

Tajikistan Says Renegade Ex-Minister Killed

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Security forces in Tajikistan said on Wednesday that they had tracked down and killed the country's former deputy defense minister who had been charged with high treason after dozens of people were killed in gun battles earlier this month.

The killing of General Abdukhalim Nazarzoda, who was the country's deputy defense minister until Sept. 4, risks stoking fresh tension in the unstable ex-Soviet state where tensions between the government and Islamist politicians are on the rise.

Gunmen loyal to Nazarzoda clashed with government forces in circumstances that have not been fully explained earlier this month. Nine police officers and 13 rebels were killed at the time, the police said.

On Wednesday, police said Nazarzoda and 11 of his supporters had been killed in a special operation in Ramit Gorge east of the Tajik capital Dushanbe. Four government officers,

including the commander of an elite security force, had also been killed, it said.

Instability in the ex-Soviet state is a source of concern to Russia and the United States who fear militant Islam could take root there because of its proximity to Afghanistan, though there has been limited evidence of that so far.

Visiting Russian President Vladimir Putin assured Tajik President Imomali Rakhmon on Tuesday of Moscow's continued support of his rule. Russia keeps a 6,000-strong military base in the country.

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