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The weakness of the United States' regional 'partners' in Central Asia

In his annual address to the Senate Commission on 16 February, the Director of National Intelligence James R. Clapper (coordinator of special services to the US president) summarised the current and potential threats to global security. Regarding Central Asia, Clapper laid particular emphasis on the weakness of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in the face of possible increased risks of Islamic extremism. Both countries are important allies of the West, as part of the northern supply corridor for US and NATO forces in Afghanistan.

Proof of Tajikistan's vulnerability is the information Clapper gave concerning the country's violent destabilisation last autumn (armed attacks on government forces, terrorist attacks, the escape from prison of dozens of opponents of the regime). The attempt by the government in Dushanbe to settle the crisis by force was a failure. The temporary pacification of the situation in the Rasht Valley (located east of Dushanbe, and a bastion of the opposition), which was widely advertised as a success for the armed forces, was only possible thanks to negotiations with local leaders of the armed opposition. As for Kyrgyzstan, Clapper stressed the possibility of a further wave of ethnic violence, in continuation of the events in the south of the country last June.

From the perspective of Washington, the governments in Bishkek and Dushanbe are de facto defenceless in the face of 'hard' security threats, and their control over their own territory (especially in the case of Tajikistan) is incomplete and conditional. This is a potentially high risk to the presence of NATO and the US in Afghanistan which, as Clapper put it, is ever more dependent on political and social stability in the region. <mmat>