The Moscow Times
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Car Bomber Kills 2 in Tajikistan

September 05, 2010



DUSHANBE, Tajikistan — Suicide car bombers struck a police station in Tajikistan on Friday, officials said, killing two officers and wounding 25 in an attack authorities blamed on a militant group linked to al-Qaida.

It is Tajikistan's first known suicide bombing in five years.

A sedan exploded after entering the courtyard of the regional police headquarters for an anti-organized crime unit in Khujand, Tajikistan's second-largest city, Interior Ministry chief of staff Tokhir Normatov said.

The bodies of two police officers and the remains of two attackers were found in the debris from the blast, which badly damaged the building, Normatov told reporters in the capital, Dushanbe.

The Interior Ministry said the attack was likely carried out by the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, which aims to establish Islamic rule in Central Asia and has fought alongside the Taliban and al-Qaida in Afghanistan.

But President Emomali Rakhmon's government often blames the IMU for attacks, while his critics and rights groups accuse him of using the Islamist threat as an excuse to crack down on dissent in the nation of seven million.

Dosym Satbayev, a Central Asia analyst based in Kazakhstan, said the bombing could have stemmed from internal power struggles with roots in Tajikistan's 1990s civil war.

"It's possible it was connected to the tough policy Rakhmon has been conducting toward former field commanders and even former allies who helped him come to power," Satbayev said.

Rakhmon's government — wary of both Islamist militancy and political opposition — has jailed 115 people this year on charges of belonging to banned groups, including at least 25 suspected members of the IMU.

The attack in Khujand came a day after Rakhmon fired most of the leadership of the country's security services following an Aug. 23 jailbreak by 25 suspected Islamist militants accused of plotting to overthrow the government.

The prisoners, including four Afghan citizens and six Russians from the North Caucasus, killed five guards as they escaped from a Dushanbe detention center.

A security service source said Thursday that one of the escapees, a former inmate of the U.S. military prison in Guantanamo Bay, had been detained not far from Dushanbe.

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