
TAJIKISTAN: FORCES REPORTEDLY SCRAMBLED AS CLASHES INTENSIFY ON AFGHAN BORDER

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Conflicting reports are emerging about the fighting unfolding in Afghanistans Badakhshan province, in an area close to Tajikistans border, but it is becoming steadily clear that Dushanbe is now spooked.

Further to the west, in Afghanistans Kunduz province, local politicians have said Taliban fighters overran yet another district sharing a border with Tajikistan, Qala-e-Zal.

Local people in the Tajik frontier town of Ishkashim in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region have reported that fighter jets patrolled the area on May 5-6. The jets would beyond almost all certainty be from the Russian armed forces stationed in the country.

An Afghan security affairs researcher tweeting under the handle @DreamF4ll on May 6 cited sources in the Afghan National Security Forces as saying the Ishkashim district in Afghanistan has fallen completely to insurgent militants.

Meanwhile, officials in the Tajik Ishkashim district have insisted that the fighting has primarily been raging at a relatively safe distance away, around 35 kilometers away from the border, in the Zebak district. But local residents have told EurasiaNet.org that the sound of combat late last month reached an area within earshot, which suggests a far greater proximity. But there was no immediate evidence of Taliban militants having a presence on the border as of May 6, the same sources said.

Afghans from the Badakhshan province have also been posting on Facebook to relay unconfirmed reports of Russian ground troops being spotted on the move in Khorog, the capital of Tajikistans Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region, which is around 100 kilometers north of Ishkashim.

For all this, there is no indication that Taliban forces have any intention to embark on any forays into Tajikistan.

Tajikistan is having to deal with what is, for now, a small trickle of battle casualties, however.

At least 10 Afghan troops have been treated at a hospital in Ishkashim. Three of those soldiers have already been discharged.

The International Committee of the Red Cross on May 5 issued a statement saying it providing additional medical supplies, include materials for infusions, dressings and sutures, to the Ishkashim District Hospital.

"These supplies will cover people's present needs," Claudia Azzolini, head of the ICRC's mission in Dushanbe, said in a statement. "But if the fighting continues in Badakhshan and more wounded people are transferred to Tajikistan, we will need to send more assistance.

The likelihood of the air sorties over Ishkashim being performed by the Russian Air Force is attested to by some recent training maneuvers of that nature in the area. As recently as February, Russian Su-25SM and Su-24M fighter jets were performing flights over the eastern Pamirs.

As to Qala-e-Zal, a Kunduz provincial council member said the district had fallen to the Taliban on May 6 after two days of intense clashes, TOLONews reported. The number of casualties has not yet been reported.

Dushanbe is trying to put a brave face on things.

Tajik President Emomali Rahmon and his Afghan counterpart Ashraf Ghani spoke by telephone on May 5, but few firm details were disclosed, except to say that the leaders exchanged views on the alarming situation in Afghanistan.

Somewhat contradicting its own line of business-as-normal, however, the government in Dushanbe has announced it will not allow a non-state-organized World War II memorial march on May 9 because of security concerns stemming from the ongoing situation in Afghanistan.

Kaynak/Source: