

Tajikistan Says 10 Suspected Militants Killed

April 17, 2011

The  **Moscow Times**

DUSHANBE, Tajikistan — Tajik government forces have scored a significant victory in the fight against Islamist insurgents, killing at least 10 suspected militants in the turbulent eastern Rasht Valley.

Interior Ministry chief of staff Ikrom Umarov said Friday that armored vehicles and aircraft took part in the military operation in the village of Samsolik, about 140 kilometers east of the capital, Dushanbe.

Local media, citing security sources, said militant leader Abdullo Rakhimov was among those killed in Thursday's raid, but Umarov said that information could not be independently confirmed. He said one police officer was wounded.

Authorities have accused militants led by Rakhimov of conducting last year's ambush on a military convoy in which at least 25 soldiers were killed.

Rakhimov, also known by his nom de guerre Mullo Abdullo, was a top warlord during

Tajikistan's 1992-97 civil war between President Emomali Rakhmon's secular government and his mostly Islamic opponents called the United Tajik Opposition.

Residents in the Rasht Valley say military operations have been intermittently taking place in the mountainous Tajikabad and Nurabad districts for some months.

In January, authorities reported killing Islamist fighter Alovuddin Davlatov, who was also believed to be involved in the military convoy attack.

The success of these military operations appear to mark the culmination of government efforts to repair relations with important power brokers in the Rasht Valley, such as former warlord Mirzokhodzha Akhmadov.

Authorities said last year that they were seeking to arrest Akhmadov on suspicion of involvement in the convoy attack. An escalation in violence and terror attacks at the time had aroused fears of a new outbreak of conflict.

But Akhmadov later surrendered to the government and promised to assist security forces in capturing prominent militants.

Also last week, the Interior Ministry announced that former United Tajik Opposition field commander Shoh Iskandarov had joined government forces.

Officials said Iskandarov was appointed to a senior position in the police in the Rasht Valley area in April.

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