

---

## **TAJIKISTAN UNDER ATTACK FROM TALIBAN AND DAESH FORCES**

-

10.05.2017

---

Times CA (09 May 2017)

Terrorist forces are now on the threshold of Tajikistan, threatening the countrys vital infrastructure and territorial control.

In Afghanistan, where fighting now takes place on three fronts: the south, the central-east and the north, doubts persist whether a few thousand more US military could make a difference for the embattled Afghan government.

The regime, which consists of a coalition of moderate southerners represented by President Ashraf Ghani and a loose association of northern warlords dominated by the Uzbek chief general Dostum, joined of late by another historic figurehead, namely his rival of old Hekmatiyar, is steadily losing ground.

### **Taliban control**

According to local feelings, it is only a matter of time before the Taliban may control all but the entire area bordering the Central Asian republics of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The latter is the most exposed, with ill-controlled borderlines and growing numbers of fifth columnists returning from Afghanistan and the Mashrek (Syria, Iraq) to receive invaders from the south with open arms. Dostum controls most of the land bordering Uzbekistan, while Hekmatyars stronghold is in the northwest, bordering Iran and Turkmenistan. Both men are powerful drugs barons, equipped with their own private armies to defend their territories and their business.

### **Fighting season strategy**

The extremist forces immediate target is the strategic province of Kunduz, bordering Tajikistan but close to the border with Uzbekistan. Last weekend, they openly took control of yet another strategic area within the frontier zone. The local news agency AhlulBayt reported on May 6: In a statement, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said the insurgents had taken police headquarters, the governor's compound and all security checkpoints. He said several police and soldiers had been killed and wounded. Over the past 18 months, Taliban insurgents have twice succeeded in seizing the town center of Kunduz for brief periods and the latest fighting underscores warnings that Afghan forces face another grueling year of fighting.

The lost battle followed a terrorist attack in Kabul against a US convoy on May 3. A powerful blast targeting a foreign forces convoy near the US embassy and NATO headquarters in Kabul killed at least 8 people and wounded 25 Wednesday, May 3, officials said, the latest attack in the Afghan capital, Agence France Presse reported. [ \* ] No group has yet claimed responsibility for the attack,

which came days after the Taliban launched their so-called "spring offensive", in which they vowed to target international troops. The annual offensive normally marks an upsurge in fighting during warmer weather, though this winter the Taliban continued to battle government forces.

#### Daesh spearheading north

It amply illustrates that the attacking forces have no trouble fighting on more than one front at the same time, while the defenders have no fighting power to confront them on various fronts. If the Taliban's main stronghold remains in the south of Afghanistan, it is in the north where the Taliban is less consolidated and lacks firm roots, thereby giving Daesh the opportunity to jump in. Daesh is operating from the Nangarhar province where it controls 12 districts. Last winter, the movement was reported to be spearheading north with new bases in the provinces of Kunar, Dzhouzdzhana and Faryab. This action brought Daesh very close to the northwestern part of the border with Tajikistan, in alliance with an Uzbek group hostile to Dostum and led by Tahir Yuldash, the son of a co-founder and former leader of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU).

#### Taliban in the southeast

Further southeast, it is the Taliban which appears to be preparing the ground for an incursion into Tajikistan. Last year on August 21 they blew up the Olchin bridge in the Kunduz Province, Caravanserai reported at the time. The 300-metre-long bridge linked Afghan northern provinces to the Afghan border town of Sher Khan, a hub for Central Asian trade. Five other bridges span the Pandzh River (Amu Darya) between Afghanistan and Tajikistan, but they are much smaller. [ \* ] The loss of the "strategically significant" bridge severed Kabul's communication not only with Tajikistan but between Kabul and two Afghan provinces as well, the report read.

Now, the Taliban are back on the scene in full flood. Local news sources reported on May 1 this year that the Taliban had taken control of the Zebak district of Afghanistan's Badakhshan province, at less than 40 kilometre distance from the Tajik town of Ishkashim.

#### International coalition required

In all, the Taliban/Daesh/Al-Qaeda troika is now thought to be in control of 62 per cent of Afghanistan's territory. Overlooking this situation, it will be clear for all to see that the Afghan government troops are no match for the Taliban/Daesh tandem (the third party threatening Kabul, Al-Qaeda, operates in the southwest and has kept a low profile so far) and a few thousand US troops more or less will not make a difference. Only an international coalition on a regional level could save Afghanistan from going under pretty much the same way as it did back in 1996. At the moment Russia, China, and India do not seem in the mood to move in, although only such coalition may replace the retreating USA, and finish the work it left undone once and for all. Although at the moment such intervention looks remote, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization seems to be the only institution that could supervise such an operation, also considering that India and Russia have military bases in Tajikistan. As Tajikistan looks like the last frontier as long as that border is not crossed, no intervention is thinkable. And in case it is, it may be too late.