involved in the private intelligence-gathering operation but did attend some social events with Ms. Nazarbayeva.

In a 2003 client report, GlobalOptions Management said the firm mined connections at the White House, State Department, Justice Department and the Federal Bureau of Investigation to learn more about the inquiry. The effort is detailed in hundreds of pages of subsequent reports in the possession of former Kazakh government officials and viewed by The Wall Street Journal.

The parent company confirmed in a statement that its affiliate was hired to gather information in the case. In its statement, GlobalOptions described the project as a legitimate "monitoring" operation using well-known law firms, and said its actions were lawful.

It isn't illegal to attempt to gather information on a criminal inquiry, but U.S. law enforcement and judicial officials and even private lawyers are bound by strictures on what they can disclose to outside parties. Any indication that officials disclosed confidential information would be embarrassing to the U.S.

Federal spokesmen declined to comment on whether they were doing an investigation into possible leaks. People involved in the matter said the documents have been given to federal prosecutors in New York.

U.S. officials who have been involved in the bribery probe say there have been various efforts by representatives of the Kazakh government to inquire about and influence the investigation, but the officials won't say whether they...
think those efforts crossed legal or ethical boundaries.

U.S. laws also require firms and individuals to register with the Justice Department or Congress if they seek to influence the government on behalf of a foreign client. GlobalOptions says it isn't covered by the laws because it was only gathering information.

The documents describing the information-gathering effort claim that unnamed persons within the FBI and the Justice Department provided the consultants with the names of witnesses, financial details and other information from the Kazakh investigation.

The 2003 report claims that "team operatives" learned from "a source at the London FBI office" that one of Mr. Nazarbayev’s advisers is "a potential key witness for the cases." It also states that in the U.S., "a meeting was held with one senior level FBI official, as well as with an FBI special agent tasked with Central Asian organized crime investigations."

GlobalOptions Management said it couldn't comment on the reports without seeing them.

In a letter to The Wall Street Journal, GlobalOptions lawyer Morton Taubman warned that the reports may include documents that were altered. The documents are in the possession of Ms. Nazarbayeva's former husband, Rakhat Aliyev, according to people who work with Mr. Aliyev. Last year, Mr. Aliyev and some former Kazakh intelligence and diplomatic officials broke with the regime and now are in hiding in Europe.

The U.S. has charged former New York banker James Giffen with accepting bribes from U.S. companies to gain access to Kazakhstan's massive Tengiz oil field, as well as with keeping some of the funds for himself. Mr. Giffen has served as a consultant to the Kazakh government and was a liaison between Western energy companies and the country's leaders. He has denied wrongdoing.

The government hasn't charged the companies, which include Mobil Oil Co., Amoco and Texaco, with any wrongdoing. The companies have denied making improper payments. Mobil is now part of Exxon Mobil Corp., Amoco is part of Britain's BP PLC and Texaco is part of Chevron Corp. In 2003, a former Mobil attorney pleaded guilty to tax evasion related to the case.

The U.S. indicted Mr. Giffen in 2003, but his case hasn’t yet come to trial. He claims in court filings that he was working as a U.S. intelligence asset, which has caused a federal judge to impose secrecy measures, making details of the case classified.

The Justice Department and the World Bank had earlier negotiated a plan that would have allowed the release of the funds to help the poor in Kazakhstan, internal World Bank emails show. Through an aide at the American Enterprise Institute, where he now works, former World Bank President Paul Wolfowitz said he approved the project at the behest of professional staff at the bank. People familiar with the matter said Mr. Wolfowitz discussed the program with Mr. Nazarbayev at a meeting in October 2006 at Blair House, a diplomatic reception facility across the street from the White House.

But last week the Justice Department barred one of the groups seeking to handle the funds, the Eurasia Foundation, from receiving the money, saying it may not be independent enough from the Kazakh government. The board of the foundation, which receives funding from the U.S. government, includes a lobbyist, a consultant, and an oil-company executive with financial ties to Mr. Nazarbayev and his government.

Sarah Carey, chairwoman of the Eurasia board of trustees, said the group's conflicts were minimal. The agreement, she added, "has so many checks and balances and safeguards that it is hard to see how Eurasia or anyone else could do something inappropriate."

In a statement, the Justice Department said it is "wholly committed" to ensuring that the nongovernmental organization selected to manage the World Bank program be independent of the Kazakhstan government.

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