

A FEW DIFFERENT OPINIONS ABOUT AMERICA IN THE TAJIK PRESS

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In Tajikistan, newspapers gave space to critics towards American foreign policy, and condemning, at the same time, the terrorist actions. A few reports from the front could also be found, from Mazar-e-Sharif.

International news coverage became the main focus of activity for the Tajik mass media during the second and third weeks of September 2001. The number one theme in the Tajik press was, and remains, the recent terrorist attacks in the US and how events will probably develop in Central Asian. Comparing the republic's governmental with independent newspapers, shows that the latter has given the events significantly wider coverage.

WAR ANNOUNCED

The front page headlines in the Dushanbe newspapers spoke for themselves: "One day as real war" (*Asia plus*, #37, September 13, 2001); "Another's war knocks at our door" (*Asia plus*, #38, September 20, 2001); "Is Afghanistan becoming a second Hiroshima?" (*Tojikistan*, #20, September 20, 2001); "Will kyarizes save the Taliban?" (*Asia plus*, #39, September 27, 2001); "One person and the global 'Web' of violence" (*Vecherny Dushanbe*, #38, September 21, 2001), and so on. Almost each newspaper edition devoted 2 or even 4 pages to these topics, and provided readers with a variety of information, from small new agency reports to larger articles and opinion pieces.

Under the headline "New York became a distress zone" *Asia plus* (#37) devoted a whole page to de-

tails of the tragic events in America. In the same issue the newspaper reported "America's secret service and the worlds' journalists suspect the #1 terrorist Osama Bin Laden of committing the terrorist attacks in the US. In the meantime more and more Arabian extremist organizations are claiming responsibility for the air attacks on New York" (Who organized the terrorist attacks?). Alongside this was another article with the headline "Did Uzbeks destroy the American skyscraper?" which, by reference to sources in the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service, imposed responsibility for the air traffic events in the US on the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.

"BLACK THURSDAY"

In the meantime, the events that occurred in the United States on "black Tuesday," September 11, 2001, were condemned by all Tajikistanis. (The words "black Tuesday" was used for the first time by Sulton Khamad, the *Tojikiston* newspaper reporter, on September 20. These words are also popular amongst correspondents working for the Tajik news agency *Khovar*). As Tajikistan is the closest neighbour to Afghanistan, the attacks on America, their consequences, and other events concerning Afghanistan were the usual subjects of discussion in the newspapers' pages.

Tajik newspapers allotted large spaces to the authorities and politicians to analyse the situation.

"SHOCKING CRIME"

"This is a shocking crime, a tragedy that is incomprehensible to the human mind," said First Vice-Premier Khodjiakbar Turadjonzoda in his interview with *Asia plus* on September 13. "We, being at one with the people of the United States of America, express our readiness to cooperate with the world community, including the US administration, in the fight against international terrorism and extremism," stated Emomali Rakhmonov, the President of Tajikistan at the 7th Congress of the People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan (*Vecherny Dushanbe*, September 28). Incidentally, during September not a single official source confirmed the degree of Tajikistan's participation in any anti-terrorist action. In the meantime, Tajik newspapers gave everyone the chance to express their opinions on the events: "... I believe this incident is the result of the US policy to create single world order and its armed intervention in the internal affairs of some countries," believes Djumakhon Davlatov, head of the legal department of the Tajikistan President's office. "Nevertheless, the terrorist attacks should be thoroughly investigated and its organizers punished with all the severity of the law." (*Asia plus*, #37). At the same time we should note that the fears concerning the likely development of events in the region and their consequences for

Tajikistan have made all the country's inhabitants uneasy. In an article headed "How will the American explosions echo in Tajikistan?" the *Asia plus* newspaper (#37) published the opinions of Tajik politicians and governmental officials: "... I am afraid that if reports confirm that radicals from Islamic organisations are behind the terrorist attacks, then increased tension between the Islamic and Christian worlds will be the result," said Khodjiakbar Turadjonzoda, First Deputy of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Tajikistan in his interview with *Asia plus*. "It can affect our republic as well." At the same time, he hoped that the US administration would be wise very precise when revealing the guilty party so no one innocent would suffer. "It is natural that in connection with this terrorist attack the country's security services undertake any necessary measures," noted Nuralisho Nazarov, the Deputy Secretary of the Security Council of the Republic of Tajikistan. "We have elaborated a state security program for the period 2002-2005 and appointed the personnel responsible for the program's realisation. Security measures within the framework of the program have been strengthened and state borders have been fortified.

JOIN THE ALLIANCE?

These days Tajikistan faces a dilemma: either join the military operation against Afghanistan or take more neutral position? In this regard the opinions of Tajik politicians have been divided. The chairman of the Committee for International Affairs, Public Associations and Information of the Lower House of the Tajik Parliament, Professor Ibragim Usmanov, believes that America has no right to carry out "revenge attacks against Afghanistan." "Otherwise, it would be a similar terrorist at-

tack, but this time on the part of America." he said (*Asia plus*, #38). His counterpart, Professor Makhmadsho Ilolov, Chairman of the Committee for Science, Education and Youth Policy, expressed his opinion in the same edition: "I don't think Tajikistan should stay apart from the fight against inter-

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national terrorism." Abduali Abdullaev, Chairman of the Revision Committee of the Communist Party of Tajikistan, believes that Tajikistan can assist the US, for example by furnishing information on the terrorist activities of the Taliban and Osama Bin Laden, without direct participation in the military activities (*Asia plus*, #38). Every single person is certain that it is necessary to fight terrorism, provided that no peaceful people suffer. Such opinions were published in the pages of *Tojikiston* (#21-22), *Vecherny Dushanbe* (#37-39), and *Asia plus* (#37-39) during the second and third weeks of September.

Tajik newspapers published some reports about American aircraft and servicemen coming to Tajikistan, however each time these stories were refuted by official sources. For example, an article headlined "The US and the Republic of Tajikistan have adjusted their position" reported on the consultations between the USA Charge d'Affaires ad interim in the Republic of Tajikistan, James Bawner and Tajikistan's highest authorities. In the meantime, the Tajikistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs denied reports published on October 2 in

The Washington Post from the Pentagon, about the air-lift of the 10th direct-action mountain division of the US Ministry of Defense to Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. "No American armed forces have arrived in Tajikistan," was the usual answer of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to *Asia plus*. Each edition of the *Vecherny Dushanbe* newspaper carried vivid headlines: "Terrorist attacks. The world is shocked" (#37-39); "The world is on the verge of a full-scale war", etc. As well as various news reports, the newspaper published polls on such questions as "What do the terrorists rely upon?" and "Are you ready to serve your country?" in which readers expressed their opinions concerning the tragedy and its consequences for the world.

POLLS IN THE PAPERS

The *Tojikiston* newspaper (#22) carried a snapshot of Osama Bin Laden on its front page with the announcement that the United States has offered a one million dollar award for his capture, and that he is going to purchase chemical weapons worth 1.5 million dollars. In edition #20 of September 20 the newspaper published the results of a poll on the question "What's your position on the fight against terrorism?" 99 per cent of respondents approved of punishing the terrorists, however 58 per cent stated that the hasty attack on Afghanistan would be the beginning of America's defeat. At the same time, *Tojikiston* published courageous opinion pieces by Sulton Khamad with analysis of the situation ("The probable American attack on Afghanistan and its consequences" #20, "Defeat or victory of America's special forces?" #22). While discussing the development of recent events, Sulton Khamad noted that over the course of several weeks the Americans had not

yet managed to prove Osama Bin Laden's participation in the terrorist attacks on America. However, the US is rapidly moving its armed forces closer to Afghanistan. It seems that evidence of Osama Bin Laden's involvement in the terrorist attacks is of no importance to Americans. American politicians are using the tragedy to raise their political authority and skillfully achieve their purposes. Sulton Khamad's article published in the *Tojikiston* newspaper on September 20 states that as well as the destruction of Osama Bin Laden and terrorist camps, America is going to place military bases close to the borders of Central Asian countries and that this is a long-standing dream. Almost all the newspapers paid special attention to the vicious attempt on the life of the Minister of Defence of the legal government of Afghanistan, Akhmadshah Masud, two days prior to the terrorist attacks in the United States. The influential independent newspaper

Asia plus (#38, Sept. 20) described the assassination attempt under the front page headline "Akhmadshah Masud – a cunning lion with an open soul". It reported: "It is possible to say without exaggeration, that together with Akhmadshah Masud a whole epoch, not only in the history of Afghanistan, but in that of the whole Islamic world has gone." Two other leading newspapers, *Vecherny Dushanbe* and the above-mentioned *Tojikiston*, gave detailed information from various sources on the preparation and the attempt itself.

"Will Afghan refugees burst through to the Republic of Tajikistan?" is another question that was covered on pages of Tajik newspapers, as events in Afghanistan and the forthcoming military actions resulted in a growth in the number of refugees rapidly leaving Afghanistan. In an interview with *Asia plus* (#39), the Head of Tajikistan's immigration service, Timur Tabarov stated that "the border will

remain closed. We shall not accept refugees." However, he emphasized that Tajikistan would not ignore their problems and would render humanitarian aid inside Afghanistan and provide safe passage to other countries rendering humanitarian aid.

While following the developing situation in Afghanistan, Tajikistan's mass media has not ignored the state of affairs with the anti-Taliban coalition, the Northern Alliance. Special attention was given to the situation on its western front, where armed units under the command of a political figure as inconsistent with the Northern Alliance as General Abdurashid Dostum are concentrated. *Tojikiston* and *Asia plus* carried news reports from their special correspondents on military affairs, who were based near Mazari-Sharif and surrounded by the army under the command of this military leader.