

AFGHAN OPPOSITION SET TO STRIKE

Author: [Vladimir Davlatov](#)

Northern Alliance counting on international help in its war with the Taleban

Afghanistan's Northern Alliance, reeling from the recent assassination of its military leader, is taking advantage of international opposition to the Taleban to press its military offensive and extend its precarious territorial hold.

"Currently the Taleban is under pressure from the international community and we simply must take advantage of this situation in order to secure the support of the world powers and win back lost positions in Afghanistan," said a high-ranking diplomat at the Afghan embassy in Dushanbe, which represents the interests of President Burhanuddin Rabbani.

The military-political situation in Afghanistan has changed dramatically since September 9, when Northern Alliance general Ahmed Shah Massoud was assassinated. The Taleban, expecting panic among its enemy's military leaders, promptly launched a major offensive.

But Rabbani's government concealed Massoud's death for a week, insisting that he was just wounded and would soon retake military leadership of the coalition. In so doing, experts say, the government maintained the confidence of its forces and repulsed the Taleban attack.

The September 11 atrocities in New York and Washington and the identification of Osama bin Laden, who is based in Taleban territory, as their mastermind, reinforced the position of the Northern Alliance.

International indignation at the attacks, and the threat of strikes by the US against Afghanistan, if they did not hand over Bin Laden, forced the Taleban to make defensive preparations.

The Kabul regime halted its offensive and moved forces towards the border with Pakistan, readying its bases, camps, air force and anti-missile defence systems, for a US assault.

Experts say the Northern Alliance took advantage of the change in tactics to send its planes to bomb Kabul, and launched several successful military operations, throwing back the Taleban forces, killing and capturing hundreds their troops, and threatening several key strategic objectives.

Military sources say Northern Alliance forces are advancing in the provinces of Balkh, Samagan, Parvan and Kabul, and are close to the cities of Khodjagar and Mazari Sharif, both of which have airports where Western military equipment could be flown in.

The sources report that some Taleban field commanders are defecting to the Northern Alliance.

"We should value the fact, that today, in spite of Massoud's death, the Northern Alliance is in a very advantageous situation. The Taleban movement is demoralised by the world reaction to the terrorist attacks in the US," said Russian border guard chief Nikolai Reznichenko.

General Reznichenko told a press conference in Dushanbe he thought the Taleban reverses would continue. "I think, that slow attrition and decline of the Taleban will start which will be followed by the liberation of the territories occupied by them," he said.

The strong international animosity towards the Taleban in the wake of the US outrages has also brought the Afghan opposition increased diplomatic respectability.

Mohammed Soleh Registoni, the Northern Alliance's military attach

Location: Tajikistan
Stavropol
Russia
Pakistan

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