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# Editorial

## Taliban still heavily embedded with terror groups

The United Nations Security Council has recently confirmed continuation of Taliban's relations with al-Qaeda and other international terror groups. In its report, the Analysis and Monitoring group of the UNSC sanctions committee said that Taliban relations with al-Qaeda and other international terror groups is ongoing, adding that in areas under the Taliban domination and protection, al-Qaeda was present and active.

Prior to this, Pentagon had also said that there is no sign of cutting ties between Taliban and al-Qaeda. In Doha agreement Taliban had promised with the Americans that they would cease ties with al-Qaeda and other international terror groups, but with elapse of over one year from their commitment, not only they have not cut ties, but also strengthened their relations with other transborder terror networks.

As per the information of Afghan secret agencies, thousands of Pakistani militants and extremists of Central Asian countries, including China and Russia are fighting beside Taliban against Afghan National Defense and Security Forces. Al-Qaeda is one of the powerful arms of Taliban that its fighters help and assist Taliban insurgents in organizing and carrying out of terror attacks. Sustaining of Taliban relations with al-Qaeda and other international terror networks is an alarm to regional countries, particularly Afghanistan's northern neighbors.

Taking into account the presence of international terrorists within Taliban ranks, the Central Asian countries are strongly concerned on expansion of insecurity scopes and terror threats close to their borders. Deployment of thousands of armed forces and sophisticated military equipment along the Afghan northern borders by Central Asian countries and Russia, is clear sign of their concerns on presence of international terrorists within Taliban ranks.

Indeed, hasty assessment of the international community and the regional countries regarding Taliban and granting political concession to the group, has jeopardized security of the whole region. The US and the regional countries acknowledged unlimited concessions to Taliban with their analysis that the group might have changed.

Direct talks with Taliban and signing of a peace agreement was a frank mistake that was perpetrated by the US, as these talks eliminated their hideousness and persuaded other regional countries to follow US and enter into negotiations with Taliban.

In the last one-year majority of the regional countries officially invited Taliban leaders and laid red carpet to them. All these caused the Taliban to promote to a political faction from a terror group.

But now it seems that the international community and the regional countries have noticed their mis-approaches. The countries who had sometimes before laid red carpet to Taliban leaders, have now sense of threats close to their ears. The recent UNSC report frankly shows that Taliban are not changeable. The groups nature is the same as it was before and no change has appeared in their ideas, thinking and behavior.

Taliban have no difference with al-Qaeda and ISIS from the ideological perspectives. Taliban have common aspects with all these groups.

The Taliban leaders have friendly ties and even relationship with leaders and commanders of most active terrorist groups in the region. Taliban are heavily embedded with terror groups and cutting ties with them seems impossible for insurgents.

Therefore, support of Afghanistan popular and legitimate system is the only way of establishment of permanent security and stability in the region, a system who senses responsibility before regional security, a system who is loyal to all international laws and conventions and has been practically on the front line of war on terror and is fighting for the world security and stability.

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# Taliban puts Tajik militants partially in charge of Afghanistan's northern border: report

When the Taliban captured a strategically important security checkpoint near Afghanistan's border with Tajikistan last month, it assigned a Tajik militant to raise the Taliban flag on the site.

The militant goes by the alias Mahdi Arsalon and has a group of fighters from Tajikistan under his command, an eyewitness to the flag-raising and other sources told Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

The Taliban also put Arsalon and his group in charge of security in five districts the Taliban seized near the Tajik border in recent months, the sources said, speaking on condition of anonymity due to personal security concerns, the RFL/RL reported.

The districts are Kuf Ab, Khwahan, Maimay, Nusay, and Shekay -- all parts of Afghanistan's Badakhshan Province.

In Afghanistan, Arsalon and other Tajik militants are known as the "Tajik Taliban." But in reality they are members of Jamaat Ansarullah, which is banned in Tajikistan as a terrorist group.

Jamaat Ansarullah -- also known as Ansarullah or Ansorullo -- was founded by a rogue former Tajik opposition commander a decade ago with the ultimate goal of overthrowing the government in Dushanbe.

According to several sources in Tajikistan, Mahdi Arsalon's real name is Muhammad Sharifov. Sharifov, 25, was born in the village of Sherbegiyon in Tajikistan's eastern Rasht Valley.

An officer in the Tajik border guard services told RFE/RL that they received information about two years ago that there was a group of Tajik fighters led by Sharifov fighting alongside the Taliban on the other side of the border. Their number is unknown.

The officer confirmed claims that Arsalon is now "in charge" of security in the five Afghan districts bordering Tajikistan currently controlled by the Taliban. The official spoke on condition of anonymity as he was not authorized to speak to the media, the RFL added.

He also said Arsalon has "introduced" about 200 Tajik militants to the Taliban. They are thought to have taken part in Taliban offensives in Afghanistan's northern Badakhshan Province in recent months where the militant group captured large swaths of territory.

Tajik fighters in Badakhshan caught the Afghan authorities' attention in November 2020 when footage appeared on social media showing insurgents brutally killing men in Afghan Army uniforms. Some of the militants spoke with a distinct Tajik accent. The video purportedly showed the fall of the Maimay district to the Taliban.

Authorities in Tajikistan identified at least 10 of the insurgents as Tajik citizens. Tajik Interior Ministry officials confirmed that Sharifov was among the group.

Qadir Safa, the head of Afghanistan's Darwaz district, confirmed to RFE/RL that Ansarullah members are active in the fighting in Afghanistan in support of the Taliban.

"Several of them were killed in fighting in our area and we were able to establish their identities," Safa said. "They had married local women."

Safa also claimed that Ansarullah recruits fighters from Tajikistan.

"We had information in the spring that nine Tajik nationals entered Afghanistan through Tajikistan's Rushon and Shughnon districts. They joined the Taliban," Safa said. "In the winter and spring, many new fighters came from Tajikistan." He added that Tajik diplomats in Kabul have been informed about Ansarullah's activities in Afghanistan.

Ansarullah was founded in 2010 by Amriddin Tabarov, who had been a field commander for anti-government Islamist forces during Tajikistan's 1992-97 civil war. Tabarov, also known as Mullah Amriddin, was killed by Afghan government forces in 2015.

Initially, Ansarullah's members were former Tajik opposition fighters who refused to accept a 1997 peace agreement between the government in Dushanbe and the Islamist-led opposition.

The so-called new generation -- children and relatives of the initial members and supporters -- have since joined the group.

Since its creation, Ansarullah has had links with other militant groups in Afghanistan and Pakistan, including the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Al-Qaeda, and the Taliban.

In 2019, two of Tabarov's sons were detained by U.S.-led forces in Afghanistan and extradited to Tajikistan.

In August 2019, they were sentenced to lengthy prison terms after being convicted of organizing a criminal group, seeking to overthrow the government, and illegal weapons possession.

But Taliban reject the claims that Tajik nationals have joined the militant group's ranks in Afghanistan.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid told RFE/RL that they even prevented its fighters from firing towards Afghan Army soldiers fleeing to Tajikistan in recent weeks because it didn't want the bullets to land in Tajikistan.

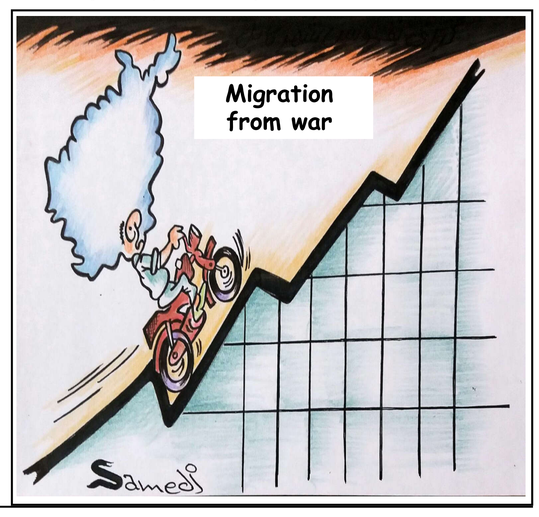
But residents of Tajik villages near the border tell a different story. Amirjon Emomalizoda, a resident of the Panji Poyon area, told RFE/RL on June 24 that stray bullets were flying overhead from the other side of the border.

Skepticism In Dushanbe

But Tajik authorities don't believe the Taliban's promises. President Emomali Rahmon ordered the deployment of 20,000 additional troops on the border with Afghanistan. Tajikistan also conducted a nationwide military drill involving some 230,000 troops.

Radio Qurqin (RFE)

Dushanbe also sought assistance from its ally, Russia, in defending its southern borders.

"Indeed, there weren't any hostile acts from the Taliban toward Tajikistan so far. The Taliban has said it won't harm Tajikistan," a Tajik government official said on condition of anonymity.

"But we know from our experiences that Ansarullah -- which currently is serving the Taliban -- has many times changed its stance and objectives. No one can guarantee that in the future Ansarullah won't turn its back to the Taliban and attack Tajikistan," the official said.