

The Taliban's quick seizure of Afghanistan is an exact replay of what happened there 25 years ago. Then, radical Islamists have managed to gain control over the entire territory of the country, except for the Panjshir Valley and its environs. It was there that part of the army, who did not like the idea of living according to medieval rules imposed by the Taliban's and al-Qaeda, they started resistance. Leading the resistance to the radical Islamists were Ahmad Massoud Jr., the son of the legendary leader of the Northern Alliance, Ahmad Shah Massoud, dubbed the "Lion of Panjshir," and the Afghan Vice President Amrullah Saleh, who has declared himself the country's legitimate head of state.

The Taliban hated to repeat their mistakes of 25 years ago, when they refrained from costly attempts to take over Panjshir. As a result, at the end of 2001, Massoud Sr. left the gorge with the troops of the Northern Alliance and took Kabul with almost no US ground support. Therefore, now, without waiting for the troops that had left to join the "lion of Panjshir"'s son and established the National Liberation Front, to fortify themselves, the Taliban and their allies have thrown all their forces on Panjshir. While, in its effort to demonstrate to the world its willingness for a compromise, the "new Kabul government" pretended to be negotiating with Massoud Jr. and Saleh, "The Haqqani Network" and other Islamist terrorist groups that are part of the Taliban coalition were already storming the approaches to Panjshir. On the morning of September 6, videos and photos of Taliban troops from the "impregnable mountain valley" were circulated around the world. However, they could only have done this due to the massive support from the Pakistani army and its special forces.

The Panjshir Gorge is more than just Afghanistan's gateway to China - it is also a zone predominantly populated by Afghan Tajiks. Afghanistan is an ethnic patchwork with Tajiks traditionally living in the North and Pashtuns - in the South. Until recently, many generations of Afghans peacefully coexisted for centuries. No longer. The Taliban are mostly ethnic Afghans or Pakistani Pashtuns. Many Arabic-speaking extremists from al-Qaeda, ISIS and the above mentioned Haqqani Network, who have arrived from Syria and Iraq, have joined forces with the Taliban. Supporters of Massoud and Amrullah Saleh are mostly Tajiks. There are many other people in Afghanistan, who do not want to live under the control of radical Islamists, however, but it is the Tajiks who have become the Taliban's number one enemy.

Saleh and Massoud are both Tajiks, as are the indigenous inhabitants of Panjshir. The Taliban do not want to repeat the mistake they made 25 years ago, because it was from this mountain valley that the Northern Alliance troops launched an offensive against Kabul back in 2001, which, by the way, was captured with little ground support from the international

coalition forces. This time, the leaders of the Taliban and their allies will try to clear out the rebel provinces no matter what. All the more so since the quick seizure of Panjshir would demonstrate to the whole world that the Taliban is capable of conducting complex and large-scale military operations instead of simply entering abandoned cities!



Why didn't Massoud give up and swallow the Taliban's bait? It's simple: he knows very well that radical Islamists are planning a total genocide of the recalcitrant valley. The Russians did not even think about this when they fought the lion cub's "father," but for radical extremists, this is normal behaviour. All the more so since Panjshir is a relatively prosperous province, which has long been spared the horrors of war and so it could be an ideal place for Afghan and Pakistani Pashtuns to settle in. As for the local residents, they would either die or flee to overpopulated and impoverished Tajikistan, leaving their homes to new owners. That is why Massoud's people were fighting - for their lives. The Taliban's military professionalism still leaves much to be desired though. But, according to some sources, following their first setbacks the radical movement turned to their Pakistani allies, who really want to fast track the creation of a direct corridor from China to Afghanistan. The military operation was coordinated by Pakistani advisers, and the Taliban "warriors of Islam" are being actively assisted by Pakistan's regular special forces.

It must be mentioned here that the defenders of Panjshir have actually been betrayed by the

Americans, whom they had counted on.

Indeed, by surrendering the country to the Islamists, Biden recognized them as negotiable partners. The White House even described the Taliban as being “completely different” from the 2001 terrorists. The new rulers in Kabul are now counting on international recognition and are even ready to pretend that they seek a dialogue with all of the country’s political forces. Shooting musicians and killing former employees of US military bases point to the exact opposite though, but Washington is ready to ignore this. After all, the Taliban allowed a peaceful evacuation from the Kabul airport. Therefore, the radical Islamist leaders offered Massoud Jr. and his supporters’ peace talks, declaring their readiness to give the National Salvation Front a couple of seats in the government.

Massoud and his supporters had agreed to negotiate and proposed their candidacies for the new government. This did not sit well with the Taliban, of course.

However, taking control over the Panjshir Gorge has never been an easy matter. Soviet troops controlled the valley, but there was nothing they could do about the rebels hiding in the mountains. As we have already noted, the Taliban are not the Red Army; they will simply clean up all disloyal settlements, thereby depriving Massoud’s fighters of any base. Most likely, within a few months, radical Islamists will also be granted diplomatic recognition. Meanwhile, the Afghan leaders, who could lead the resistance, are ignored by both the United States and Europe, who are trying to hide them away.



Afghan resistance movement and anti-Taliban uprising forces take part in a military training at Malimah area of Dara district in Panjshir province on September 2, 2021 as the valley remains the last major holdout of anti-Taliban forces. (Photo by Ahmad SAHEL ARMAN / AFP)

Tajiks are not the only ethnic minority ready to stand up to the Taliban. An equally unenviable fate awaits the Uzbeks, who account for almost ten percent of the country population. They even have their own leader, a combat-hardened general, and now Marshal Dostum, who, unlike Massoud Sr., studied in the Soviet Union and served in the government troops of the old republic. The problem is, however, that in mid-August the old soldier suddenly fled to Uzbekistan along with all his loyal units! Although a very controversial figure (suffice it to mention his alleged predilection for alcohol, which is taboo in a country with Islamic traditions), Dostum is very popular in the non-Pashtun north. Still, the onetime hero of the country's liberation movement has disappeared from the media's radar, although, together with Massoud Jr., he could try to protect the Uzbek regions of Afghanistan. Dostum has never been a coward, which he has more than once demonstrated on the battlefield. What made him, despite his high rank flee the country with money and

people loyal to him? Was there some US guarantees too?

Along with the “lion cub,” Vice President Abdullah Saleh, an ethnic Tajik, is the only one ready to share the fate of his people. Their National Resistance Front can hold out in the gorges of Panjshir for a very long time even in the conditions of modern war, though not indefinitely. The professional Pakistani military, air force and UAVs are able to significantly shorten the time of their resistance. However, with the defeat of the National Resistance Front, the world would face a new unprecedented genocide, but the West will not know about this. After all, the information blockade of Panjshir has already proved to be quite effective, allowing the Taliban to trumpet their victories. Having cleansed the country from ethnic minorities and “rebels” the new, extremist Afghanistan will set their sights on their neighbours because radical Islamism knows no borders...

Besides, al-Qaeda, the Islamic State and the Taliban all see their mission in the creation of a global Caliphate, while showing disdain for the religion and beliefs of Europeans and Americans. So, whoever negotiates with them, Afghanistan will become a haven for those who will be only too happy to repeat the events of September 11, killing free journalists and sending out suicide bombers to schools and churches in the European countries!

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