Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan, has received a noticeable increase in media attention in recent reports. Numerous media covered in detail the celebration of the 30th anniversary of state independence of Tajikistan, which ended on September 9 in Dushanbe with a grand celebratory fireworks display and a colorful concert program.

On September 16-17, the Tajik capital will host the jubilee summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), when it celebrates its 20th anniversary. The SCO is a regional international association whose full members are Russia, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, China, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Four states have observer status - Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran and Mongolia; another six countries are in the organization as dialogue partners: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cambodia, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Turkey. Since 2004, SCO has been an observer at the UN General Assembly. In 2021, Tajikistan holds the presidency of the organization. This year’s Dushanbe summit will be attended by many leaders of the organization’s member states. Their meetings on the margins of the summit are envisaged and agreed upon, making the Tajik capital a prominent venue for important international organizations meetings and discussions of not only current regional issues. During the forthcoming summit, it is expected that the procedure of inclusion of Iran as a full member of the SCO will begin.

However, especially frequent mentioning of Tajikistan in various mass media lately is conditioned by events in Afghanistan as well. Tajikistan is the only country bordering Afghanistan that has taken a stubborn stand against the current regime in Kabul, which consists entirely of Taliban fighters (a terrorist organization banned in Russia).

Tajik President Emomali Rahmon said recently that to solve the neighboring country’s political problems, “an
inclusive government with the participation of all national minorities should be established.” Tajikistan firmly believes that Tajiks, who makeup about 40% of the Afghan population and constitute the largest ethnic group in the country after the Pashtuns, should also be represented in it. But in the already announced Taliban government, with one exception, only Pashtuns are represented. Therefore, national minorities held mass protests in Afghan cities against the cabinet announced by the Taliban. In the Panjshir province, Tajiks, under the umbrella of the National Resistance Front of Afghanistan, organized the fight against the Taliban groups. Against this backdrop, Tajikistan is increasingly becoming a centre of an anti-Taliban struggle to a certain extent. The active and very loud Tajik youth is sympathetic to the Afghan Tajiks. It clarifies that they will not accept any decision from their authorities other than support for the resistance forces. Social networks are even calling for troops to be formed and sent to help the Panjshiris.

However, according to information coming out of Afghanistan, Taliban militants have managed to establish control over all provinces of Afghanistan, including the rebellious Panjshir. A Taliban flag has already been hoisted in the provincial capital. Afghan resistance leader Ahmad Massoud, son of legendary Northern Alliance leader Ahmad Shah Masood, an ethnic Tajik, did not surrender but retreated to an unknown direction and called for resistance. But most likely, he, together with his group and civilians, have gone into the mountains, which the Taliban will not be able to fully control. Ali Nazary, head of foreign relations for the National Resistance Front of Afghanistan, told the Financial Times that the resistance in Afghanistan's Panjshir Province had decided to change tactics and switch to guerrilla warfare against the Taliban.

However, such guerrilla resistance is impossible without external support, especially with the onset of cold weather. The representatives of the Front had already sent a call to the international community to provide the National Resistance Front of Afghanistan with any assistance, but so far, nothing has come of it. According to some experts, this was due to a large extent because the rapid development of events in Afghanistan came as a surprise to all, even for America, which has been trying to build its own scheme of developments in this country for the last two decades. After all, it was the US that made the Taliban such a powerful force when they abandoned their positions in strategic areas of Afghanistan without warning to the Afghan authorities while leaving the latest and most advanced weapons here that the Taliban would simply come and take. It was also at Washington's request that the movement's leaders were recently released from prisons in Pakistan and Afghanistan, in the apparent expectation of forming a force that would be under their influence once they left the region. No doubt there were agreements with Taliban leaders and Ashraf Ghani to shift power after US soldiers left the country, but the US failed to implement it in time.

As for the current situation in Afghanistan and Panjshir, Washington has so far been clearly not showing its position, preferring to be limited to monitoring developments and the actions of the Taliban. However, the US is unlikely to have forgotten that they conducted a counter-terrorism operation in Afghanistan in 2001. With the support of the Northern Alliance, overthrew the Taliban regime, who moved into Pakistan, established the Islamic Emirate of Waziristan in 2006 and were in a military struggle with the Americans and their proxies in Kabul.

In the conditions mentioned above, Panjshir was left alone, and all the external players took time out to comprehend the new realities and the balance of power in the country. The Taliban have used this momentum to consolidate their power across the country. So far, only Dushanbe has been overtly critical of the Taliban. However, whether Tajikistan will militarily support the National Resistance Front of Afghanistan forces remains to be seen.

In any case, given the evolving situation in Afghanistan, as well as the fact that Dushanbe on September 16 will host not only the anniversary summit of the SCO but also another session of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the capital of Tajikistan will not once again appear in media reports as a platform for active discussion of Taliban activities and policies, as well as of the National Resistance Front of Afghanistan in that country.

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