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Afghanistan: Badakhshan province: Information on the targeting of Tajiks by Taliban; general security situation

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Non-English language information is comprehensively summarised in English. Original language quotations are provided for reference.

Information on the targeting of Tajiks by Taliban

Among the sources consulted by ACCORD within time constraints no specific information could be found with regard to Tajiks targeted by Taliban members in Badakhshan province. Research has yielded only little specific information as to current relations between ethnic Tajiks and Pashtuns in Badakhshan.

A 2009 article by Antonio Giustozzi and Dominique Orsini, published in the journal "Central Asian Survey", provides an overview of the ethnic composition of Badakhshan province, stating that the majority of the population of Badakhshan (71 per cent) can be described as Tajik (though different regional identities remain strong among them, and the Tajik community is split between Sunnis and Shia Ismailis). The Pashtun minority in Badakhshan comprises 6 per cent of the population, and about 1 per cent speaks Pashto:

"Historical patterns of fragmentation are reflected in Badakhshan's ethnic and sectarian diversity [...]. The border districts are mostly populated by the so-called Pamiris, also inappropriately labelled Mountain Tajiks, themselves divided into several ethnic groups such as the Shighnani, Darwazi, Tangshewi, Wakhi, Ishkashimi and Warduji. They constitute about 10% of the population and belong to the Ismaili sect. The districts closer to Takhar and particularly Argoo and Keshm have a strong presence of Uzbeks, who may account for about 12% of the population of the province. There is also a significant Pashtun minority (6%), which has, however, been largely absorbed into the Persophone population and only about 1% still speaks Pashto. The majority of the population (71%) can be described as Tajik, but in reality regional identities are still strong: Ragh, Jurm, Yaftal,

Keran-e Munjan and several others are all parts of Badakhshan where people have strong local identities. Moreover, the Tajik community is split between Sunnis (61%) and Ismailis (10%).” (Giustozzi/Orsini, 2009, p. 2)

The following sources contain information with regard to the influence of the Taliban as well as relations between ethnic Pashtun and Tajiks in Badakhshan province:

According to a report published by the Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN) in May 2011 (authors: Antonio Giustozzi and Christoph Reuter), the insurgency in northern Afghanistan has increased its pace since 2008, bringing more and more areas under Taliban control by late 2010. Badakhshan is described as an area where insurgents find penetration difficult. This does not seem to be due to an innate hostility towards the Taliban, but to local conditions which advise local powerbrokers to keep the war away from the province. The reports points out that ethnic borders alone represent no effective barrier, as the Taliban have managed to establish cells in non-Pashtun areas (AAN, 5 May 2011, p. 32). Attempts by Taliban to reach out to areas with no Pashtun majority could be observed by their appointment of ‘shadow governors’ even for areas that were outside the control of the former Taliban regime (AAN, 5 May 2011, p. 8). The report observes that unlike Kunduz and Takhar, where a strong Taliban and a weak Hezb-e Islami are cooperating, in Badakhshan province a comparatively stronger Hezb-e Islami (Hekmatyar) tolerates and supports the few Taliban there (AAN, 5 May 2011, p. 22).

The AAN report contains the following detailed Provincial Case Study with regard to insurgent activities and influence in Badakhshan:

“Annex 4 Provincial Case Study, Badakhshan

Badakhshan province was one of the very few areas never conquered by the Taleban during their rule that ended in late 2001. High-ranking Taleban from Badakhshan served in the government in Kabul or operated elsewhere, but not in their home province. The Taleban had some local contacts during the 1990s but not on the same scale as in other provinces, even if they recruited many madrassa students in Pakistan who were originally from Badakhshan.

Another peculiar element of the power equation in this remote and large province is the eminent role of smuggling: for a long time Badakhshan has been the hub of smuggling opium and heroin to Tajikistan, which – according to experts – is the easiest route to Europe. This business has created wealth and power and different, sometimes contradictory, effects on Taleban activities: those who run the smuggling are not against doing business with Taleban but they do not like them to challenge their power. At the same time, conflicts among commanders are often covered up as Taleban activity. Last but not least, the business includes human trafficking – of Taleban and other insurgents.

Given the relatively exposed position of the province, Taleban efforts to infiltrate it have yielded very modest results as of 2010. Violence seemed to be picking up in 2008 but fell to negligible levels during 2009. In early 2010, activities apparently resumed. As of June, it

was not clear whether Taleban activities would be sustained after a reaction by the local security forces, who apprehended a few Taleban cadres. Argo, an old Hezb-e Islami stronghold, has been one of the main centres of insurgent activity. The exposed district of Warduj, which can be infiltrated from Nuristan, has been another. What the exact source of violence is in most cases is not clear; factional conflict goes on within Jamiat and between Jamiat and Hezb-e Islami, which causes violence that is sometimes attributed to the Taleban. Local sources further suggest that small-scale Taleban infiltration from Takhar and Nuristan continues. Taleban coming over from Takhar might be more inclined to help establish a Taleban presence in the adjacent districts while Taleban coming over from the east, that is, Tajikistan or Pakistan, mainly use Badakhshan as a transit corridor to reach other destinations.

The new military commission of the Taleban, appointed to overlook the northeastern region in spring 2010, reportedly concluded that the insurgency in Badakhshan was developing too slowly and that new leaders should be appointed to accelerate the pace. The two long-standing leaders of the Badakhshan Taleban, Mawlawi Saif-ur- Rahman (temporarily detained, current status unclear) and Pahlawan Shamsuddin, could not get along, the latter being a Tajik and the former an Uzbek with links to IMU and al- Qaeda. Saif-ur-Rahman's group has recently become more active and one of his cadres has reached Badakhshan from Pakistan, organising a couple of small insurgent groups in Argo and Keshm districts and trying to mobilise more.

The arrest of one of the main Taleban figures in Badakhshan in 2009, Mullah Abdul Razzaq, by German Special Forces might have convinced the commission of the need for new blood. New, proactive commanders were sent to Badakhshan to motivate or shame into action the less active local sympathisers of the Taleban. Some of the new arrivals may already have sprung into action, attacking Keshm district centre on 11 May 2010 and ambushing the Warduj chief of police as well as a progovernment mullah in early May. Until this fresh activism, Taleban sympathisers were mostly active in the conservative and Deobandi-influenced Warduj district. Fundamentalist mullahs operate in the northern part of the district, which is largely Sunni – as opposed to the south, which has a large Ismaili population. One of the leading figures in the north is Mullah Sayed Amir, a former commander of Hezb-e Islami. Some minor local commanders, including disaffected Jamiatis and some other Hezbis, have taken part in violent activities in Warduj. German forces in Warduj came under attack in early 2010. But after most troops from the PRT in Faizabad were redeployed to Kunduz to reinforce the newly formed ASB mentoring battalion, the patrols' range was reduced to the provincial capital. The killing of ten international and national staff members of the International Assistance Mission (IAM) on 5 August 2010 (who were treating patients in remote villages of Nuristan) seems to have been an isolated attack, perpetrated by fighters from outside the Taleban command structure, following orders from Pakistani insurgents.

According to a western analyst, 'the Taleban couldn't operate here without the blessing of Hezb-e Islami who itself remains quiet here.' Technically, the Taleban fighters are improving: while until 2009 the material used to produce IEDs was mainly ammonium nitrate fertilizer, today military explosives are used.²¹⁴ For the Taleban in general,

Badakhshan seems to be very relevant for smuggling and a safe passage to and from Pakistan.

In Badakhshan, dual loyalties that cross current frontlines can be frequently observed. The reason for this phenomenon lies, according to local sources, in the ongoing competition between commanders and police chiefs over control of the main smuggling routes. Taliban are not seen as allies or foes but as an additional source of income. One example is Qari Waddud, the police chief in Baharak district, a former Hezb-e Islamifollower who is now, according to Western intelligence sources in Faizabad, providing the Taliban with information. A second example is Nazir Muhammad, one of the most notorious militia leaders in Badakhshan, who guards the outer ring of the German PRT with his illegal militiamen (and guarded the inner ring until 2009 when Mongolian troops took over this duty). He is also reportedly one of the patrons of weapon smuggling in the province. According to Afghan intelligence sources, MP Zalmay Mujaddedi – a minor commander until Hamed Karzai appointed him as head of the NDS 10th Directorate in charge of protecting the president – has been involved in granting safe passage to insurgents for cash. On 15 January 2008, he supposedly met a high ranking insurgent commander in Jurm to negotiate the fee for Taliban crossing from Pakistan through Badakhshan: according to the source, a fee of US\$200 for each Afghan and US\$500 for each foreign fighter was agreed upon, provided that he just cross and not stay in the province. Badakhshan's role as a transit corridor is corroborated by information that three groups of IMU fighters stayed in Badakhshan for several weeks in summer 2010 on their way from Pakistan to Kunduz and Takhar. Reportedly, they were led by two commanders, Aka Sharif (who arrived in Chahar Dara in August) and Sharif Tatar (who already fought in the Swat valley in Pakistan and later in Nuristan and who is believed to have been in Khwaja Bahauddin in Takhar since August 2010).

In the markets of Sheghnan and Ishkashim, weapons – mainly AK-47s and AK-74s – are traded for poppy or heroin, indicating that the main Taliban interest seems to be acquiring weapons, not smuggling for cash. According to smugglers and local sources, several middlemen are involved in the transactions: big smugglers who control the market places bring the weapons into Afghanistan from where they are transported by members of the border police. Then, for example, from Chah Ab district, a Hezb-e Islami commander named Tisha takes over and delivers them to Kunduz and Takhar. In Argo, the known Taliban commander Abdul Waddud is said to be in charge of transporting them to Chahar Dara. Between July and August 2010 alone, he reportedly transported 300 AK-47s from Argo to Kunduz. The opium is said to mainly come from Nangarhar and is processed locally to heroin in several laboratories that belong to various commanders who mostly have positions within the Afghan government.

While Jamiat and Shura-ye Nazar still dominate the political setting in Badakhshan, the province's clergy traditionally follow a very conservative approach. Activities of Deobandi madrassas in Pakistan have heavily influenced the religious environment in Warduj. This created a fundamentalist attitude cutting across local allegiances to the majority Jamiat in the 1980s and 1990s. While the district remained politically under the control of Rabbanī's Islamic State of Afghanistan, sympathies for the Taliban ideology among the district clergy

and rank-and-file mujahedin was quite high. In the 1990s, a local cleric declared an Islamic Emirate on the district level. Without breaking with the Rabbani government politically, its leader sought to implement the same socioreligious decrees locally the Taleban had enforced in the rest of the country.

Since 2009, wandering preachers of the tablighi movement, close to the Deobandi school in Pakistan, roam the province. Staying for days or weeks in one place, they are preaching in mosques as well as in private houses against the 'infidel occupation'. Mostly, they are Badakhshanis who had studied for years at madrassas in Pakistan and now return to spread their acquired belief of jihad. In mid-June 2010, a group of 15 young local tablighi preachers, most of them from Argo district, who had studied in Pakistan for several years and led by a 20-year-old named Mullah Hassan, managed to turn a rumour about two women receiving male visitors at home in Jurm into a local uprising against immorality. The women were subsequently killed as alleged prostitutes, Jurm's girls' school burned down and, a week later, a fatwa was issued that women were only permitted to go to the bazaar if accompanied by their husband or another male mahram. Within days, the same fatwa was issued in Keshm and some other places as well; altogether three girls' schools were burned down in Badakhshan.

Back then it seemed that, under the strong influence of conservative mullahs, a peaceful district could tip over within weeks and trigger the same effect in neighbouring areas. But two weeks after the unfriendly takeover of Jurm, the majority of the local population and their elders were fed up with the new 'Islamic rule' and called a former commander in for help. Subsequently, Mullah Hassan was killed; his companions were arrested by the NDS and handed over to US forces under the accusation of being al-Qaeda members.

Although this kind of recruitment attempt was less successful here than in other provinces, the inclination towards a very conservative interpretation of Islam seemed to represent an entry point for Taleban infiltration. However, even that apparently does not always work, as in the case of the most radical madrassa of the province, Dasht-e Farakh in Baharak district – security forces shut it down in early July 2010 and no further activities have been observed since.

At the same time, Badkhshan local security officers – as elsewhere – are deeply irritated by the general shift in Kabul's policy welcoming the Taleban 'as brothers'. 'The word 'Taleban' is no longer a curse, the red line now is drawn before al-Qaeda. Hence people are doubtful whether we should fight the Taleban – or not any longer? All these talks about reconciliation and Karzai's constant appraisal of Mullah Omar have in the last three months dramatically changed the perception of people.'

Apparently, at the provincial level the local population as well as the authorities try to prevent Taleban from gaining ground in Badakhshan (except for the areas mentioned above). At the same time smugglers, local powerbrokers, police commanders (the three categories often overlap) and politicians have no problem in facilitating Taleban activities in other provinces by providing them with weapons or safe passage as long as their own province remains relatively calm. [...] The number of fighters is low, approximately 100.

According to a western analyst, 'They couldn't operate here without the blessing of Hezb-e Islami, who themselves remain quiet here.'" (AAN, 5 May 2011, pp. 49-53)

The AAN report of May 2011 contains a map indicating the areas with Taliban presence in Badakhshan province, which appear to be Fayzabad, Warduj, and Kishim (AAN, 5 May 2011, Map 7, p. 53).

The Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) reports in November 2010 that according to local officials, insurgents have infiltrated into the northern provinces of Afghanistan in recent years. According to an ANP commander, insurgents have turned north as they came under pressure in the southern provinces. The police commander mentions that the Taliban have a foothold in Badakhshan province. The article states that, in addition, attacks by armed factions targeting Pashtun communities as well as poverty are combining to produce local recruits for the Taliban. According to Mohammad Wakil, a political expert, the Taliban have won recruits among local people who felt unprotected from attacks by paramilitary groups such as Jamiat-e Islami¹, which is dominant in the northeastern provinces:

"Local officials blame the infiltration of insurgents into northern areas over recent months, aggravated by inadequate security provision on the ground. In addition, attacks targeting Pashtun communities and grinding poverty are combining to produce local recruits for the Taleban. 'The insurgents have come under pressure in the southern provinces, so they have turned to the north,' Daud Daud, commander of Afghan National Police's Pamir 303 Zone, which covers the north and northeast of the country, told IWPR. Daud said the situation was critical in Kunduz, Takhar, Baghlan, Balkh, Jowzjan and Faryab provinces, and in the remaining northern provinces – Badakhshan, Sar-e Pol and Samangan – the Taleban also had a foothold. [...] Attacks in Daud's within zone of responsibility in the last month alone have resulted in 30 casualties among Afghan army troops and the police, and dozens more among civilians and aid workers. [...] Other observers say northern Afghanistan has become fertile ground for insurgent activity because of the aggressive action of armed factions in the region, often targeting the Pashtun minority. Political expert Mohammad Wakil said the Taleban had won recruits among local people who felt unprotected from the paramilitary groups Jamiat-e Islami and Junbesh-e Melli, dominant in northeastern and northwestern provinces, respectively." (IWPR, 2 November 2010)

Pajhwok Afghan News (PAN) reports in early November 2010 that unidentified gunmen shot dead four members of a family in the Diarm district of Badakhshan province. Fauzia Kofi, a public representative from Badakhshan², said that the dead included one of her campaigners in the September 2010 parliamentary election:

"A number of Meshrano Jirga members on Tuesday asked security organs to step up efforts at controlling the increasingly deteriorating security situation in northern Badakhshan province. The call comes a day after unidentified gunmen shot dead four

¹ Several sources refer to Jamiat-e Islami as a Tajik-dominated party (AREU, February 2011, p. 11; German Foreign Office, 27 July 2010, p. 17)

² An ABC News report from June 2010 states that Fauzia Kofi is an ethnic Tajik MP (ABC News, 29 June 2010)

members of the same family in the Diarm district of the remote province, bordering Pakistan's Chitral Valley. Fauzia Kofi, a public representative from Badakhshan, said the dead included one of her campaigners in the September 18 parliamentary election. The incident took place in front of the district police headquarters but police did not take any action to prevent the killings. A senator from Badakhshan, Dr. Samim, complained incidents of violence had increased in the province after the parliamentary ballot. He claimed most of areas were under Taliban's control." (PAN, 2 November 2010)

In a June 2011 article on the abduction and killing of a local resident by Taliban in Badakhshan, Tolo News quotes a senior police official as saying that the Taliban are usually active in areas within Keshm and Tagab districts, where the incident occurred, and they are usually committing acts of violence of this kind. Although a relatively peaceful province, Tolo News says that recently there have been reports of insurgent activity in some parts of the province (Tolo News, 20 June 2011).

In a March 2011 article, Swiss daily newspaper Le Temps mentions that despite Pashtuns being a minority in the northern provinces of Kunduz, Balkh and Badakhshan, Taliban infiltration of rural pockets inhabited by Pashtuns has increased over the years in these provinces (Le Temps, 16 March 2011).

The Wall Street Journal (WSJ) reports in October 2010 that insurgents have started launching regular attacks in the province of Badakhshan, which had previously been one of Afghanistan's most peaceful regions (WSJ, 18 October 2010). The Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) news agency states in a May 2010 report that there has been a recent increase in Taliban activities in Badakhshan (AIP, 10 May 2010).

General security situation

The ANSO Quarterly Report of July 2011 states that a total of 29 attacks were carried out in Badakhshan province during the second quarter of 2011, which constitutes an increase by 61 per cent over the 18 attacks that occurred in the second quarter of 2009 (ANSO, July 2011, p. 9). These comparative figures are further illustrated on two maps on page 8 of the report, in which Badakhshan province is marked as a "low insecurity" region:

- ANSO: ANSO Quarterly Data Report Q.2 2011; 01 January - 30 June 2011, July 2011, p. 8 http://www.ecoi.net/file_upload/1788_1311851412_anso-q2-2011.pdf

The ANSO bi-weekly data report covering the period from 16 to 30 June 2011 (published 2 July 2011) provides the following overview of the security situation in Badakhshan province during the first six months of 2011:

"Badakhshan has recorded 118 security incidents over the first 6 months of 2011, demonstrating approximately a 50% increase over the 79 security incidents that were recorded over the same period in 2010. Although Badakhshan remains a province with many largely operable environments for NGOs, insecurity continues to flourish as a result of shifting power brokers (GOA and ACG) and drug related crime. These are 2 elements that are unlikely to disappear in the near future." (ANSO, 2 July 2011, p. 12)

The UNHCR Afghanistan Protection Cluster provides a "Protection Overview" of the northern and north-eastern regions of Afghanistan, published May 2011, stating that in May 2010 the UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) considered that the number of districts in the provinces of Baghlan, Takhar, Badakhshan and Kunduz where security conditions could be assessed as 'unstable or high' rose from 12 (December 2007) to 29, which constitutes an increase by 242 per cent:

"In May 2010, UNDSS considers that the number of districts (Provinces of Baghlan, Takhar, Badakhshan and Kunduz) where security conditions are considered as 'unstable or high' jumped from 12 (Dec. 2007) to 29, which constitutes a 242% increase. Currently, nearly half (42%) of all NER districts have now reduced humanitarian access (as against 18% in 2007). Of the 55 districts of the NR, 9 are currently inaccessible to the UN. Further, 11 districts are partially closed for UN agencies. Of the remaining 35 districts, several provide access only to the District Center, leaving only 30 districts where UN agencies have full access." (UNHCR, 11 May 2011, p. 11)

As regards the second half of June 2011, ANSO bi-weekly report 2 July 2011 states that, among other incidents, a convoy of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) that included Provincial Governor was attacked by AOG members in Warduj district along a main drug trafficking route. The attack, which occurred in the Bashond area in the middle of the day, came following anecdotal reports about armed men in the area. According to ANSO, this area is key to controlling drug trafficking access between Badakhshan and Tajikistan, over which multiple parties (AOG, ACG, GOA) seek to assert control. ANSO further reports about an escalation of a conflict between two local groups in Kishim district. ANSO states that all these incidents appeared to be criminal acts (ANSO, 2 July 2011, p. 12).

As to the period of 1-15 June 2011 (published 17 June 2011), ANSO reports that the drug harvest season, which has just arrived, is likely to directly affect Badakhshan's security. There has been an increased number of military operations in Badakhshan to destroy drug crops throughout the province. Local populations have not responded kindly to the Afghan Government's efforts to reduce their most lucrative crop, and the onset of operations combined with the harvest and increased use of trafficking routes have caused a seasonal shift in the security paradigm. A total of 15 incidents has been recorded in Badakhshan province during this two-week period. Following three missions conducted by the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) in Argo district (neighbouring Fayzabad) during which hundreds of hectares of drug crops were destroyed, armed criminal groups (ACGs) attacked an Afghan National Police (ANP) checkpoint. During the reporting period a new round of attacks surfaced in Baharak district, which has been the primary source of manifested insecurity in the province earlier in the year. In Darayim district, a clash between members of an armed opposition groups (AOGs) occurred when one member objected to another's attempts to reconcile with the government. According to ANSO, clashes such as these are common since arbakis (local tribal militias) and local police are "natural competitors" who draw support from the same populations (ANSO, 17 June 2011, p. 16).

Regarding the period 1 to 15 May 2011, ANSO reports that low-level violence against government and police forces as well as incidents based on shifting power dynamics and

interpersonal disputes make up the majority of manifested insecurity in Badakhshan province. In Kishim, one of the few districts in Badakhshan with a known AOG presence, an attack on AOG members on District Chief of Police (DCOP) of Tagab District and the abduction of a former Jihadi commander by AOG members have been reported, bringing the number of security incidents in Kishim since January 2011 to eight. Kuran Wa Munjan district saw its 7th incident over the first half of 2011 (an attack at the ANP headquarters in the district administrative centre), which stands in contrast to the two incidents that took place over the entire previous year of 2010, and only one incident in 2009 (ANSO, 17 May 2011, p. 14).

The following media reports contain coverage of security-related events in Badakhshan province since July 2011:

In a 1 August 2011 article, Afghan Tolo TV quotes the provincial governor of Badakhshan, Shah Waliullah Adib, as saying that the Al-Qaeda network, especially the Uzbek Islamic Movement, and other terrorist groups from Central Asia are increasing their activities in the province (Tolo TV, 1 August 2011).

A Hasht-e Sobh newspaper reports on 18 July 2011 that according to security officials, military operations have been launched against Taliban in Badakhshan Province:

“Report by Saihon from Badakhshan entitled ‘Volatile areas in Badakhshan Province will be cleared from the Taleban’ quotes security officials in Afghan north as saying that they have launched military operations to clear the area from the Taleban in Badakhshan Province.” (Hasht-e Sobh, 18 July 2011)

National Afghanistan TV reports on 17 July 2011:

“Afghan security forces eliminate militants in Warduj District of northern Badakhshan Province where the Taleban have recently launched subversive activities and sabotaged normal life in the district.” (National Afghanistan TV, 17 July 2011)

In a 10 July 2011 article, Hasht-e Sobh quotes residents of Badakhshan province as expressing concern over security threats in some districts:

“Report by Saihan entitled ‘Badakhshan’s residents: Taleban harm people’ quotes a number of residents of northern Badakhshan Province as expressing concern over security threats in some districts of the province, calling on the government to take necessary measures to address problems.” (Hasht-e Sobh, 10 July 2011)

Pajhwok Afghan News (PAN) news agency reports on 13 July:

„A Taliban group leader was among three fighters killed during a clash with police in the northeastern province of Badakhshan, officials said on Wednesday. The slain Taliban leader was identified as Amanuddin. Two policemen were injured during the clash that broke out in Wardaj district on Tuesday, according to Col. Hussain Safdari, the deputy provincial police chief. A heroin processing lab was also seized during the operation, according to Safdari.” (PAN, 13 July 2011)

Another PAN report of 4 July 2011 reports on the following incident:

„The fate of the police officer who was abducted on Saturday in the Yawan district of northeastern Badakhshan province is not yet known, an official told Pajhwok on Monday. Hussain Ali, a Yawan district police officer, was kidnapped by unknown men in Faizabad City while transporting three months' worth of the district policemen's salaries from Kabul to Yawan, provincial crime branch chief Col. Fazal Ahmad Nazari said.“ (PAN, 4 July 2011)

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