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Taliban Warns Kazakhstan on Entering Afghan War

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KABUL, Afghanistan — The Taliban has warned Kazakhstan that its decision to send troops to the NATO-led war in Afghanistan would have severe consequences and was not in its regional interest.

The statement, distributed to media on Saturday, appeared to nod to growing Islamist tendencies in Central Asia, where militants enjoy support from the Taliban and have worried Kazakhstan and Russia.

The Kazakh parliament decided May 18 to become the first nation in Central Asia to send troops to join the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force as the war drags into its 10th year.

Though not a member of NATO, Kazakhstan said it would send an unspecified number of soldiers on six-month missions. It has been providing air and ground corridors for the delivery of supplies to Western troops in Afghanistan.

Kazakhstan "has focused on protection of American interests instead of taking into account the aspirations of their people and the regional interests," the English-language Taliban statement said.

Kazakhstan is Central Asia's most successful economy and largest oil producer. Seventy percent of its 16.4 million people are Muslim. The vast nation has to date avoided the Islamist violence that has occurred in its former Soviet neighbors.

"The Muslim people of Kazakhstan should stand against this wrong policy of their rulers. ... This step on the part of Kazakhstan will leave a long-term negative impact on relations between Afghanistan and Kazakhstan and the region," the statement said.

Analysts have warned that Central Asian militants, after years fighting in Afghanistan and Pakistan, are filtering back across the region's porous borders to their homelands, bringing with them ambitions to spread jihad, or holy war.

Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan all border Afghanistan.

Tajikistan's army has been fighting insurgents in the country's mountainous east since an attack on a military convoy killed 28 troops last September, shortly after suicide car bombers attacked a police station in the country's second city.

Several militant Islamist groups have stated their objective of creating a Muslim caliphate incorporating large swathes of Central Asia, a region twice the size of Saudi Arabia.

However, in contrast with poorer republics in Central Asia, analysts have said militant groups were unlikely to garner much support in relatively prosperous Kazakhstan.

Despite the presence of up to 150,000 foreign troops, violence across Afghanistan is at its worst since the 2001 overthrow of the Taliban government by U.S.-backed Afghan forces. Last year both sides suffered record casualties.

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