Does the Anti-Taliban Resistance in Afghanistan have a Future?

After Taliban (the movement banned in the Russian Federation) militants entered the Afghan capital, Kabul, on 15 August and declared the “end of the war” in Afghanistan, the anti-Taliban resistance in the country has intensified. This is a clear indication that, unlike the former Afghanistan President, Washington-backed Ashraf Ghani, who fled the country and took the “party gold” with him, there are still resistance forces against the Taliban in the country, who have become increasingly vocal about their existence in recent days.

On August 19, resistance fighters in the Taliban-controlled Panjshir province asked Western countries to help them with weapons. Their head Ahmad Masood said Afghan army fighters have already responded to his call and are on their way to Panjshir with weapons and equipment.

Initially it was planned that the stronghold of resistance would be the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif, but the Afghan leaders, relying in part on military units that, because of US miscalculations and untrained control of equipment, proved ineffective in combat, were disorganized and simply at some point opened a front to the Taliban.

Former Afghan Vice-President Marshal Raşid Dostum said in a statement to the Turkish publication Anadolu that there was no room for the Taliban in the north. According to him, the Taliban had tried several times before to take over northern Afghanistan, but some Taliban chiefs were trapped. Dostum noted that people in northern Afghan provinces would rise up against the Taliban and defeat it in that region.

The Taliban’s ruthless assault on districts and towns across Afghanistan has led to a massive humanitarian crisis,
one manifestation of which is internal displacement. Many families lost all their livelihoods and fled to escape the brutality of the Taliban, adding to the anti-Taliban sentiment in the country.

Against this background, internal mobilization of various political parties, influential figures and the Afghan people is emerging in various parts of the country, and popular uprisings are forming in support of the Afghan armed forces fighting the Taliban. Herat and Mazar-i-Sharif are good examples of such popular uprising against the brutality and policies of the Taliban.

Resistance forces against Taliban militants have taken control of three districts in Baghlan province in Afghanistan, Gen. Bismillah Khan Mohammadi, the former head of the Ministry of Defense, said on August 20. “The Puli Khesar, Deh Salah and Banu districts in Baghlan are occupied by resistance forces. The resistance continues to be alive!” the general wrote on his Twitter.

As for the anti-Taliban resistance established in Panjshir province by the son of Afghan national hero Ahmad Shah Masood and former Vice President Amrullah Saleh, although Ahmad Masood claims that they are “the first line of defense”, it should be noted that there are no strong groups in Afghanistan today that are capable of mounting real opposition to the Taliban.

The Western media refers to Ahmad Masood as the leader of the National Resistance Front of Afghanistan. He is the son of the late Northern Alliance leader Ahmad Shah Masood, who also fought with Taliban militants (recognized as a terrorist organization and banned in the Russian Federation). Ahmad Masood is a graduate of the British Royal Military Academy Sandhurst. He is a professional and young enough (born in 1989) to be energetic and independent. He is charismatic and looks a lot like his father, which greatly increases his popularity with local Afghans. He did not hold any official position in occupied Afghanistan, but inherited actual power over the Panjshir Gorge from his father, who was killed by al-Qaeda (the terrorist outfit banned in the Russian Federation). Together with his comrades-in-arms, he flew to the Panjshir Gorge to stand at the head of the Tajik units. He has already started to forge a coalition against the Taliban, so the possibility of a guerrilla war against the Taliban is high.

Panjshir is one of 34 provinces in Afghanistan with a population of more than 140,000 people and the most difficult terrain, inhabited by ethnic Tajiks. Main NATO forces, led by the US, were based in this province. This territory has in fact always been independent of Kabul, regardless of who controlled the country at that moment. The Panjshir Tajiks have enough weapons for themselves and for the defense of the gorge, but they are clearly insufficient for going outside the gorge. What they do have though is money: Masood controls one of the world’s largest emerald mining sites (the market is illegal) and lithium mines. And without lithium, as you know, there are no batteries for mobile phones.

The Taliban already failed to capture Panjshir Gorge 25 years ago, when they came to power in 1996 - the Northern Alliance leader Ahmad Shah Masood resisted them then by gaining a foothold in this province. However, when it comes to the revival of the Northern Alliance, the attempt to recreate it this year has already failed. In particular, the leaders of many northern groups who tried to establish a command in Mazar-i-Sharif were defeated and fled to Uzbekistan. As for the fate of the Masood clan, it is unknown.

According to reports coming from Afghanistan in recent days, some 10,000 fighters have already left for Panjshir province to fight against the forces of the Taliban that have taken over the country. These are General Raşid Dostum’s forces and Afghan army personnel carrying weapons.

Ahmad Masood and a number of other Afghan politicians have access to important European and American channels. Furthermore, keep in mind that some of these people have US citizenship and some assistance may be forthcoming from the West. It is difficult to say yet when this will happen as most international players, including the United States, are still stupefied, all waiting to see how things develop.

Resistance units are known to have stockpiles of ammunition and weapons, as well as weapons from Afghans who have responded to the call to join the resistance in recent days. There are Afghan regular army soldiers who were angered by the surrender of their commanders, and former members of the Afghan Special Forces. But by Masood’s own admission, it is not enough.

However, Afghan Vice President Amrullah Saleh’s Resistance Forces recently recaptured the Charikar district in Parwan province and are also fighting the Taliban in Panjshir. Panjshir, virtually the only region that has not surrendered to the Taliban, is flying the flag of the Northern Alliance, formerly led by the legendary Ahmad Shah Masood, better known as the “Panjshir Lion”. Nevertheless, it recognizes that without substantial external
assistance, the new Northern Alliance is effectively doomed to a last stand in the Panjshir Gorge. But, even with massive support from the US, Iran or India, it seems that the Taliban will still be very firmly in control of Afghan territory and that power is here to stay.

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