

# **Tajikistan's Road to Stability:** Reduction in Small Arms Proliferation and Remaining Challenges

*By Stina Torjesen, Christina Wille, and S. Neil MacFarlane*



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## Acronyms and abbreviations

201st MRD	201st Gatchina Twice Red Banner Motor Rifle Division (Russian Federation Army)
AFKOR	Centre for Research in Marketing and Sociology
APC	armoured personnel carrier
BOMCA	Border Management Programme for Central Asia
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CISPKF	CIS Peacekeeping Force
CSSC	Civil Society Support Centre
DCA	Drug Control Agency
EU	European Union
FSB	(Russian Federation) Federal Security Service
GDP	gross domestic product
GBAO	Gorno Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast
ICG	International Crisis Group
IMU	Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan
IRP	Islamic Renaissance Party
KOGG	Committee for the Protection of State Borders of the Republic of Tajikistan
MB	Ministry of Security
MoD	Ministry of Defence
MVD	Ministry of Internal Affairs
NGO	non-governmental organization
NRC	National Reconciliation Commission
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
OVD	Provincial internal administration
PoA	UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat, and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects
RBF	Russian Federation Border Forces

SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
SSR	Soviet Socialist Republic
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNODCCP	United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention
UNMOT	United Nations Mission of Observers in Tajikistan
UNTOP	United Nations Tajikistan Office of Peace-building
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
UTO	United Tajik Opposition
WHO	World Health Organization

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## Summary

Small arms and light weapons are not an immediate threat to the security of most civilians living in Tajikistan. This report shows that the Government of Tajikistan was generally successful in collecting weapons left among the civilian population after the Tajik civil war (1992–97). Relatively few civilians are likely to possess illegal weapons. Gun injury rates across the country have dropped dramatically since 2001.

Some issues related to small arms and light weapons nevertheless still figure as significant risks with regard to national and human security in Tajikistan.

Opposition forces were not fully demobilized after the war, which makes it likely that some weapons stockpiles remain under the control of opposition commanders. The recent arrest of a former government commander indicates that some commanders on the government side also have their own private or semi-private weapons assets.

Civilians in Afghan border areas and in a few villages in former opposition areas feel insecure, in part due to the presence and use of small arms and light weapons.

Afghanistan continues to figure as a potential major source of weapons supplies, should demand for weapons re-emerge in Tajikistan. During the civil war, the opposition procured most of its weapons in Afghanistan. At present, however, only a very limited amount of weapons used for protection of drug traffickers transit the Afghan–Tajik border. There are regular skirmishes between border guards and drug traffickers in the border areas.

The drugs business has so far produced relatively little gun violence inside the territory of Tajikistan. It is uncertain, however, how long this will last. The calmness of the present situation could easily be altered if elements within the government or members of the international community initiate a crackdown on the key organizers of Tajikistan’s drug trade. Alternative future scenarios could be saturation in the European and Russian Federation drug markets or reduction in supplies from Afghanistan. Either of these could enhance compe-

tition and lead to an increase in the use of violence between competing drug exporters in Tajikistan.

Inspections by international experts have revealed inadequacies in safety and storage practices at government weapons stockpiles. These could lead to leakage or accidents at storage sites. There are signs, however, that corrupt practices by individuals in the police force pose an equally significant challenge with regard to stockpile management and leakage.

The degree of risk that the issues above represent is highly contingent on political developments in Tajikistan. This report does not aim to predict the political future of that country. However, it did find much war weariness among the population and significantly reduced power and influence for former government and opposition commanders. This makes a return to the scenarios of 1992–97 unlikely. Table 1 reflects the report’s assessment of risk factors in Tajikistan at the moment.

While the focus of this report is on small arms and light weapons in Tajikistan, it also highlights some broader issues.

Table 1  
**Risk factors in present-day Tajikistan**

Small arms and light weapons issue	Present threat	Future risks if political stability continues	Future risks if political stability deteriorates
Weapon possession by former government and opposition commanders	Medium	Low	High
Illegal weapons possession by civilians	Low	Low	High
Supply of weapons from Afghanistan	Low	Low	High
Leakage from and accidents in government weapons stores	High	High	High
Weapons use by criminals and organizers of the drugs business	Low	High	High

Results from 76 focus groups involving 682 people across Tajikistan show that civilians in Tajikistan feel considerably more secure now than in 1992–93, but security levels are still not as high as in Soviet times. In the focus groups, civilians indicated that commanders and weapons were no longer vital sources of power. Money, government positions, and relatives were perceived as more important.

Civilians in Tajikistan are frequently made to feel insecure due to irregular and harsh practices by the police. There is little trust in law enforcement. This affects weapons collection. Some civilians do not hand in weapons because they lack confidence that local police officers will grant them the legal privileges (i.e. no charges of illegal weapon possession) specified in the presidential decrees on weapons collection and amnesties.

Tajik law enforcement continues to operate in much the same way as in Soviet times. Some citizens are still afraid of being ‘informed’ on. Unreformed institutions such as the Ministry of Security (the secret police) (MB) and Ministry of Internal Affairs (the national police force) (MVD) have on the one hand helped the Tajik government to establish the necessary level of law and order for small arms and light weapons to be successfully collected. As such, Tajikistan’s current ability to deal with small arms and light weapons proliferation has proved to be significantly better than in neighbouring countries such as Afghanistan. On the other hand, elements in these law enforcement institutions continue to worsen the human security of many Tajik citizens, so that police practices often constitute a greater worry for civilians than proliferation and use of small arms and light weapons. In light of this significant threat to the human security of Tajikistan’s population, reform of law enforcement seems urgent.

The report indicates that the immediate post-conflict challenges such as disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration are not the most pressing issues in Tajikistan today. Instead, long-term developmental challenges related to governance, human rights, and poverty appear to be increasing in relative significance. Moreover, potential criminalization of the Tajik state and society, as a result of large-scale drug transit through Tajikistan, could not only increase the use of small arms and light weapons in the future, but also seriously affect economic and political developments.

This report lists a number of specific recommendations related to weapons management for the Tajik government and the international community to consider. The most pressing of these recommendations is a call for security sector reform. Initiatives designed to enhance weapons control in Tajikistan must be accompanied by efforts to enhance transparency, accountability, and control in Tajikistan's law enforcement agencies. Failure to reform will undermine any technical assistance initiative in the area of small arms and light weapons. 📄

# Introduction

This report assesses to what degree small arms and light weapons are a threat to stability and human security in Tajikistan. The proliferation of small arms and light weapons has been identified as a security challenge in Central Asia as a whole. It is widely believed that the problem is at its most serious in Tajikistan, as a result of the loss of control over weapons stocks at the beginning of the country's civil war (1992), as the belligerents sought weapons from outside the country to sustain their military efforts, and as some regional states supplied various factions in the war. Although there was substantial collection of weapons during and after the war, concerns remain that there may be considerable numbers of weapons outside the control of the state.

The issue is of importance for human security in Tajikistan for at least three reasons. Firstly, as elsewhere, guns in civilian hands if misused are a potentially serious threat to the security of individual human beings. Secondly, there remains some potential for renewed conflict in Tajikistan, although this appears to be diminishing. The presence of weapons may contribute to that potential by aggravating intergroup perceptions of threat. High levels of perceived threat encourage the recourse to violence in the event of political crisis. In addition, if conflict does recur, the presence of large numbers of small arms outside state control is likely to increase the number of casualties both among the parties involved in the conflict and in the civilian population as a whole.

Thirdly, the economic development of the country is handicapped to a degree by very low levels of foreign investment. Although this shortfall to some extent reflects economic factors (e.g. market size and infrastructural deficiencies) and politico-legal impediments (corruption, state weakness), it may also be a product of the widespread perception that Tajikistan, more than other states of the region, is unstable and awash with weapons. Mitigating such concerns is crucial as Tajikistan makes its transition from post-conflict recovery to sustainable development.

Estimates of the dimensions and seriousness of the small arms problem in Tajikistan vary widely. Some informed observers in the country maintain that

the problem either does not exist or is insignificant. Others characterize it as a profoundly serious challenge for the Government of Tajikistan and its international partners. Seven years have passed since the conclusion of the peace agreement in Tajikistan. In that time, there has been no substantial, in-depth examination of the small arms problem in the country. This study seeks to fill this gap.

## Structure of the report

The report is divided into two sections. Section I is designed to give the reader a short overview of the main challenges posed by small arms and light weapons in Tajikistan at present, while section II presents important in-depth research findings.

Section I starts by discussing illegal private weapons stockpiles held at present by former commanders, followed by an assessment of the degree of illegal civilian possession in Tajikistan and the extent and impact of government collection efforts. The section then turns to an examination of community perceptions of security in Tajikistan and the civilian demand for weapons, which is followed by a discussion of present-day weapons use in Tajikistan. It then assesses the control of Tajikistan's government storage facilities and the degree to which leakage from these facilities is a problem. Finally, the challenges posed by Tajikistan's border with Afghanistan are examined. The section ends by listing recommendations to Tajikistan's government and the international community on steps needed to tackle the small arms and light weapons challenges facing Tajikistan.

Section II provides the reader with a more comprehensive and detailed insight into past and present weapons threats in Tajikistan. The section discusses small arms and light weapons in relation to future prospects for national and regional stability and presents important new research findings related to supplies, distribution, and collection of arms in Tajikistan for the period 1991–2004. It discusses the evolution of the role played by former government and opposition commanders in Tajikistan's military and political affairs. Development practitioners and others may also find useful information in the extensive overviews of Tajikistan's and the international community's responses to the

small arms and light weapons challenge, government weapons storage procedures, and Tajikistan's legal framework for weapons control. The section concludes with a list of the local researchers who assisted the authors of this report in their research.

## Methodology in the study of small arms and light weapons in Tajikistan

The study of small arms in Tajikistan, as well as elsewhere in Central Asia, is a difficult business. One problem is access to relevant data. Government agencies and Russian Federation military formations are often reluctant to provide data on force size, weapons in their possession, leakage (illegal sale, loss) of these weapons, and gun-related crime and injury.<sup>1</sup> Despite repeated requests to the government and promises that requested data would be provided, the researchers had only partial success in obtaining precise data in these areas. Detailed information on weapons collection is also a sensitive matter. Civilians who may have retained weapons illegally are generally reluctant to admit this, which makes it difficult to assess the degree of illegal possession through methods such as household surveys or interviews.

When official data is obtained, its significance is unclear. Figures may reflect incomplete data collection, while data collection methodologies may vary among agencies. Not all incidents are reported to responsible agencies, leading to under-reporting in official figures. Definitions of variables and methods of data collection may change over time. In addition, data may be distorted for political purposes: government agencies may have an incentive to underplay issues related to potential political instability, or, if they are seeking assistance in addressing a particular problem, may overstate the dimensions of that problem.

Beyond issues of confidence in the data, there are deeper questions of knowledge. It appears, for example, that there was no complete inventory of weapons in opposition hands (and in the hands of community self-defence groups) during the civil war. If that is so, then it is very difficult to assess the effectiveness of the post-civil war arms collection programme and the numbers of opposition weapons that may still be outside government control. It remains unclear whether the Government of Tajikistan in fact knows exactly how many

weapons and what types are in its possession.<sup>2</sup> By definition, no complete dataset could exist on weapons in illegal possession. And how usable these weapons are depends on how they are stored.<sup>3</sup> It is, in other words, difficult to collect hard and reliable 'facts' on weapons issues in Tajikistan. In particular, comprehensive indicators or proxy indicators on illegal weapons possession were not available to researchers, while other related issues such as bribe taking and smuggling, due to their clandestine nature, could not be assessed directly.

Nevertheless, the authors of this report believe that, through extensive fieldwork and application of a range of different methods, they have managed to obtain insight on the main trends with regard to small arms and light weapons issues in Tajikistan. Three international researchers worked in Tajikistan for varying lengths of time over the course of four months in 2004 in cooperation with over 24 researchers from the country itself. Their joint efforts included careful and sustained attempts at securing access to relevant bodies of official data, though they only succeeded partially in obtaining the datasets they needed. Official sources were supplemented by a press review focusing on weapons-related information. Information from the archives of *Asia Plus* news bulletins from 1997 to 2004 has been carefully assessed alongside a review of the *Crime Info* news archives from the same period.

The international researchers travelled extensively across Tajikistan and conducted over 160 interviews with government officials and health sector personnel, representatives of NGOs, journalists, diplomats, and personnel of intergovernmental organizations. Local researchers from the Academy of Sciences research group AFKOR conducted 60 semi-structured, anonymous interviews with former fighters and other people with particular insights on small arms and light weapons such as mullahs and mid-ranking personnel in collective farms. Individuals with access to particular target groups were commissioned to seek their opinion on difficult issues. These included conversations with people in positions of power in former opposition areas, privately armed businesspeople, and people with access to the weapons black market. Another set of researchers provided insights on the security situation facing ordinary civilians and how small arms and light weapons affect their lives by conducting 76 focus group discussions throughout Tajikistan. The focus groups were semi-structured to allow greater comparability among different regions. Quantifiable

information from all focus groups was tabulated, providing a dataset on the opinions of 682 Tajik citizens.

As a result of the extensive involvement of local specialists in the research, there is now a pool of researchers and NGO members across Tajikistan who possess sophisticated expertise on a range of small arms and light weapons issues. The authors encourage any project interventions in the future to draw on this local capacity. A list of local researchers and experts is provided at the end of this report. 📄

## Section I

### The small arms and light weapons problem in present-day Tajikistan

The problem of small arms and light weapons in Tajikistan has five key aspects, which to varying degrees challenge the security of citizens and the state structure:

- private illegal stockpiles of former government and opposition commanders;
- illegal civilian possession;
- the safekeeping of weapons in government storage facilities and leakage from these;
- the use of weapons by criminals and drug traders; and
- the potential future supply of weapons from Afghanistan.

This report will argue that while legal civilian possession in most areas is low, private stockpiles held by former commanders and leakages from government storage facilities remain a threat to political stability. Unlike the situation during the civil war, at present there is no significant flow of weapons across the border from Afghanistan. However, Afghanistan remains a potential source of weapons should the political situation in Tajikistan deteriorate.

More importantly, the Afghan border has become a scene of gun violence, with regular skirmishes between border guards and armed drug traffickers. Civilians living in border areas consequently feel insecure and attribute this to weapons use by drug traffickers. Likewise, inhabitants in individual villages in former opposition areas also came to feel increasingly insecure in 2004 following the standoff between the government and a handful of former opposition commanders. Aside from these two categories of civilians, however, small arms and light weapons are not a major source of human insecurity for the citizens of Tajikistan. As we shall see below, gun injuries and gun death rates are low in Tajikistan, which is an indicator that weapons are not widely used. This clearly signifies a remarkable improvement from 1997.

How can this be explained? In the following discussion it will be argued that civilian gun possession remained relatively low during the war in most areas. Government collection campaigns have been extensive and reasonably successful and, perhaps most importantly, ordinary civilians remain fearful of the MVD and the repercussions of being caught with an unlicensed gun. It is also noted that large-scale drug traders within Tajikistan have faced limited government pressure and they seldom engage in 'turf wars' with each other. This reduces demand for and use of weapons. In addition, there are allegations that people who are in need of protection, including those involved in criminal activities, can find ways to legalize their protection.

### Small arms and light weapons and the civil war

While the emphasis of this report is on what threats small arms and light weapons pose to Tajik society at present, some reference must necessarily be made to the civil war. Like the other union republics in the Soviet Union, Tajikistan had extremely strict gun controls before independence. A limited number of legally possessed and registered hunting weapons were by and large the only weapons in civilian hands before 1991. With the outbreak of civil war in 1992, Tajik society became saturated with weapons from both domestic and external sources. In order to understand the pattern of illegal weapon possession in Tajikistan today and the threat this might pose to future stability, it is necessary therefore to understand who were the key weapons holders during the war, how they acquired their weapons, and in what quantities.

Briefly, the collapse of Soviet control over the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) triggered intense debate on the future political direction of the country, the composition of leadership, and control over economic resources. As demonstrations flared in Dushanbe from 1991 onwards, two separate alliances emerged. One stressed democratic reforms and Islamic renewal. The other emphasized political continuity and secularism. Both alliances drew support from different areas of Tajikistan, and this gave the conflict a regional as well as political and ideological character. Elite tensions merged with grass-roots friction stemming from poverty, shortages, and long-simmering conflicts in communities in Khatlon, which had received large groups of peasants from



mountainous areas (such as the Rasht and Tavildara valleys) who had been ordered to resettle in cotton producing areas in the 1950s and 1960s (Akiner, 1999). Growing tension on elite and grass-roots levels soon provoked competitive armament and then open conflict. The war involved massive violence and destruction of property, particularly in Khatlon province, as well as a protracted insurgency in the Rasht valley. In its first years, the conflict was fought largely by regionally based militias. Some (Kulyabi and ethnic Uzbeks from Khatlon) supported the government led by Imomali Rakhmonov that had emerged after the overthrow of a coalition Government of National Reconciliation in late 1991. Others (from the Rasht valley and from resettled communities in Khatlon) supported the Islamic and democratic opposition groups. These latter groups were consolidated into the United Tajik Opposition (UTO) in 1993 at a meeting in Taloqan, Afghanistan.

Protracted negotiations produced a political settlement in June 1997. The settlement included an agreement on power sharing that allowed substantial opposition participation in the central government and regional authorities. The new power structure effectively constituted an agreed redistribution of the pie amongst the political elite. The military component of the agreement called for the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of combatants. Provision was made for the integration of many UTO combatants into the armed forces, police, and border forces of the government. Although implementation of the agreement took significantly longer than was envisaged, it was essentially complete by 1999. As will be seen below, there is significant dispute over the effectiveness of the disarmament provisions of the agreement and many of the opposition fighters have since been removed from the jobs or government positions they had obtained by 1999.

Some commanders challenged the settlement in political–military terms. Others turned to organized criminal activity. The government (with help from former opposition forces) expended considerable effort in 1997–2000 to suppress these groups and confiscate their weapons. This process was largely concluded by July 2001 with the suppression of a group led by Rahmon Sanginov (‘Hitler’) and Manur Makalov in the outskirts of Dushanbe. The government then prohibited open carrying of weapons by defence, law enforcement, and security personnel, as well as by civilians in urban areas (see Box 6).

## **Private illegal stockpiles of former commanders**

### *The emergence of commanders and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons*

This section assesses to what extent the former commanders on the government and opposition sides arranged for their men to disarm and to what degree weapons were handed over and included in government controlled weapons stockpiles. It argues that the political strength of former commanders has been greatly reduced in recent years. However, the section also finds that significant weapons stockpiles are still likely to be in the hands of former commanders, which poses some threats to the stability of Tajikistan.

As political disputes escalated into armed confrontation in Dushanbe and Khatlon in 1992, factions of armed men were formed on both sides of the dispute. Local community leaders, police officers, or former army servicemen became leaders of formations based on kinship, community, or workplace ties. Some of the leaders who emerged on both sides had previously operated in the Tajik shadow economy, had criminal records, or had been part of the distinct milieu associated with combat sports in Dushanbe and Kofarnihon (Akiner, 1999). The leaders organized the acquisition of weapons and their distribution to their groups (section II outlines how fighters were mobilized and how guns were distributed). Leaders supporting the former Communist Party first secretary Rakhmon Nabiev obtained equipment from national law enforcement structures and also received weapons supplies from countries such as Uzbekistan and the Russian Federation. Commanders from both sides, but particularly from the opposition, encouraged (sometimes pressured) community members to hand over goods and valuables (carpets, livestock, etc.) and then traded these goods for weapons in Afghanistan. A significant number of the 160 people interviewed for this report also stated that many government and opposition commanders, as well as ordinary civilians, bought guns informally from officers in the 201<sup>st</sup> Gatchina Twice Red Banner Motor Rifle Division (201<sup>st</sup> MRD), a Soviet Army unit that was later transformed into a Russian Federation Army division and stationed in Tajikistan. A full overview of the sources, distribution, and quantity of weapons during the war is listed in section II of this report.

Many former opposition commanders were integrated into government structures after the peace agreement. Most former government commanders

already held official positions in law enforcement or the military by 1997. One leading political figure, who previously served in the law enforcement structures in Tajikistan, asserted in an interview for this report that there had been approximately 60 key commanders on each side. Between 50 and 60 of the government commanders managed to successfully retain or obtain influential government positions or succeed in business.<sup>5</sup> Of the 60 opposition commanders, however, only a minority eventually managed to hold on to their positions and influence: as few as 15–20 remained in 2004 in good government or private sector positions.<sup>5</sup> The figures may not be exact, but it seems clear that government commanders have been better able to retain powerful positions than opposition commanders. Indeed, the majority of the former opposition commanders have been killed or imprisoned, or have left the country.

The remaining commanders, whether from the government or opposition, are relevant in the context of a discussion of the current small arms and light weapons situation in Tajikistan. It is particularly important to establish how many weapons the commanders had and whether they handed them in. If they still have weapons, does this mean that they pose a threat to political stability in Tajikistan? The question of their impact on political stability is relevant for both government and opposition commanders, since commanders from both groups have in previous years instigated destabilizing actions.<sup>6</sup>

### *Weapon possession by opposition commanders*

In order to establish how many weapons the opposition commanders may have at present, it first needs to be determined how many weapons they controlled during the civil war. During the war, these commanders were in charge of groups of fighters organized into small units, usually ranging from 5 to 20 members.<sup>7</sup> Interviews suggest that after 1993 (upon returning from training in Afghanistan) there was no shortage of weapons for these groups. Successful raids against government troops supplemented the weapons stockpiles of the opposition forces.<sup>8</sup> The best-organized groups would have at least one AK-47 per fighter and in most cases one additional pistol per fighter. USSR-produced AK-47s from the 1970s and 1980s and Makarov pistols were the most common types of weapons used. While Tajik citizens formed the majority, some contract soldiers from Uzbekistan, Chechnya, the Russian Federation,

Pakistan, and the Middle East also served in the opposition forces.<sup>9</sup> There was an abundance of weapons, but ammunition was often in short supply.<sup>10</sup>

After the peace agreement, the commanders of the armed units became focal points in the disarmament process. There are strong indications that many commanders collected weapons from their men but only handed over a small percentage of these weapons to the National Reconciliation Commission (NRC), which was in charge of the disarmament process. By 1998, only 2,119 weapons had been handed in (Burkhard, 2000). This is a low figure considering that there were over 6,000 combatants officially registered by that time.<sup>11</sup> Some arms are likely to have been handed over after 1998, but a well-placed former officer in the MB also asserted in an interview for this report that only 2,500 arms in total had been handed in as part of the NRC-facilitated disarmament process.<sup>12</sup> Taking 2,500 weapons as the baseline, and if 6,000 combatants and 1–2 weapons per opposition fighter are the correct figures, that would mean that only 18–36 per cent of the opposition forces' weapons were handed in. In other words, between 3,500 and 9,500 weapons may remain in the hands of former fighters and opposition commanders. It is impossible to say for certain how many of these illegal weapons remain with former fighters and how many are held in the former commanders' stockpiles. However, most of the low-level fighters that were surveyed in semi-structured interviews (over 50 across Tajikistan) stressed that they had handed in their weapons to their immediate commanders. This suggests that a large share of the 3,500–9,500 weapons are stored in commanders' private caches in Tajikistan (some may also be located in Afghanistan).

### *Weapon possession by government commanders*

During the civil war, government commanders emerged and operated in much the same way as the UTO commanders on the opposition side. The government side was more a group of militias than a regular army. The government forces underwent some restructuring in 1993–94 and were nominally transformed into a national army structure.<sup>13</sup> This may have improved the overall organization of these forces, including the control and record keeping of government weapons stockpiles.<sup>14</sup> The government commanders continued, however, to play a dominant role and it is not clear whether there were properly delineated and coherent lines of authority and control among them.

The government forces were well equipped. Each fighter had 1–2 personal weapons.<sup>15</sup> Like opposition fighters, pro-government fighters interviewed for this report also stressed that they handed in weapons to their immediate commanders, some as early as 1993. These commanders were nominally part of the Tajik army or law enforcement structure. It is likely, therefore, that the guns were registered as part of government stockpiles. Nevertheless, the Mirzoev case (see section II) highlights the extent to which presumed government storage facilities may in fact in some cases be under the personal control of former government commanders.

### *Small arms and light weapons possession by former commanders as a source of political instability?*

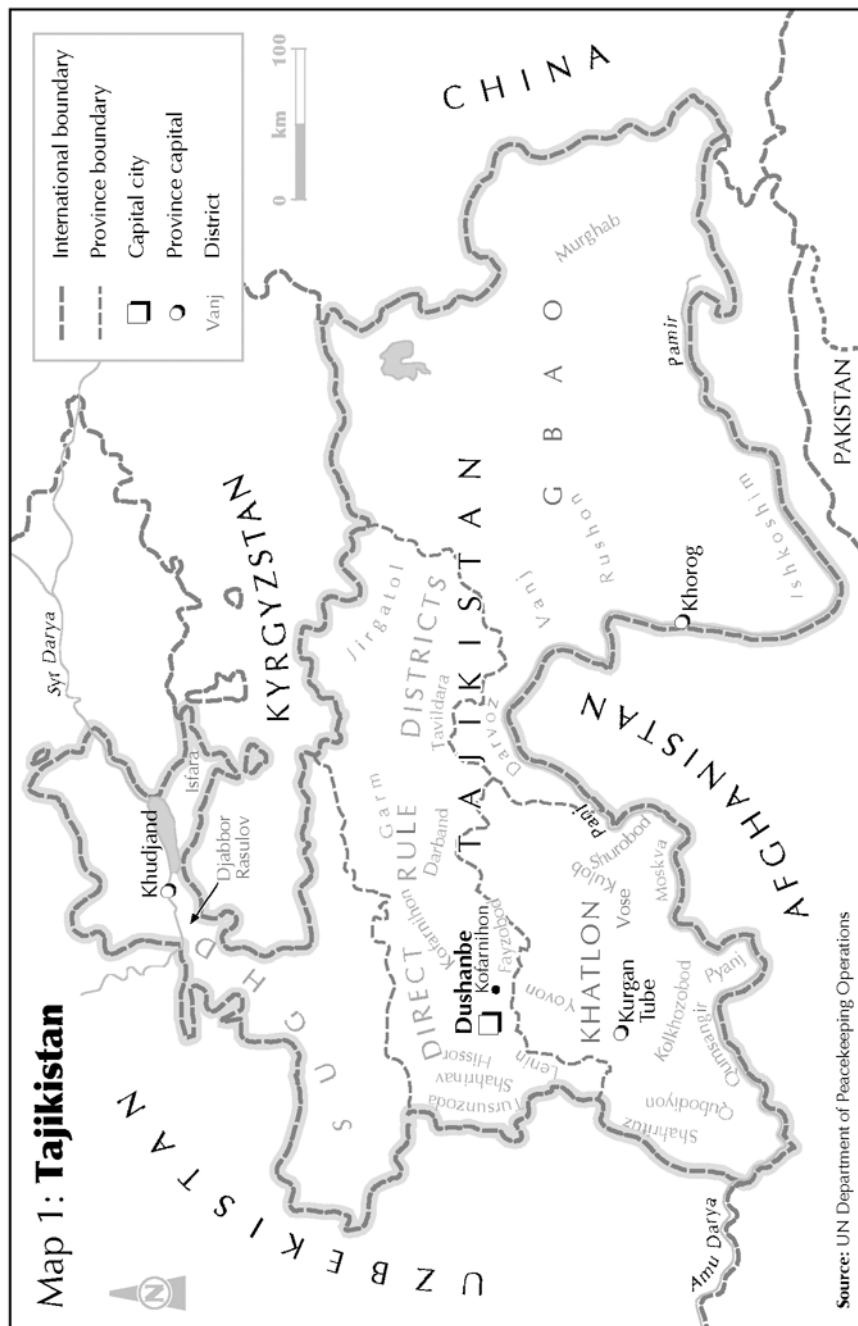
It is evident that many opposition commanders have by and large ceased to play important political roles and do not figure as military threats to the present political arrangements. A handful of former opposition commanders nevertheless retain a strong position in Tajik politics and society. These include the former military leader of the UTO, now minister of emergency situations, Mirzo Zioyev; Shoh Iskandarov (who holds a central position in the Committee for the Protection of State Borders of the Republic of Tajikistan or KOGG); and the recently detained Makhmadruzi Iskandarov, the head of the Democratic Party.<sup>16</sup> Zioyev's position is bolstered by the fact that he heads a ministry that by law is entitled to stock and use weapons. In our interview with him, Zioyev confirmed that many of his men had been integrated into the Ministry of Emergency Situations (as well as other units such as KOGG) and that the weapons his men had brought with them were now officially registered and stored in ministry stockpiles.<sup>17</sup> Some former fighters and informed observers in the Rasht area claimed that Zioyev had between 1,000 and 2,000 men under his command in 1997, making him by far the most powerful of the military opposition leaders.<sup>18</sup> However, the Ministry of Emergency Situations is constantly receiving new conscripts from the national army draft, and the ratio of former fighters in relation to all employees seems to be dropping gradually.<sup>19</sup> KOGG, which originally held many former opposition fighters, has a similar turnover of personnel. Iskandarov previously headed a KOGG unit in Jirgatal, which was composed of many of his men from the civil war. He was, however, recently relocated to

the Dushanbe headquarters of KOGG and therefore no longer has any direct control over this unit.

As for the government commanders, President Rakhmonov's strategies regarding these individuals certainly seem to indicate unease and uncertainty as to whether they might challenge him militarily and politically. One influential former commander has been assigned to serve as defence attaché in China (Saidsho Shamolov), while others, such as Yakub Salimov and Kurbon Cholov, have been imprisoned for criminal acts committed during and after the civil war. The former commanders, given their close links to or the fact that they are embedded in national law enforcement or army structures, could easily access arms. Some may possess semi-private arms stockpiles of the kind Mirzoev was arrested for (see section II).<sup>20</sup>

It follows from this analysis that both opposition commanders (due to insufficient demobilization) and government commanders (due to access to official and semi-private weapons stockpiles) are likely to maintain considerable small arms and light weapons assets. However, neither the government nor opposition commanders are in control of an apparatus that could quickly mobilize fighters to match their weapons assets. Judging from the interviews with former fighters, and given the high labour migration rates of able-bodied men in the former opposition areas, it seems certain that the military formations controlled by the former opposition commanders have been dissolved (Olimova and Bosc, 2003). Few commanders would be able to repeat the mass mobilization of fighters that occurred in opposition areas in 1992 and at present few commanders seem to have more than 10–50 loyal men around them who might feel duty bound to take up arms.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, it is highly uncertain whether government commanders would be able to mobilize large groups of fighters to challenge the Rakhmonov leadership. In focus groups, ordinary civilians from pro-government areas expressed dissatisfaction with the commanders, while the former government fighters surveyed conveyed deep resentment towards the behaviour of their commanders after 1997. The accusation that the commanders have only thought of themselves is frequently encountered.<sup>22</sup> Other studies indicate a deep feeling of war weariness in the general population.<sup>23</sup>

A review of the weekly news briefings from *Asia Plus*, *Crime Info*, and UN documents highlights the decline in violence associated with former civil war



commanders. The total number of reported incidents was 29 and annual figures fell from seven in 1998 and 1999 to zero in 2004.<sup>24</sup> The press and document survey may indicate only general trends in frequency and location of acts of violence, since statistics from the law enforcement agencies were not available to the researchers of this report. Reported acts of violence by the commanders include killings, kidnappings, hostage taking, and the use of explosives. The highest numbers of these incidents were reported from Dushanbe and Kofarnihon. As Table 2 shows, incidents were reported in only 13 of Tajikistan's 53 districts. Acts of violence perpetrated by former civil war commanders appear in the survey much less frequently than other armed clashes defined as initiated by criminal groupings (see below), of which there were as many as 89 in 2000 and never fewer than 14 in 2004 (January–31 October 2004).

Table 2  
**Areas where acts of violence were committed by former civil war commanders, 1998–31 October 2004**

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	Total
Darband			2	1				3
Darvoz		1						1
Dushanbe	2		1	2	1			6
Fayzobod		1						1
Garm		1	1		1			3
Kofarnihon	1	2	1	1				5
Lenin		1		1				2
Pyanj	1							1
Kurgan Tube	1							1
Khudjand	1					1		2
Tavildara				1				1
Tursunzoda	1							1
Vose			1					1
Yovon		1						1
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>29</b>

To conclude, the arrests in summer 2004 of former commanders and President Rakhmonov's dismissal and reshuffling of former government and opposition commanders over the past year increased levels of uncertainty about the security situation in Tajikistan.<sup>25</sup> The most striking feature of these arrests, nevertheless, was the lack of violence and protest and the absence of major groups of fighters mobilizing to support their former leaders. It is important to stress that the coup attempt by former government commander Makhmud Khudoiberdiev in 1997–98 remains the only serious and large-scale attempt to challenge the new political order. Section II outlines these events. Suffice to note here is that Khudoiberdiev had one of the most organized and well-equipped fighting groups.<sup>26</sup> His campaign was, nevertheless, quickly crushed by forces loyal to the government.

The remaining former government and opposition commanders have at present a much-reduced pool from which to draw fighters in comparison to Khudoiberdiev in 1997, and are therefore unable fundamentally to challenge the Rakhmonov leadership. The former commanders are left with the option of threatening, or actually initiating, violent actions such as bombings, hostage takings, or minor armed attacks in order to destabilize the situation, but at present it is hard to envisage political scenarios where such actions would be rational.

## Illegal civilian possession

Civil wars produce an influx of weapons to conflict zones and tend to saturate societies with weapons. This section assesses the magnitude of illegal possession among ordinary Tajik citizens and whether this poses a challenge for Tajik society.

Few civilians appear to possess weapons in Tajikistan and ordinary civilians seldom use illegal guns. There are indications, however, from interviews and focus groups that the rates of gun possession are likely to be higher in former opposition areas such as Rasht and Gorno Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO).

### *Number of unregistered weapons in civilian hands*

This report estimates that there are between 23,000 and 67,000 firearms among the Tajik population (this includes the 3,500–9,500 weapons possibly still in

the hands of former opposition commanders and fighters; see above). There are between 0.4 and 1.1 firearms per 100 people. The majority of them, 57–86 per cent, are unregistered, if we accept the MVD's figure of around 10,000 legally registered hunting rifles.<sup>27</sup> The rate of total civilian possession is very low compared to most countries, but seems to be roughly comparable to gun ownership rates in Japan, which has a rate of 0.6 per 100. However, unlike Japan, a larger proportion of Tajikistan's arms are unregistered and thus illegal, whereas in Japan the majority of guns are registered. Section II of this report provides a full outline of how this estimate for Tajikistan was arrived at.

### *Explanations for the low rates of illegal civilian possession*

Why are Tajik communities not flooded with weapons at present? The explanation is threefold: firstly, both government and opposition forces limited civilian possession (as had been the case in Soviet times) during the civil war. Secondly, the government has undertaken extensive collection campaigns. Thirdly, the repercussions at present for an ordinary civilian caught with an unlicensed gun are severe.

The outbreak of widespread fighting in the Dushanbe area and Khatlon in the summer and autumn of 1992, and then later in the areas of Rasht and Tavildara, triggered demand from ordinary civilians for arms for self-protection. Many civilians suffered in the precarious security situation and this would have given many a strong incentive to acquire weapons.<sup>28</sup> However, some aspects of the political and security situation in Tajikistan also worked to reduce the demand for guns. In the Khatlon area, many of the former fighters interviewed claimed that there were insufficient arms available in 1992 to meet fully the demand for weapons by fighting groups and civilians. Consequently, only a small portion of ordinary civilians acquired weapons in this period. Many of the civilians who did acquire guns at that time are likely to have belonged to communities in Khatlon perceived as being part of opposition forces. These people took their guns with them when fleeing to Afghanistan.

In late 1992 and early 1993, government forces established full control over Khatlon and the Dushanbe area and the fighting moved from Khatlon to the Rasht and Tavildara valleys. In Tavildara and Rasht, with the exception at times of the eastern villages and the district centre in Tavildara district, government

forces established control of most of the more densely populated and low-lying areas from 1993 onwards. The opposition fighters operated in the mountains. Both government and opposition forces discouraged gun possession by civilians. When areas fell under government control, Tajikistan's restrictive gun laws, which prescribe long prison sentences for illegal gun possession, were put back into force. Likewise, opposition forces prohibited gun possession by civilians who did not have links to the opposition movement in the areas they controlled. Gun possessors were seen as potential enemies and risked being killed.<sup>29</sup> These restrictive gun regimes discouraged civilian gun possession and give grounds to expect that proliferation of weapons among civilians in Tajikistan was at a low level during the civil war. Nevertheless, informed observers noted in interviews that in some of the former opposition areas armed clashes continued up to 1997 and beyond. Even if there were a strict weapons regime in force in these areas, it is likely that some civilians kept weapons, because of profound security threats.<sup>30</sup> A comparison of results from focus groups across Tajikistan also points to the likelihood of higher possession rates for the Rasht valley, Tavildara, and GBAO.

### *Government collection efforts*

The small arms and light weapons situation in Tajikistan is different from that in neighbouring countries in the region such as Afghanistan and Pakistan for two important reasons. Firstly, before the start of the war, Tajikistan (like any area of the former Soviet Union) had exceptionally low civil possession rates. Moreover, much of the law enforcement apparatus and practices from Soviet times remained intact after independence in 1991 or were re-established on a local level after the end of the civil war. This enabled the Tajik government to enforce the goal of reducing illegal weapons proliferation to a much larger degree than neighbouring states in the region.

The first government weapons collection efforts came with the transformation of the government militias into national army units in 1993. The collection initiative and the overarching legal framework were later expanded and codified in the 2 December 1994 presidential decree *On the Voluntary Handing in and Confiscation of Firearms, Ammunition and Military Equipment from the Population of Tajikistan* (Republic of Tajikistan, 1994). The decree established a Republican

Commission to oversee and coordinate gun collection.<sup>31</sup> All branches of law enforcement have worked to fulfil the decree, but it is the MVD that has done the bulk of the weapons collection.<sup>32</sup>

The government collected 24,000 guns between 1994 and 2004. This included over 8,000 automatic weapons (Kalashnikov assault rifles and sub-machine guns), approximately 2,500 pistols, over 3,500 rifles, and over 1,000 smooth-bore and other hunting rifles.<sup>33</sup> Many of the guns collected were handed over voluntarily, though at least 4,000 guns were confiscated and 5,000 discovered.<sup>34</sup> Based on figures released in 2000, approximately 40 per cent of all collected weapons come from Khatlon (*BBC Global Monitoring*, 2001). Since Khatlon was the scene of heavy fighting during the war, it is not surprising that this province has high collection rates. It is also the area where the first collection started. However, it is noticeable that other areas likely to have had high rates of unregistered guns in 1997, such as Rasht and GBAO, had relatively low collection rates, based on figures from 2000.

As for the situation at present, the majority of the former fighters interviewed thought that only very few civilians and former fighters possessed guns now. Most fighters interviewed stressed that it would be dangerous to keep a gun. Illegal gun possession may result in prison terms from six months to 12 years. The MVD and MB still encourage citizens to 'inform' on others.<sup>35</sup> Even a well-hidden gun could easily become a liability if it were reported to the police. Focus group participants in the Rasht valley listed 'informants' as one of the things they most feared.<sup>36</sup>

The local police structures seem to put a high priority on tackling illegal gun possession. Each head of department within each local MVD office has to report regularly on small arms collection to the provincial police station, which in turn sends a monthly report to the MVD in Dushanbe on the subject. Success in gun collection seems to be one important criterion for the career advancement of individual officers.<sup>37</sup> A number of informed observers also noted that the collection of guns by law enforcement agencies proceeds according to planned monthly and yearly targets for each MVD station. The limited number of monthly reports available to the authors of this report seem to confirm this by their remarkable consistency in number of arms collected per month per district. In a report, the ICG (2002) documents the government's reliance on

statistics and planned targets. The targets for solving crimes, for example, are very high (80–90 per cent), causing MVD officers, according to the ICG, to coerce confessions from suspects.<sup>38</sup>

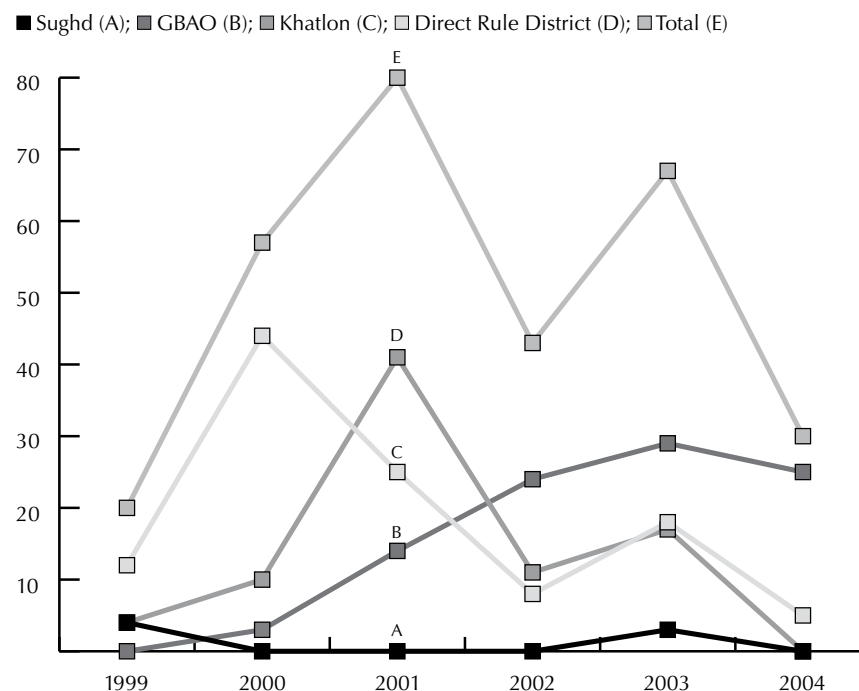
Some observers also claim that the pressure on local police stations to fulfil the presidential decree has spurred the creation of ‘false’ caches containing arms generated from official storages ‘lent out’ for the occasion of a ‘discovery’.<sup>39</sup> Such a discovery helps the local station reach its targets, while also advancing the career of the officers involved. To the extent that this is true, official collection statistics may not reflect the actual numbers seized or the general number of guns in the community. It would also raise serious questions about the account of weapons in official possession.

### Discoveries of arms caches

A review of newspaper sources showed that a total of 297 arms caches were reportedly uncovered between 1999 and 2004.<sup>40</sup> Discoveries peaked in 2001 with a total of 80 caches discovered and were high again in 2003 (67 caches), compared to 30 discoveries by the end of October in 2004, according to newspaper reports. The trend is similar across all regions. Interpretation of these trends has to remain speculative as the origin and purpose of weapons caches can suggest either leftovers from the civil war or present-day drug-related activities. Moreover, the boundaries between engagement in the civil war and the drug business may be blurred where former commanders have turned to the drug trade using their old caches for a new purpose.

In 2004, the highest number of weapon caches were discovered in GBAO, particularly in Khorog and Darvoz. In 2003, the majority of discoveries were in the district of Ishkoshim, which suggests a connection to the drug trade as Ishkoshim is a well-known border transit point for drugs. Overall, GBAO has seen an increase in numbers of discovered weapons caches over the years, and since 2002 more than 20 such caches have reportedly been discovered in the area and many have been found in conjunction with drugs stored in this area. It may also be because many groups of fighters were based in the safe areas of GBAO during the civil war and key weapon supply lines ran through the province at that time. There is not enough information on the types of weapons in the caches to draw certain conclusions as to whether some of the

Figure 1  
Reported discoveries of arms caches by province, 1999–31 October 2004



remaining civil war caches that are believed to remain in the this area have been diverted into the drug trade.

Over half of all caches contained grenade launchers and larger military weapons (see below).

In 2001, Khatlon province was the area with the highest number of discoveries, with more than 40 weapons caches, mainly in Shurobod, Kulob, Shahrituz, and Moskva. There have been fewer since and none up to 31 October 2004. The high numbers in the border region of Shahrituz (on the border with Uzbekistan) may reflect the fact that weapons were shipped from Uzbekistan to Tajikistan during the war and that Khudoiberdiev retreated through this region in 1997 and may have left weapons here as he did so. Shurobod and Moskva are regions thought to have had some of the highest levels of drug transit, and

Table 3

**Reported discoveries of arms caches in GBAO, 1999–31 October 2004**

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	Total
Darvoz	0	2	8	8	4	12	34
Vanj	0	0	0	3	2	0	5
Murghab	0	0	0	0	6	0	6
Rushon	0	0	0	0	3	0	3
Ishkoshim	0	0	2	5	11	1	19
Khorog	0	1	4	8	3	12	28
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>95</b>

weapons caches may have affiliations to the drug shipments. Lower levels of arms cache discoveries in the Khatlon–Afghan border area compared to the border in GBAO could suggest lower arms availability due to more systematic collection efforts in the past. It may also suggest a lower demand of arms among drug traffickers than in GBAO, or less effective law enforcement.

Table 4

**Reported discoveries of arms caches in Khatlon, 1999–31 October 2004**

District	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	Total
Shahrituz	0	7	8	1	4	0	20
Qubodiyon	0	0	2	0	1	0	3
Yovon	2	0	1	0	0	0	3
Qumsangir	0	0	0	3	3	0	6
Kolkhozobod	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
Vose	0	0	1	0	1	0	2
Kulob	0	0	9	3	0	0	12
Pyanj	0	1	2	1	1	0	5
Moskva	2	1	8	0	4	0	15
Shurobod	0	1	10	3	1	0	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>83</b>

Table 5

**Reported discoveries of arms caches in the Direct Rule Districts, 1999–31 October 2004**

District	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	Total
Tursunzoda	3	8	3	2	3	1	20
Shahrinav	0	7	0	0	0	0	7
Hissor	0	9	13	0	0	0	22
Jirgatal	0	0	4	0	3	0	7
Lenin	2	11	0	0	5	0	18
Tavildara	0	0	0	4	0	0	4
Dushanbe	7	9	5	2	7	4	34
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>112</b>

The Direct Rule Districts saw the highest number of reported discoveries of arms caches in 2000 and numbers have fallen since, with the exception of 2003, which saw an increase to 18 arms caches. The highest numbers of caches were discovered in Dushanbe, Hissor, Tursunzoda, and Lenin. Both the location and time frame suggest that these figures reflect post-conflict weapons collection measures. The reported number of arms caches discovered in the former key opposition areas in and near the Garm valley, Jirgatal, and Tavildara remains surprisingly limited and has not shown any particular increase over time. This suggests that relatively high quantities of civil war weapons probably remain in this area.

Few arms caches have been discovered in Sughd province, which is not surprising as there was little fighting during the civil war in this area. A limited

Table 6

**Reported discoveries of arms caches in Sughd, 1999–31 October 2004**

District	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	Total
Djabbor Rasulov	0	0	0	0	3	0	3
Isfara	4	0	0	0	0	0	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>



number were found in Isfara in 1999 and Djabbor Rasulov in 2003. The largest proportion were handguns, which suggests a link to ordinary criminals.

Assault rifles were the most common content of arms caches until 2003. This would suggest that many of the stocked weapons had previously been used in the civil war. Caches containing larger military weapons or grenade launchers grew in proportion, though not so much in numbers, mainly because of discoveries of arms caches of this type in GBAO.<sup>41</sup> It remains unclear whether these are also leftovers of the civil war that are now being utilized by drug traffickers. The proportion of caches of hunting guns fell, but remains significant, suggesting either that hunters continue to fear sanctions from law enforcement officers and therefore keep hunting guns away from their home or that some of these may be false caches as hunting rifles may be easier to obtain for such purposes than military weapons.

Figure 2  
**Content of reported discovered arms caches, 1999–31 October 2004**

■ Handguns; ■ Long guns; ■ Assault rifles; □ Grenade launchers; ■ Larger military weapons; ■ Various weapon types

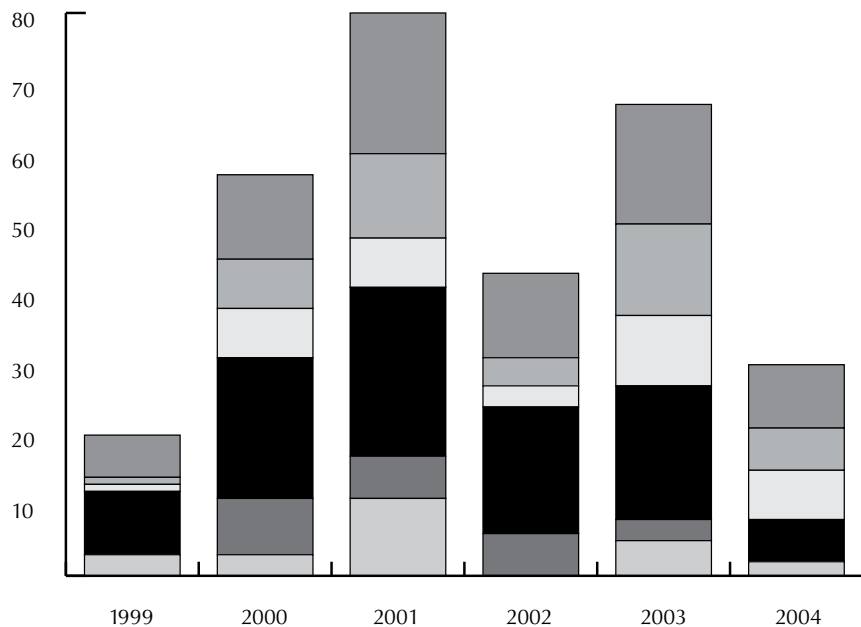


Figure 3  
**Content of reported discovered arms caches in GBAO, 1999–31 October 2004**

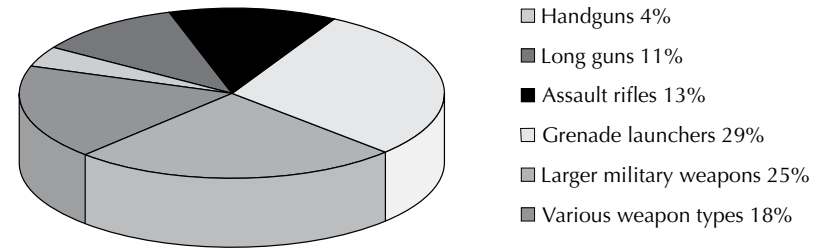


Figure 4  
**Content of reported discovered arms caches in Khatlon, 1999–31 October 2004**

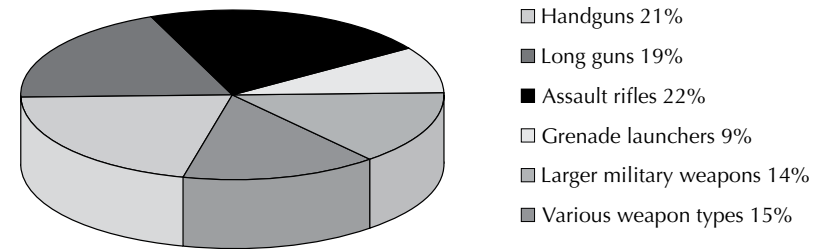


Figure 5  
**Content of reported discovered arms caches in the Direct Rule Districts, 1999–31 October 2004**

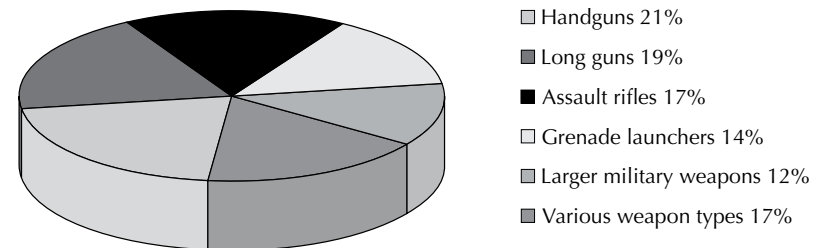
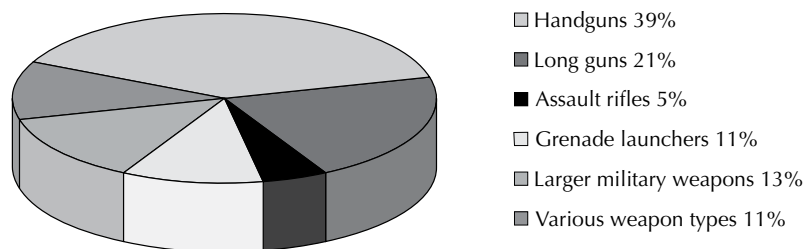


Figure 6  
**Content of reported discovered arms caches in Sughd, 1999–31 October 2004**



### Are independent additional weapons collection efforts needed?

This report has documented extensive collection efforts on the part of the Tajik government. Is there a need for further weapons collection sponsored by the international community? Any donor considering support or intervention in this sphere would need to take into account that, while the government weapons collection process as a whole has brought greater stability to Tajik society, it has often meant an increase in insecurity for individual Tajik citizens, in large part due to the harsh measures employed by the police. International donors contemplating project intervention would need to consider whether they wanted to be associated with these practices and think through the consequences of engagement for individuals in particular communities. Each region should, moreover, be assessed individually with regard to whether guns are a problem and whether further collection efforts are really needed. Given that in most areas of Tajikistan ordinary civilians are not the key gun holders, it is an open question whether more intensive collection would produce the desired result. It may be the case that many guns are still held for fundamental political and security reasons, which an international project intervention would be unlikely to address.

On the other hand, the report has suggested that civilian possession may remain a problem in areas formerly controlled by the opposition. Here, a reluctance to surrender weapons for collection may sometimes reflect not so much

political or personal security considerations, but fear of harassment by the MVD. Providing a neutral international mechanism for collection might reassure those reluctant to hand in their weapons. Nevertheless, in a society where many still ‘inform’ on each other, it is hard to see how sufficient trust regarding illegal gun possessors could be established. It is therefore important to identify the particular concerns of each region, including precise reasons for gun ownership and motives for handing in guns, as well as possible entry points for weapons collection programmes, before designing a policy. One possible avenue to explore would be to encourage women to handle the surrender of guns. There is a tradition in Tajik society and among Tajik law enforcement agencies of treating female citizens more gently. They might consequently have less to fear when surrendering weapons.

### Legal and illegal weapons use

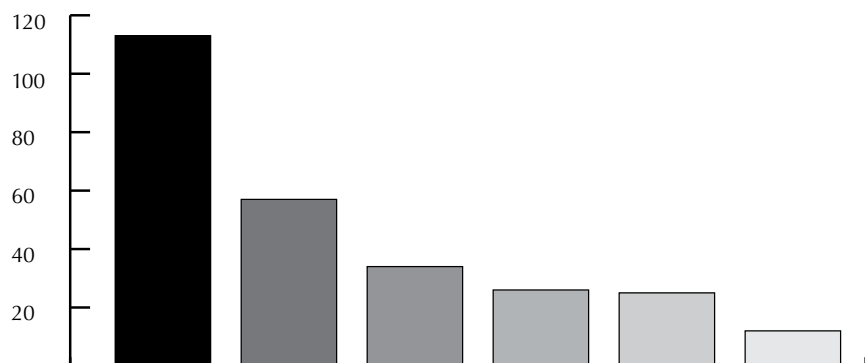
While overall civilian gun possession does not appear to be high as a result of the civil war, there are nevertheless some owners and users of guns in Tajikistan’s society at present. This section seeks to identify current gun users and how gun use has changed since the restoration of government control. These findings are based on focus group research and key informant interviews.

In societies with high gun proliferation, guns often provide their users with considerable power. Therefore, focus group participants were asked to describe what characteristics and behaviour made people in their communities powerful.<sup>42</sup> For one, most participants in focus groups thought that former commanders, fighters, and other people carrying guns had lost power in recent years. Yet the perceived power of government officials, and in particular representatives of law enforcement agencies, has grown, as has that of successful businesspeople.<sup>43</sup>

Discussions also revealed that in the 1990s, guns were an important source of power in Tajik villages. In 2004, however, government positions, acquaintances, relatives, and money were seen as more important sources of power by the focus group participants. The exceptions are a few villages in the Rasht area, where focus group participants continue to perceive former commanders or fighters as powerful.

Figure 7  
Sources of power in Tajik villages, according to focus groups<sup>44</sup>

■ Material resources; ■ Personal characteristics; ■ Weapons; ■ Connections; ■ Information/knowledge; ■ Other



### Legal guns

According to focus group participants, legal gun users in Tajik society are first and foremost representatives of the state, most importantly the MVD, the army, the KGB, judges and public prosecutors, and border guards. The main groups of non-state agents who use guns legally are reportedly hunters and bodyguards.

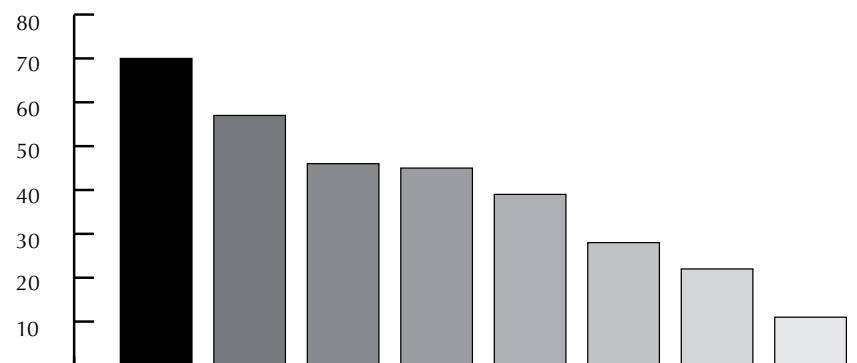
### Illegal guns

According to participants in focus groups, individual and organized criminals, as well as powerful individuals such as businesspeople and drug traffickers, are the key users of illegal guns. Some also noted that religious extremists and, in a minority of areas, former fighters and former commanders were users of illegal guns.<sup>45</sup> A few focus groups also identified hunters as unregistered and thus illegal gun users.

However, focus group participants in nearly all parts of the country indicated that the use of small arms among these illegal gun users presents no major security threat. Injury and crime indicators support this perception (see below). Guns appear to be possessed by these categories of people mainly for personal protection, and for deterring robberies and attempts at extortion, as well as for hunting and private security.

Figure 8  
Legal gun users in Tajikistan, according to focus groups\*

■ MVD/militia; ■ Army; ■ KGB; ■ Public prosecutor; ■ Border guards; ■ Hunters; ■ Bodyguards; ■ Other state organs



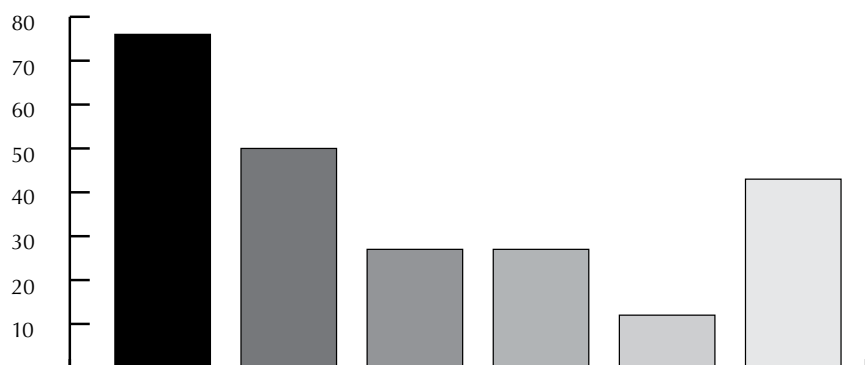
\* Focus group participants were asked to list legal or official gun users. Each time a particular user was mentioned, it was counted as one. The y-axis shows the number of times the particular group of gun users was mentioned among the 76 focus groups.

People involved in the drugs business are likely to constitute a significant proportion of illegal gun users. However, it is striking how little violence is associated with the multibillion dollar drugs business in Tajikistan.<sup>46</sup> There have been few arrests of former-commanders-turned-drug-traders and there have been no arrests of large-scale drug traders operating out of or through Tajik territory in recent years. Fights and shooting between individuals involved in the drugs business are also rare. This reduces the need for weapons use.

While stating that few people owned weapons and that weapons are not regularly used, ordinary Tajik citizens also frequently asserted that weapons, if needed, were easy to obtain. This apparent contradiction between limited use and easy availability of weapons led the research team to commission a researcher in Dushanbe to conduct four confidential interviews with people that were either part of or had good knowledge about criminal activities. In all four interviews, the respondents listed the army or law enforcement agencies as the primary weapons suppliers. They also pointed out that many influential people, including businesspeople, drug dealers, and criminals, have managed to find legal ways of enhancing their security.

Figure 9  
**Illegal gun users in Tajikistan, according to focus groups\***

■ Criminals; ■ Crime groups; ■ Drug related; ■ Powerful; ■ Hunters; □ Other



\* Focus group participants were asked to list illegal gun users. Each time a particular user was mentioned, it was counted as one. The y-axis shows the number of times the particular group of gun users was mentioned among the 76 focus groups.

While it is impossible to verify these claims, it is interesting to note that observers with contacts within the protection services have supported these assertions. It appears that some businesspeople, having demonstrated that they are under threat, have been able to arrange for official MVD protection. In such instances, the MVD certifies an MVD guard or bodyguard. The bodyguard is usually a relative or an employee of the person in question and is paid by that person. The bodyguard is, however, provided with a legal MVD gun and certification of MVD affiliation. According to interviews, no formal training aside from proof of army service is needed in order to serve as an ‘MVD bodyguard’. If these findings are true, it would mean that people engaged in business or, potentially, criminal activities can avoid becoming illegal weapons possessors. In other words, their activities might be criminal, but their use of guns or arrangements for protection are not. These findings of semi-official involvement would explain both the relatively benign gun environment and the relatively easy availability for those with money and connections. It also suggests that despite strict formal procedures, government stockpiles may actually serve as one of the most convenient sources for weapons acquisition in present-day Tajikistan.

Several focus groups reported that hunters faced difficulties in legally registering hunting guns because of the associated costs and administrative procedures. This explains why hunters figure among ‘illegal’ gun users in Tajikistan. Some hunters are therefore in breach of the law, whereas some criminals are allegedly able to legalize their protection by armed security guards.<sup>47</sup>

#### Box 1

##### **Small arms and light weapons and radical Islamic groups**

Central Asia has been host to two radical Islamic groups: Hizb ut-Tahrir and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). The main aim of the IMU was to challenge President Karimov’s regime in Uzbekistan, but it also fought with the opposition forces during the Tajik civil war and was based in Tavildara up to February 2001. IMU members were well trained and well armed and maintained caches of weapons in the Tajik and Kyrgyz mountains. Since 2001, however, there have been few signs of the IMU operating in Tajikistan.<sup>48</sup> Reports on the activities of Hizb ut-Tahrir are by contrast becoming more frequent and it now seems the organization maintains active members in Khatlon, Dushanbe, and Sughd province (IWPR, 2004b). While Hizb ut-Tahrir’s political aims pose a fundamental challenge to the secular regimes in Central Asia, the organization’s members stress that they will not use violent means, including weapons, to achieve their goals. There is therefore not, at present, an immediate and obvious link between radical Islam and illegal small arms and light weapons use in Tajikistan. There is one exception, however. In April 2004, members of a group called Bay’at (‘The Oath’) were arrested in the Isfara region of Sughd province. A high-level government investigation into the murder of the former criminal turned Baptist priest Sergei Bessarab had uncovered the group. Approximately 20 members were arrested and faced criminal charges, including illegal weapons possession (IWPR, 2004c). On 29 December 2004, law enforcement agents attempted to arrest an additional member, Ali Aminov, but he reportedly offered armed resistance and escaped (Jamestown Foundation, 2005).

The nature and aims of Bay’at remain elusive. Some reports have attributed a radical Islamic agenda to the group and note its frustration with local government-controlled Islamic clerics and religious oppression. Some of those arrested were former members of the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) and had fought for the opposition during the civil war. Other assessments of Bay’at, however, including a local law enforcement officer interviewed for this report, stress that the group was involved in purely criminal activities and maintained a religious aspect more as an ‘image’ or unifying factor.<sup>49</sup>

Regardless of the true nature of Bay’at, the incident highlights the potential for friction that can be created in religious strongholds such as the Isfara region in reaction to government restrictions. These issues, it seems, have yet to result in an increase in small arms and light weapons proliferation in Tajikistan. They constitute, nevertheless, a source of tension, and small arms and light weapons could potentially come to aggravate disputes related to religious and political practices.

## Human insecurity and gun use

This section presents the findings on the extent to which the impact of guns constitutes a threat to the human security of the citizens of Tajikistan.

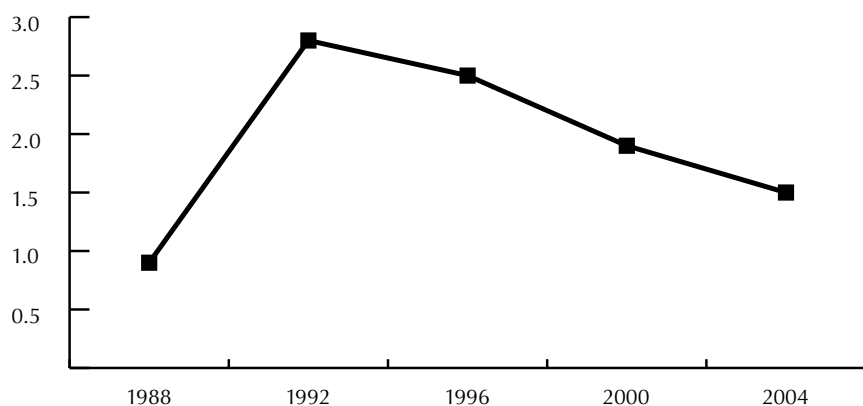
### *Perception of security and insecurity*

The focus group discussions revealed that, for the most part, ordinary citizens have perceived a marked improvement in personal security since 1997. Across Tajikistan, there was general agreement that 1992 had been the most insecure year. People's perceptions of security still, however, do not match the level of Soviet times. In this finding, Tajikistan differs from many other post-conflict countries where civil war-related insecurities were replaced with concerns stemming from an increase in crime in general and gun crime in particular.

### *Gun injury and mortality*

The perception of improved security is supported by health records, which show a decrease in gun use and impact since 1997–98.<sup>50</sup> Interviews with doctors

Figure 10  
**Changes in perceived feelings of insecurity among the Tajik population, according to focus groups\***



\* Focus group participants were asked to compare and rate their feelings of insecurity from one (most secure) to three (least secure) for the years 1988, 1992, 1996, 2000, and 2004. The results from all 76 focus groups have been summed and the average level of security has been calculated against a possible maximum of 228 (76 x 3) for the highest level of insecurity.

### Box 2

#### **Reduction in weapons use at the bazaars**

In a review of the security situation and history of gun use at three major bazaars in Dushanbe, traders and customers noted that serious security problems had been experienced in the markets up to the late 1990s. Armed gunmen could show up at any time and demand that traders hand over goods without payment. This made the bazaars particularly insecure places. At present, however, the traders stressed that there were no security concerns and that they were satisfied with the general conditions, such as tax and rental rates. There had been no gun incidents in recent years at any of the three bazaars. One of the bazaars investigated was privately owned and run by the family of a former government commander. There were private security guards with registered guns, as well as local police officers guarding this bazaar. The other two government-run bazaars had only police officers as security guards. The traders in these bazaars noted they would offer in-kind contributions to the policemen as supplements to their low government salaries.

Figure 11  
**Patients treated for gun injuries, 1991–2003**

■ Republican Hospital A. M. Dyakov (A); □ Khatlon Province Hospital No. 1 (Kurgan Tube) (B); □ Khatlon Province Hospital No. 2 (Kulyab) (C); ■ Sughd Province Hospital (Khujand) (D)

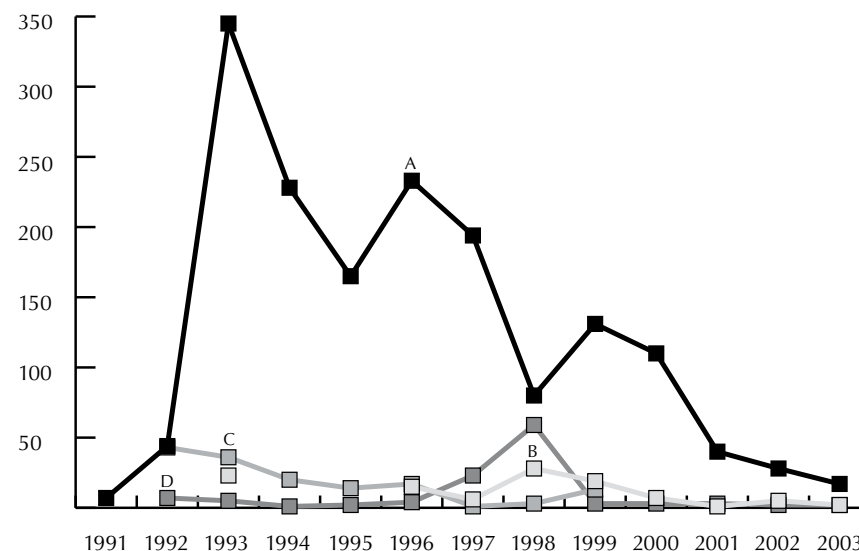


Table 7  
**Medgorodok hospital, Dushanbe: Injury statistics, 1992–2003**

	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Bullets	50	70	39	11	61	42	43	45	28	13	1	1
Mine explosions	8	14	5	7	6	4	7	4	8	2	3	0
<i>Of which men</i>	56	81	42	17	63	43	45	45	35	11	3	1
<i>Of which women</i>	2	3	2	1	4	3	5	4	1	4	1	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>

from ten major hospitals across Tajikistan, as well as the medical data made available to the research team, point to a gradual decrease in gun injuries since 1997.

The decrease in injuries from gunshots occurred predominantly among men, underlining the use of weapons in the conflict and in combat rather than in domestic violence.

### *Black market weapons prices*

Analysis of the prices of illegally purchased weapons also shows that the control of weapons of war has been relatively successful, but suggests higher rates of circulation of pistols.

In the course of the four interviews with individuals associated with criminal activities, one person claiming to have good connections with a weapons supplier quoted the black market prices given in Table 8. These price estimates corresponded to figures stated by a number of other informed observers interviewed.<sup>51</sup>

The quoted prices for AK-47s and grenades suggest successful control of these items, as these prices are very high.<sup>52</sup> The price for a Makarov pistol is normal by international standards, which suggests a higher rate of circulation and stronger supply than any of the other weapon types. There appears to be a more active market in handguns than weapons of war. This assumption is

Table 8  
**Black market weapons prices**

Type of weapon	Price (USD)
AK-47	300
Makarov pistol	500
Grenade (RGD-5)	30
Grenade (F-1)	50
Grenade launcher	700
Machine gun	500

confirmed by qualitative interviews that described Makarov pistols as being in demand because they are relatively easy to hide. The market for Makarov bullets appears competitive, which is a further indicator that these weapons are in demand and are used.<sup>53</sup>

The analysis of weapon prices underlines the transition from demand for automatic weapons to handguns, and thus from conflict- to crime-related weapons. This is a typical development in many post-conflict countries.

### *Crime rates and gun crime*

Crime rates in general, and armed robberies in particular, have declined since 1998. The fact that armed robbery has gone down much more dramatically than robbery suggests the successful removal of a large proportion of the guns held by former fighters and criminals.

It is unlikely that official crime data provides an accurate portrait of the current crime and gun crime situation in Tajikistan. While it can be assumed that the general trend shown by the national crime statistics is reasonable, the numbers may suffer from a degree of under-reporting. Tajikistan's officially reported crime rate is considerably lower than in any other Central Asian state.<sup>54</sup>

The suspicion of considerable under-reporting is confirmed by accounts of ordinary citizens in focus groups who mentioned several reasons why they had not reported crimes to the local police. These included the expectation

Table 9  
**Total crimes reported in criminal police statistics for Central Asian republics, 1997\***

Country	Per 100 000
Tajikistan	219
Kyrgyzstan	803
Kazakhstan	1,028

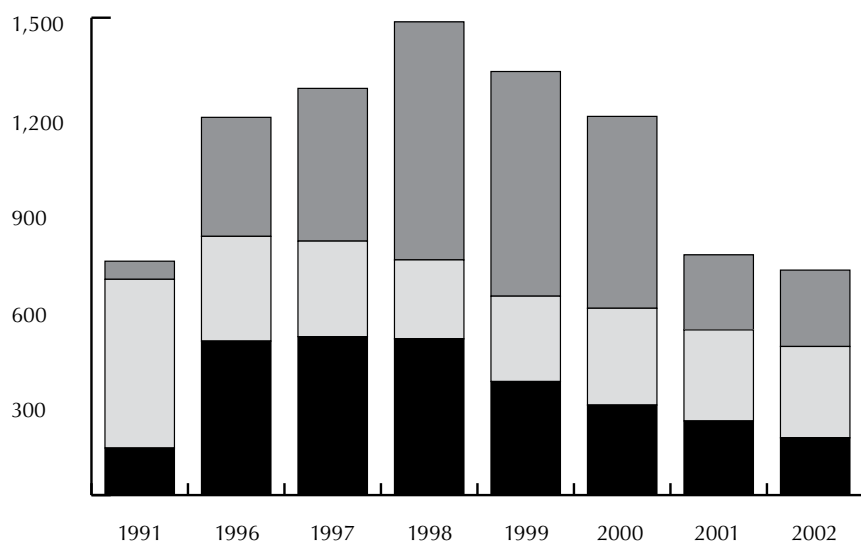
\* The last year of the sixth UNODC survey was 1997. Tajikistan did not report any information to the seventh (1998–2000) or eighth (2001–02) survey. The ninth survey data (2003–04) is not yet available.

Source: UNODC (1998)

that the police would not investigate the crime because of stretched material resources and fear about the consequences of accusing powerful local leaders.<sup>55</sup> Observers of Tajik society also note that informal and traditional methods of conflict resolution are still used, especially in the countryside.<sup>56</sup> The local mullah

Figure 12  
**National crime statistics, 1991 & 1996–2002**

■ Premeditated and attempted murder; □ Robbery; ■ Armed robbery



Source: MVD, Section for Statistics

Table 10  
**Reported firearms incidents from the 76 focus groups during the two years prior to the focus group meetings\***

Type of incident	Number of incidents
Gun crime <sup>a</sup>	10 <sup>b</sup>
Killings <sup>c</sup> of opposition or militia members in the Rasht valley <sup>d</sup>	9 <sup>e</sup>
Unspecified killings	5 <sup>f</sup>
Domestic	2 <sup>g</sup>
Mentally ill asylum inmate killed someone	1 <sup>h</sup>
RBF member killed someone for illegal border crossing	1 <sup>i</sup>
Killings among drug dealers	1 <sup>j</sup>
One soldier killed another	1 <sup>k</sup>

\* Focus groups were held in 2004.

<sup>a</sup> Reported incidents include stealing of cattle, robbery of an exchange office, armed robbery, and armed crime.

<sup>b</sup> Focus groups 11, 21, 33, 42, 44, 48, 49, 51, 67, 71

<sup>c</sup> In one case, it was an attempted killing, but the former opposition commander survived (focus group 21).

<sup>d</sup> In one case, a former opposition commander was beaten up and killed with a stone. This has not been included in this count (focus group 27).

<sup>e</sup> Focus groups 21, 22, 23, 24, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32

<sup>f</sup> Focus groups 13, 26, 36, 43, 47

<sup>g</sup> Focus groups 25, 56

<sup>h</sup> Focus group 2

<sup>i</sup> Focus group 16

<sup>j</sup> Focus group 41

<sup>k</sup> Focus group 3

or group of elders, not the police, will often be the first institution from which a person seeks assistance and advice. Official or law enforcement authorities are therefore not the first to be involved. In consequence, a significant proportion of crimes in Tajikistan go unreported, both by the police and by the newspapers (which tend to rely on official police announcements). There might also be regional differences in the degree of under-reporting, which would further distort statistics.<sup>57</sup>

In the absence of crime victimization data, the only overview on the nature of gun crime within Tajikistan comes from the 76 focus groups and their experiences with armed crime in their neighbourhoods or villages. This provides an



interesting, though somewhat incomplete, snapshot of some villages and urban neighbourhoods (76 in total) across Tajikistan.

Although, in general, the focus groups showed that while the overall majority of villages did not see weapons use and misuse as a grave problem, several focus groups in the border areas in Khatlon reported incidents involving guns.<sup>58</sup> Equally, people living in former opposition areas often expressed concern about violent acts involving or directed against former opposition leaders.<sup>59</sup> The extent to which Tajik society and the Government of Tajikistan have managed to combat widespread lawlessness and crime often associated with post-conflict countries is remarkable.

However, participants in focus groups throughout Tajikistan mentioned that misconduct by law enforcement and army personnel was an issue of concern.<sup>60</sup> The misconduct described by participants depended upon the type of agency. Participants complained about instances of drunkenness among border guards and army personnel.<sup>61</sup> The military draft commissions (*voennkomat*) were mentioned particularly often as sources of insecurity, especially in Khatlon province. Participants indicated that military conscription was carried out by armed personnel, who turned up unannounced in villages and used heavy-handed tactics to recruit young men into military structures.<sup>62</sup> The recent sacking of nine senior military officials for enlistment offences lends support to these focus group findings (IWPR, 2004e). Focus group participants also complained about the conduct of many representatives of the MVD, who they believed failed to behave appropriately towards them.<sup>63</sup> Some claimed that searches or arrests were often carried out without proper warrants and often involved gun threats and physical abuse. Government efforts to control misuse of weapons have largely been limited to reducing the carrying of weapons by law enforcement and police officers—an important measure for reducing gun violence (see Box 6).

The recent government crackdown on abuses by military recruitment officers is also a sign that Tajikistan is prepared to take proactive steps to prevent abuse. Judging from the many concerns raised by focus group participants across Tajikistan, however, there seems to be a common disregard for civilians' legal rights within law enforcement structures. More measures are needed by the government to prevent law enforcement from becoming an increasing source of insecurity for civilians.

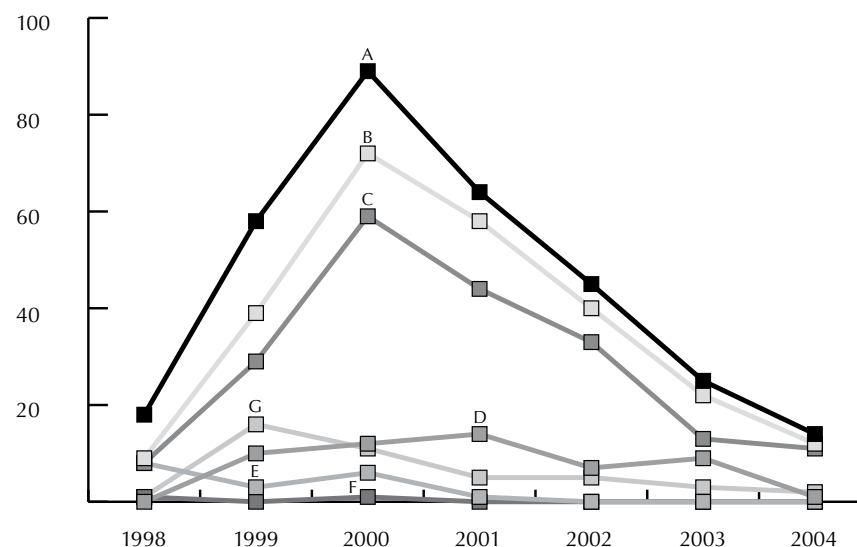
## Challenges in the border areas and the potential supply of weapons from Afghanistan

Tajikistan's border with Afghanistan forms a distinct area of concern in relation to small arms and light weapons. It is an issue of growing salience, given the Tajikistan–Russian Federation agreement on a phased withdrawal of the Russian Federation Border Forces (RBF), which will be completed by 2006. If KOGG does not manage to deliver sufficient protection levels—and this is a likely short-term scenario—then Tajikistan risks further increases in drugs flows and will be more vulnerable to potential weapons inflows.

In present-day Tajikistan, the border areas face the gravest threats in relation to gun violence and weapons proliferation. Aside from a previous history of cross-border weapons transfers, the Afghan border areas themselves also have higher rates of gun use and of discovery of weapons caches than other areas in

Figure 13  
Reported armed clashes, 1998–31 October 2004

■ Total number of armed clashes (A); □ Total armed clashes along the border (B); ■ Armed clashes involving RBF (C); ■ Armed clashes involving TBF (D); ■ Armed clashes involving civil war commanders (E); ■ Armed clashes involving a joint operation between RBF and TBF (F); □ Other armed clashes (G)





**Reported armed clashes, 1998–31 October 2004**



Tajikistan. The security of civilians in many border areas is significantly worse than in other parts of the country. Afghan drug traders frequently cross the Afghan–Tajik border. In some instances, Tajik citizens have been taken hostage in drug-debt disputes. Hostage taking was more common in the 1990s, but there have nevertheless been some recent incidents.<sup>64</sup> Before the start of their withdrawal in 2004, the RBF frequently clashed with armed Afghan drug traders attempting to cross the Pyanj River. The drugs caches hidden a few hundred metres into Tajik territory from the Afghan border nearly always contain some weapons and ammunition for the protection of the drug smuggler.

A review of reports on armed clashes in newspapers (*Crime Info* and *Asia Plus*) and UN documents indicate that overall the number of reported arms clashes in the post-war period peaked in 2000. The majority of reported incidents involved the RBF.

Table 11

**Reported armed clashes, 1998–31 October 2004**

Province/City	District	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004 (January–October 31)	Total 1998–2004
Sughd oblast – district unidentified	Khujand	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Sughd	Mashtoh	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Sughd	Asht	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Direct Rule Districts	Tursunzoda	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Direct Rule Districts	Varzob	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Direct Rule Districts	Kofamihon	3	3	2	0	1	0	0	9
Direct Rule Districts	Garm	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	4
Direct Rule Districts	Lenin	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	2
Direct Rule Districts	Fayzobod	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Direct Rule Districts	Roghun	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Direct Rule Districts	Darband	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	3
Dushanbe		2	9	8	2	0	2	2	25
Khatlon	Shahriz	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2
Khatlon	Qubodiyon	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1



forces will have less experienced officers and soldiers and a poorly developed supply infrastructure. While most soldiers and some officers serving in the RBF are ethnic Tajik, they are unlikely to seek transfer to KOGG, which offers comparatively low pay and poor conditions.<sup>71</sup> The RBF is likely, as was the case after the handover of the Murghab border post, to strip the bases of essential equipment before leaving. The sophisticated network of intelligence gathering and routines for operational response built up by the RBF are unlikely to be easily replicated by KOGG.

These factors suggest that in the initial period after the RBF withdrawal there will be less effective border control. The likely consequence is an increase in the amount of drug trafficking and also possibly in the number of people engaged in the trade.<sup>72</sup> Some civilians along the border expressed the fear that hostage taking and incursions by individual armed Afghan drug traders into their villages might increase with the departure of the RBF. This increase in insecurity enhances incentives for civilians to protect themselves. Acquiring small arms and light weapons might be one measure to tackle these security threats. One international observer also noted that the main players in the drugs business in Tajikistan are likely to jostle for position and influence after the introduction of the new border regime.<sup>73</sup> This might trigger some armed violence among those involved.

Tajikistan was at the centre of much regional weapons transfers and trafficking in the 1990s. A considerable portion of Iranian and Russian Federation weapon transfers to Afghanistan's Northern Alliance passed into Afghanistan via Osh–Murghab–Ishkoshim and Kulyab.<sup>74</sup> After September 2001 and with the start of the 'Enduring Freedom' campaign, weapons supplies to the Northern Alliance sent via Tajikistan and later Uzbekistan increased. France also provided logistical support to the 'Enduring Freedom' coalition partners from its base at Dushanbe airport.

There is no indication that there is major weapons trafficking going north from Afghanistan via Tajikistan.<sup>75</sup> One senior figure in KOGG noted in an interview for this report that Tajik law enforcement and border forces have not recorded any northern flows of weapons accompanying drugs flows.<sup>76</sup> This finding corresponds to similar trends in Kyrgyzstan.<sup>77</sup> A small number of weapons for self-protection for the traffickers, however, are smuggled in con-



Russian soldiers patrol the Tajik–Afghan border in the Tajik region of Kholkayar in November 2001.

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junction with the drug trade.<sup>78</sup> China's Xinjiang Autonomous Region, which borders Tajikistan, is a destination, albeit a very minor one, for guns trafficked from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan to Uighur separatists (MacFarlane and Torjesen, 2004). The Murghab–Kashgar road was opened in March 2004 and could potentially serve as an entry route for supplies to Uighur separatists—some of whom were trained in Afghanistan and fought with the Taliban.<sup>79</sup> However, the new China–Tajikistan border crossing seems well guarded from the Chinese side and this is likely to deter smugglers.

The transition from the RBF to KOGG comes at a challenging time in Afghan–Tajik relations. The repair or construction of five bridges over the Pyanj River along the border is certain to increase contact between Afghanistan and Tajikistan. The ousting of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and the possible stabilization in that country after the elections in October 2004 bring hope of increasing trade and peaceful interaction with Afghanistan in the medium to long term. Nevertheless, Afghanistan will, at least in the short term, continue to function

as the key supplier of drugs and as a potential source of small arms and light weapons. This is a weapons source that could be easily utilized if demand should arise in the future in Tajikistan. The new bridges and the reduced protection level that is likely to be offered by KOGG are likely to enhance, not lessen, these problems in the Tajik–Afghan relationship.

## Safekeeping and leakage of weapons in government storage facilities

During the civil war, one of the key weapons sources was the stockpiles of the national security structures. Above it was also suggested that government stockpile control remains a problem in Tajikistan and that the system that is in place at present is vulnerable to leakage. This is an area in which the Tajik government has appealed for aid from the international community, and for which international donor assistance may be provided. The features of Tajikistan's stockpile management are discussed fully in section II. Two issues should be highlighted here: stockpile control at individual duty stations of law enforcement agencies and the army; and stockpile control and storage conditions at the central storage facilities of each ministry. Local and international researchers involved in the writing of this report had the opportunity to inspect gun rooms in some MVD stations and also some of the provincial offices of the Drug Control Agency (DCA). Although official procedures of MVD duty station stockpile management are comprehensive and rigorous, their circumvention by individual MVD staff seems comparatively easy. International experts and the Government of Tajikistan have also assessed security and safety at central weapons storage sites and have found some serious shortcomings related to locks and signalling systems, training of personnel, fire hazards, storage of old explosives, and so on (see section II).

Technical assistance in upgrading storage facilities could offer improvements in the control and safe keeping of small arms and light weapons in Tajikistan. This report recommends that international donors consider supporting such activities. Donors, however, need to bear in mind that unless these technical initiatives are implemented in conjunction with other reforms of police practice, such as efforts to increase accountability, there may be little overall effect.

Improved stockpile management will only take place if all relevant law enforcement institutions are engaged in a comprehensive manner. It is important to avoid assistance whereby only individual units within the MVD, such as the logistical departments, benefit. Instead, there should be an overall effort to enhance material and human resources in the management of small arms and light weapons stocks in law enforcement agencies. Maintaining good record keeping and sophisticated weapons expertise are as important as renewing locks and signalling systems at storage sites. A particularly central unit with regard to control of small arms and light weapons in Tajikistan is the Criminal Investigation Centre of the MVD, a specialized and highly professional section that maintains a Ballistic Research Unit. It performs important tasks such as maintaining a catalogue of bullets from crime scenes dating back to 1996 and employing laboratory equipment and expertise to investigate gunshot- and explosion-related incidents.<sup>80</sup> The unit could prove effective in investigations of leakage from government storage facilities. Other units within the MVD are charged, according to the national legal framework, with keeping a national archive (*cadastre*) of all government and legally registered civilian weapons.<sup>81</sup> Further recommendations on how to approach the issue of government stockpile management are given in section II.

It is also crucial that any party contemplating engagement on small arms issues in Tajikistan is familiar with the relatively strict and extensive legal framework. By and large, Tajikistan's legal framework corresponds to basic tenets of the *Best Practices* document (OSCE, 2004) of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), which Tajikistan has officially endorsed. A survey of the legal framework is provided in section II; this also includes recommendations as to how it could be further improved.

## Conclusion and overall analysis of the small arms and light weapons situation in Tajikistan

This report has presented circumstantial evidence that possession by former commanders of substantial quantities of weapons may be a problem. This is evident from the shortfall in the handing in of weapons as part of the NRC-led disarmament process, and also the recent gun seizures from Gaffur Mirzoev

and other commanders. It is important to note in this context that international agencies in Tajikistan will have difficulties in dealing with or offering any constructive assistance in solving this weapons problem. The illegal stockpiles often figure as key assets when the main political actors in Tajikistan balance each other in the struggle for influence, security, and economic resources. International agencies are unlikely to be able to offer endorsements that could outweigh the importance of possessing these weapons. Reduction of these illegal stockpiles is therefore contingent on political developments within Tajikistan and actions undertaken by the Tajiks themselves.

The report's findings indicate that illegal possession by civilians is not particularly widespread, though there may be some regional differences. Gun use is low, gun deaths and injuries are low and declining, and people are generally not worried about guns. This suggests that the problem is not all that important from a human security perspective and that there are good reasons for international agencies *not* to engage in further large-scale weapons collection efforts, but rather to prioritize other causes of human insecurity such as malfunctioning governance structures and economic hardship.

The report's findings also point to dysfunctions among government authorities when it comes to the management and control of guns in Tajikistan. The methods used scare people, involve intimidation, and may impede effective collection, since they further reduce the population's trust in the police. Widespread corruption and disregard for formal procedures and laws within law enforcement ensure that government weapons are constantly at risk of leaking into the illegal gun market. Powerful individuals with a perceived need for protection seem able to obtain guns from official sources. There are also logistical and technical aspects to the government storage of guns such as shortcomings in building and security structures. Overall, though, it seems that storage issues are disturbing, not so much because of an immediate danger of theft, but more because of the possibility of a catastrophic accident due to disregard for fire safety or mishandling of explosives and ammunition.

In the immediate future, Afghanistan remains a potential weapons source for Tajikistan, while the withdrawal of Russian Federation border troops may bring additional problems and possibly increased human insecurity to border areas.

The drugs business has so far produced relatively little gun violence inside the territory of Tajikistan. It is uncertain, however, how long this will last. The calmness of the present situation could easily be altered if elements within the government or members of the international community initiate a crackdown on the key organizers of Tajikistan's drug trade. Alternatively, increasing competition in the future if the European drug market should become saturated or should Tajikistan-based shippers be denied access could spark violence among agents involved in the drugs business.

## Recommendations

What constructive steps should the international community and the Government of Tajikistan undertake, given the distinct small arms and light weapons challenges facing the country?

Some overall recommendations are listed below. In the overview of government stockpile management and the legal framework that appears in section II, the reader will also find more detailed recommendations on these separate issues.

It is recommended that international agencies and donors should consider the following.

- They should continue their assistance to border control in Tajikistan by offering further support to KOGG and the Customs Committee. The authors of this report are particularly concerned that KOGG will be unable to recruit the highly trained and skilled Tajik soldiers and low-ranking officers serving at present in the RBF for service in KOGG. Loss of these human resources will aggravate the security risks at the border and further strengthen the role of Afghanistan as a potential source of illegal weapons.
- They should consider supporting Tajikistan's efforts to improve the material conditions in government stores.
- They should advocate more transparency and accountability on the part of the Tajik government, in particular in law enforcement structures.
- They should consider funding and initiating large-scale structural reform programmes within the security sector.

- In project interventions, they should be careful to involve the newly established focal point on small arms and light weapons in the presidential administration, while also including and working with the other main government institutions that traditionally have been responsible for coordination on small arms and light weapons, notably the General Prosecutor's Office and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for security issues (presently occupied by Gen. Maj. Saimudin Zuhurov). The MVD Criminal Investigation Centre, which has special expertise on small arms and light weapons issues, could also usefully be engaged.

It is recommended that the Government of Tajikistan, for its part, could usefully consider the following.

- It should clarify whether the amnesty on the voluntary handing in of guns is really still in operation and, if so, make sure that all law enforcement officers at the local level adhere fully to the amnesty terms.
- It should initiate a debate on how law enforcement structures operate and aim at improving police conduct so as to increase the population's trust in these state organs.
- It should take steps to improve the accountability and transparency of law enforcement structures. A good first step would be to make public the internal procedures controlling police conduct.
- It should investigate the use of bodyguards by official and non-official people in Tajikistan and clarify who is entitled to bodyguards and on what grounds.
- It should consider initiating large-scale structural reform of the security sector. 🗨️

## Section II

Section I outlined key features of the small arms and light weapons challenge in Tajikistan. In this section, the report provides more in-depth insights and presents significant new research findings related to past and present small arms and light weapons proliferation in Tajikistan. The section starts by assessing overall risk potential in Tajikistan and Central Asia. Later, a history of the civil war is presented alongside detailed findings related to supply and distribution of weapons, as well as the mobilization and later demobilization of fighters. The changing role of former civil war commanders is assessed in greater detail than in section I, and a survey of government and civilian weapon possession is also given. The section ends with an overview of the responses of Tajikistan and the international community to the small arms and light weapons challenge, government storage practices, and Tajikistan's legal framework covering weapons possession.

### Small arms and light weapons and the potential for national and regional instability

The significance of small arms as a human security issue lies not only in the quantities and types available; their distribution across the population; and the nature, scope, and effectiveness of legal frameworks regulating possession, use, and trade. It depends also on the socioeconomic and political context in which they exist. With this in mind, a comprehensive assessment of Tajikistan's internal and external challenges has been provided below.

#### *Ethnodemographic and cultural indicators*

Tajikistan has a territory of some 143,100 square kilometers. It lies in the extreme south of former Soviet Central Asia, and is bordered by Afghanistan, China, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. As of 2002, its population was estimated to be 6.3 million, and growing at 0.6 per cent annually.<sup>82</sup> It is majority Tajik, but 25–30

per cent of the population are Uzbek.<sup>83</sup> The management of minorities is, consequently, a significant political issue. In terms of age profile, Tajikistan's population is weighted towards the lower end, the average age being 22.8 years in 2002. Absorbing large numbers of young people, particularly young males, into the economy is a major challenge.<sup>84</sup> Tajikistan is a major exporter of labour. It is estimated that between 500,000 and 800,000 Tajiks work abroad, mainly in the Russian Federation and other states in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Many former fighters have participated in seasonal and short-term migration to labour markets in Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation in the face of the lack of opportunities at home. Given possible changes in Russian Federation and other CIS regulations requiring the carrying of national passports, the migration safety valve may close, forcing tens of thousands of male migrants to return home, where they have little prospect of gainful activity. The return of large numbers of migrants may be a source of increased criminal activity and political instability.

The physical geography of Tajikistan has broken the Tajik population of the country into several reasonably distinct groups defined by regional origin: those living in northern Tajikistan, living for the most part in and around the Ferghana Valley; those dwelling in the valleys and foothills of the centre (the Karategin valley, Garm, Tavildara) and south-east of the country (Kulyab); and those populating the large Pamir region of GBAO in the east.<sup>85</sup> The Soviet period brought a significant degree of mixing of populations, as mountain populations from Karategin were forced to migrate to the cotton producing areas of Khatlon (the Vakhsh valley), Pandjakent, and, to a lesser extent, Leninobod (Sughd).

There was evidence of tension among the different regional groups from the Soviet period. Fighting between Kulyabis and Garmis was common in Dushanbe's universities. In areas into which mountain Tajiks migrated, there were disputes over land and water. The critical issue appeared to be access to scarce resources.

There is little indication from the research that guns play a significant role in the culture of Tajikistan's various groups. Particularly in mountain areas, guns are possessed and used for practical purposes—hunting and the protection of livestock—by individuals involved in these activities. Unlike some other regions of the former Soviet Union, they are not widely seen as a symbol of male identity.

### Box 3

#### **The Tajik economy at a glance**

During the Soviet era, Tajikistan ran a structural deficit, with Moscow effectively subsidizing around 40 per cent of the republic's budget. Independence, the collapse of the Soviet internal market, economic transition, and civil war brought a massive economic contraction, which ended in the late 1990s. Gross domestic product (GDP) was USD 1.3 billion in 1998, USD 1.1 billion in 2001, and USD 1.2 billion in 2002. Current growth is estimated at 9–10 per cent, but from a very low base, given the collapse of the economy during the civil war (World Bank, 2002, p. 9). Given the economy's high dependence on exports (in 2002, 58 per cent of GDP), and given that the country's exports are largely commodity based, growth is seriously vulnerable to shifts in international commodity prices, notably for cotton and aluminium. Foreign direct investment is insignificant as a motor of growth: the World Bank reports USD 22 million of such investment in 2001 and zero in 2002 (World Bank, 2003, p. 2). These low levels reflect not only small market size and governance problems, but also concern over the country's stability in the longer term. The country faces a substantial debt burden: cumulative public debt at the end of 2000 was approximately 129 per cent of GDP. Its present value amounts to 400 per cent of public revenue, well above the highly indebted poor country (HIPC) threshold ratio of 250 per cent. In 2002, debt service requirements were approximately 10 per cent of the value of annual exports.

Official unemployment was estimated at 2.5 per cent in 2001. The World Bank estimates a hidden unemployment rate of 11–15 per cent, and suggests that the overall rate rises to 33 per cent when seasonal labour demand is low (World Bank, 2002, p. 26). More than half the officially unemployed are between the ages of 18 and 29. The unemployed include large numbers of former fighters. Those employed generally earn very low wages. The average nominal monthly wage is 25 somoni (USD 11 at the 2002 exchange rate). In the meantime, inflation ran at 38 per cent and 12 per cent in 2001 and 2002, respectively. Prices rise more quickly than wages.<sup>86</sup>

#### *Economic indicators*

The economy itself gives few grounds for optimism, with low levels of activity generally, very low foreign investment, high unemployment, low wages, and price inflation that significantly undermines the standard of living (see Box 3).

Official data significantly understates the actual level of economic activity, not least because of the size of the informal economy and of remittances from labour migrants, but also because of the significant flows of drugs through the country.<sup>87</sup> The latter has important implications for assessments of gun use and possession in Tajikistan. Given the scale of the drugs business, one might



expect extensive use of weapons among those involved in this criminal activity. This has certainly proven to be the case in neighbouring Afghanistan. As the main report suggests, the crackdown on major players in the drugs business in Tajikistan has been limited up to now, but any significant improvement in drug interdiction and any future moves by the government to eradicate organized drug trafficking could increase gun use and gun violence.

These qualifications notwithstanding, the situation regarding human development in Tajikistan is fairly dire. In 2004, the country ranked 116<sup>th</sup> on the Human Development Index, with an index value of 0.671.<sup>88</sup> This is the lowest among the Central Asian states (with Kazakhstan at 78<sup>th</sup> and 0.776 at the top of the group) and among the former Soviet republics (with Estonia at 36<sup>th</sup> and

#### Box 4

##### **Regional and rural–urban distribution of poverty**

The country's poverty profile displays significant rural–urban and regional variation: 23.4 per cent of the rural population falls into the very poor category, and 18.6 per cent of the urban. Dushanbe, the capital, makes up just under 10 per cent of the national population, but only 2.1 per cent of the very poor live there. Land reform has created new opportunities for rural entrepreneurs and is a significant motor of current growth. However, the scope of the reform is limited and its impact on rural poverty varies. In GBAO, for example, land reform significantly enhanced food security in the years after the war. However, in certain key areas (e.g. the densely populated cotton growing regions of Khatlon) it has been handled inequitably, concentrating control of the land in the hands of a relatively small number of well-connected individuals. Many of the poor remain landless. In other words, many of the poor have been left out and are vulnerable to abuse from those who contract their labour. In addition, control over the cotton market is highly concentrated, to the disadvantage of small producers. The imperfections of land distribution may foster further rural conflict in the future, which in turn could spark renewed demand for weapons by disaffected groups in poor areas.

Regionally, the largest numbers of the very poor are found in Khatlon, Sughd, and the Direct Rule Districts. The lowest numbers of the very poor are found in Dushanbe itself. When one looks at the regional distribution of the 'merely' poor, one finds that 39 per cent reside in GBAO (Sharq Scientific Research Centre, 2002, p. 10). In other words, not only is there significant poverty, but there are significant rural–urban and regional differences in its incidence. These do not correspond with political cleavages in the civil war: the principal protagonists were both based in very poor regions (Kulyab, on the one hand, and Khatlon and the Karategin valley, on the other). None the less, widespread geographical disparities in standards of living are one contributor to conflict potential.

0.853 at the top of the former Soviet group). Mass poverty is a key issue, with the great majority of the population living below the national poverty line.<sup>89</sup> There is some evidence to suggest that the incidence of poverty is increasing, despite the country's reasonably impressive rate of economic growth.<sup>90</sup> Poverty is accompanied by deepening income inequality. Richer households spend on average four times what the poorest do, with the latter spending 80 per cent of their income on food. Anecdotal evidence suggests that growing income inequality is a cause of significant frustration among less-prosperous elements of the population. Resulting conflict potential may be exacerbated by significant regional and rural–urban variations in poverty levels (see Box 4).

In summary, the Tajik economy was weak to begin with, shrank drastically in the 1990s, and is having considerable difficulty in recovering. Such recovery as there is, is vulnerable to external shocks, such as changes in international commodity prices and restrictions in access to foreign labour markets. Substantial poverty, unemployment, and lack of economic opportunities (particularly among young people) are a potential source of future instability.<sup>91</sup> Growing income inequality creates incentives for both poor (criminal activity) and rich (protection) to arm themselves.

#### *Governance*

Three characteristics of governance in Tajikistan are relevant to the analysis that follows.

Firstly, as is evident from Table 12, after an initial experiment with reasonably pluralistic governance in 1991, Tajikistan relapsed into authoritarianism. Since 1991, the country has had no elections that satisfied the free and fair standard of the OSCE. Although with the end of the civil war the civil liberties situation improved, there is no evidence of progress towards democratic governance in Tajikistan. Instead, there is evidence of an increasing concentration of influence around the president of the republic. The process was assisted by a constitutional referendum in June 2003 in which the one-term limit on the presidency was extended to two terms of seven years. In theory, since the new clock started ticking from the adoption of the constitutional amendment, President Rakhmonov could remain in office for 14 years from the next presidential election (due in 2006).



Table 12

**Democratic governance in Tajikistan after 1991\***

	1991	1992	1993	1997	2002	2004
Political rights	3	6	7	6	6	6
Civil liberties	2	6	7	6	5	5
Freedom rating	PF	NF	NF	NF	NF	NF

Source: Freedom House (2004a, 2004b)

\* This table covers years in which data on political rights and civil liberties changed in Tajikistan. It also provides the 2004 data. Ratings for political rights and civil liberties are on a scale with 1 being best and 7 being worst. The freedom rating is a composite of the political rights and civil liberties indices. There are three possible ratings: not free (NF), partially free (PF), and free (F).

The government's concentration of power limits opportunities for effective articulation of opposition within constitutional political processes. As these avenues are narrowed, the disaffected may exit the political process, turning to violence instead. This would have a direct effect on the demand for small arms.

Secondly, and of critical importance in the control of small arms, the bureaucracy lacks capacity. Its ability to generate reliable data (including data on small arms in its own possession) is limited. This is linked to a third problem—corruption. Tajikistan ranks 133<sup>rd</sup> out of 145 countries included in the global Corruption Perceptions Index of Transparency International (2004). Along with Georgia and Turkmenistan, which share the 133<sup>rd</sup> rank, it is the lowest of the former Soviet republics included in the index.

In general, endemic corruption risks diluting popular support for the government. In the small arms area, corruption compromises official procedures for the control of weapons in official possession, creating a large gap between the legal framework for control of official weapons and the reality where—according to the interviews carried out for this report—the law enforcement agencies and the Ministry of Defence have been and continue to be sources of illegal weapons in Tajikistan.

*The regional and international contexts*

War and peace in Tajikistan are intimately linked to processes in neighbouring countries and the wider international context. Significant instability in the neigh-

bourhood carries the risk of increasing arms traffic, as well as the spillover of conflict into Tajikistan itself, with attendant increases in weapons demand and use. Likewise, transnational criminal activities are often associated with illegal weapons possession and use.

Uzbekistan enjoyed strong influence over Soviet Tajikistan and was reluctant to lose it during the latter's transition to independence. In addition, given its own perception of threat from political Islam, Uzbekistan was deeply hostile to any entry of Islamists into the Tajik government. In addition, the Uzbek Islamic opposition (e.g. Juma Namangani and the IMU) enjoyed close relations with opposition commanders such as Mirzo Ziyoiev. IMU militants fought for the opposition and, in return, were provided with sanctuary from which they launched raids in 1999 and 2000 against Uzbekistan.

Uzbek forces intervened in behalf of Rakhmonov during the civil war, providing limited numbers of troops for the CIS Peacekeeping Force (CISPKF), arming large numbers of pro-Rakhmonov fighters, airlifting supplies and arms to government-controlled Kulyab when that region was under blockade, and providing air support for government ground actions. Uzbekistan was unhappy with the provisions of the peace agreement that brought Islamists into government. Uzbek-Tajik relations deteriorated rapidly in 1996–97 and Uzbekistan supported Khudoiberdiev's challenge to Rakhmonov in 1997–98, providing sanctuary for the former's forces when he retreated. With the IMU attacks through Kyrgyzstan into Uzbekistan in 1999 and 2000, the Uzbek government established severe restrictions on trade and movement across the border with Tajikistan and laid considerable numbers of mines along it, producing numerous fatalities among residents of those border regions.

Looking to the future, the prognosis for Uzbekistan is bleak. Efforts to suppress Islamic opposition to the government appear to be generating significant popular discontent and rising levels of violence. More recently, changes in economic policy provoked a mass demonstration of traders in Kokand (Azamatova and Sulaimonov, 2004).<sup>92</sup> The capacity of the current government to hold on to power may be questioned. Any serious challenge to it risks civil war or chaos in Uzbekistan, the most populous and most powerful country in the region. Such a development would have serious spillover effects on neighbouring countries, including Tajikistan, and create new demand for weapons in the region.

The second major complication in Tajikistan's regional context is Afghanistan. Afghanistan was in mid-civil war when Tajikistan gained its independence. It was a major source of weapons for the opposition side in the Tajik civil war. Ahmed Shah Massoud's forces, which dominated the Tajik border region, provided sanctuary for Tajik refugees and training areas and support for opposition fighters driven from Khatlon, Dushanbe, Karategin, and Tavildara in 1992. As the Taliban grew in power, Massoud's interests changed. He sought the support of Tajikistan's government in order to secure supplies of weapons from Iran and the Russian Federation needed to resist further Taliban advances.<sup>93</sup> This in turn gave him a stake in peace in Tajikistan, which was a major contributing factor to the conclusion of the peace agreement in June 1997.<sup>94</sup>

The second point to make regarding Afghanistan concerns the narcotics trade. Afghanistan has long been a major source of opiates traded into Europe. Although production declined under the Taliban poppy ban in 1999–2000, it expanded substantially after the Taliban were removed from power and continues to grow, as do volumes of illicit trade across the Tajik border. Eighty-five per cent of seizures of narcotics in Central Asia occur in Tajikistan.<sup>95</sup> The composition of this trade has altered, with heroin making up an increasing proportion at the expense of raw opium.<sup>96</sup> This in turn has generated a related trade in precursor chemicals. In 2002, Tajik authorities and the RBF seized some four tons of narcotics, while in the first nine months of 2003, seizures totalled 6.8 tons. Both Tajik and international agency officials estimate that this is around 10 per cent of the total volume of drugs crossing Tajikistan (RFE/RL, 2003b). This suggests a total volume of 40–68 tons. The drug trade is usually associated with the movement of arms. Although, as we have noted in section I of the report, drugs-related use of arms is low in Tajikistan, many drugs seizures involve confiscation of illegal weapons as well.

The third point regarding Afghanistan concerns terrorism. Afghanistan provided sanctuary for a wide array of Islamic radical groups during the Taliban period (1996–2001). These included groups committed to political change in Central Asia and western China, some of which (e.g. the IMU) enjoyed close relations with al Qaeda. These groups were destroyed or severely damaged during the American-led removal of the Taliban in late 2001. Despite a successful national election in October 2004, the failure thus far of coalition and govern-



Russian border guards load drugs seized on the Tajik–Afghan border near the Tajik town of Kulyab in January 2005.  
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ment forces to consolidate control of Afghanistan and growing activity on the part of the Taliban opposition to the Karzai government raise the possibility that Afghanistan may re-emerge as a sanctuary for Islamic groups opposed to the secular status quo in Central Asia. Not only is Tajikistan a potential target in this regard, but it is also the easiest conduit for movement by armed groups towards targets deeper inside Central Asia. In a general sense, stability in Tajikistan is closely linked to political developments in Afghanistan, not only because of the possibility of spillovers of terrorism and the profound impact of the narcotics trade, but also because of the ethnic links between Afghan and Tajik politics, and the heritage of close political (and military interaction) between groups in the two countries.

Beyond Central Asia, several other states impinge in significant ways on the security equation. China shares a substantial border with Tajikistan, and is faced with a low-level ethnically- (Uighur) and religiously-based insurgency

in Xinjiang. The insurgents have enjoyed reasonably close links to al Qaeda and had bases and training facilities in Afghanistan during the Taliban period. Arms and personnel were smuggled into China via Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan during that period, and China has taken steps to strengthen its border with both countries. China has also actively promoted multilateral counter-terrorist activities under the umbrella of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). In a larger strategic sense, China has an interest in ensuring that Central Asia remains a relatively benign environment and has evinced discomfort with the growing American security presence in the region, including Tajikistan.<sup>97</sup>

The Russian Federation inherited the USSR's strategic presence in Tajikistan in the form of border forces, and the 201<sup>st</sup> MRD. Russian Federation forces intervened early in the civil war to end disturbances in Dushanbe. These forces were allegedly a significant source of weapons supply for the two sides in the evolving conflict. In 1992–93, in cooperation with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, the Russian Federation established a CIS peacekeeping force to defend its interests in Tajikistan and to contain if not resolve hostilities in the country. The Russian Federation also played a major role in mediating the peace agreement of 1997. It has retained army and border force units in Tajikistan since that time, although in 2004 it agreed with Tajikistan on a phased withdrawal of the latter. Despite this agreement, the Russian Federation has enhanced its military capacity in the region as a whole since 2001, ostensibly as part of the general concern about terrorism, but also reflecting its unease with regard to the expanding American strategic presence there. It is a reasonably active participant in both SCO and CIS counter-terrorism cooperation in the Central Asian region. Its new air base at Kant is ostensibly intended to provide air support for regional rapid reaction capability.

The Russian Federation's behaviour in the region has reflected several factors. One is concern over a threat from Islam, originating in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Since 2001, and in the context of foreign engagement in the insurgency in Chechnya, this concern has merged with the threat of terrorism. Afghanistan is perceived as a source of terrorism, but also of drug and gun flows. This leads to a more practical consideration: the Russian Federation does not have the required infrastructure effectively to control its border with Kazakhstan. Constructing an effective border system on the Russian Federation–Kazakhstan

frontier would be prohibitively expensive. Consequently, for much of the period since Central Asia's independence, the Russian Federation has taken a view expressed in 1993 by Boris Yeltsin: Tajikistan's border with Afghanistan is also the Russian Federation's border with Afghanistan. The decision to withdraw the RBF from Tajikistan suggests that such practical concerns may be waning in significance. On the other hand, the withdrawal of the RBF will make it more difficult to control the Tajik border with Afghanistan and therefore the drugs and guns that flow across it.

More broadly, the Russian Federation has claimed pre-eminence in the CIS space, and notably in Central Asia. It has displayed discomfort with growing penetration of the region by external powers. Even (or particularly) after 2001, when President Putin acquiesced to American military engagement in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan, Russian Federation behaviour displays a concern to sustain strategic influence in the region and to limit American inroads.

As for the United States, during the Clinton administration, the salience of the Central Asian region as a source of energy grew in US foreign policy. This had little effect on Tajikistan itself, although it did increase the geopolitical stakes in the region as a whole. The 'war on terror' increased Central Asia's importance to the United States to a much greater degree. It sought military facilities in the region from which to pursue the campaign in Afghanistan and to support that country's stabilization after the overthrow of the Taliban. The campaign in Afghanistan ended quickly, but there is little sign that America's engagement in the region is temporary. Although the principal focus of American military engagement has been Uzbekistan, both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have benefited from much closer security relations with and substantially increased flows of military and related (e.g. border control and anti-trafficking) assistance from the United States.<sup>98</sup>

The deepening Russian Federation and US involvement in the region's affairs reflects shared interests in the control of terrorism and narcotics. However, it carries the prospect of competition between them, and, as seen above, of implicating China in this competition as well. To the extent that this competition proceeds in the area of security assistance, it could produce substantial additional flows of weapons into the region, including to Tajikistan.

In short, the regional context has important implications for small arms in Tajikistan. Violence in contiguous states may implicate Tajikistan in illicit arms transfer, as well as spilling over into Tajikistan itself, affecting demand for small arms and light weapons. Regional criminal activities may create and sustain a demand for illegal weapons. The dynamic of the region's geopolitics is generating an increasing flow of arms into it.

## The civil war

### *A short history of the context of small arms and light weapons issues*

The most important historical and contextual factor in assessing the small arms issue in Tajikistan is the recent experience of civil war. The civil war began soon after independence in December 1991. At the elite level, the political process in the pre-independence period had undermined the traditional control of the Leninobodi group within the Tajikistan Communist Party, as well as the hold of the party itself on power when faced with the rise of self-styled democratic and Islamic movements.

In the meantime, the atrophy and then disappearance of central control from Moscow greatly increased political uncertainty among political elites. The parameters of political and economic competition had been reasonably clear (and narrow) in Soviet times. Without the deterrent effect of central power, everything was up for grabs—politically and economically. Given fairly deep sectional rivalries within the party, it was improbable that consensus could be achieved on a new dispensation, and the capacity of the state to constrain competitive behaviour was extremely low. In such positions, actors in conflict generally revert to unilateral positions ('take what you can and protect what you've got'), particularly when the pie was shrinking as a result of the loss of central subsidies.

At the mass level, life was becoming substantially more difficult as Soviet institutions collapsed. The value of pay and savings declined rapidly. Enterprises ran into significant difficulties, with consequences for employment. Social safety nets and free public services crumbled as the state could no longer sustain them. Mass social and economic uncertainty and associated social frustration were a fertile bed for political mobilization for conflict.

From a small arms perspective, two further elements of the pre-war situation deserve mention. In general, after the Soviet collapse, the newly independent governments of the former Soviet republics received a share of Soviet military assets and established their own armed forces. This process had not occurred by the time Tajikistan descended into civil war: there was no Tajik Army. Official possession of arms was limited to republican security organs (the MVD, republican KGB, etc.) and to Soviet units in place at the time (some 10,000 soldiers in the 201<sup>st</sup> MRD and 7,500 in the border forces contingent guarding the republic's frontiers with Afghanistan and China). Moreover, Tajikistan, in contrast to, for example, Moldova, was not a major weapons store for the Soviet military. It was not anticipated as a major offensive vector in the event of war; nor, given the terrain along the Tajik–China border, was it seen to be under threat from an attack originating in a neighbouring state. Moreover, representation of regional groups in the power ministries was uneven: Pamiris were increasingly represented in the MVD and Kulyabis in the republican KGB and the (Soviet) armed forces (Tadjbaksh, 1996, p. 337). Where these organs fragmented under the pressure of war, limited opportunities were created for access to official weapons by these groups.<sup>99</sup>

The course of the war has been outlined earlier in the report. The conflict occasioned unilateral intervention (mainly through the use of air power and arms transfers) by Uzbekistan in support of the government. The opposition benefited from the support of Tajik-dominated factions in northern Afghanistan, and from financial underpinning originating in the Middle East, much of which was used to purchase weapons. The CIS, acting at the behest of neighbouring Central Asian states (concerned by the threat of political Islam) and the Russian Federation (which had a strategic interest in control of the Tajik frontier with Afghanistan), inserted the CISPKF in 1992 in an effort to stabilize the situation, pending a settlement of the conflict. From 1994, the UN Mission of Observers in Tajikistan (UNMOT) observed this force.

The war—and associated atrocities committed against civilians (notably in Khatlon)—generated a massive flow of refugees, principally into Afghanistan: 600,000 people fled and, in exile, provided a mass base of support for the opposition's military campaign. An estimated 50,000 people died in the war, the largest death toll of any conflict in the former Soviet Union.<sup>100</sup>

Government efforts to gain control of its own forces and of small arms proliferation in general began in 1993, with the integration of Kulyabi forces into a national army, and an associated disarmament process among pro-government forces in that region. In 1994, President Rakhmonov declared an amnesty on illegal civilian possession of arms and a protracted collection of civilian weapons began in areas under government control.

The war came to an end in a political settlement in 1997. Its principal characteristics included an agreement on power sharing that allowed substantial opposition participation in the central government and regional authorities.

As indicated in section I, the agreement was not accepted by all combatants. Some commanders challenged the settlement in political–military terms, with the main challenge coming from Makhmud Khudoiberdiev.

### *The decline and fall of Makhmud Khudoiberdiev*

Khudoiberdiev was a leading government commander in the civil war. His forces were among the best-organized fighters on the government side. Khudoiberdiev headed one battalion that controlled areas around Kurgan Tube and Tursunzoda. Estimates of the number of soldiers in the battalion range from 200 to 1,000 men.<sup>101</sup> Khudoiberdiev and many of the men under him were ethnic Uzbeks with Tajik citizenship. Khudoiberdiev disagreed with the political strategies of the NRC and clashed with other former government and opposition forces in August 1997. He and his men then retreated south via Shaartuz and Beshkent into southern Uzbekistan.

The battalion is said to have left a number of arms caches in Tajikistan near the Uzbek border. This is confirmed by the high number of caches found near Beshkent. One former law enforcement officer claimed that Beshkent had the highest ratio of discovery of arms caches in western Khatlon.<sup>102</sup>

Some observers suggest that, after leaving Tajikistan, Khudoiberdiev and his men moved through Uzbekistan into Afghanistan in November 1997 to assist General Dostum. Khudoiberdiev returned to Uzbekistan in June 1998 and set up a base close to Djishar, near the Tajik border. The group was reportedly equipped with Uzbek combat gear in October 1998 and later entered the Tajik border area near Shakristan. Khudoiberdiev's forces launched an attack on 3 November 1998 on key sites in Khujand, including the base of the interior forces

regiment, the OVD station, the MB station, and the post and telecommunications office. In the course of the fighting, Khudoiberdiev's men managed to obtain weapons from law enforcement stores, which were distributed to civilians. It seems that Khudoiberdiev aimed to encourage ordinary citizens in Sughd province to take his side in a campaign against the government.<sup>103</sup> Few civilians, however, took up arms.

Government reinforcements were dispatched to Sughd province the following day and Khudoiberdiev's fighters were quickly defeated. The government is reported to have lost 39 men in the fighting, while approximately 50 of Khudoiberdiev's men were killed. Khudoiberdiev's battalion retreated through Nau and Chakalovsk regions, leaving weapons behind as they retreated.

Law enforcement agencies, in particular the MVD and MB, quickly moved to collect the weapons distributed by Khudoiberdiev to civilians in Sughd. Most households living near the areas through which Khudoiberdiev retreated were questioned about gun possession after the events. The collected guns were, according to observers, meticulously recorded.<sup>104</sup>

An interesting feature of these events is Khudoiberdiev's inability to mobilize other factions in the Tajik elite. His forces remained isolated and were easily suppressed by government forces with the support of UTO fighters. The failure of Khudoiberdiev, one of the best-organized commanders, provided a powerful lesson to others: if Khudoiberdiev was unable to seize power from President Rakhmonov and the NRC in 1997–98, then other attempts were likely to prove equally futile.

### *Flow and sources of weapons in 1992*

When Tajikistan descended into civil war in the spring of 1992, there were two potential sources of small arms—external and internal. Both played a significant role in fuelling the conflict. The main internal sources were leakages from the former Soviet Army units and local law enforcement structures.

Two branches of the Soviet armed forces had units in the Tajik SSR at the time of independence: the border guards and the 201<sup>st</sup> MRD. The 201<sup>st</sup> MRD had been stationed on Tajik territory since 1945. It had been dispatched to Afghanistan as part of the Soviet intervention and had been the last unit to withdraw after Soviet forces pulled out. Tajikistani citizens who took part in

this withdrawal claim that Soviet forces left much of their weaponry with their allies in Afghanistan.<sup>105</sup> In 1991, the 201<sup>st</sup> MRD had five regiments, one in Kurgan Tube, one in Kulyab, and three in Dushanbe. The standard size of one Soviet Army regiment (*polk*) was 3,000 men. It is likely that there was on average one small arm for each soldier. This could mean that there were at least 15,000 small arms and light weapons in the 201<sup>st</sup> MRD in 1991.<sup>106</sup> The Kulyab regiment was not attacked during the civil war and is unlikely to have suffered major leakage.<sup>107</sup> The Kurgan Tube and Dushanbe regiments, however, were situated near areas where many of the major early clashes occurred. The Kurgan Tube regiment may have yielded a substantial part of its small arms and light weapons. Dushanbe regiments, with a likely total stockpile of at least 9,000 small arms and light weapons, also may have suffered serious leakage.<sup>108</sup>

The second deployment of the Soviet military structure in Tajikistan was the border forces. There were four border commands (*otryadi*): Murghab, Khorog, Moskovsky, and Pyanj. Each command is likely to have had 2,000 men, with at least one small arm or light weapon per soldier.<sup>109</sup> A plausible estimate of the border forces' small arms and light weapons stockpile is therefore at least 8,000 weapons. However, there are few accounts of large-scale trading in guns by the border forces. The smaller units seemed to have been mostly concerned with protecting themselves. At times, they were attacked by both government-affiliated and opposition-affiliated groups. An exception seems to have been the border force detachments in the Kalaikum area, which in focus group sessions and interviews for this report were frequently mentioned as a key gun source. These detachments were deployed near the Vayho valley, which was later to become a headquarters of the opposition forces.

Tajikistan and the Russian Federation concluded a general agreement on the status of the former Soviet military units in 1993. Between 1991 and 1993, it had been unclear which countries or institutions should control the formerly Soviet units and who should serve in the new structures. Some border forces were bolstered by CIS peacekeeping units during the civil war. The border, however, remained relatively open in these years, in particular in GBAO.

Local law enforcement structures constituted a second internal source for arms acquisition in 1991–92. There were probably around 20,000–30,000 law enforcement officers from all the power structures (i.e. KGB, MVD, Civil Defence,

Presidential Guard, etc.) and 30,000–60,000 small arms and light weapons.<sup>110</sup> Much of this stockpile was retained by law enforcement agencies and was used by government forces to fight the opposition. As tensions escalated, however, a split appeared in the law enforcement structures themselves, with some high-ranking officers choosing to side with opposition forces. These officers appropriated the weapons available to them.<sup>111</sup> In the early period of the fighting, opposition forces attacked some MVD and KGB stations in Dushanbe and Khatlon to seize weapons. The MVD claims that it has records of the number of guns lost and found during the war, but these were not made available to the researchers of this report.<sup>112</sup>

In addition to the law enforcement stockpiles, in 1991 there were also 1,800 guns for military training (*voennaya podgotovka*) in high schools and universities.<sup>113</sup> The military draft commissions, the *voennkomat*, which had offices across Tajikistan, also had stockpiles. Weapons from these two sources were seized quickly by both sides. However, the stockpiles of the *voennkomat* offices were limited. There were no large reserves of military weapons to equip draftees in Tajikistan, since conscripts from Tajikistan reported to Termez (Uzbekistan), and were issued necessary equipment, including weapons, there.<sup>114</sup> When the *voennkomat* office for Sughd province was robbed by its former head, Major-General Mamjonov, only 101 AK-47s were stolen, 99 of which were retrieved by law enforcement authorities afterwards.<sup>115</sup> There were also no stores of weapons for mobilization in the event of attack, since Tajikistan was not a promising route for offensives directed against the USSR.

The internal weapons supply did not meet the demand for guns in 1992. Government forces were supplied with weapons from Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, and Uzbekistan. During the blockade of Kulyab, weapons and food supplies for National Front supporters of the Rakhmonov government were flown in by Uzbek and Russian Federation planes. In the initial phase of fighting, civilians in Khatlon were encouraged to join the National and Popular Fronts. Trucks loaded with weapons from Uzbekistan arrived at the Uzbek–Tajik border village of Gulbrahor (near Termez). In some instances, government commanders also went to Afghanistan to purchase weapons equipment.<sup>116</sup> There were also limited cases of procurement directly from Russian Federation weapons producers.<sup>117</sup>

The opposition groups and civilians associated with the opposition acquired weapons internally through the defection of sympathetic law enforcement officials, the seizure of government stockpiles, and the purchase of guns from Russian Federation forces and national law enforcement officers. The main source, however, was weapons procurement in Afghanistan. The political instability in late 1991 and early 1992 triggered large-scale efforts to bring weapons across the Pyanj River.

### *Weapon supplies and financial support, 1992–97*

The opposition forces were pressed hard in late 1992 and early 1993; most fled to Afghanistan. Former fighters and civilians claim the opposition forces were badly equipped and faced shortages in weapons and ammunition prior to their departure. Many civilians perceived to be affiliated with opposition forces faced grave security threats and were also forced to seek refuge in Afghanistan.<sup>118</sup> It is likely that weapons acquired by the opposition fighters and civilians in the period 1991–92 were taken along to Afghanistan to provide some degree of protection.

The opposition forces reorganized in Afghanistan. The major political and military leaders met in early 1993 and formed the UTO. These leaders then raised money for the support of the refugees and for weapons procurement for the fighting groups. The financial support for weapons came mainly, according to interviews with former centrally placed opposition members, from transnational organizations with members in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Pakistan. Weapons were procured in Afghanistan and Pakistan.<sup>119</sup>

Drug trafficking was not a source for financing weapons procurement in 1992, but it became increasingly important during the course of the war. The major drug trafficking routes in the early 1990s went through GBAO, and it was particularly the commanders from these areas that utilized drug trafficking for weapons procurement. In 1995, the commander Alesha Gorbun admitted to, and defended, the drug trafficking. He noted that aside from the use of drugs for making food purchases, 'we also need money for buying weapons in order to defend ourselves' (*Literaturnaya Gazeta*, 1995).

The government forces continued to rely primarily on weapons supplies from Collective Security Treaty allies such as Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and the

Russian Federation. It is uncertain how or if Tajikistan paid for these supplies. The country's financial situation in the early and mid-1990s did not allow for monetary payment, but it is possible that the weapons procurement was registered as government debt. Alternatively, weapons might have formed part of barter arrangements. Government forces occupied important production sites during the war, such as the aluminium factory in Tursunzoda and precious-metal sites like the gold mine of Tajik Zoloto in Khovaling, near Kulyab. Aside from providing resources for the general upkeep of troops, these production sites may have financed some of the government weapons procurement.

### *Mobilization of fighters, distribution of weapons, and post-war social situation of fighters<sup>120</sup>*

Village authorities affiliated with the state administrative structures or informal community structures influenced young Tajik men's decisions on whether to fight in the civil war. Most fighters surveyed in semi-structured interviews for this report stressed it was their own decision to take up arms. Many, however, referred in addition to requirements or expectations levied on the young men by the structures mentioned above. In the National and Popular Front areas such as Hissor and Kulyab, fighters noted that there was a call by local authorities for all men to join the fighting. The men were told they had to fight to prevent the establishment of an Islamic state. As one government fighter noted: 'the Mullahs were declared to be enemies'. Another fighter said, 'my relatives and friends went [fighting] so it was embarrassing for me not to go'. Some were promised benefits, while others were pressured by government authorities, in particular the local military draft board committees (*voenkomat*). Young men who did not want to fight left for the Russian Federation or Kyrgyzstan. In opposition areas, most fighters said that they joined the fighting groups in order to defend their families and their property, both of which were being attacked. Still, some fighters from opposition areas noted that many fighters were forced to participate by more informal structures such as family networks and individual opposition commanders. Relatives of commanders seem to have been particularly likely to join the fighting groups. Many stressed that it had been a question of survival: either accept the arms offered and join the opposition, or the government or opposition groups would kill you.

Fighters from the same village or with common family ties seem often to have grouped into the same units, though many of the opposition fighters that were interviewed in the Rasht area also referred to mixed groups that included people from the resettled communities in Vakhsh and southern border districts in Khatlon, as well as Kofarnihon and Dushanbe.

Most fighters claim that they were given guns by their commanders. Very few noted that they had to buy their own guns or had heard of fighters that had to buy their own guns. The very act on the part of commanders of acquiring guns seems to have established these men as war leaders. Control over the distribution of guns was one of the main initial sources of prestige and influence for the commanders. They also played a prominent role in the collection of weapons after the war. Fighters from government areas reported that the way guns had been collected had resulted in problems later on. In many cases the fighters had given their guns to their government commanders, who had also been responsible for the record keeping of the weapons handover. Later, however, the commanders had died or left the country, but the MVD would still demand that the fighter give up a gun he no longer had, and for which he had no proof of handing in.

The fighters interviewed noted that some of the armed groups on both sides had been occupied with criminal activities such as theft. At times, the lines had become blurred between those groups struggling for a political cause and those simply looting and robbing.

Many former fighters stressed that they had encountered difficulties since 1997. Law enforcement officers regularly summoned former opposition members for questioning and put pressure, often in breach of their codes of conduct, on former fighters to admit to illegal gun possession or other crimes. The majority of former fighters (5,377) were granted amnesty in the list of 1999. Nevertheless, few fighters are familiar with the legal technicalities of this amnesty and most are not aware of their full rights and the protection given to them. Their lack of knowledge may easily be exploited by law enforcement agencies.<sup>121</sup> Moreover, local law enforcement may interpret the ambiguously phrased amnesty laws in ways that are unfavourable to the former fighters (ICG, 2004).

Some opposition fighters who have returned from labour migration in the Russian Federation noted that the MVD summoned them for questioning imme-

diately on their return. The fighters stressed that this is done not because the returned person is particularly likely to have committed crimes that are unanswered for, but because the returned migrants are expected to have good financial means and can be made to pay bribes.<sup>122</sup> The old integrated opposition units have provided important support to the fighters when they have had difficulties with law enforcement authorities. High-ranking officers formerly with the opposition have intervened to assist former fighters faced by threats of investigation from law enforcement agencies. However, with the increasing dilution of the opposition units within law enforcement structures and the overall decrease in the number of former opposition fighters in law enforcement and the military, this kind of support is now harder to come by.

The overall consequence of law enforcement pressure on former fighters is caution on the part of the fighters, in particular with regard to gun possession. They might have knowledge of illegal arms caches or have their own guns stored clandestinely away from their property or houses, but few are likely to have weapons readily available in their homes.

## Demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration in Tajikistan after 1997

The 1997 peace agreement provided a detailed framework for the demobilization of opposition forces.<sup>123</sup> Particular areas were singled out as assembly points for opposition fighters in 1997 and 1998. The main assembly points were in Kofarnihon, Khorog, Vanj, Garm, Komsomolo, Tojikobod, and Lenin districts, where fighters from the mountain areas and the groups in Afghanistan gathered in late 1997 and early 1998. Apparently fighters from Afghanistan were often first registered and disarmed in Afghanistan.<sup>124</sup> Representatives of the NRC undertook medical checks and the registration of all assembled fighters. UNMOT observed this process. The fighters initially remained in their original groups and were integrated as whole units into the military and law enforcement structures. While some 'battalions' were created (such as the units of MVD interior troops in Garm and Khorog), some groups of fighters joined existing structures. Of the 6,842 combatants registered by the NRC sub-commission on military affairs, 6,061 were approved for further service.<sup>125</sup>



The fighting groups submitted some of their weapons upon registration, though there is anecdotal evidence that guns also remained in the hands of the opposition. For example, a former opposition commander researchers spoke to in the Rasht district centre said that there had been at least 790 registered former fighters in his area. Half of these joined the interior troops battalion, but only 190 guns were handed over.<sup>126</sup> Staff in the Ministry of Emergency Situations in Khorog similarly noted to researchers that they received 50–60 opposition fighters, but only nine pieces of weaponry were handed in.<sup>127</sup>

Table 13

**Opposition fighters who handed in a weapon upon registration and disarmament (as recorded by UN observers in 1998)<sup>128</sup>**

Area	%
Lenin district	48
Kofarnihon	37
Karategin districts	35
GBAO	29
Total integrated UTO fighters: 6,238 in 1998	Total weapons handed in in 1998: 2,119 (36%)

Source: UNMOT news briefings

The weapons that were registered were later transferred officially with full documentation into the government units that the opposition fighters had joined. Some of these weapons remained in the gun room of the particular unit or were transferred to the central stockpiles in Dushanbe of the relevant ministry or government committee.<sup>129</sup> Officers originally affiliated with government forces in many cases obtained de facto control over the integrated opposition weapons.<sup>130</sup>

**Civil war commanders:  
The reduction in political and military significance**

Section I described in general terms the gradual reduction in numbers of politically active former commanders and the waning political influence of the

commanders in recent years. The section still argued, however, that significant weapons stockpiles are likely to remain in the hands of former commanders. A number of specific incidents in 2004 have highlighted the decline of many commanders' positions, while also revealing the continued role played by small arms and light weapons. Below are outlined in detail two such incidents, the attempted arrests of two former opposition commanders in the Rasht valley, and the arrest of former government commander Gaffur 'Sidoy' Mirzoev. This is followed by three tables (Tables 15, 16, and 17) surveying the present and former actions and positions of the most commonly referred to commanders on the government and opposition sides, and leaders of armed gangs from both sides, in order to assess their potential for creating instability in post-civil war Tajikistan. These detailed insights are important. They lend credibility to the claim that the role of former commanders is greatly reduced in Tajikistan—in effect making the country significantly more stable and reducing the role of small arms and light weapons compared with the civil war years and the period immediately following the peace agreement.

Table 14

**Weapons seized by MVD from Yeribek 'Sheik' Ibrahimov**

Type	Quantity
'Sagger' anti-tank guided missile launcher	15
IGLA—NATO-designated SA-18 portable surface-to-air guided missile	10
Light machine gun	4
Motor bomb	113
RPG-7 rocket	80
'Sagger' missile	21
Ariel bomb	112
122 mm rocket—for a GRAD missile system	1
73 mm cannon from BMP 1 tracked APC	1
Small arms ammunition—various	5,000
Safety fuse	10
Explosives	1

Source: Abdullaev (2004)

### *Government crackdown on former opposition commanders in 2004*

Government agents attempted to arrest two former commanders between June and September 2004. Akhmad Safarov's home was surrounded by an armed MVD task force in June after a marijuana dealer under interrogation in Dushanbe reportedly told the MVD that Safarov was the owner of the marijuana he had been selling. Safarov shot his way out of the circle of police and fled to the mountains, where he remains at large. A group of his men, estimated at between five and 30, joined him to offer protection (IWPR, 2004d). Another former commander, Yeribek 'Sheik' Ibrahimov, led a group of 20 men in an armed attack on the MVD station in Tojikobod on 26–27 August 2004. Ibrahimov was arrested on 2 September. He cited revenge for repeated harassment by the local law enforcement agencies as the reason for the attack. A sizeable stockpile belonging to Ibrahimov was found after his arrest (see Table 14). He stated that part of his stockpile remained from the civil war. The rest had been left by IMU leader Juma Namangani.

### *Weapons seizures and arrest of Gaffur 'Sidoy' Mirzoev*

The arrest of Mirzoev illustrated how weapons possession and control over government posts have helped some of the former government commanders to maintain strength and influence since 1997.

Mirzoev, from Kulyab, was one of the main leaders of the Popular Front during the war and came to serve as the head of the Presidential Guard from 1995 onwards. In January 2004, President Rakhmonov dismissed Mirzoev from this post, but later reappointed him as head of the DCA. Rakhmonov is said to have dismissed Mirzoev so as to eliminate potential political rivals ahead of the parliamentary (2005) and presidential (2006) elections.<sup>131</sup> Rakhmonov only unwillingly reappointed Mirzoev as DCA head. It may be that it was the knowledge of Mirzoev's large weapons stockpiles that prompted Rakhmonov to give Mirzoev the top post in the DCA. Political analyst and head of staff in the IRP, Hikmotullo Saifullasoda, argued that the large quantity of weapons in Mirzoev's hands was known to the law enforcement agencies, and that 'with these weapons [Mirzoev] was able to move from the post as head of the President's Guard to become head of the DCA' (Avesta News Agency, 2004a).



Tajik investigators inspect weapons found in Dushanbe in August 2004. Meanwhile, the head of the Tajik Drug Control Agency, Gaffur Mirzoev, was arrested and charged with murdering a district police chief outside Dushanbe in 1998, as well as illegally possessing weapons and contraband. © Nozim Kalandarov/Reuters/Avesta

There were rumours in Dushanbe in January and February 2004 that ‘200 loyal officers’ from the guard would move to protect Mirzoev if pressured, but no support from these supposed loyal men materialized in the course of events (IWPR, 2004a).

On 6 August, President Rakhmonov removed Mirzoev from the post as head of the DCA, arrested him, and had the General Prosecutor’s Office lay over 40 criminal charges against him, including an accusation of the murder of an MVD officer in 1998. Some newspapers reported shooting between law enforcement agents and Mirzoev’s seven bodyguards during the arrest (*Eurasia Insight*, 2004). The criminal charges, aside from murder, included illegal weapons possession, illegal use of bodyguards, and illegal land appropriation. Immediately after Mirzoev’s arrest, an investigation was launched that uncovered large weapons caches in Dushanbe and near Kulyab. Over 3,000 weapons, mostly machine guns and sub-machine guns, had been hidden in the DCA building. In the Mirzoi Rakhmon meat factory, a surface-to-air missile launcher of the Stinger type was discovered, while in the village of Okbulok in Khatlon a large cache containing ammunition and mines was uncovered (Avesta News Agency, 2004b). The total value of the weapons and other equipment seized from Mirzoev and his men was estimated to be over one million USD (Avesta News Agency, 2004b).

The weapons caches are reported to have been known only to Mirzoev and ‘a few of his trusted men’ (Avesta News Agency, 2004b). This suggests that, while some of Mirzoev’s weapons were located in government buildings, they were his own private, and illegal, guns and had not been part of official government-registered stockpiles. Other items, however, such as two helicopters, had been registered as part of the Presidential Guard *matériel*, but were rented out privately by Mirzoev to a contractor in Afghanistan.<sup>132</sup>

### *An overview of former civil war commanders*

The following three tables (Tables 15, 16, and 17) reflect the current situations of former UTO and government commanders during the civil war most often mentioned in publicly available source material, and key leaders of armed groups facing criminal charges at present, or already sentenced. The list is not comprehensive, but provides an overview of the commanders most often mentioned

Table 15

#### **Former UTO field commanders**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Main place of operation</b>	<b>Activities before and during the civil war</b>	<b>Activities after the civil war</b>
‘Akhmed’	GBAO		
Ayombekov, Tolib	GBAO		Heads an MVD interior forces battalion in Khorog
‘Boqir’	GBAO		Heads the border guard battalion in Murghab (took over after the Russian Federation withdrawal)
Daroz, Ishon	Vahdat (and formerly Kofarnihon)		Now heading one of the subdivisions of the Tajikistan MVD; 20–30 of his men are said to be working with him
Darveshev, Shakhobiddin (‘Eshoni Junaid’)			After the civil war, his battalion was stationed in Shaartuz on the Afghan border; initially, 100 of his men remained in the battalion, later to be joined by another 200 conscripts.
‘Darvoz’, Ne‘mat			Given a post in the Ministry for Emergency Situations
Davlatov, Alovudin (‘Ali’)	Garm		Became the head of a farm; some reports claim he made attempts to form a <i>madrasah</i> with 20 followers in 1999–2000 for the study of the Koran in combination with hard physical training
Ghairat, Adhamov	Pyanj	Was one of the field commanders that fought in the Khatlon region; based in Afghanistan during the civil war	Appointed as the first deputy of the Ministry of Security (according to the 30% quota in the peace agreement)
Gorbun, Alesha	GBAO	Known as an authoritative and powerful leader during the war	Died in an explosion in front of his house

Ibrahimov, Yerbek ('Sheik')	Tojikobod	One of the political radical opposition commanders; had ties to the IMU	Became the head of a farm; his battalion was disbanded and was imprisoned in September 2004 for attacking the MVD and the prosecutor's office in Tojikobod region and also accused of illegal possession of a large weapons arsenal
'Imum'	GBAO		Paralyzed in a confrontation with government forces in Khorog
Iskandarov, Makhmadrusi	Tojikobod	One of the politically moderate opposition field commanders; a former construction worker	Became the head of state holding company TajikGas, but was controversially dismissed in November 2003; is the owner of a number of private firms, and also founder and leader of the Democratic Party; his former troops serve mainly in the Sughd region; was detained in Moscow on 9 December 2004; later released, but detained in April 2005 by Tajikistan's Ministry of Security and put in a pre-trial detention centre in Dushanbe
Iskandarov, Shoh (brother of M. Iskandarov)	Garm group of regions (Jirgatal)	Commanded a battalion of approximately 400 men	His battalion is now part of KOGG in Jirgatal; is reported to have considerable influence in the region and previously controlled much of the potato trade in the area; was transferred in 2004 to a high level position in KOGG at the Dushanbe headquarters
Kholbashev, Kholbash	Khorog	Worked as an officer of Tajikistan's MVD before the war; considered to have a moderate political position	His battalion was integrated into KOGG and he has protected and controlled a significant portion of the border with Afghanistan
Kalandarov, Hakim	Pyanj region	Educated at a financial-technical institute; from late 1992 to 1995 was in Afghanistan as a deputy to Ziyyev; had 140 men under his command	Almost all of his men were integrated into KOGG and they initially controlled and protected the western border with Uzbekistan
'Malysh'	Tavildara		

Majnunov, Majnun	GBAO		
Mukhabbatov, Salamsho	Vanj region; Pamir	Studied in the agricultural institute in Dushanbe; during the last years of the civil war had close contacts with the RBF	Currently heads the state tourism company Sayoh; his battalion (200–350 men) was formally integrated into KOGG
Narukov, Mahmadozir			Was given a position in the MVD in the Garm region
Nizomov, Mirzokhuja	Garm	Former Soviet militia officer; at the beginning of the war was commanding officer of the Tojikobod MVD; fled to Afghanistan in 1993, but soon returned; one of the first to accept contacts with the government; during the war, had up to 500 men	After the war, was made head of Tajikistan's Customs Committee, but was unexpectedly dismissed in 2002; few are said to remain under his control
Nozim	Vahdat (Kofarnihon)		
Rakhimov, Abdullo ('Mullo Abdullo')	Darband region	Sympathetic to the Taliban; fought not only government troops, but also opposition forces after the signing of the peace agreement; accused of killing Rasht leader, Sergei Dovlatov	After the collapse of his group in autumn 2000, fled to Afghanistan, where is thought to have fought against the coalition forces in 2001
Sadirov, Rizvon		Chief of staff of the armed forces of the Islamic opposition in the early period of the armed conflict; is reported to have fought under Ahmed Shah Massoud's command against the Taliban in the early 1990s	Faced a number of criminal charges stemming from the civil war and was killed in an armed confrontation with government agents in his house

Saidov, Makhmadrusi			Made the head of the MVD in Nurobod region; later transferred to Baljuvon region where he also heads the MVD
Sarabek	Tavildara		Affiliated with the Ministry of Emergency Situations
Shoboi	GBAO		Originally from the Roshtqala region of GBAO, but lived in Dushanbe before the war
Umar, Mullo	Vahdat (Kofarnihon)		Lives in Porshinev, near Khorog
Yodgor	GBAO		Was killed in a government operation in 2001 in the outskirts of Dushanbe
Yorov, Saidmukhtor			Had about 200–300 combatants under his command; controlled the eastern part of Dushanbe: villages (settlements) of Teppai Samarkand and Nagornaya
Zioyev, Mirzo ('Djaga')	Tavildara		Considered to be the most influential of the civil war commanders with the largest military formation, some estimate about 2,000 fighters in 1997; he and his men are reported to have trained in the early 1990s in Afghanistan under Masoud

Table 16

**Former government field commanders**

Name	Main place of operation	Activities before and during the civil war	Activities after the civil war
Abdulloev, Faisullo	Kulyab (fought in Vahdat)	One of the early key commanders of the Popular Front; killed in 1992 during an armed clash	
Abdurakhim, Abdurakhim	Kulyab (fought in Vahdat and Dushanbe)	Fought alongside S. Safarov against the opposition in Kulyab	
Bovmatov, Ibod	Hissor, Tursunzoda, Shahrinav regions	Former bus driver; ethnic Uzbek; rose to power as commander in the Popular Front in 1992	Faced criminal charges after the war
Cholov, Kurbon	Kulyab, Dushanbe	Used to be one of the commanders of the Popular Front; controlled the Kulyab region and also fought in the Khatlon region	Dismissed from government service due to criminal charges; later imprisoned
Cholov, Suleiman	Kulyab, Dushanbe	The brother of Kurbon Cholov; used to be one of the commanders of the Popular Front; controlled the Kulyab region and also fought in the Khatlon region	
Kasymov, Suhrob ('Iron')	Varzob (Garm, Tavildara)	Before the war, worked as a teacher of physical education, then became a commander of the Popular Front; controlled the northern part of Dushanbe; also fought in Garm and Tavildara; reported to have had close connections with the 201 <sup>st</sup> MRD	Remained the commander of a special forces brigade; fought against Makhmud Khudoi-berdiyev and Yakub Salimov after the civil war; headed the Soccer Committee in Tajikistan from 2000; reported to have until recently controlled a major bank in Tajikistan, Oriyon Bank, and also controlled a large cement factory; reported to have well-trained and mobile soldiers and be in possession of anti-aircraft guns and helicopters



Kenjaev, Safarali	Tursunzoda	Before the war, was the deputy of the Supreme Soviet, later chairman of the Armed Forces; during the demonstrations in 1991, was appointed as the minister of security, but owing to pressure from the opposition, was dismissed from office; during the war, became one of the commanders of the group that controlled Hissor and Tursunzoda; one of the founders of the Popular Front; his division was among the forces that entered Dushanbe in January 1993 and occupied the capital; was killed in 1994; considered to be one of the main candidates for president of Tajikistan and was the founder of the Social Party of Tajikistan	Coup attempt in 1997–98; escaped via Uzbekistan
Khudoiberdiev, Makhmud	Kurgan Tube and Tursunzoda	A leading government commander in the civil war; ethnic Uzbek; estimates of number of soldiers under his command range from 200 to 1,000	
Mirzoev, Gaffur ('Sidoi')	Kulyab (Garm, Tavildara)	Graduated from the Pedagogical Institute of Kulyab; became one of the commanders of the Popular Front; controlled the Kulyab region and also fought in Garm, Tavildara, and Dushanbe	From 1995 to 2003, headed the Presidential Guard; is reported to have controlled all of the western part of Tajikistan (Tursunzoda, Shahrinav, and Hissor) and also the southern parts of Kulyab (Baliujon and Khovaling); also reported for a period to have controlled the Tajikistan Aluminum Factory; was dismissed as head of Presidential Guard in January 2004 and appointed as the head of the DCA; in July 2004 was arrested; reported by many to have good relations with Makhmadsaid Ubaidulloev, mayor of Dushanbe and head of the Upper Chamber of Parliament; also previously owned a casino and a hotel in Dushanbe

Safarov, Sangak	Kulyab	Before the war, was a barman in Dushanbe; became one of the founders of the Popular Front; was one of the key leaders of the pro-government forces; killed in 1993 in his house during a meeting with Faizali Saidov	
Salimov, Yakub	Dushanbe	Headed an armed group in Dushanbe; was one of the main commanders believed to have supported Rakhmonov in his bid for the presidency; later appointed as minister of internal affairs; in 1995, protected Rakhmonov with his body during an assassination attempt and was injured	Appointed Tajikistan ambassador to Turkey, but soon came back to Dushanbe and was appointed as chairman of the Customs Committee; after an armed conflict with S. Kasymov in 1998, escaped to Saudi Arabia; in 2003 was arrested in Moscow and was extradited to Dushanbe; currently in the prison of the Minister of Security; many of his supporters have written letters to President Rakhmonov with a petition to free him
Saidov, Faizali	Kulyab (fought in Vahdat)	Before the war, served in the Soviet Army in Germany; all his relatives and family reported to have been killed in the first days of the civil war; his father reported to have been ethnic Lakai-Uzbek from Kurgan Teppa; headed a group of fighters in the Popular Front; was considered to be one of the strongest and most-skilled field commanders among the government forces; killed during a meeting with Sangak Safarov in 1993	
Shamolov, Saidsho	Varzob (Garm, Tavildara)	Used to be one of the commanders of the Popular Front; controlled the Kulyab region and Khatlon valley	Was the head of a unit within the Ministry of Defence until 2003; reported to control several private companies in Dushanbe, and used to have a casino and several restaurants; in 2003, was appointed military attaché in China and is involved in trade and business cooperation with Chinese companies

Table 17

**Key leaders of armed groups from both sides facing criminal charges, 1991–2004**

Name of group leaders	Period of operation	Area	Type of crime that the group or group leaders were accused of	Government actions
Abdushukrov, Kussheh ('Tyson'), and Umarov, Abdurasul	1997	Sughd province	Assassination attempt on the president	14 men convicted
Afionov, Pirumsho	2002	Darvoz region	Killed three shepherds in Davdona village, Khovaling region	Sentenced to death on 11 March 2003
Basaliev, Nabijon	1992–95	Shaartuz region	Killed four people in a Moscow restaurant in 1999	Convicted in Russian Federation and now in prison there
Boboev, Naim	1996–2000	Dushanbe and Direct Rule Districts	Theft and murders; controlled the eastern part of Dushanbe (Zainabbibi, Nagornaya, Karateginskaya str.); reported to have shot his second wife in front of her parents	Killed in fighting with another group
Darveshov, Yukub	1995–99	Komsomol region	Murdered four UNMOT observers	Sentenced to death
Gafurov, Raushan	1996–2001	Dushanbe and Direct Rule Districts	Robbed Ministry of Health storage facility	Killed during internal fighting within his group; remainder of the group arrested in 2002 (R. Kurbanov, F. Kassirov, Z. Gadboev)
Gulov, Said		Hissor, Tursunzoda, Shahrinav regions	Headed a small criminal group	
Kamidov, Kasym		Hissor, Tursunzoda, Shahrinav regions	Headed a small criminal group	
Khasanov, Shomahmad ('Maugly')		Dushanbe and Direct Rule Districts	Various crimes	Sentenced to 23 years in prison
Kurbobaliev, Namoz	1992–98	Dushanbe and Direct Rule Districts	Crimes still under investigation	Sentenced to 20 years in prison in 2003
Nazarov, Nazar, MVD officer	1992–99	Dushanbe and Direct Rule Districts	Controlled Dushanbe, Lenin, and Hissor regions; killed an MVD lieutenant-col.	Killed himself in an explosion before government forces could capture him
Nozirov, Yunus	1992–97	Kofamihon region	Killed a BBC representative, Muhiddin Olimpur, 12 December 1995; killed Russian TV journalist, Viktor Nikulin, 27 March 1996	
Rakhimov, Abdullo ('Mullo Abdullo')	1995–2000	Komsomol region	Armed attacks in Garm region (S. Davlatov)	Group eliminated or dispersed by the government in 2000; Abdullo reported to have fled to Afghanistan
Saidmuhtor, Yorov	1997	Dushanbe and Direct Rule Districts	Led the remains of Rizvon Sodirov's group	Captured in 1997
Sanginov, Rahmon ('Hitler') and Muakalov, Manur	1992–2001	Lenin region	Criminal case against the group consists of 236 volumes; charged with banditry, murder, and robbery	Captured in government operation, 22 June 2000
Shukurov, Rakhmon	1997–2002	Kofamihon region	Murder of three MVD officers	Law enforcement still searching for Shukurov and three members of his group; three other members sentenced to imprisonment
Sodirov, Rizvon and Bakhrom (brothers)	1992–97	Dushanbe and Direct Rule Districts	Armed attack against Gen. Khuvaiddulloev; murder of 16 Vostok-Merkury workers; murder in Garm	Bakhrom Sodirov and Kirovatsho Nasyrov sentenced to death; Rizvon Sodirov killed in fighting with government forces
Tagaev, Rakhmatullo	1999–2001	Dushanbe and Direct Rule Districts	Murder of a Ministry of Security officer, 15 July 1999	Sentenced to death
Urnov, Abdurauf	1992–93	Yovon region	Murder of singer Karomatullo Kurbonov	

in publicly available source material. The tables were compiled on the basis of qualitative interviews, *Asia Plus* and *Crime Info* newspaper reviews, and the overview of commanders presented in Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (2003). As indicated earlier, the tables lend credibility to the claim that the role of former commanders is greatly reduced in Tajikistan—in effect making the country significantly more stable and reducing the role of small arms and light weapons compared with the civil war years and the period immediately following the peace agreement. Particularly noteworthy is the large number of former opposition commanders currently employed by the state, and therefore coopted into state service (14 out of 25 surveyed).

### Estimates of illegal and civilian-held guns in Tajikistan

Estimating illegal guns is inherently problematic. Illegal gun possession in Tajikistan is penalized with high prison sentences. No civilian, former fighter, or former commander is therefore likely to offer reliable information on quantities of illegal weapons in their own or others' possession. The law enforcement agencies are likewise in no position to offer more than estimates of illegal weapons possession. The authors of this report, like the Tajik law enforcement and Tajik authorities, have no hard facts on which to base estimates of illegal possession. They have, however, acquired the following: a general sense of the quantities of weapons that came to be circulated in Tajikistan after the start of the civil war; insights on patterns of civilian and fighter weapons possession during the war; knowledge of the number of weapons collected by the government since 1993; and an awareness of how serious a problem civilians across Tajikistan today think illegal civilian possession is. These insights allow an estimate of the likely quantities of illegal guns across Tajikistan. The accuracy of these figures cannot be guaranteed, and, as such, they should be treated with great caution. However, they should provide the reader with a sense of the scale of the problem of small arms and light weapons as it manifests itself across Tajikistan.

It is also worth stressing that it is at times hard to distinguish between legal and illegal guns in Tajikistan. Getting a weapon such as a sporting and hunting gun registered is a cumbersome and potentially costly procedure, even if a

person is legally entitled to obtain this permission. Given these obstacles, many weapons possessors end up unwillingly with unregistered, and thus illegal, guns.

### *Civilian possession*

Civilian possession of arms is by law restricted to hunting weapons, sports weapons, and pneumatic weapons. In an interview in the summer of 2003, the deputy minister of internal affairs noted that there were 9,863 hunting guns registered in Tajikistan. A representative of the Committee for Environmental Protection claimed recently, however, that there were about 15,000 active hunters in Tajikistan. Each hunter is likely to have at least one hunting gun. This means that either the committee overestimates the number of hunters or there are a substantial number of hunting guns that remain unregistered. In remote and mountainous areas, villagers may have difficulties in obtaining or renewing the necessary registration and permits.<sup>133</sup> The difficulties with ensuring re-registration of membership in the hunting society are important, because these are likely to cause many hunters involuntarily to possess illegal firearms. This in turn makes them easy targets in MVD collection campaigns.

Figures for the number of air-powered and sports weapons in civilian possession were not made available to researchers, but focus group interviews did not suggest that gun sports are a common leisure activity in Tajikistan. It is unlikely that there are significant numbers of either type of weapon in the country.

Based on the input from nearly 1,000 participants in the 76 focus groups held across Tajikistan, the statements of the majority of the former fighters interviewed, and many of the 160 interviews held with government officials and other informed observers, it seems that civilian possession of illegal arms is, in general, very low in Tajikistan. When asked about the likelihood of illegal civilian gun possession, the overwhelming majority of respondents noted how dangerous it would be to keep an unregistered gun at home. If the police were to discover illegal weapons, it would result in a cumbersome and expensive legal case against them. Most ordinary civilians had either not acquired weapons during the war or had made sure to turn in their weapons some time after the introduction of the gun amnesty law in 1994.



This conclusion is supported by anecdotal evidence on violence against women, data on gun injuries, and accounts of suicides.<sup>134</sup> Women, NGOs, and representatives from law enforcement agencies state that domestic violence rarely involves the use of guns.<sup>135</sup> Hospital data from Dushanbe shows few incidents of women injured by guns. Qualitative interviews with law enforcement and medical personnel on suicide indicate that hanging and self-immolation, not guns, are the most common means.

Some qualifications, however, need to be made to the picture of overall low gun possession rates. In comparison to other respondents, focus group subjects and interviewees in the former opposition areas, including GBAO, more commonly voice concern that some guns might be left in the hands of civilians in their areas. Researchers also have reason to believe that civilians in these areas faced graver security threats over a longer period of time than civilians in the rest of the country. This situation would increase the perceived need and demand for weapons on their part. While gun possession is likely to be low in the remaining parts of the country, it is worth examining nevertheless. Particular individuals might have their own reasons for possessing guns, either for criminal or personal protection needs.

These considerations led researchers to single out two different rates for illegal gun possession in Tajikistan. They base these possible rates on descriptions and judgements made by civilians living in the respective areas. On the one hand, there are the former opposition areas, including GBAO, with a higher estimate: approximately every 5<sup>th</sup> to every 15<sup>th</sup> household may have possessed one illegal gun in 1997. On the other hand, there are the remaining parts of Tajikistan with a lower estimate: approximately every 15<sup>th</sup> to every 25<sup>th</sup> household may have possessed an illegal gun in 1997.

Both categories are likely to have further distinctions within them, such as higher possession rates in urban and border areas than elsewhere. Moreover, for the lower category, there might be significant differences between Khatlon, which was the scene of much fighting in the early period of the civil war, and Sughd, which had no fighting save the incursion by Khudoiberdiev in 1998. As the researchers were unable to map these differences accurately, they chose instead to provide broader estimates in the form of higher and lower rates, which should encompass these variations.

Table 18  
**Illegal civilian gun possession in 1997 in main opposition areas**

Regions in opposition areas	Total number of households	Number of weapons if every 5 <sup>th</sup> household had an illegal weapon	Number of weapons if every 15 <sup>th</sup> household had an illegal weapon
<i>Direct Rule</i>			
<i>Districts:</i>			
Lenin	37,000	7,400	2,467
Fayzobod	10,000	2,000	667
Roghun	3,000	600	200
Kofarnihon	23,000	4,600	1,533
Darband	7,000	1,400	467
Rasht	15,000	3,000	1,000
Tavildara	2,000	400	133
Tojikobod	4,000	800	267
Jirgatal	10,000	2,000	667
<i>Sub-total</i>	<i>111,000</i>	<i>22,200</i>	<i>7,401</i>
<i>GBAO:</i>			
Darvoz	4,000	800	267
Vanj	4,000	800	267
Roshtqala	3,000	600	200
Rushon	5,000	1,000	333
Shughnon	5,000	1,000	333
Ishkoshim	4,000	800	267
Khorog city	5,000	1,000	333
Murghab (remote mountain area)	4,000	800	267
<i>Sub-total</i>	<i>34,000</i>	<i>6,800</i>	<i>2,067</i>
<b>Total</b>	<b>145,000</b>	<b>29,000</b>	<b>9,468</b>

Table 19

**Illegal civilian gun possession in 1997**

Province, group of regions, or city	Total number of households	Number of weapons if every 15 <sup>th</sup> household had an illegal weapon in 1997	Number of weapons if every 25 <sup>th</sup> household had an illegal weapon in 1997
Direct Rule Districts (excluding main opposition areas listed in Table 18)	94,000	6,267	3,760
Khatlon province	307,000	20,467	12,280
Dushanbe city	140,000	9,333	5,600
Sughd province	365,000	24,333	14,600
<b>Total</b>	<b>906,000</b>	<b>60,400</b>	<b>36,240</b>

Table 20

**Total illegal weapons in Tajikistan in 2004, including possession by fighters, commanders, and civilians**

	Higher estimate	Lower estimate
Total civilian possession in opposition areas in 1997	29,000	9,468
Total civilian possession in non-opposition areas in 1997	60,400	36,240
Weapons held by commanders and fighters in 1997	12,000	6,000
<i>Sub-total</i>	<i>101,400</i>	<i>51,708</i>
Weapons handed in by fighters and commanders after 1997	(2,500)	(2,500)
Guns collected by the government by the end of 2003	(24,000)	(24,000)
<i>Sub-total</i>	<i>74,900</i>	<i>25,208</i>
Attrition rate, 10%	(7,490)	(2,521)
<b>Total</b>	<b>67,410</b>	<b>22,687</b>

Table 21

**Estimated gun ownership rates per 100 inhabitants<sup>a</sup>**

Country	Guns per 100 inhabitants
Tajikistan	0.4–1.1
Japan <sup>b</sup>	0.6 <sup>c</sup>
Netherlands <sup>d</sup>	2
Brazil <sup>e</sup>	1–17
Sweden <sup>f</sup>	24
USA <sup>g</sup>	83–96

<sup>a</sup> These figures are estimates and are unlikely to be accurate, but they provide an impression of the difference in scale of civilian firearm ownership in different countries.

<sup>b</sup> Small Arms Survey (2005)

<sup>c</sup> Japan has a 0.4 per 100 rate for legal guns and an estimated 0.2 per 100 for illegal guns.

<sup>d</sup> Small Arms Survey (2003, p. 64)

<sup>e</sup> Small Arms Survey (2004, p. 51)

<sup>f</sup> Small Arms Survey (2003, p. 64)

<sup>g</sup> Small Arms Survey (2003, p. 61)

The estimates given indicate that weapons proliferation in terms of numbers not part of government stockpiles is not significant. There are between 0.4 and 1.1 firearms per 100 inhabitants among the Tajik population. The majority are unregistered: if we accept the figure of 10,000 registered hunting guns, then 57–85 per cent of all estimated guns are unregistered (0.17 guns per 100 people). The total number of guns in Tajikistan is low in comparison to most countries, but comparable to rates in Japan. One significant difference, however, is the fact that there are substantially more unregistered guns in Tajikistan than in Japan.

**Estimates of official weapons stockpiles***Government possession*

Tajikistan does not provide information on government stockpiles, as this is regarded as a state secret. There are also reasons to doubt that the Tajik government has a complete, computerized, and up-to-date inventory of its stockpiles and the number of guns available per soldier and employee in other state bodies

whose members are entitled to carry firearms. The following stockpile information is therefore an estimate, based on the estimated number of servicemen and -women allowed to use guns as part of their official duties carried out for the Tajik state. Drawn from estimates of numbers of state employees with access to firearms, the small arms and light weapons stockpile of the Government of Tajikistan is estimated to be between 31,550 and 44,550 weapons.

The Tajik Army is estimated to have approximately 8,000 soldiers and officers and it is likely that the army has about the same number of small arms and light weapons (IISS, 2002). This assumption is based on comparison with other countries that make their stockpile data public. A military strategy that relies on soldiers rather than high-tech weapons suggests that the army will have more per capita small arms and light weapons than the US or Swiss Armies, who both have fewer than one weapon per soldier. Relatively low military spending and interviews with informed observers suggest that the Tajik Army possesses fewer weapons per soldier than it would like to have, thus making its weapons stocks likely to be lower than Finland or Canada, who do not face such constraints.

In 2002, Tajikistan was estimated to have spent USD 130 million on defence. This is half the amount of Kyrgyzstan and more than ten times less than Uzbekistan (which spent USD 1.8 billion in the same year) (IISS, 2002). A representative of the Ministry of Defence (MoD) interviewed for this report noted that there

Table 22  
**International data on small arms and light weapons per soldier**

Country (date)	Total forces	Total weapons	Multiplier
Canada (2000) <sup>a</sup>	103,900	233,775	2.25
Finland (2003) <sup>a</sup>	462,000	531,300	1.15
Togo (2001) <sup>a</sup>	6,950	12,649	1.82
Switzerland (2001) <sup>b</sup>	631,200	517,584	0.82
US (2001) <sup>b</sup>	2,577,300	1,520,607	0.59

**Average multiplier 1.33**

<sup>a</sup> Small Arms Survey (2005, p. 77)

<sup>b</sup> Bevan and Kytömäki (2004)

Box 5

**Tajikistan's weapons imports according to information provided by exporting states**

While the table below is unlikely to hold the complete list of weapons imports, it highlights some of the main suppliers of legally imported guns to Tajikistan.

Table 23

**Weapons imports to Tajikistan, as reported by exporting states\***

Period	Exporter	Commodity	Trade value (USD)
1998	Russian Federation	Shotguns, or shotgun-rifles, for sport or hunting	5,178
1998	Russian Federation	Cartridges, shotguns	1,849
2000	Russian Federation	Shotguns, or shotgun-rifles, for sport or hunting	30,098
2000	Russian Federation	Rifles, for sport or hunting	35,434
2000	Slovakia	Revolvers and pistols	17,916
2000	Slovakia	Small arms ammunition and parts	584

Source: NISAT (2004)

\* Tajikistan does not release any information on its imports. The figures available from exporting states are likely to be lower than the actual number of total imports.

were shortages of weapons in the Tajik Army.<sup>136</sup> One weapon per member of the Tajik armed forces is therefore a likely ratio. The small arms available to soldiers are largely Soviet- and Russian Federation-produced Kalashnikovs. Most officers are entitled to carry Makarov pistols.

The total number of firearms available to different ministries and agencies is estimated to be between 23,550 to 36,550 small arms, with the overwhelming majority (20,000–28,000) being in the hands of the MVD. The figure is based on estimates of numbers of employees and can only be approximate in the absence of information from the Tajik government.

The estimates of employees in the MVD vary from 20,000 to 28,000<sup>137</sup> and the total number of weapons at their disposal is also estimated to be between 20,000 and 28,000.

In addition to the Tajik Army and MVD, select individuals in a number of government ministries and agencies in Tajikistan have the right to carry firearms. These are affiliated with the MB, the Ministry of Emergency Situations, the Ministry of Justice, the Main Directorate for the Tax Police and the Tax Committee, the Committee for the Protection of the Environment, the government messenger service, and the General Prosecutor's Office. There are no publicly available sources for the number of employees within these institutions who are entitled to carry and use guns. Estimates are therefore difficult, but may be between 1,000–5,000 weapons users, with one weapon per employee.

The National Guard (formerly the Presidential Guard) has 1,000 members, and is reportedly well trained and well armed. One to two guns per guard could be a likely estimate.

KOGG has approximately 1,200 border guards (IISS, 2002). A high-ranking KOGG officer noted that there was a shortage of equipment, including firearms, in KOGG.<sup>138</sup> Any estimates over 1,200 small arms, mostly Kalashnikovs, therefore, seem unlikely.

There are about 350 servicemen in the DCA with about the same number of firearms available to them.

### *Russian Federation forces*

The Russian Federation forces in Tajikistan consist of the 201<sup>st</sup> MRD and the FSB-administered RBF. The Russian Federation chose to continue to maintain the 201<sup>st</sup> MRD in Tajikistan for strategic and security reasons, and some of the division now makes up one part of the rapid reaction force for Central Asia of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (a security alliance consisting of Belarus, the Russian Federation, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan). The 201<sup>st</sup> MRD has 160 tanks, 300 armoured personnel carriers, about 200 artillery pieces and mortars, and 1,100 transport vehicles. It does not have the personnel of a full division: only about 6,000–7,000 men and women are serving at present. The headquarters, the 92<sup>nd</sup> Rifle Regiment, and the division's support units (tank battalion, air defence regiment, etc.) are based on the outskirts of Dushanbe. The 149<sup>th</sup> Guards Motor Rifle Regiment is situated in Kulyab and the 191<sup>st</sup> Motor Rifle Regiment in Kurgan Tube. The division is likely to have been complete when returning from service in Afghanistan in 1989. It is

uncertain whether the subsequent reduction of troops in the division has included reductions in the small arms and light weapons stockpiles. In addition, it is unclear whether weapons sold or given to the civil war factions from divisional stocks were replaced from stores in the Russian Federation. Assuming there should be at least one small arm per soldier and officer, then the division may still have between 6,000 and 15,000 small arms. While the 201<sup>st</sup> MRD remains one of the most potent fighting forces in Central Asia, there are nevertheless some concerns with regard to staffing and the training of its personnel.<sup>139</sup>

The RBF are estimated to have between 8,000 and 11,700 servicemen.<sup>140</sup> The Russian Federation and Tajikistan agreed in 1993 to transform the Soviet border units serving on the Tajik–Afghan border into Russian Federation forces. The border forces are well equipped and have good supply lines from Dushanbe

Table 24  
**Estimated Tajik government and Russian Federation forces' small arms stockpiles in Tajikistan, 2004**

Agency	Estimated small arms stockpiles
<i>Tajik government</i>	
Tajik Army	8,000
MVD	20,000–28,000
KOGG	1,200
DCA	350
Presidential Guard	1,000–2,000
Other ministries and agencies <sup>a</sup>	5,000
<b>Total small arms of Tajik government forces</b>	<b>35,550–44,550</b>
<i>Russian Federation forces</i>	
RBF	8,000–23,400
201 <sup>st</sup> MRD	6,000–15,000
<b>Total small arms of Russian Federation forces</b>	<b>14,000–38,400</b>
<b>Total Tajik and Russian Federation forces small arms</b>	<b>49,550–82,950</b>

<sup>a</sup> MB, Ministry of Emergency Situations, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of State Income and Dues, Committee for the Protection of the Environment, government messenger service, General Prosecutor's Office.

and Osh, in Kyrgyzstan (the 3333 Avtobatalion). It is likely that the border forces have 1–2 small arms per soldier, which would give an estimated 8,000–23,400 small arms. As indicated in section I, the RBF has initiated a phased withdrawal from the border and will be replaced with KOGG forces by 2006.

## Responses to small arms and light weapons challenges by Tajikistan and the international community

This report has pointed to several challenges that small arms and light weapons pose for Tajik society. Firstly, it has indicated the grave insecurity caused previously by weapons proliferation and the fighting in the civil war. Secondly, Tajikistan is vulnerable because of its border with Afghanistan. Thirdly, there is considerable danger associated with leakage, theft, or accidents in government weapon stores. Below is an assessment of what actions have been taken on these issues by the Tajik government and the international community.

### *Government of Tajikistan*

The Government of Tajikistan has made real efforts to deal with weapons proliferation caused by the civil war. This report has documented substantial weapons collection efforts since 1994. The government also participated in the country reporting exercises under the UN *Programme of Action* in 2003. These exercises led to the establishment of a small arms and light weapons focal point in the presidential administration. A temporary working group, comprising representatives from a number of government ministries and agencies, was also created to assist in the writing of the UN report. The small arms and light weapons focal point continues to function as a contact point for the international community on small arms and light weapons issues. The government's reporting under the *Programme of Action* has done much to raise awareness of international initiatives and standards concerning small arms among government officials.

The government has singled out stockpile management as an area of concern. It recently prepared a self-assessment of stockpile security as part of a request for donor support at the tripartite OSCE review meeting in September 2004 (Republic of Tajikistan, 2004).

### Box 6

#### **Operation Order in Dushanbe**

The Government of Tajikistan has made concerted efforts to reduce weapons misuse by people associated with military and law enforcement structures. Both President Rakhmonov and the minister of internal affairs, Khumdin Sharipov, have admitted that misconduct by law enforcement officers remains a problem (*Asia Plus*, 2000, 2004a). The measures undertaken in Dushanbe to deal with official misuse provide an interesting case in point. The first major nationwide steps were taken on 17 June 1999 with a joint UTO–government protocol banning the carrying of guns in public places by law enforcement officials and military personnel. In early 2000, the mayor of Dushanbe, Makhmadsaid Ubaidulloev, narrowly escaped an attempt on his life and a bomb exploded in a local bus carrying over 20 passengers. This prompted the mayor to initiate Operation Order, targeting illegal carrying and use of guns by law enforcement and military personnel in the context of a broader intensification of the struggle against criminality. In the course of the operation, at least 26 weapons were confiscated from MVD officers, 24 from MoD and KOGG personnel, six from Ministry of Emergency Situations personnel, and 46 from other members of government forces and the Russian Federation military. Some 443 military uniforms and 273 civilian cars with dark windows were also confiscated.

Shortly after the operation, a local polling agency did a survey on the initiative, which indicated that 55.7 per cent of respondents said that they thought Operation Order had been effective (*Asia Plus*, 2000a).

The government is also undertaking efforts to tackle trafficking in drugs, and potentially arms, from Afghanistan. It is actively seeking outside support to enhance the material and technical equipment of the border forces. Moreover, the new DCA has field offices in Kurgan Tube, Kulyab, and Khorog and Pandjakent. All three offices are heavily involved in investigating border trafficking, as well as improving coordination between the law enforcement and border agencies.

### *International community*

Although there was extensive engagement by multilateral organizations and international NGOs in the reintegration of fighters and reconstruction process, they have paid little attention to the issue of small arms proliferation in and of itself. UNMOT closely monitored the disarmament of former fighters, but did not participate in the collection of guns, which was conducted under the

auspices of the NRC. The UN Development Fund (UNDP) gave constructive support in the preparations for the government's report for the UN *Programme of Action*. The UN Children's Fund has also done a capacity building and awareness raising project on small arms and light weapons in the Rasht valley.

As regards stockpile security, the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre in Vienna has produced a comprehensive *Handbook of Best Practices on Small Arms and Light Weapons* (OSCE, 2004), which is available in Russian. This handbook was launched in Central Asia in Ashgabat. It addresses key concerns facing Central Asian states, including stockpile management, marking, and trafficking in arms. The international NGO International Alert also initiated a regional project on small arms and light weapons in Central Asia. This included the assessment of local capacity for implementation of the *Programme of Action* and some publications on small arms and light weapons issues in the region.<sup>141</sup>

The international community is offering support for border management. The joint European Union and UNDP Border Management Programme for Central Asia (BOMCA) project aims to enhance border management in Central Asia, including the Tajik–Afghan border, and also to offer capacity building for KOGG. The International Organization for Migration has assisted with enhancing the capacity of the border forces and customs committee regarding migration procedures. The UN Office for Drug Control (UNODC) offered extensive support to the Tajik government during the establishment of the DCA. UNODC also has a number of projects dealing with drug trafficking across the Afghan–Tajik border and aims at coordinating international assistance to Tajikistan following the decision to withdraw Russian Federation forces from the border. Foreign governments, particularly the UK and United States, have provided financial and material assistance to the Tajik government's border management structures. There are ongoing negotiations between the United States and Tajikistan, and the former is expected to increase its assistance to border control in Tajikistan (Jamestown Foundation, 2004).

## Government stockpile control

Stockpile control pertains to two main issues: stockpile control at individual duty stations of law enforcement agencies and the army; and stockpile control

and storage conditions at the central stores for each ministry. The latter include storage and security of weapons collected since 1994. All stockpile procedures were overhauled following the presidential decree in 1994 (Republic of Tajikistan, 1994, art. 7). Law enforcement agencies and the army were given until 5 December 1994 to re-establish order and initiate adequate procedures for stockpile management. Many agencies adopted new internal instructions to help carry out the demands put forward in the decree. These instructions are still in use and form the backbone of government regulation of stockpile management. Since these instructions were not made available to researchers by the Government of Tajikistan, they had no official document to guide their assessment. However, descriptions of the instructions by past and present MVD officers suggest that they are comprehensive and conform to the basic recommendations for stockpile management put forward in the OSCE *Handbook of Best Practices*.

Procedures for stock control in the duty stations of law enforcement agencies and the army in Tajikistan are fairly typical of the group of former Soviet republics. The MVD, for example, keeps weapons in locked storage. MVD officers are not issued with guns as a matter of course, only on special instruction. If the officer has permission to check out a weapon, he receives it (through a window) from the gun room when he comes on duty in return for a card.<sup>142</sup> At the end of his shift, the gun is turned back in and the card returned. The gun room is manned by an armed officer. It is locked and the door can be opened only on instructions from the officer in command. The commander or the deputy commander of the duty station is usually the person charged with the overall control of weapons. Both the officer in charge and the officer manning the gun room keep records of weapons use and the weapon inventory.

Duty stations are subject to a number of inspections of weapon stockpiles and procedures, conducted by their central ministries. One former MVD officer thought that there were as many as five different inspections conducted regularly, some of which are audits of the records, others of inventory and combat readiness. Some of these should be unannounced and carried out by impartial inspectors.<sup>143</sup>

Local and international researchers involved in the writing of this report had the opportunity to inspect gun rooms in some MVD stations and also some of

the DCA's provincial offices. Overall, conditions were good. Record keeping and the system of identity cards seemed to be in operation, and guns were always kept behind locked iron doors in designated shelf spaces. The guns collected recently from the population tended, however, to be piled in a disorderly fashion on the floor of the gun room, waiting to be transported to the central stores in Dushanbe.<sup>144</sup>

A further serious concern stems from investigation of the black market for weapons in Tajikistan. Researchers obtained strong indications that law enforcement authorities and the army were the principal and most convenient source of weapons and ammunition for black market circulation. While the official procedures of duty station stockpile management are comprehensive and rigorous, it appears that they may be subverted by individual MVD staff members.

The ministries entrusted with weapons have their own separate central weapons stores in Dushanbe. In 2004, two security experts from UNDP Tajikistan were invited to inspect the central MVD storage site and the section holding collected weapons. The experts found some serious shortcomings at the storage site. While there are some fences, locks, and safety measures, these could be easily circumvented and the site broken into. Explosives were improperly stored; and the personnel lacked expertise in the handling and safe keeping of weapons and explosives. Fire safety was unsatisfactory. The storage site was in a residential area; the many unfused, old explosives posed a danger to the surrounding areas. Explosives and weapons shipped from the regions to the central stores were transferred in cars unfit to handle the dangerous cargo.

The Government of Tajikistan noted some similar shortcomings for all four major Dushanbe storage sites (MVD, MB, MoD, and KOGG) in its *Request of the Republic of Tajikistan on Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW)* put forward at the OSCE meeting on 29 September 2004 (Republic of Tajikistan, 2004). The government stressed in particular that the technical equipment protecting the sites could be better, training and expertise of personnel should be enhanced, and support should be given from donors for the acquisition of better transport means and the development of a destruction site for small arms and light weapons (153 weapons have been destroyed so far in the furnace of the Tekstil Mash factory).

### *Recommendations for stockpile management and weapons control*

- It is commendable that the Tajik government is appealing for technical and material support to help remedy deficiencies. It would also be advisable for it to reassess whether increased transparency and mechanisms for greater accountability over law enforcement agencies could help remedy shortcomings in police conduct and stockpile management. This report has highlighted the low level of transparency in law enforcement. The secrecy of internal instructions on weapons collection and weapons storage is an important example. The public can exercise little scrutiny when it is uncertain what laws and regulations individual law enforcement officers are operating under. Increased transparency and accountability might be a good way to ensure that the rights of Tajik citizens are more fully respected, and to enhance the efficiency of law enforcement and improve central control over local duty stations.
- There are indications, discussed in this report and elsewhere, that weapons collection is based on planned targets and that meeting these targets is an important criterion for promotion in law enforcement structures. The Government of Tajikistan and Tajik civil society could usefully initiate debate on whether planned targets and promotions are useful ways of ensuring continued government weapons collection.
- It remains uncertain whether there exists a full and up-to-date arms inventory covering all branches of the government. This could usefully be clarified. Should there be shortcomings in this respect, then the Government of Tajikistan could seek to remedy this by its own means or appeal for outside support. Outside support could usefully assist efforts to develop a centralized and computerized inventory. This inventory should indicate the location of weapons and which officers regularly use them, enhancing capacity to trace weapons and prevent leakage from government storage facilities. It would also be helpful for the government to make records of weapons losses publicly available.
- The Government of Tajikistan could also usefully reassess the operation of government procedures on stockpile management. One particularly important aspect is the inspection of central stores and gun rooms in duty stations. Some observers claim there are at least five types of regular inspections of duty stations with the aim of checking weapons stockpiles.<sup>145</sup> It is important



to make clear whether these inspections really function as checks and how the different inspections relate to one another. It might be that a simpler yet more rigorous inspection system could enhance stockpile control.

- Government and international experts have suggested a number of technical improvements in stockpile management. These include improvements in fire safety; improving qualifications of personnel working at central stores; developing expertise in the regions for the local defusing of explosives and ammunition; improving lights, locks, and signalling systems; and enhancing capacity for the safe transportation of weapons and ammunition. Further technical support could also be given to the Criminal Investigation Centre in the MVD. This a highly professional unit that performs important tasks related to control over small arms and light weapons in Tajikistan. This unit would benefit from better computer software for ballistic identification, new equipment for the bullet archive, a larger collection of sample guns to use for investigative purposes, and more training of personnel within the unit and at local duty stations.
- Technical initiatives such as those listed above would certainly represent improvements in the control of small arms and light weapons in Tajikistan, and this report recommends that international donors consider support for such activities. Such donors, however, also need to bear in mind that unless these technical initiatives are carried out in conjunction with other reforms of police conduct, such as efforts to increase accountability, there will be little overall effect.

## Survey of the legal framework

There is strict and extensive weapons regulation in Tajikistan. Most of the provisions and practices stem from the legal framework of the Soviet Union. The USSR had a restrictive gun regime, with possession limited almost exclusively to hunters and law enforcement officials. The majority of the legal provisions for both civilians and government officials are presented in the publicly available *Law on Weapons*. There are some additional ‘instructions’ that apply to individual ministries and committees within the law enforcement and military structures. These are, however, secret and were not made available to the research-

ers of this report. This review is therefore based on the publicly available legal framework.

### *Legal possession*

The legal framework in Tajikistan separates weapons into three categories, namely fighting, service, and civil weapons.

Article 9 of the *Law on Weapons* stipulates that the following civilians and organizations have the right to acquire guns:<sup>146</sup>

- enterprises, organizations, and institutions, after receiving a licence from the relevant law enforcement agencies;
- sport and hunting unions;
- general educative institutions;
- citizens of the Republic of Tajikistan; and
- foreign citizens.<sup>147</sup>

Enterprises and organizations such as large factories or other entities that are likely to have special need for protection can acquire guns, provided that they have received a permit from the MVD.<sup>148</sup>

Tajik citizens over 18 years of age with a permanent registered place of residence in Tajikistan have the right to acquire weapons for self-defence, sports, and hunting, provided they have obtained permission from the MVD. The permit for bearing and storing weapons is valid for five years. Citizens who have been registered by official health institutions for problems with alcoholism, drug use, or mental illness are not permitted to possess guns. Neither are citizens who have committed premeditated crimes or have disturbed public order (*Law on Weapons*, arts. 13 & 14). Permission to carry and store hunting guns also requires membership of the Society for Hunters and Fishermen of the Republic of Tajikistan.

Foreign citizens (art. 17) are permitted to purchase arms and may be allowed to export these arms, provided this is supported by the person’s diplomatic representatives in Tajikistan. Foreigners may also acquire and possess hunting guns if they obtain a permit from the MVD and an invitation from the Society for Hunters and Fishermen. Unlike citizens of Tajikistan, foreigners are, however, not permitted to acquire weapons for self-defence.



The *Law on Weapons* does not establish any restrictions on the number of guns a person can possess. Article 23 allows collectors to build up gun collections.

### *Government possession*

Military institutions of the government structure are permitted to purchase or otherwise add weapons to their arsenals on the basis of a decision by government (*Law on Weapons*, art. 18). There is also a separate provision authorizing state agencies to acquire weapons for self-defence or for carrying out tasks vested in their institutions (i.e. environmental protection, courier services, etc.).<sup>149</sup>

State employees (i.e. servicemen and -women or officers) are subject to both explicit restrictions and distinct rights related to the use of weapons. The legal framework lays out general regulations for the use of guns by these employees. The same employees are also obliged to adhere to the internal instructions that each government ministry or agency has for gun use. These instructions are not available to the public.<sup>150</sup>

### *Penalties for illegal gun possession*

Article 19 of the criminal code penalizes illegal purchase, transfer, storage, selling, transportation, and carrying of weapons and ammunition with fines and imprisonment from six months to 12 years, depending on the seriousness of the violation.

### *Production*

Production of arms is permitted in Tajikistan provided the producer has obtained a licence from the MVD. Illegal production can result in imprisonment for 5–12 years.

### *Import, marking, and record keeping*

The Government of Tajikistan regulates imports and assures that only those entities that are entitled to acquire guns may import them. All imported weapons are subject to obligatory marking and certification. Ammunition similarly must have distinct marks or symbols. Article 7 of the *Law on Weapons* states that there should be a state archive of official and civilian arms, along with an archive of the corresponding cartridges.

### *Export*

As Tajikistan is not an arms producer, the legal framework on export is of less relevance. When Tajiks resell arms, however, provisions from the *Law on State Control of Export of Arms and Military Equipment with Dual Destination* apply. The law calls for observance of Tajikistan's commitments to non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and other types of weapons; it also stresses that political and security concerns must be taken into account.<sup>151</sup>

### *Transit and brokering*

Article 7 of the *Law on Export* allows for transit of weapons through Tajikistan, provided there is permission from the government. The legal framework, however, does not embody any concrete procedures for the control of arms transit, and neither are there any legal measures for regulating arms brokering.<sup>152</sup>

### *Control of stockpiles and circulation*

Article 1 of the *Law on Arms* defines circulation of firearms as their production, sale, transfer, purchase, registration, storage, carrying, transportation, use, seizure, demolition, import, and export. A range of departments within the MVD are charged with the task of controlling circulation of weapons on Tajik territory. These agencies may, according to Article 23 of the *Law on Arms*, cancel weapon licences and permits in cases of misconduct in storing or using a weapon, though the revoking of a licence may be appealed in court by the holder. As specified in Article 24, the same agencies may also seize firearms in cases of absence of the appropriate licences after violation of regulations for carrying and storing weapons, in the event of criminal proceedings against the arms possessor, and in cases of the death of a person holding a legal gun permit.

The law on arms also specifies authorized procedures for control of the circulation of arms. Officials of internal affairs organs may carry out firearms inspections at the places of their production, trade, storage, and destruction. They may also require that juridical and natural persons present documents and written information necessary to fulfil control functions; and may order the seizure of guns if any storage regulations have been broken.

The law enforcement agencies' responsibility for dealing with the circulation of arms was enlarged in the presidential decree of 1994 (Republic of Tajiki-

stan, 1994). The decree called for the formation of an inter-agency Republican Commission on Control of the Seizure of Firearms, Ammunition, and Military Equipment. The MVD and MB were called on to report every morning at 8.00 to the commission (and the commission had in turn to report every ten days to the president). Article 2 of the decree required

*the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan and the Ministry of Security of the Republic of Tajikistan to take necessary measures to collect illegally kept weapons, ammunition, military equipment, military munitions and forcibly seize them. In conducting the above-mentioned actions, [these agencies] are allowed, in accordance with the law, to use special means and firearms without warning.*

The decree came into force in 1994 and was meant, according to some government experts, to end in 2004.<sup>153</sup> Lower-ranking police officers and civilians in some regions of Tajikistan had also frequently suggested that the decree would end in 2004. Other observers, however, including the General Prosecutor of the Republic of Tajikistan, claim the decree will remain in effect.<sup>154</sup>

As part of their duties related to control of the circulation of weapons, the MVD and other law enforcement agents are entrusted with verifying the safe storage of arms. The major arms holder in Tajikistan is, however, the state itself. Law enforcement organs have detailed prescriptions relating to the procedures for the storage and stockpile control of government weapons. However, these procedures are included in the internal instructions of the MVD and other agencies, to which, as indicated earlier, the researchers of this report were not granted access.

### *Legal recommendations*

- The collection of guns from the population has at times involved the abuse of Tajik citizens. Mistrust of law enforcement remains an obstacle to effective collection of illegal weapons remaining in civilian hands. The government needs to take steps to address this problem, as part of a general process of law enforcement agency reform.
- There is also some confusion within law enforcement agencies and among the population as a whole as to whether the decree on gun amnesty is still in effect. The 1994 decree and corresponding procedures could usefully be

reassessed by the political leadership, the law enforcement agencies, and civil society in Tajikistan. A clear message should be issued by the government as to whether the decree is still in operation and, if so, for how long it will last (Republic of Tajikistan, 1994).

- The provisions for licensing and end-use certificates in Tajikistan correspond to basic international standards. However, the licensing procedure could, as the *OSCE Handbook* recommends, be made simpler and transparent. There should be a clear delineation of authority with regard to the issuing of licences for arms export. Government oversight would be more effective if only one government unit were in charge of export issues.
- There is, moreover, very little transparency with regard to legal arms trade and legal arms transit. Tajikistan could usefully publish annual records of arms exports and imports. Another way to enhance transparency is, as the *OSCE Handbook of Best Practices* notes, to involve parliamentary deputies or a parliamentary committee in the work of the overall coordinating body taking decisions on arms exports, imports, and transit.
- Tajikistan has committed itself in the *OSCE Handbook of Best Practices* to include human rights, possible prolonging of conflicts, and security concerns of other countries among the criteria governing the granting of export licences to particular countries. Tajik law also makes provision for participation in UN or other sanctions regimes and arms embargoes. At present, however, legislation regulating the arms trade stresses only the need for consideration of Tajikistan's political and security objectives. There are no explicit guidelines on human rights and human security concerns in recipient countries. This could usefully be reviewed.
- Given the history of legal, grey, and illegal arms transfers across the territory of Tajikistan, the country could usefully investigate such flows and develop regulations that control these in a coherent and effective way.
- Tajikistan could also usefully add regulations on brokering activities to its export control regulations. Although there are no known cases of arms brokering occurring on the territory of Tajikistan, one of the world's major illicit arms brokers, Victor Bout, is reportedly a Tajik citizen (*Washington Post*, 2002). There is no established international model for how to regulate brokering activities. The few countries that have adopted brokering regulations differ

in the scope of their regulations. The Government of Tajikistan could usefully review the different approaches to the control of brokering activities with a view to developing its own legislation. Basic brokering regulation, as recommended in the OSCE *Handbook of Best Practices*, would require licensing of all brokering activities taking place on Tajik territory, irrespective of the nationality of the broker (including the use of fax and e-mail to facilitate arms deals in third countries). Tajikistan could also consider holding Tajik citizens accountable in Tajik law even when operating outside of Tajik territory (extra-territorial jurisdiction). The decision to grant a brokering licence could be made contingent on criteria such as potential risks of armed conflict and the human rights situation in destination countries. Strict requirements on end-user certificates could be extended to the brokering legislation.

- Tajikistan and the international community would also benefit from Tajikistan adhering to the UN Firearms Protocol.

### Local expertise on and government agencies dealing with small arms and light weapons issues

Table 25 contains a list of the researchers and consultants that have assisted in compiling this report. In the event of future projects or initiatives on small arms and light weapons in Tajikistan, these local resource people could usefully be involved. Yusuf Mamedov, Rustam Sharipov, and Faredun Hodizoda offered particularly extensive support and each holds substantial expertise on a range of small arms and light weapons issues.

Aside from the local researchers who worked on this report, it is important that future initiatives involve all appropriate government offices that deal with small arms and light weapons issues. These are listed in Table 26.

Table 25  
**Local researchers and contributors to the UNDP/Small Arms Survey report on small arms and light weapons**

	Name	Position	Contribution
1	Mahmudjon Alizoda	Executive director of National Association of Civil Society Support Centres (CSSC) of Tajikistan	Focus groups in Rasht district
2	Safiya Ashurova	NGO activist, Kurgan Tube	Focus group facilitator, Kurgan Tube zone
3	Abubakr Choriev	Member of NGO 'Rushd'	Focus groups in Chakalovsk
4	Hurinniso Ghafforzoda	Director of CSSC 'Rasht'	Focus groups in Rasht district
5	Yusuf Mahmedov	NGO activist, Kurgan Tube	Organizer and consultant on development of focus group training module
6	Kholiknazar Mardonaev	Inspector in Department of Education	Focus groups in Rushon district
7	Rahmon Mirsaidov	Programme manager for CSSC 'Consortium of Initiatives', Khujand city	Focus groups in Isfara, Khujand, D. Rasulov district, and B. Ghafurov district
8	Boimurod Murodov	NGO activist, Kurgan Tube	Focus group facilitator, Kurgan Tube zone
9	Dilafroz Nasrulloeva	NGO activist, Kurgan Tube	Focus group secretary, Kurgan Tube zone
10	Shifo Sheraliyeva	NGO activist, Kurgan Tube	Focus group secretary, Kurgan Tube zone
11	Qanoatsho Shorustamov	Leading specialist in Department of Education	Focus groups in Shughnon district
12	Nazarhudo Chorshanbiev	Lecturer, Tajik State Pedagogic University	Interviewer
13	Qurbon Giyoev	Head of department, Institute for Philosophy and Law, Tajik Academy of Science	Interviewer

14	Hayriddin Idiev	Leading scientist, Institute for Philosophy and Law, Tajik Academy of Science	Interviewer
15	Iso Rahmatulloev	Head of library, Institute for Philosophy and Law, Tajik Academy of Science	Interviewer
16	Azatsho Shoismatulloev	Employee, Centre for Social and Marketing Studies (AFKOR)	Interviewer
17	Shonazar Shoismatulloev	Deputy director, Institute for Philosophy and Law, Tajik Academy of Science	Head of the group
18	Faridun Hodizoda	Coordinator, Ambassadors of Goodwill Network	Consultant and meeting facilitator
19	Bakhtiyor Naimov	Student	Researcher
20	Alexander Sadikov	Student	Researcher
21	Rustam Sharipov	NGO 'Legal Education Centre', Dushanbe	Legal specialist and reviewer of Tajikistan small arms and light weapons laws

Table 26

**Tajik government offices dealing with small arms and light weapons issues**

Unit	Small arms and light weapons-related task
Deputy Prime Minister's Office (on security)	Coordination of law enforcement bodies
General Prosecutor's Office	Coordination and supervision of government collection of small arms and light weapons
Criminal Investigation Centre, MVD	Research and archives on weapons crimes
Small arms and light weapons focal point in presidential administration	Coordinated interministerial working group for the report to the UN on the UN <i>Programme of Action</i>
Customs Committee	By law charged with regulating arms export and transfers
KOGG	By law charged with preventing weapons smuggling across Tajik borders

## Endnotes

- 1 This problem is not unique to the security sector. The authorities in Tajikistan have been remarkably reticent about providing data on typhoid infection rates in Dushanbe in 2003 and 2004, despite their reliance on the support of international health agencies and NGOs in coping with the problem.
- 2 Not least because it is widely reported that government agencies are themselves a principal source of supply for the illegal weapons market.
- 3 One interviewee noted in this context that it was unlikely that many of the weapons in private caches were usable, since they need to be stored in oil, of which there had been a shortage when weapons were hidden (interview no. 111, Dushanbe, 25 August 2004).
- 4 The influence and engagement of former commanders in the economy also increased after the war. Many became official or unofficial patrons of markets, hotels, casinos, or factories.
- 5 Interview no. 157, Dushanbe, 24 July 2004.
- 6 In the one incident after the peace agreement where President Rakhmonov's leadership was seriously threatened by military actions (in 1997–98), it was a former government commander, Makhmud Khudoiberdiev, who challenged the president (see section II). Moreover, Rakhmonov's dismissal of the former government commander Gaffur Mirzoev from his post as chief of the Presidential Guard, and Mirzoev's subsequent arrest in August 2004 (see section II) on grounds of illegal weapons possession (among other charges), brought to the fore the issue of government commanders' potential for independent armed action and disloyalty. In the early years after the peace agreement, former opposition commanders contributed to political instability by hostage takings and armed clashes with law enforcement agencies. Commanders such as 'Sheik' Ibrahimov and, reportedly, the present minister of emergency situations, Mirzo Zioyev, caused a deterioration in national security by harbouring IMU militants. Tajikistan's security cooperation with its neighbours suffered as a consequence and the human security of civilians in Rasht and Tavildara was endangered. Members of the IMU stayed in the Tavildara region until February 2001, when Russian Federation helicopters airlifted IMU fighters from Tajikistan to Afghanistan. At that time, the group allegedly consisted of approximately 250 people (*Times of Central Asia*, 2001; *Eurasia Insight*, 2001; interview no. 118, Tavildara, 24 August 2004). For an overview of Uzbekistan's concern with Islamic groups in Tajikistan, sanctions against Tajikistan, and intervention in domestic affairs in Tajikistan, see Horsman (1999).
- 7 The best-organized and -trained groups would have 9–12 fighters. Three of these fighters would be 'specialists' operating a cannon, grenade launcher, or light machine gun. The remaining members would support the 'specialists'.
- 8 A former commander in the Rasht valley claimed that the raids on government troops were an easier and more effective source of weapons than shipment from Afghanistan (interview no. 127, Garm, 19 August 2004).
- 9 The foreign contract soldiers would often function as specialists in the groups and would operate the advanced equipment (interview no. 110, Tavildara, 23 August 2004; interview no. 118, Tavildara, 24 August 2004).

- 10 Many of the attacks and hostage takings by the opposition against government forces were carried out in order to obtain ammunition (interview no. 113, Garm, 24 August 2004).
- 11 The figure of 6,842 was given by one of the heads of the military section of the NRC in a conference paper; see Rakhmonov (2001). Rakhmonov bases his figures on the official NRC records. There is some debate, however, as to whether the NRC lists reflect the real number of fighters. One opposition commander noted that there could have been between 4,000 and 10,000 opposition fighters (interview no. 92, Dushanbe, 30 March 2004).
- 12 Interview no. 81, Dushanbe, 26 March 2004.
- 13 Interview no. 50, Kulyab, 5 March 2004.
- 14 The national army consisted of former national and popular front fighters and young conscripts. These young conscripts were in many cases physically threatened and forced to join. Some fighters that were interviewed gave accounts of how young men were rounded up randomly on the streets of Dushanbe and sent to army bases. They received little or no training before being transported to conflict zones, where they became easy targets for opposition fighters. In addition to the new army, personnel from law enforcement agencies such as MVD and MB units also made up a core element of the government fighting force.
- 15 Heavy weaponry and equipment such as tanks and armoured personnel carriers (APCs) also formed part of the government operations. The government forces also received aircraft and helicopter support from the Russian Federation and Uzbek armed forces. There are signs, however, that the tactics used by the government forces were sub-optimal. They were organized in large units that were vulnerable to attacks from the smaller opposition guerrilla groups. By utilizing the topography of mountain areas, the opposition forces managed to inflict major damage and high casualty rates on the more numerous government forces.
- 16 Iskandarov was until very recently a former opposition commander with considerable political strength. However, in December 2004, he was detained in Moscow, later released, but then detained anew days later by Tajik security services and moved to a pre-trial detention facility of the MB in Dushanbe. There has been no violent response to his arrest by any of Iskandarov's supporters. He faces charges on six articles of Tajikistan's criminal code: terrorism (Article 179); banditry (Article 186); illegal possession of weapons (Article 195); illegally keeping bodyguards (Article 327); embezzlement (Article 245); and the attempted assassination of the prosecutor of Tojikobod district (Article 104) (*Asia Plus*, 2004b; RFE/RL, 2005).
- 17 Interview no. 89, Dushanbe, 29 March 2004.
- 18 Interview no. 126, Garm, 20 August 2004; interview no. 131, Garm, 19 August 2004; interview no. 123, Garm, 20 August 2004; interview no. 113, Garm, 24 August 2004.
- 19 In Tavildara, a former Zioyev stronghold, local government representatives and informed observers thought that only 20–30 of Zioyev's fighters remained in the local branch of the Ministry of Emergency Situations. The observers held that the new recruits for the ministry had previously been drawn from the pool of young men in former opposition areas; now, however, there was no geographical bias and recruits entered from all over Tajikistan (interview no. 116, Tavildara, 23 August 2004; interview no. 118, Tavildara, 24 August 2004; interview no. 129, Tavildara, 23 August 2004).
- 20 It should be noted, however, that Mirzoev was one of the most powerful former commanders and it is unlikely that most other commanders would have similar-sized private stockpiles.
- 21 It has proven to be a challenging task for former commanders to make the transition from warlord to powerful patron successfully. They have had to walk a tightrope between securing power, resources, and a position for themselves, while simultaneously distributing benefits to former fighters that would be sufficient to secure their loyalty.
- 22 One former opposition fighter interviewed noted morbidly that, should fighting break out again, he would first concentrate on killing the commander that had disappointed him previously (interview no. 113, Garm, 24 August 2004).
- 23 See, for example, ICG (2004).
- 24 The review ended on 31 October 2004.
- 25 Many officers in the MVD in Tajikistan were given orders to carry arms while on duty in the capital and the checkpoints around the city were strengthened in the wake of Gaffur Mirzoev's arrest. In focus groups conducted in or near areas where the government crackdown had been taking place, participants expressed grave concern over the campaign. They felt it escalated tensions and were concerned over what would happen once the power balance between the commanders from their areas and government law enforcement was broken.
- 26 Interview no. 118, Tavildara, 24 August 2004.
- 27 The figure of 10,000 registered hunting guns was given by Abdurahim Abdulahadovoic Kakharov, first deputy head of the MVD, in an interview on 15 August 2003.
- 28 Civilians in Rasht and Tavildara were harassed by fighters from both opposition and government forces. As government troops swept back to control in the Rasht and Tavildara areas in February 1993, they raided houses and stole possessions such as cars and valuables (confidential source I). Many young women and teenage girls were raped. There are some, albeit fewer, accounts of opposition forces robbing civilians and demanding tribute in the Rasht and Tavildara areas. Rapes and forced marriages were also imposed by opposition commanders on many local young women (confidential source I). Both government and opposition forces established checkpoints along the main roads. Civilians were made to pay tribute when passing these posts and were also subject to unpredictable and potentially violent behaviour from the armed fighters. The conduct by both the government and opposition forces provided a strong incentive for keeping guns. On the other hand, the potential repercussions for an ordinary civilian of being caught with a gun acted as a powerful deterrent. Some inhabitants noted that a common solution would be for households to bury weapons in fields or hide them in the mountains. In this way, if the guns were really needed they could be collected, yet both government forces and opposition groups would have difficulty in proving illegal possession.
- 29 Interview no. 118, Tavildara, 24 August 2004; interview no. 124, Tavildara, 22 August 2004.
- 30 Interview no. 123, Garm, 20 August 2004; interview no. 100, Khorog, 31 July 2004; interview no. 113, Garm, 24 August 2004.
- 31 The General Prosecutor's Office chaired the commission. The relevant ministries were to report on progress in the collection efforts to the commission every day at 8 a.m. and to the president every tenth day. The decree granted permission to law enforcement agencies to use 'special means' in uncovering and collecting weapons from the population (Republic of Tajikistan, 1994).
- 32 The MVD has district police officers, or *uchastkovaya militsia*, who operate in designated areas (in rural districts this tends to be from 1–5 village administrations) across Tajikistan. Members of one such unit working in the outskirts of Kulyab noted that they had started the collection of guns in 1994, but that the peak years had been 1997 and 1998. The western parts of Khatlon had targeted collection campaigns after Khudoiberdiev retreated through the Shaartuz and Beshkent districts to Uzbekistan in 1997 and are also likely to have had

the bulk of guns collected in this period. One former law enforcement employee in Shaartuz said district police officers had returned from villages with the trunks of their Zhiguli cars filled with guns. Government officials in GBAO noted that collection campaigns had started after 1997, while law enforcement officers in the Tavildara and Rasht valleys noted that collection efforts only fully started after 1998–99 (interview no. 129, Tavildara, 23 August 2004). In Tavildara, aside from the small arms and light weapons handed in, heavy weaponry and military equipment such as tanks and APCs were collected. Some villages had several tons of military items to hand in (interview no. 129, Tavildara, 23 August 2004).

33 The 24,000 figure and the breakdown into types of weapons collected were given by Raushan Alimov, ambassador to the UN for the Republic of Tajikistan, in his speech at the UNIDIR regional conference on small arms and light weapons, Almaty, 16–18 March 2004. Other sources list slightly different figures. This seems largely to depend on when the figures were obtained from government authorities. The figure is constantly growing, since the government collection process is continuing. A figure of 26,000 government-collected guns is given in Heathershaw et al. (2004, p. 17) and one of 22,831 collected weapons in Republic of Tajikistan (2003).

34 Interview with Kakharov, first deputy head of the MVD, 15 August 2004.

35 Interview no. 54, Kulyab, 4 March 2004.

36 Some areas have experienced particularly intense and targeted collection campaigns. One such area is southern Khatlon. The law enforcement agencies believed that many guns were left with alleged Khudoiberdiev supporters and in caches near the Uzbek border. Eyewitness accounts from the Shaartuz region also note that there was a ‘clean-up operation’ or a ‘sweep’ by government-affiliated groups across the areas Khudoiberdiev had passed through. According to a number of these accounts, the ‘clean up’ was done harshly. Citizens suspected of supporting Khudoiberdiev were gravely intimidated and had belongings such as cars and other valuables taken from them. Ethnic Uzbeks seem to have been particularly targeted in the operation. Some of the people the researchers interviewed in Shaartuz referred to the clean-up groups as ‘the MVD’; others called them ‘a third force’ or simply ‘Kulyabis’ (interview no. 67, Shaartuz, 10 March 2004; interview no. 69, Shaartuz, 9 March 2004). In 2001, following the crackdown on the last of the renegade commanders, Rakhmon ‘Hitler’ Sanginov, a sweep-up operation was launched in the areas he had controlled outside of Dushanbe (Samarkand Teppa). Some young men were threatened and beaten by the police. The police claimed they had ‘operative information’ that the young men were illegal weapons possessors (account from a focus group, Dushanbe, August 2003).

37 Informally, officers claim that if an officer collects more than 3–5 guns a year, he is likely to be promoted faster (interview no. 131, Garm, 19 August 2004).

38 The ICG also notes that, in dealing with drug trafficking, the police have tended to focus on small-scale drug traffickers, often women, while letting major traffickers go. Detaining many small-scale traffickers gives, at least statistically, the impression that a local station is actively combating drugs smuggling (ICG, 2002). It is likely that a similar bias towards minor offenders exists in regard to arms collection. It may also be the case that the number of confiscated or collected hunting guns reflects not so much the owners’ intention to break the law as it does the difficulty of re-registration.

39 Interview no. 55, Kulyab, 3 February 2004; interview no. 86, Dushanbe, 18 March 2004; interview no. 137, Kulyab, 13 August 2004.

40 The review of the newspaper sources ended on 31 October 2004.

41 There were 12 caches containing larger military-style weapons in 2001 and 13 in 2003, and seven and ten caches containing grenade launchers in 2001 and 2003, respectively. All of these were found in GBAO, with the exception of six of the caches containing larger military weapons found in 2003, of which three each were found in Khatlon and the Direct Rule Districts.

42 Focus group participants were asked to name powerful members of their communities and to identify the source of their power. These discussions among villagers revealed many aspects of the dynamics in local communities. Guns were deliberately not mentioned by the facilitator in order to avoid biasing respondents towards particular answers related to firearms.

43 It is often the case, however, that many of the people with economic power today also played central roles during the civil war.

44 Participants were asked to name what gives people power in their communities. The answers were later classified in the following categories: *material resources*, *personal characteristics*, *weapons*, *information*, *contacts*, *religion*, and *other*. Particular sources of power in each category included the following: *material resources*: money, wealth, richness, gold, dollars, business, foreign cars, flashy clothes, having satellite TV, property; *personal characteristics*: health, hard work, manners, respectability, intelligence, thoughts, kindness, honesty, honouring guests, physical power, good behaviour; *weapons*: guns, weapons, to be a military person, army uniform, ammunition, banditry, to trouble someone, to be a commander; *information*: knowledge, information, education, profession, skills; *contacts*: relatives, friends, good children, rich relatives, relatives with high positions, good support, having children; *religion*: religion, mullahs.

45 Extremists and former fighters and commanders are included in the ‘other’ category.

46 The proportions of the drug trade in Central Asia and Tajikistan are documented in UNODC (2003).

47 The distinction between ‘legal’ and ‘illegal’ gun users is therefore not the most appropriate concept to apply when attempting to identify gun use that is in need of policy attention in Tajikistan.

48 Interview no. 118, Tavildara, 24 August 2004.

49 Interview no. 142, Isfara, 1 September 2004.

50 According to the national crime statistics, there were, for example, 748 armed robberies in 1998, but only 240 in 2002. In 2002, only 42 of the 180 murders, or 23.5 per cent, were committed using guns. This is a very low murder-by-gun rate for a post-conflict country. In Kosovo the rate is over 70 per cent (Khakee and Florquin, 2003).

51 Interview no. 137, Kulyab, 13 August 2004; interview no. 134, Dushanbe, 11 August 2004.

52 Typically, in other markets, a second-hand AK-47 would sell for USD 90–150. The price of grenades is very high. Factory prices are usually around USD 6–12 (depending on the market type). High prices reflect either supply constraints or strong demand. Qualitative interviews across Tajikistan indicated a widespread fear of the consequences of illegal weapon possession. There are considerable risks in possessing guns, which have significantly constrained demand. AK-47s can usually only be obtained from the police, army sources, or civil war weapons caches. Transactions occur on a very occasional basis and depend on establishing personal contacts.

53 The official price for one Makarov bullet is 8 somoni (USD 2.67), though one researcher was offered bullets on the black market for 2 somoni (USD 0.67).

- 54 It is generally difficult to compare total rates of crime due to the varying definitions of crime. However, the institutional codes and cultures of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan have not markedly changed since the break-up of the Soviet Union, and definitions are therefore sufficiently close to allow for a comparison.
- 55 One focus group participant in Sughd province claimed that after reporting an incident to the police where a person had threatened him with a knife, the police had summoned the person voicing the accusation for questioning 30 times at the police station. In the end, the participant claimed, the person who had threatened him had gone free after the involvement of high-ranking acquaintances in the government structure.
- 56 Interview no. 42, Dushanbe, 2 March 2004.
- 57 One observer in Rasht noted that before local police chiefs had been replaced by outsiders, very few crimes had been officially recorded in this area, but that after the rotation of MVD personnel, the recording of crime rates was increasing (interview no. 131, Garm, 19 August 2004).
- 58 Of the total of ten reported incidents, seven occurred in Khatlon, in Moskva (3), Bokhtar (2), Kulob (1), and Vose (1). The remaining incidents occurred in Thosn, Garm, and Chakalovsk.
- 59 Focus groups and interviews conducted in Rasht and Tavildara showed, however, that civilians in these areas felt threatened by the continued presence of some non-integrated opposition commanders and forces up to 2000–01. There seem to have been a marked improvement after 2001, when some of the dominant commanders either left, or were killed or captured in confrontations with the government. Nevertheless, the continued tensions between the government and a handful of former commanders in particular villages in Rasht made inhabitants in these parts continue to feel insecure even after 2001.
- 60 Twenty of the 76 focus groups told stories of gun misuse by officials. Ten focus groups did not discuss the issues for a variety of reasons. Other studies confirm these findings; see, for example, UNTOP (2003), cited in ICG (2002).
- 61 Focus group participants in Chakalovsk portrayed their area as being more insecure than other places in Sughd province due to the military bases located there. The citizens that researchers talked to in Chakalovsk felt that the military bases attracted criminals to the area and served as potential proliferators of weapons. The lack of restraint and accountability relating to police and military actions facilitates abuse and irregular behaviour towards the civilian population.
- 62 Focus group participants worry that, once enlisted in the army, young men of their village will be subject to abuse, injuries, malnourishment, and illness.
- 63 A recent study documents the deprofessionalization of the Tajik police. It showed that 82 per cent of MVD employees had some form of either secondary or tertiary education. Of these 82 per cent, however, only 40 per cent had a relevant education, such as a law degree or police academy training. The study was conducted by a partner organization to the NGO The Legal Education Centre, Dushanbe.
- 64 For example, four Tajik citizens from a village in Shurobod district were held hostage in July 2004 (interview no. 133, Vose, 13 August 2004).
- 65 Interview no. 104, Khorog, 2 August 2004.
- 66 Interview no. 94, Dushanbe, 26 July 2004; see also WPS (2004).
- 67 The general degree of contact between villagers on each side of the border river seems also to be determined by whether the inhabitants are of the same ethnicity and whether villages on either side are closely situated.
- 68 Interview no. 159, Dushanbe, 12 April 2005.
- 69 Interview no. 94, Dushanbe, 26 July 2004.
- 70 The ‘drug baron’ also claimed that it was special Russian Federation forces, not the usual border guards, that would fight the border violators (interview no. 97, Ishkoshim, 1 August 2004).
- 71 Interview no. 98, Ishkoshim, 1 August 2004.
- 72 The minor ‘drug baron’ researchers interviewed in GBAO claimed that once the RBF left, ‘even teenagers would start doing drug smuggling’.
- 73 Interview no. 94, Dushanbe, 26 July 2004.
- 74 For a detailed account of transfers along the Oshoba–Murghab–Ishkoshim route, see MacFarlane and Torjesen (2004).
- 75 For claims to the contrary, see Pirseyedi (2002) and Sagramoso (2002).
- 76 Interview no. 76, Dushanbe, 25 March 2004.
- 77 For a discussion on weapons flows in Kyrgyzstan, see MacFarlane and Torjesen (2004).
- 78 For a fuller discussion of the absence of a link between drugs and guns trafficking, see MacFarlane and Torjesen (2004).
- 79 Interview with Alexander Alexeevich Knyasev, lecturer in International Journalism, Kyrgyz–Russian Slavic University, 13 August 2003.
- 80 The Criminal Investigation Centre would benefit from better computer software for ballistic identification, new equipment for the bullet archive, a larger collection of sample guns to use for investigative purposes, and more training of personnel within the centre and at local duty stations.
- 81 *Law on Weapons*, art. 7.
- 82 The average birth rate for 1989–2000 is reported to have been 2.1 per cent annually (Republic of Tajikistan, 2001, p. 43). The birth rate has declined by 30 per cent since 1990 as a result of war, economic difficulties, and large-scale labour migration.
- 83 Although there was a fairly sizeable urban Russian minority in Tajikistan during Soviet times, some 286,000 people from non-indigenous minorities emigrated between 1991 and 1995. A considerable portion of these were ethnic Russians (Olimova and Bosc, 2003, pp. 17–18). Another expert estimates that 320,000 of the original 500,000 Russians had left by the end of 1994 (Tadjbaksh, 1996, p. 329).
- 84 There are over 120,000 new entrants to the labour force annually.
- 85 The researchers are aware of the debate as to whether the Pamiris are Tajiks or not. From their perspective, this is a tangential issue, since the politics of the country largely has not been drawn along ethnic lines, and the Pamiris have had an essential role within Tajik politics for the entire period of independence and long before that.
- 86 In 2002, the price of a consumer food basket rose 6 per cent, while the minimum wage rose 3.7 per cent (Olimova and Bosc, 2003, p. 16).
- 87 The 600,000–800,000 Tajiks who have left to work in the Russian Federation and other CIS states since 2000 remit an annual sum believed to be equivalent to annual government expenditure and greater than public revenue. This data does not fully include the value of remittances from migrant labour. The migration of married men from Tajikistan tends to be seasonal (taking advantage of peak construction and agricultural demand), with workers leaving in spring and returning in the autumn. Younger migrants without family may stay away for several years, working in year-round enterprises (Olimova and Bosc, 2003, p. 34; RFE/RL, 2003b). For 2002, remittance by bank transfer amounted to approximately USD 78

- million. When combined with illegal money transfers and transfers in kind, the total is estimated at approximately USD 200–230 million (Olimova and Bosc, 2003, p. 94).
- 88 It is worth noting that Tajikistan's 2001 rank was 103 out of the 174 countries ranked (World Bank, 2002, p. 8).
- 89 Tajikistan's *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper* notes that assessment of the incidence of poverty varies radically (from 17 per cent to 76 per cent), depending on what criteria are used. If one employs self-assessment (i.e. do people consider themselves poor?), national incidence of poverty is around 60 per cent (Republic of Tajikistan, 2002a, p. 10). In the interviews, poverty was frequently cited as a far greater concern than political instability.
- 90 In Sharq Scientific Research Centre (2002) it is noted that while 18 per cent of families reported an improving economic situation in 2001, 29 per cent reported a deteriorating situation.
- 91 In connection with this, it is worth noting that recent research by the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) shows that young people have strikingly positive attitudes towards guns (meeting with Nilufar Pourzand, programme co-ordinator, UNICEF, Dushanbe, 19 February 2004).
- 92 The demonstration in Kokand was followed by disturbances in Ferghana.
- 93 For an illustration of this arms trade, see MacFarlane and Torjesen (2004).
- 94 The rise of the Taliban also increased Iranian and Russian Federation pressure for a settlement of the conflict.
- 95 RFE/RL (2003a), citing a statement by President Rakhmonov.
- 96 See UNODCCP (2002, p. 6), where it is noted that, whereas in 1995 heroin constituted 3 per cent of total Central Asian seizures, it was estimated to have exceeded 90 per cent in 2001.
- 97 On this point, see Guangcheng (2003, p. 109).
- 98 See MacFarlane (2004, pp. 454–5).
- 99 Interviews in GBAO suggest, for example, that one important early source of weapons during the war was returning Pamiri MVD officers.
- 100 Estimates of deaths in the war are as high as 100,000 people.
- 101 Interview no. 124, Tavildara, 22 August 2004.
- 102 Interview no. 57, Shaartuz, 10 March 2004.
- 103 The political arrangements after 1997 left the traditionally dominant northern elite with little influence.
- 104 Interview no. 155, Dushanbe, 19 July 2004.
- 105 Interview no. 154, Dushanbe, 25 July 2004; interview no. 155, Dushanbe, 19 July 2004.
- 106 The 201<sup>st</sup> MRD may have had reserve units in the Tajik SSR; if so, it would have had substantially larger weapons stockpiles than 15,000 units.
- 107 A fighter from Kulyab claimed that many 201<sup>st</sup> MRD troops were evacuated before the major fighting, but that the National Front forces protected the 201<sup>st</sup> MRD compound without stealing from it (interview no. 55, Kulyab, 3 February 2004).
- 108 Interviews with former opposition and government commanders and former law enforcement officers confirm that individual officers in the 201<sup>st</sup> MD informally sold weapons to both government and opposition factions (one eyewitness account tells of guns sold off the back of trucks in the centre of Dushanbe in 1992) (interview no. 92, Dushanbe, 30 March 2004; interview no. 134, Dushanbe, 11 August 2004).
- 109 Interview no. 156, Dushanbe, 19 August 2004.
- 110 Interview no. 86, Dushanbe, 18 March 2004.
- 111 Interview no. 75, Dushanbe, 24 February 2004.
- 112 Interview no. 132, Dushanbe, 17 July 2004.
- 113 Interview no. 90, Dushanbe, 18 March 2004.
- 114 The Tajik SSR belonged initially to the USSR's Turkestan military district, but later came under the new Central Asia military district, which was established in the late 1960s.
- 115 Interview no. 155, Dushanbe, 19 July 2004.
- 116 One former high-ranking law enforcement officer who fought for the government side claimed that he had bought 30 grenade launchers for USD 2,000 in Afghanistan in 1991 (interview no. 154, Dushanbe, 25 July 2004).
- 117 Interview no. 39, Dushanbe, 27 February 2004.
- 118 Civilians that took part in the exodus—as many as 60,000 sought refuge in Afghanistan—claimed in interviews for this report that serious atrocities were committed against them. While the refugees were stranded on the Tajik bank of the Pyanj River waiting for boats to take them across to Afghanistan, armed groups and aircraft shot at the fleeing civilians. Many drowned while crossing the river in unfit vessels (interview no. 64, Shaartuz, 10 March 2004).
- 119 Interview no. 84, Dushanbe, 26 March 2004.
- 120 This section has been compiled on the basis of 46 key informant interviews done by the research group AFKOR in Dushanbe, Khatlon, and the Direct Rule Districts.
- 121 A centrally placed person in the IRP noted that opposition leader Nuri's nephew had recently been forced to pay a bribe for alleged illegal weapons possession. Even when he had been made aware of the rights granted to him under the amnesty law, the fighter preferred to pay the bribe, as it gave him a long-term guarantee against further interference (interview no. 83, Dushanbe, 29 March 2004).
- 122 Interview no. 111, Dushanbe, 25 August 2004.
- 123 The principal military issues were actually worked out in the military protocol signed on March 1997 by the two sides. This protocol dealt with the reintegration, disarmament, and disbanding of UTO forces, as well as the reform of law enforcement (Rakhmonov, 2001).
- 124 Interview no. 32, Vakhsh region, 6 March 2004; see also *Obshchaya Gazeta* (1998).
- 125 At least 1,606 were integrated into the Ministry of Defence, 1,591 into KOGG, 1,041 into the Ministry of Emergency Situations, and 773 into the MVD (Rakhmonov, 2001).
- 126 Interview no. 126, Garm, 20 August 2004.
- 127 Interview no. 99, Khorog, 2 August 2004.
- 128 These figures were made available in UNMOT news briefings and are referred to in Burkhard (2000); the latter only reports the percentages and not the total numbers.
- 129 Interview no. 117, Garm, 20 August 2004.
- 130 For example, the interior troops battalion in Rasht, which initially consisted entirely of opposition forces and some new conscripts, stored their weapons in the MVD district station; members need permission from the MVD station head to take out guns. The interior troops battalion in Khorog must first have permission from the central MVD leadership before taking armed action, though in emergency cases, members are permitted to undertake armed operations and use the guns from their gun room, obtaining permission after actions have been undertaken (interview no. 107, Khorog, 31 July 2004; interview no. 117, Garm, 20 August 2004).
- 131 In particular, commentators note that Mirzoev could have potentially linked with the influential mayor of Dushanbe, Makhmadsaid Ubaidulloev. This would have been a powerful alliance that could have posed a substantial challenge to Rakhmonov (*Eurasia Insight*, 2004; Avesta News Agency, 2004a).



132 According to General Prosecutor B. Bobohronov, two MI-8MTB helicopters belonging to the Presidential Guard had been rented out privately to a contractor in Afghanistan for USD 60,000 per month, but the funds had gone directly (and thus illegally) to Mirzoev (Avesta News Agency, 2004c).

133 The hunters' society for the Kulyab region exemplifies the difficulties facing organized and legal hunting activities: the society has one full-time employee and occupies one room and a phone in the local administration building. There is no filing cabinet for the membership index cards of the 1,800 members. The representative noted that his main duty was to provide hunters with supplies and ensure payment of membership fees. Since most hunters live in remote areas, many had difficulties with renewing their yearly membership fee of USD 1.7. The representative claimed he walked 300–400 km a year to visit hunters in remote areas (interview no. 53, Kulyab, 4 March 2004).

134 The proportion of suicides committed with firearms among all suicides and the proportion of women among homicide victims (who are predominantly victims of domestic violence) are considered indicators of the extent to which civilians have access to guns (Small Arms Survey, 2004, ch. 6).

135 Interview no. 48, Kulyab, 3 May 2004; interview no. 36, Kulyab, 4 March 2004.

136 Interview no. 158, Dushanbe, 27 March 2004.

137 See ICG (2002); also from interview no. 86, Dushanbe, 18 March 2004.

138 Interview no. 76, Dushanbe, 25 March 2004.

139 Michael Orr (2001, p. 4) notes low wages and harsh conditions as key reasons for Russian Federation soldiers' reluctance to serve in Tajikistan. Orr claims that many soldiers unfit for service end up in Tajikistan and this reduces the effectiveness of the 201<sup>st</sup> MRD.

140 See Dinkaev (2004); interview no. 112, Dushanbe, 18 August 2004.

141 See, for example, Heathershaw et al. (2004).

142 Procedures were much looser prior to June 1999, when strict limits were placed on the rights of law enforcement and defence personnel to carry weapons, notably in Dushanbe. In the earlier period, officers would carry weapons as a matter of course.

143 Interview no. 86, Dushanbe, 18 March 2004.

144 Observations at Garm MVD gun room.

145 Interview no. 86, Dushanbe, 18 March 2004.

146 The civilian arms that the above entities may be entitled to are: firearms for self-defence (which includes a range of weapons such as smooth-bore, long-barrelled firearms; pistols; gas pistols; and aerosol sprays); sports weapons; hunting weapons (firearms with rifled barrel, smooth-bore firearms, combined firearms); and signal firearms with a barrel and without barrel.

147 Article 17 of the *Law on Weapons* specifies that that foreigners may purchase, export, and import civilian firearms.

148 The employees of the enterprise that will be handling the guns must themselves have undergone training. The permit for the enterprise is given for three years.

149 The following officials are permitted to carry arms: administrative personnel, officers, and servicemen and -women of the MVD and the interior forces (*Law on Militia*, art. 13; *Law of Interior Forces*, art. 18); KOGG officers and servicemen and -women; certain categories of officials of the customs committee and the tax police; officers and enlisted staff of the MB (*Law on Bodies of State Security*, art. 22); prosecutors and investigators in the Prosecutor's Office (*Law on Bodies of the Prosecuting Office*, art. 51); judges (*Law on Courts*, art. 10);

servicemen and -women (*Law on Defence*, art. 14); servicemen and -women of the Presidential Guard (*Law on Presidential Guard*, art. 10); employees of the national courier (messenger) service (*Law on Communication by the State*, art. 13); prison guards (*Decree on Reform of the System of Penalty Execution*); personnel of the Ministry of Emergency Situations; and personnel of the DCA.

150 The restrictions in the overall national legal framework in Tajikistan tend typically to insist on the use of weapons only as a last resort, and that warning shots should be fired whenever possible. There are extra provisions stressing the avoidance of firing on women and children. The explicit rights allow use of arms when needed to repel attacks on government institutions, fight crime, or establish order. Every case of arms discharge should be registered and cases of deaths or injuries should be immediately reported.

151 The law dealing with export control (art. 5) specifies the licensing procedures for the export of weapons. The required procedures are relatively extensive and correspond largely to the basic recommendations of the *OSCE Document on Small Arms and Light Weapons* (OSCE, 2000) and the *OSCE Handbook* (OSCE, 2004). A government licensing body should submit the application by the exporter, the contract, and the end-user import certificate to the Customs Committee. The end-user certificate must come from an authorized state body, and must guarantee against re-export of the goods. The Tajik Customs Office is permitted to inspect arms to be exported.

152 Tajikistan is not the only country without legislation on brokering activities. However, a growing number of states, including the United States, have adopted rigorous measures; see Small Arms Survey (2004).

153 Interview with Radjabali Kurbanovich Pirakov, head of department, General Prosecutor's Office, 14 August 2003.

154 Interview no. 79, Dushanbe, 29 March 2004.

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