

Tajik Rebels Threaten Attacks

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ALMATY, Kazakhstan — Islamist rebels in Tajikistan have threatened to renew attacks on government forces and called on Tajiks to rise against the rule of President Emomali Rakhmon.

Security forces this month tracked down and killed an Islamist warlord known as Mullah Abdullo and accused him of carrying out an attack on a column of troops in September.

"It is time for the Muslims to stand up and throw off the chains of [Rakhmon] and his wretched inner circle," a group calling itself "The Mujahideen of Tajikistan" said in an English-language statement.

"How long can the Muslims endure injustice and humiliation?" said the statement, dated April 23 and posted on Kavkazcenter.com, a site sympathetic to an Islamist insurgency in the North Caucasus.

It described Mullah Abdullo as "a martyr who had fought against the enemies of Allah for 19 full years" and added: "There are many more brothers prepared to sacrifice their lives for the sake of Allah. Attack the cops and the government employees that fight against Islam!"

Those calling themselves "mujahideen" in Tajikistan represent some of Rakhmon's fiercest opponents in the country. They are not part of the registered opposition that signed the 1997 power-sharing peace deal with his secular government.

"We do not comment on any statements issued by extremists or terrorists," a Rakhmon spokesman said.

The al-Qaida-linked Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan claimed responsibility for Mullah Abdullo's Sept. 19 attack on government troops in which 28 soldiers were killed.

Rakhmon, a Soviet-era state farm director who has ruled Tajikistan since 1992, says he fights radical Islam in order to build a modern and secular state.

In February, he instructed his security services to tighten control over religious education and mosques, saying they were often used to foment religious radicalism in his country.

A few months before that, he ordered all Tajik students studying religion abroad to return home.

Authorities jailed more than 100 members of banned groups last year, while Rakhmon also criticized what he sees as a growing trend among women to wear religious clothing.

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