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**THE PERILS OF EMERGING STATEHOOD: CIVIL  
WAR AND STATE RECONSTRUCTION  
IN TAJIKISTAN**

**AN ANALYTICAL NARRATIVE ON STATE-MAKING**

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## **The Perils of Emerging Statehood: Civil War and State Reconstruction in Tajikistan**

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### **Introduction**

Tajikistan is one of the Soviet successor states of Central Asia, with a population estimated at 7,163,506 people<sup>1</sup> in 2006. It is located on the borders of Afghanistan and China and is the poorest state of the former USSR. The origins of the conflict in Tajikistan can be traced to the history of its creation as a USSR constituent republic and to developments during the Soviet era. Further escalation of the conflict was triggered by the events of *perestroika*, attempts at democratisation and the dissolution of the USSR. The collapse of the Soviet Union threw Tajikistan into an acute crisis of decolonisation,<sup>2</sup> and from the onset of independence the country rapidly disintegrated into conflict and violence.

The conflict in Tajikistan is unique in the post-Communist world. Reported casualties amount to 157,000 dead,<sup>3</sup> but unofficial estimates put the death toll up to 300,000 out of the pre-war population of 5.1 million, making the Tajik civil war the bloodiest conflict to result from the end of the Communist era. Still more remarkable is that the country managed to recover and build a viable state in a relatively short time, being the only conflict in the post-Communist world resolved via a peace settlement.

This paper presents an analytical narrative of the process of civil war and state formation in Tajikistan. The purpose of the study is to assist in identifying causal mechanisms for the civil war and state breakdown. The paper provides a brief historical account of the establishment of Tajikistan during Soviet times, then proceeds to assess how political contestation unfolded when the Soviet system fell apart and how this has changed over time. It analyses why the violence started and how the state managed to survive, how it responded to crises, and how it was actively engaged in their creation. Lastly, it discusses the factors contributing to and hindering state reconstruction after the war.

The study does not attempt to cover all aspects of the modern political history of Tajikistan and concentrates on internal developments, providing a brief account of the roles of external powers to put events into context. This is consistent with the main argument of the paper that internal factors were largely responsible both for the crisis and subsequent recreation of the state, while external forces played mitigating or exacerbating roles. The study is based on a review of the existing literature in English and in Russian, and identifies any gaps in current research. It is supplemented by field interviews conducted by the author in Tajikistan between 2003 and 2007.

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<sup>1</sup> The US Department of State. 2006, 'Tajikistan: Country Background Note,' <http://www.state.gov>

<sup>2</sup> Muriel Atkin, 1997. 'Thwarted Democratization in Tajikistan', in Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott (eds.), 'Conflict, Cleavage, and Change in Central Asia and the Caucasus', Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 27-311, p. 304.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Randa Slim and Faredun Hodizoda, 2001. 'Tajikistan: from civil war to peacebuilding', in Paul van Tongeren, Hans van der Veen and Juliette Verhoeven (eds.), 'Searching for Peace in Europe and Eurasia', pp. 516-535, p. 517.

## 1. Tajikistan before Independence

### *Historical and Demographic Setting*

Tajiks are a Persian-speaking people living alongside the Turkic ethnic groups of Central Asia. The origin of Tajik statehood can be traced back to the Samanide Empire which, at its height in the tenth century (AD), stretched from the Syr Darya to the Hindu Kush and from the Pamirs to northern Iran. The territory of present-day Tajikistan occupies only a small proportion of this area; but the historical association with the Empire is important in drawing a line with the neighbouring Uzbeks.

Turkic-speaking Uzbeks constitute a minority in Tajikistan and a majority in Uzbekistan, the largest country in Central Asia. During the ethno-territorial delineation of Central Asia of the 1920s the territory of the modern Tajikistan was created as an autonomous republic in Uzbekistan, but in 1929 it was separated and upgraded to the status of a full Union Republic. This division left Tajikistan without its major centres of urban civilisation – namely Samarqand and Bukhara, which were allocated to Uzbekistan – and was followed by an exodus of Tajik families into the newly established Tajik republic.

As ‘compensation’, the eastern part of the Ferghana Valley in the north (Soughd province) was incorporated into Tajikistan – an area that was heavily populated by Uzbeks.<sup>4</sup> This northern region was the most developed part of the country due to its location on transport routes, good irrigation opportunities from Syr-Darya and the cultural and educational heritage of the ancient centres of Central Asian civilisation. Under Soviet rule, ethnic Tajiks from the mountain regions were moved to this area, resulting in an increasingly mixed population in the northern region.

Tajikistan was the poorest of the Soviet republics, heavily dependent on central government for subsidies and development aid. It was multi-ethnic: Tajiks constituted 62.29 per cent of the total population, with other sizeable groups including Uzbeks (23.5 per cent) and Russians (7.6 per cent – all Slavic groups combined made up 8.58 per cent). The Uzbeks lived mainly in the areas bordering Uzbekistan: 38 per cent in Soughd province, 35.7 per cent in Khatlon and 20.6 per cent in Karagetin Valley. Of all the ethnic groups in the country, the Uzbeks and Kyrgyz experienced the highest degree of ethnic self-identification.<sup>5</sup> Russians and other Slavs moved to Tajikistan mainly in the post Second World War period and were largely urban; in 1989 they constituted 36 per cent of 601,500 population of Dushanbe, the capital.<sup>6</sup> In the period 1950-1971, 235,700 representatives of European groups were resettled in Tajikistan, mainly in cities.

The period after the Second World War witnessed gradual urbanisation, after which about one third of the total population lived in urban areas: 33 per cent in 1960, 35 per cent in 1980 and 32 per cent in 1990.<sup>7</sup> However, ‘the condition of urban life – to become an individual in the city – was an idea not readily accepted by generations raised on communal principles’.<sup>8</sup> New

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<sup>4</sup> More on the situation of Uzbeks in Shirin Akiner, *Central Asia: Conflict or Stability and Development?* 1997, Minority Rights Group Report, MRG, London: pp. 29-30.

<sup>5</sup> Borzikova T. N., ‘Проблемы Этнических Меньшинств в Таджикистане’, (Issues of Ethnic Minorities in Tajikistan), 2003, Dushanbe, Open Society Institute-sponsored sociological survey, p. 18.

<sup>6</sup> Национальный Состав Населения СССР: Финансы и Статистика. Москва, Госкомстат: 1990, p. 26.

<sup>7</sup> Jarmo Eronen, *Central Asia: Development Paths and Geopolitical Imperatives*, Helsinki: Helsinki School of Economics, 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Saodat Olimova, ‘Political Islam and Conflict in Tajikistan’, in Lena Jonson and Murad Esenov, *Political Islam*

migrants tended to transfer to the cities social structures that they had inherited from rural life. A slight decrease in the proportion of urban dwellers is perhaps explained by higher birth rates in rural areas and by the fact that the Soviet drive to create an urban base for the young republic slowed down as the absorption capacity of Tajikistan showed its limits. In the Soviet Union migration was controlled, and the sporadic movement of large groups of population was impossible. The population was young (45 per cent under 15 years of age) and there was a high rate of demographic growth:<sup>9</sup> the 1980s witnessed a ‘baby boom’, with a growth rate between 3.3 and 3.5 per cent.<sup>10</sup>

Essential social services, particularly in education and healthcare, had been funded by the Soviet central government.<sup>11</sup> Education and healthcare were free and universally available; but there was also a range of other welfare benefits – for children, mothers who gave birth to several babies, the handicapped, the elderly and so on – as well as rewards for achievement in sport, science and the arts. Allworth, however, claims that as late as in 1977 only 80 per cent of children of school age actually went to school in Tajikistan.<sup>12</sup> The policy of *korenizatsia* (‘indigenisation’, or the establishment of national cadres) favoured the development of local elites.

### ***Geography and Resettlement***<sup>13</sup>

Akiner notes that the development of the country was shaped in many ways by its physical geography. Such features as high mountain ranges, the scarcity of arable land and uneven distribution of natural resource endowments (especially water) have determined agricultural practices, industrial development, transportation systems and the construction of infrastructure in the Soviet period. These features also accounted, in part, for the centrifugal regional tendencies.<sup>14</sup>

Tajikistan encompasses a territory of some 143,100 sq. km. and 93 per cent of this land is covered by mountains, glaciers and windswept plateaus; some 28 ranges divide the country into isolated areas of habitation. There are relatively few passes across the mountains, and many are closed by snow for several months of the year. Only 7 per cent of the territory of Tajikistan has human settlement, and only 5 per cent of the land is arable.<sup>15</sup>

Four geographic zones can be distinguished. Historically, each of these had distinctive patterns of trade and transport ties with adjacent regions. The largest zone is province of

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*and Conflicts in Russia and Central Asia*, Conference Paper no. 24, The Swedish Institute of International Affairs, Stockholm, 1999.

<sup>9</sup> Demographic data from the 1989 Soviet census. The average crude birth rate was estimated at 41.8 per thousand, and infant mortality (within first year of life) at 46.7 per thousand. Average life expectancy was 69.7 (source: *Vestnik statistiki*, no. 7, 1991, relevant sections).

<sup>10</sup> In Leninabad (presently Soughd) province, growth was 4.8% (Soviet Statistics’ Committee, 1990, results of 1989 census). Current growth rate is 1.5%.

<sup>11</sup> In 1991, the central government subsidy to Tajikistan was greater than Tajik revenue from taxation (Kaser and Mehrotra, *op. cit.*, p. 49).

<sup>12</sup> Edward Allworth (ed.), *Central Asia: 130 Years of Russian Dominance: a Historical Overview*, Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1994, p. 539. Allworth provides no reference for his sources regarding this assertion.

<sup>13</sup> Akiner, IPA

<sup>14</sup> Akiner, IPA.

<sup>15</sup> *Regional Cooperation for Human Development and Human Security in Central Asia: Background Country Study on Tajikistan for UNDP Regional Human Development Report*, Research Center Sharq, Dushanbe, 2005.

Gorno (meaning ‘Mountainous’)-Badakhshan in the east, which is mainly comprised of the high mountains across the river Pyanj from Afghan Badakhshan. Gorno-Badakhshan (Mountainous Badakhshan Autonomous Region or GBAO) is home to small groups of Eastern Iranian peoples (collectively known as ‘Pamiris’),<sup>16</sup> whose languages are not mutually comprehensible with the Tajik variant of Persian. The second zone lies in the centre of Tajikistan and is dominated by massive mountain ranges, which together represent a formidable north–south barrier. This barrier splits the zone internally into Karategin Valley and the Hissar region. The third zone (Kulyab and Kurgan-Tyube, together making up the Khatlon province) is in the southwest. Traditionally, this area constituted the divide between the mountain-dwellers and the plain-dwellers. The fourth zone (Soughd province<sup>17</sup>) encompasses the lowlands to the north of the central mountain ranges. The population breakdown in 1991 was as follows:<sup>18</sup>

Dushanbe (capital city) administrative district	592,000
Kulyab province	668,000
Kurgan-Tyube province	1,113,000 <sup>19</sup>
Soughd (Leninobod) province	1,636,000
Karategin Valley, or Gharm (centre/ northeast)	1,182,000
GBAO	167,000

The Soviet system practiced large-scale resettlement initiatives from the mountains into the plains, motivated both by development projects that required a labour force and by difficulties in sustaining a growing population in the mountain regions. This was a typical practice in parts of the USSR with similar geographical settings and economic development patterns. Thus, highlanders from Zeravshan were moved to the Ferghana Valley in the north, and those from GBAO, Karategin Valley and the highland areas of Kulyab province were moved to cotton plantations in Kurgan-Tyube province in the southern plains. Tensions and rivalries between lowlanders and highlanders persisted throughout the post-Second World War era. Subsequently, several of the leading opposition figures in the civil war came from these uprooted communities.

Due to the high mountainous terrain and difficulties in communication, different parts of the country seldom mixed, which precluded the formation of a Tajik national identity. Certain highland areas on the borders with Afghanistan and China, especially in GBAO, had particular significance in the Soviet defence doctrine and were privileged accordingly; these privileges included the maintenance of higher living standards and support for local cultural and educational facilities.

Tajikistan has long borders with Afghanistan (1,206 km), Uzbekistan (1,161 km) and Kyrgyzstan (870 km), and a shorter border with China (414 km). In the Soviet era interaction between the Tajik Union Republic and the neighbouring Uzbek and Kyrgyz ones was rampant, as administrative borders were merely a formality. Some border territories changed administrative jurisdiction several times; they were reallocated to neighbouring republics,

<sup>16</sup> Today the Pamiri peoples in Tajikistan number about 150,000; there are also Pamiri communities in the adjacent regions of Afghanistan, China and Pakistan (see Akiner, *Tajikistan*, p. 9; also K. Abdullaev and S. Akbarzadeh, *Historical Dictionary of Tajikistan*, Scarecrow Press, London, 2002, p. 161).

<sup>17</sup> This province underwent several name changes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century: it was known as *Khujand uyezd* in 1918–1926, then reformed as *Leninobod oblast’* in 1939; it was again renamed as *Soughd veloyat* in 2000.

<sup>18</sup> Народное Хозяйство СССР в 1990, 1991 гг. Статсборник, Moscow, 1992.

<sup>19</sup> Kurgan-Tyube and Kulyab were merged into Khatlon province after independence.

returned, their borders redrawn again and so on. By contrast, interaction with China was almost non-existent, while experience of Afghanistan derived firstly from the Soviet intervention in that country (1979-1988) in which Tajiks were used as interpreters due to linguistic proximity, and secondly from the subsequent civil war in Tajikistan.

### ***Political and Economic Development***

Tajikistan was an independent state for a few months in 1992 before the war broke out. Prior to this, Moscow determined most policies and supervised their implementation. This included policies on security, the dominance of the Communist party, administration, the legal system, the economy and the educational system. As the main security challenge came from Afghanistan, it was met by the Border Troops belonging to the KGB (Committee of State Security) structure. The army was centrally commanded and was the responsibility of the Ministry of Defence in Moscow, including a surveillance system to oversee the situations in Afghanistan, Pakistan and China. Policing was the responsibility of the republican Ministry of Interior and the police force was recruited and administered from Dushanbe.

The Communist Party ensured political control over all spheres. The First Party Secretary of a republic, province, or district was the supreme head, his number two was the chair of the Supreme Soviet (parliament) or a local council, and number three was the head of the executive (Council of Ministers). Informally, being the head of a local KGB branch carried significant weight, and, depending on personality, the head of the executive could be more important than the head of parliament. When the authority of the Communist Party weakened in Tajikistan, other parts of the governing system fell into disarray. The Soviet legal system was not meant to be literally a guide for action, but rather represented the state's aspiration in terms of how it wanted to be seen by its citizens. The freedom that came with *Perestroika* unleashed a debate in society on previously unheard of legal matters, such as the constitution and public participation.

State legitimacy was maintained officially via uncontested elections and informally through the distribution of material goods and benefits. This was supplemented by a social contract: the state took responsibility for the citizens' basic needs in exchange for citizens not questioning the authority of the state. In Huntington's words, the system 'did not provide liberty, but it provided authority'.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, the concept of *institutional multiplicity*<sup>21</sup> – a situation where individuals and organisations appear to operate simultaneously in multiple institutional systems governed by different sets of rules and incentives – is well-suited to explain how the Soviet system worked in less developed and more traditional parts of the USSR. Beneath the formal rules and institutions lay a plethora of networks and patronage relations, which often softened the impact of an authoritarian system and enabled citizens to ensure their livelihoods and get jobs done.

On the whole, the people of Central Asia had a high degree of association with the Soviet state, and nostalgia for the Soviet past is widespread even today. It is common for villagers to speak fondly of the days when their *kolkhoz* [collective farm] scored the highest harvest in the province and was awarded a Red Flag; when women who were the star harvesters were allocated beautiful cloth to make dresses, and families were given package holidays at resorts.

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<sup>20</sup> Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1968).

<sup>21</sup> Jonathan DiJohn, 'Conceptualising the Causes and Consequences of Failed States: A Critical Review of the Literature', Working Paper 25 (series 2) Crisis States Research Centre, January 2008, p. 33.

In the words of one observer, the Soviet experience in Central Asia has produced 'Third World countries with non-Third world populations'.

Moscow made the most important decisions and set policy parameters. It directly ruled defence enterprises with practically no involvement from the republican authorities. These enterprises mostly employed Europeans in professional and managerial positions. In relation to economic management, there were three tiers of subordination: union, republican and local. Union enterprises (for example, aluminium smelters or hydropower stations) were answerable to the relevant ministries in Moscow, republican ones (such as cotton production and processing) were the responsibility of the government in Dushanbe, and district authorities were in charge of small enterprises in the service, retail and food industries.

Under the surface of a unified Soviet system, regional identities were strong and collective solidarity remained very much alive. Regions competed for centrally-distributed benefits, as there were virtually no legal sources of autonomous income available locally. In the run up to independence and civil war, there was an acute sense throughout the country that benefits were distributed unfairly; it was widely felt that other regions benefited disproportionately while one's own region was unjustly deprived. As the assets and benefits were distributed centrally (from Moscow) and at the republican level (from Dushanbe), there was a widespread perception that the state had assets that were being withheld from citizens of certain regions, and that these could be redistributed justly. It later transpired that this perception was largely based on a false premise and there was very little wealth in the republic *per se*; Tajikistan's coffers were empty, and most resources had been coming from Moscow in the form of direct or indirect subsidies.

The underlying grievances were related to how power was distributed within the republic, given that those in power were responsible for how resources were allocated between regions. Throughout the Soviet period the north, which was the most developed region, dominated Tajikistan's politics. In the 1970s more Kulyabis and Hissaris (people from the centre of the country) were drafted into the ruling establishment, while Pamiris were heavily represented in cultural circles and later the police force. By contrast, the poorer and mostly rural areas of Kurgan-Tyube and Gharm had little standing.

The freedom that came with *Perestroika* in the 1980s therefore unleashed many grievances that had been suppressed in Tajik society. The intelligentsia was concerned with the assertion of Tajik culture and identity over that of the Uzbeks and Russians, while the pro-religious constituency sought a greater role for Islam. There were also popular grievances relating to corruption and living standards, as well as to the extent of cotton cultivation and environmental degradation. Furthermore, the autonomous region of GBAO demanded an elevation of the status of its autonomy from region to republic.

This period saw the rise to prominence of alternative economic elites, which developed through shadow agricultural businesses in the south of the country and in Karategin Valley. They had been benefiting from the exploitation of the centrally commanded economy, which had left many loopholes in the periphery. Despite having accumulated significant funds, they had no access to political power and few means to influence decision-making. As the state's power weakened, their frustration became more pronounced.<sup>22</sup> Such groups became

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<sup>22</sup> Saodat Olimova in 'Межтаджикский Конфликт: Путь к Миру' (Inter-Tajik Conflict: Road to Peace), Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Russian Academy of Sciences and Sharq Information and Analytical Centre (Dushanbe), Moscow, 1998.



especially prominent in Gharm, which was the region least controlled by the state; this was because most of the republican authorities' attention was dedicated to cotton-producing regions (Kurgan-Tyube, Soughd and parts of Kulyab) due to the necessity of fulfilling the Republic's plans and meeting Moscow's targets in terms of cotton production, the main export of the republic.<sup>23</sup>

### *The Role of Islam*

Political Islam played a prominent role in the intra-Tajik civil war – a role that has yet to be fully apprehended. Most Tajiks are Sunni Muslims of the Hanafi *mazhab* (school), while Pamiris (about 5 per cent of the population) are Ismaili Muslims (spiritual followers of the Aga Khan). The republic has a socially conservative outlook and religion occupies a significant space in daily life and family rituals. After the suppression of Islam in 1920s and 1930s, more religious freedoms were allowed during the Second World War, when a Spiritual Board of Muslims with a seat in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, was created. However, the political expression of Islam was suppressed and state control over religious affairs was tight. In 1987 there were only 30 official mosques in the republic, although many more unofficial ones functioned underground.

During *Perestroika* Islam became associated with the revival of the Tajik identity, which asserted itself against Soviet secularism and entered the political domain. Olivier Roy distinguishes between 'official' Islam as represented by Qazi Qolon Ali Akbar Turanjonzoda, the supreme Islamic judge and official leader of Tajikistan's Muslims, and 'parallel' Islam, which was made up of grassroots groups united around informal figures. Initially, representatives of official Islam made demands on the authorities for permission to open more mosques, the right to train more clergy and the right to publish more religious literature.<sup>24</sup> In the late 1980s the construction of mosques was allowed, and many Islamic preachers came out from the underground. On occasion, state officials solicited Muslim leaders to calm tensions in cases of violence.<sup>25</sup> The government cooperated with the official *Qaziyat* (office of the supreme Islamic judge) in the construction and repair of Islamic institutions, and encouraged the organising of the *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca). Repeated exhortations from leaders of official Islam to remain loyal sustained the compromise between official Islam and the government.

The emergence of 'parallel' Islam is a little-explored topic. A personal story of one of its leaders is as follows. Abdullah Saidov (later Nuri) was born in 1947 to a man who was the director of a *sovkhos* (state farm). Nuri came from the rural middle class and was trained in the system of secular education, having graduated as geodesics engineer. However, Nuri was also a student of Qari Mohammed Rustamov Hindustani, who ran a clandestine *madrassa* in Dushanbe until it was closed by the KGB in 1973. Among the students were the future founders of the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP). The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 contributed to radicalisation of this network. In March 1987 the Afghan *mujaheddin* launched an operation on Tajik territory over the Panj River, next to Imam Sahib, the base of

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<sup>23</sup> Fattoev, (2001), p. 39.

<sup>24</sup> "From January 1989 to January 1990 the number of officially registered mosques increased from 17 to 47 and continued to grow. In July 1991 the number reached 2,700." (Mavlon Makhamov, 'Islam and the Political Development of Tajikistan after 1985,' in *Central Asia: Its Strategic Importance and Future Prospects*, Hafëez Malik (Ed.), New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994, p. 200.

<sup>25</sup> Brown notes, "The clergy intervened, apparently with limited success, in the disturbances in the Ferghana Valley in June 1989; the qazi [Islamic judge] of Tajikistan made public appeals to calm passions in Dushanbe in February." Bess Brown, p. 27.

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. Another operation took place in April 1987 on the Moskovskii border post. In March of that year a small demonstration in support of the *mujaheddin*, led by Nuri, took place in Tajikistan close to the place of the attacks. He was imprisoned as a result and served a jail sentence.

There were reports that the first violent protests by Islamists took place in Kurgan-Tyube in 1976, at the height of Brezhnev era. In the mid-1980s Nuri had founded a clandestine religious youth organisation, *Sazman-i Djavanan*. Nuri's declarations and statements of the time identify him as an Islamist close to the Muslim Brotherhood and mildly critical of the cautiousness of the official clergy.<sup>26</sup> There had been accounts of active Wahhabi propaganda and a desire for confrontation with the forces of the state. A Wahhabi Mullah, Abdullo Saidov, asked his followers in April 1986 to 'virtually take up arms' to achieve the goal of establishing an Islamic state.<sup>27</sup> Soviet KGB officer V. V. Petkel claimed that in 1986-87 he saw dozens of trials of ringleaders and Muslim clerics who had called for *jihad* against the existing system. These mullahs tried to infiltrate the Communist Party, Soviets (local councils) and law-enforcement organs, and Petkel linked them to foreign ideological centres.<sup>28</sup>

The origins of the IRP are obscure; it is most likely that it was a merger between several different groups. The IRP was led by Nuri, Mohammad Sharif Himmatzoda and Davlat Usmon Himmatov. Recently urbanised teachers and students with strong village roots were prominent in its formation, and the party found a following mostly in rural areas. IRP political identity took root with the rural youth, who were in favour of low-key Islamisation of customs and constraints on the behaviour of women.<sup>29</sup> Ideologically, the party studied and disseminated the views of Sheikh Hasan al-Banna, the brothers Sayyed and Muhammad Qutb, Sayed Hawwa and Abdullah Mawdudi.<sup>30</sup> As *perestroika* progressed, the Islamic constituency grew more prominent; the IRP's following grew and it was officially registered in 1991.

Although Sufism had been a long-standing spiritual tradition of the region, Roy does not see a direct link between Sufism and political Islam in Tajikistan. He notes that 'Sufi affiliations do not necessarily correspond to political affiliations. They create personal links, which may contribute to political mobilisation or may maintain links between opposing groups, but in Central Asia they do not have a direct political expression.'<sup>31</sup>

Local analysts claim<sup>32</sup> that for about sixteen years before the war broke out, Wahhabi groups from abroad had been penetrating the more devout areas of Tajikistan, propagating Wahhabism among groups discontented with the Soviet regime, such as Gharmis in Kurgan-Tyube province and the Ferghana Valley in the north. It should be noted that these were die-hard areas of resistance to Soviet rule in the 1920s and 1930s. International Islamist influence was also projected via the *hajj* and Islamic education abroad, as well as the spread of audio recordings and literature. When the state entered a crisis and the central authority had weakened, these investments by the Islamists brought a return.

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<sup>26</sup> Roy, p. 154.

<sup>27</sup> Helsinki Watch Report, 'Conflict in the Soviet Union: Tajikistan', 1991, p. 14.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Giampaolo R. Capisani, *The Handbook of Central Asia: a Comprehensive Survey of the New Republics*, London: I. B. Tauris Publishers, 2000, pp. 161-204, p. 164.

<sup>30</sup> Saodat Olimova, 'Political Islam', p. 129.

<sup>31</sup> Roy, p. 149.

<sup>32</sup> Ahad Mahmudov, Faredun Hodizoda.

## *Organisation of Society*

Social organisation is important since it creates a layer of rules and conventions operating underneath formal politics. In Tajikistan these came to the fore when the official political authority was weakening and the state entered a crisis. Tajiks have always been a sedentary people, unlike the neighbouring nomadic Kyrgyz. Their traditional form of territorial organisation is the *mahalla* (the European equivalent being the 'quarter', 'parish' or neighbourhood). Unlike in neighbouring Uzbekistan, where *mahalla* is the smallest administrative unit, in Tajikistan it has remained an informal structure. Typically, a village contains several *mahallas*. Each one has a leader who regulates relations within the *mahalla*, sets norms of acceptable behaviour and mobilises social support from within for those in need. Each *mahalla* tries to keep its affairs to itself. Crime, unless it is serious, is seldom reported to law-enforcement agencies; typically the crime is solved and perpetrators condemned within the *mahalla*.

Other important elements of social organisation are the *gaps* and *gashtaks*, which are male clubs. *Gaps* are male networks based on personal affiliations; i.e. professional, co-educational, or relating to shared experience. They are a particular feature of northern Tajikistan, where life is more urbanised (large villages resemble small towns in terms of their internal organisation). In these regions men organise regular gatherings (weekly, bi-weekly or monthly) in a local *chaihona* (tea house), taking turns to arrange and pay for a party. Men can belong to more than one *gap*. In the south, however, there is no *chaihona* tradition, and here *gashtaks* fulfil the same function as *gaps* but are organised at one's home (men gather in turns in somebody's house rather than in a public place). *Gaps* and *gashtaks* are horizontal networks in society that are capable of maintaining solidarity and solving problems informally. They played an important role in the Soviet era, when deals often needed to be done to bend rules and soften the impact of an authoritarian system.

Information in Tajik society was traditionally passed on orally via *gashtaks* and *gaps*. This mechanism was utilised by the IRP for the mobilisation of supporters in the run-up to open conflict.<sup>33</sup> During the civil war, resistance in Kulyab drew heavily on *gashtak* networks, which brought together 'people of influence' both from officialdom and the underworld. Typically, influential people in the south consisted of the following groups: criminal bosses who enjoyed local respect, *pahlovans* (wrestlers in the national sport), those who organised gambling for money, corrupt economic *nomenklatura* with too much money to spend, and selected Soviet party and state officials. When fighting broke out in the south, the authorities appealed for help through *gashtak* networks to criminal bosses and rich individuals who accumulated wealth through dubious means, urging them to provide material and human resources to organise defences; so they did. Tajik criminal bosses from the south then appealed to the central all-Union criminal network to facilitate purchases of Russian weapons in Tajikistan. The network responded by providing funds and paying bribes to military officials in Moscow to sanction such arms transfers.

Another form of affiliation is that based on blood ties. An *Avlod* is an extended family, or a kinship/patronymic group. It unites blood relatives and is hierarchically organised from junior to older members. Each *avlod* is headed by a leader, who is usually male but occasionally an old woman. In 1996, 25 per cent of respondents noted that their *avlod* leader was the leader

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<sup>33</sup> Vladimir Bushkov, Dmitrii Mikul'skii, Таджикское общество на рубеже тысячелетий (Этнополитическая ситуация в начале 1990х годов), Горбачев-Фонд, Москва, 1992.

they trusted most (although more people (28 per cent) trusted the President).<sup>34</sup> Marriages within an *avlod* are common, but also lead to 'bad blood'. *Avlods* form a caste system; i.e. there are noble and prominent *avlods*, upper middle, middle, lower middle and so on. There is no universal or written codification of the *avlod* hierarchy, but it is no secret in society, especially when it comes to marriage. A bride normally comes from an *avlod* one step lower than the groom; it is very rare for this to be the other way around.

As each *avlod* originates from a certain locality, it is known in this place whether the *avlod* is prominent and respected or common, even if many members have migrated to other places. The most respected *avlods* come from the areas that were urbanised in the Middle Ages; Bukhara, Samarqand, Khujand and Konibodam. In the south there are some locally respected *avlods*, but these are insignificant on the national level. The Sharq Centre sociological survey returned findings that indicate 68.3 per cent of the population of Tajikistan consider themselves belonging to an *avlod*; this includes 82.2 per cent of those living in Kulyab, 78 per cent of those in the (former) Kurgan-Tyube province and Gorno-Badakhshan, and 75 per cent of the population of Karategin Valley.<sup>35</sup>

*Avlod* members seek to obtain good positions for their kin; if one representative manages to secure a good job, he or she promotes other *avlod* members to form a network, which becomes a closely knitted system. Kinship plays an important role in economic and social life, and produces strong patronage networks; but also, when a representative of one group (either ethnic or regional) holds an important appointment, he benefits people from his native area. This has led to perceptions that certain groups monopolise particular professions or social opportunities, leaving outsiders generally unable to advance in that area.

*Avlods* are a form of vertical organisation of society. Power is concentrated within the *avlod* and different *avlods* do not normally form horizontal alliances. They regulate marriages and address the economic and social needs within their *avlod*, such as land ownership or the distribution of other assets. The *avlod* leader resolves disputes between its members, such as arguments among brothers over inheritance. Unlike in *gaps* or *gashtaks*, women can hold considerable informal power within an *avlod*, providing 'advice' to a male leader. Nobler *avlods* invest time and money in education and the raising of their junior members. A young person from a good *avlod* has a better intellectual and material starting position in life than a commoner, and benefits not only from connections, but from the higher standards that a good *avlod* can maintain for its children.

The Tajik scholars Saodat and Muzaffar Olimovy consider the *avlod* structure to be one of the main drivers of mobilisation for fighting during the conflict. According to their interviews with former war participants, many fought because they were prompted by the *avlod* leaders and had little or no sense of the politics behind the fighting. Their ultimate goal was to exterminate the rival *avlods* to the root; hence atrocities against women and children from the enemy groups were committed.

The Soviet state did not challenge the *avlod* system, but adapted it to its needs and drew upon its resources. Most managerial and professional as well as clerical elites came from higher *avlods*, which typically occupied lucrative niches. All the Soviet leaders of Tajikistan came from the prominent northern *avlods*.

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<sup>34</sup> Olimovy, Saodat and Muzaffar, 'Межтаджикский Конфликт,' pp. 83-86.

<sup>35</sup> Olimova Saodat, presentation, in 'Межтаджикский Конфликт,' p. 37, o .

However, the civil war significantly disrupted the system. Nowadays, the noble *avlods*' importance is diminished and their significance is preserved in family matters but not in political power. The current president, Imomali Rahmon<sup>36</sup>, comes from the humble place of Dangara and from a low, common Kulyabi *avlod*. On the other hand, his wife comes from a prominent local *avlod*. When the president's power became entrenched, he began to appoint cadres from his wife's *avlod* to senior positions. His wife's brother Hassan Sadullayev is the head of Orienbank (the main commercial bank) and one of the most influential people in the country.

Nevertheless, many presidential appointments are now made on the basis of personal loyalty (education, shared upbringing, professional experience – factors more typical of a *gashtak* network) rather than on *avlod* principle.<sup>37</sup> Whether this proves temporary and the old *avlod* system will regenerate itself in the new circumstances, or whether on the contrary it has been dealt a blow from which it will not recover, remains to be seen.

One significant social construct derives from the Soviet experience. Roy stresses the importance of *kolkhozy* (state farms)<sup>38</sup> in the social organisation of Tajikistan. The *kolkhozy* and rural administrative districts were the places where Soviet notables had their power base, and where factions and political networks were set up. This was a result of low levels of urbanisation, the weakness of the urban elites, and the correlation between the structure of the Party and the administrative structure. It also incorporated traditional affiliations: the *avlod* and *mahalla* were reincarnated in the traditional sub-divisions of the *kolkhoz*. Cotton production has reinforced both community bonds and *kolkhoz* structure in the south, for two reasons. Firstly, cotton requires massive irrigation leading in turn to conflicts over water; to prevent these from happening, water management arrangements were administered centrally from Dushanbe and carried out by *kolkhoz* management. Secondly, cotton harvesting needs a collective effort on the part of the whole community, for which the preservation of traditional social structures was useful.<sup>39</sup>

Roy defines the *kolkhoz* as a recomposed solidarity group that benefited from the administrative, economic, social and political institutionalisation of the Soviet system. The *kolkhoz* management ran things not so much by administrative power as by means of networks and informal meetings. Moreover, the *kolkhoz* system was a socio-economic community that also functioned as a global collectivity: it took care of work, administrative identity, social welfare, the sharing of incomes and public works. It provided protection for its members beyond the confines of its territory, for example when they migrated to towns. A member could rely on *kolkhoz* solidarity or on the *kolkhoz* director's networks within the party or administration as a way of finding work or resolving difficult situations when they were outside of *kolkhoz* territory.

When population groups were moved, typically they were allocated a *kolkhoz* of their own, for example a Gharimi, German, or Korean *kolkhoz*, while the host groups would also have their own *kolkhoz*. In some cases the displaced groups transferred their conflicts into the

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<sup>36</sup> In 2007 the President dropped a Russified ending 'ov' from his last name and became 'Rahmon.'

<sup>37</sup> The above is based on interview with Ahad Mahmudov, Dushanbe, January 2007.

<sup>38</sup> Literally, *kolkhoz* means 'collective farm', while *sovkhos* is a state farm. In reality, there was little distinction between the two.

<sup>39</sup> Saimurod Fattoev, Социально-Политические Конфликты в Современном Обществе: опыт Таджикистана (Social and Political Conflicts in Modern Society: Experience of Tajikistan), Sharq-i Ozodi publishing house, Dushanbe, 2001, p. 37.

*kolkhoz*. This happened with the mixed Gharmi and Kulyabi *kolkhozy* in Kurgan-Tyube province, and led to some of the most severe fighting during the war. Tribalisation of the *kolkhozs* has led them to engage in tribal wars. When civil war broke out, defences were organised along *kolkhoz* boundaries, with groups who were a minority in a given *kolkhoz* fleeing for protection of a *kolkhoz* where ‘their’ group was in majority (for example Gharmis in a majority Kulyabi *kolkhoz*). The territorial limits of *kolkhozy* became front lines, with digging of trenches and setting up ambushes.<sup>40</sup>

## 2. Escalation of Conflict and Civil War

One central question in the Tajik case is whether post-colonialism is a useful analytical paradigm for explaining the country’s rapid descent into a civil war and state collapse. The experience of Tajikistan, as well as of other less developed republics in the former USSR, certainly draws parallels with that of colonial states. Its institutions were not indigenous, but imported and imposed from outside, and important policy decisions and parameters emanated from the centre – Tajikistan was not responsible for its own security, fiscal policy or foreign affairs, for example. In that sense sudden independence when the national government became responsible for all the country’s affairs – with virtually no backing from the former metropolis – bears similarities with post-colonialism.

Yet there are important differences, which weigh against defining Soviet-era Tajikistan as a colonial state. Firstly, the people of Tajikistan enjoyed equal rights and the same access to opportunities and services as all other citizens of the USSR. Secondly, financial and in-kind transfers from the centre were balanced in Tajikistan’s favour, given that it was heavily subsidised. Thirdly, the people of Tajikistan did not in general see themselves as being colonised and there was no drive for separation from the USSR: elites sought more autonomy and primacy for national language and culture vis-a-vis Sovietism, but not a complete break. At present, national discourse is not framed in colonial/post-colonial terms.

### *Emergence of New Politics*

In the late 1980s, when tensions in society had come to the surface, the role of the intelligentsia in the politicisation of grievances became crucial. In an atmosphere of increasing openness unleashed by the policy of *glasnost*, the expression of grievances and aspirations became widespread. There was a strong sense of cultural identity that had been suppressed in the Soviet times and was now looking for expression. The process, although turbulent, was largely peaceful. In February 1989 between 60 and 70 intellectuals formed the *Ru-ba-Ru* (Face to Face) civic initiative, which began to promote public dialogue between representatives of the state and society. Helsinki Watch Report notes that ‘on the official side, the chairmen of various committees, including MVD [Interior Ministry], KGB, and youth leaders, were active.’<sup>41</sup>

With the awakening of cultural identity a rapid political mobilisation occurred, leading to creation of parties (although not all became registered as such) of a democratic orientation, such as Rastakhez, the Democratic Party, Lal-e Badakhshan, and other less formal political

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<sup>40</sup> Roy, pp. 86-96.

<sup>41</sup>"Conflict in the Soviet Union: Tadjikistan," Helsinki Watch Report (New York: Helsinki Watch, July 1991), 16. Suzanne Crow, "Informal Groups in Tajikistan--Will They Have a Role?" *Report on the USSR* (February 23, 1990): 20-21.

groupings of intelligentsia.<sup>42</sup> The civic organisation Rastokhez was established on 14 September 1989 to promote national culture and values. Rastokhez adopted the Zoroastrian motto "Noble thoughts, noble words, noble actions."<sup>43</sup> Members could and did retain their membership in the Communist Party.<sup>44</sup>

The language issue became an important focus for politicisation. On 22 July 1989, six months after thousands of people attended a public meeting to demand state recognition for the Tajik language, state authorities responded and made Tajikistan the first Central Asian state to raise the status of its titular language.<sup>45</sup>

The overarching goals of Tajik intellectuals were similar; they all wanted the democratisation of Tajikistan, but they became bitterly divided over the question of the role of Islam in politics. This split the democratic intelligentsia into 'Islamophobes' and 'Islamophiles'. Still, despite these ideological differences, Tajik intellectuals shared a strong attachment to an independent Tajikistan, a feeling which the Soviet system helped to create. They shared a vision of national history similar to the one that was proclaimed by the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Tajikistan, Bobojon Gaffurov, in the 1950s.<sup>46</sup>

### ***The Road to Violence***

The first violence erupted in Dushanbe in February 1990. It was prompted by anti-outsider protests prompted by the resettlement of Armenian earthquake victims in Dushanbe. Unintentionally, Rastokhez provided impetus for these protests. It gained public attention by calling for the banning of the Communist Party, portraying its leaders as operating out of loyalties to their own clan and region, and demanded rectification of the injustice of northern dominance.<sup>47</sup> In January 1990 it organised demonstrations against CP First Secretary Qakhor Mahkamov. Subsequently, the rumour that Armenians would be resettled into newly built houses in the centre added fuel to ongoing demonstrations, exacerbating a grievance held by people from the Hissar region close to the capital, where hundreds of Tajiks remained homeless after an earthquake in January 1989. Many Hissaris participated in the demonstrations.<sup>48</sup>

When riots started in the capital, there did not appear to be much protection on offer by the republican authorities; nor did the Soviet troops stationed in the republic intervene. Residents

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<sup>42</sup> On the earlier period of democratization see Muriel Atkin, 'Thwarted democratization in Tajikistan', in Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott (eds.), 1997, *Conflict, Cleavage and Change in Central Asia and the Caucasus*, project on 'Authoritarianism and Democratization in Post Communist Societies', volume 4, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press., pp. 277 – 311.

<sup>43</sup> The Democratic Party used the same motto. Aziz Niyazi, 'The Year of Tumult: Tajikistan after February 1990' in Vitaly Naumkin (ed.) *State, Religion and Society in Central Asia: A Post-Soviet Critique*, (Reading, Ithaca Press, 1993).

<sup>44</sup> It was joined by other small informal organizations such as Vahdat in Ura-teppe, Oshkoro (glasnost) in Kulob and Ehyeyi (Renaissance) in Khujand. These other groups were incorporated into Rastokhez in December 1989. Aziz Niyazi, *ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Muriel Atkin, "Tajikistan: Reform, Reaction, and Civil War" in *New States, New Politics: Building the Post-Soviet Nations*, ed. I. Bremmer and R. Taras (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 606.

<sup>46</sup> Capisani, p. 165.

<sup>47</sup> Mavlon Mahkamov, "Islam and the Political Development of Tajikistan after 1985," in *Central Asia: Its Strategic Importance and Future Prospects*, ed. Hafeez Malik (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), p. 199.

<sup>48</sup> Bess Brown, "Ten Months after the Dushanbe Riots," *Report on the USSR* (January 4, 1991), 33. Yaacov Ro'i also mentions the significance of the homeless after the Hissar mudslide. Yaacov Ro'i, "Central Asian Riots and Disturbances, 1989-1990: Causes and Context," *Central Asian Survey* 10, no. 3 (1991), p. 34.

began to set up self-defence units as demonstrations collapsed into riots in which between 9 and 22 people were killed.<sup>49</sup> The Soviet security system was unprepared for dealing with urban rioting and mob violence, as it had never experienced these events in the past.

In the words of a former KGB officer:<sup>50</sup>

I was working in a department responsible for gathering external intelligence on countries of Middle Asia (Iran, Afghanistan and Turkey). We were analysts and networkers, with no operational experience in a military sense. One evening when we were about to leave home, our boss asked us to get our designated pistols from a strong room and to proceed to a car. We were taken to a military airport outside Moscow, boarded a plane and flew to an unknown destination. When we landed, the sign at the airport told us that we were in Dushanbe. The airport was empty, we saw a guard who fled as soon as he saw us. We called the head of the KGB republican branch, who said that the crowds are approaching the building from three directions, that most staff has fled and he is sitting under his desk with a machinegun. Then the line went dead.

When our group managed to get to the building, we still could enter it, because the crowds were far enough, but were steadily approaching. They were angry and were shouting slogans, including Islamic ones. They wanted to overtake the building, as some wanted to get hold of KGB files containing compromising material on the officials. Few local KGB officers were in the capital, because most had been sent to the Afghan border where the situation had been deteriorating and there was a threat of cross-border attacks. We were preparing to defend the building and arranged ourselves along the perimeter, but none of us had a real experience of how to do this. Some were busy destroying the important documents. When the crowds approached and were preparing to storm, we heard the noise of approaching heavy armoured vehicles. Soviet airborne troops have been dispatched. On the sight of the armoury, the crowds dispersed. There was virtually no violence.

Following these events, episodes of violence started to erupt in various places. Expressions of anti-Russian feelings, previously unheard of, started to be voiced. Local Russians and other Slavs were increasingly harassed by ethnic Tajik and Uzbek policemen. Many chose to emigrate as a result. Bushkov and Mikulskii report conflicts between different groups of Tajiks (resettlers from the Karategin Valley and the host Tajik and Arab population) in Kabodiyon in southern Tajikistan as early as in July 1991.

In Zartmann's view, protests and conflicts in Tajikistan before February 1990 did not result in persistent political consequences. Gorbachev's anti-corruption campaign did not affect Tajikistan as deeply as it did Uzbekistan, where the removal of the Communist Party First Secretary Sharaf Rashidov turned into a major political scandal. In Tajikistan, only the Communist Party First Secretary Rahmon Nabiev and a few other officials have been replaced.<sup>51</sup> The initial attitude of the First Secretary Qakhor Mahkhamov was open and tolerant to the emerging diversity of political groupings. In September 1989, he encouraged

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<sup>49</sup> Helsinki Watch Report, pp. 35 – 37.

<sup>50</sup> Author's interview with a former KGB officer, Moscow, 1992.

<sup>51</sup>"The dismissal of ... Tajikistan's Rahmon Nabiev, and Kyrgyzstan's Usabaliev in the fall 1985 were quieter affairs, as was the subsequent 'cleansing' of those republics' Communist Parties." Martha Brill Olcott, 'Central Asia's Political Crisis,' in *Russia's Muslim Frontiers: New Directions in Cross-Cultural Analysis*, ed. Dale F. Eickelman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 52.



the development of youth groups by praising the *Khazina* foundation and the political group *Ru-ba-Ru*. According to Bess Brown, 'Makhkamov's comments on informal youth groups constitute the most enthusiastic approval to be expressed in print by a Central Asian leader.'<sup>52</sup> Mahkamov also argued in 1986 that it was better to legalise unregistered mosques than to drive them underground.<sup>53</sup>

### *Acute Civil War*

The collapse of the USSR and independence, which happened by default, were not welcome developments. Tajiks, much like other citizens of the USSR, wanted more powers to be given to the local and national levels and wished for pride of place for their national culture and identity, but did not want the end of the whole country and its political and economic system. Independence occurred too rapidly for the national authorities to be prepared for its future perils. Akiner identifies the factors leading to the civil war as follows: recession of the Soviet economy, which became unable to maintain the same level of budgetary transfers and large scale development projects; youth unemployment and anti-social behaviour;<sup>54</sup> corruption and abuse of office;<sup>55</sup> Islamic resurgence;<sup>56</sup> and a proliferation of new political activists. Local analysts (Ahad Mahmoudov, Lidya Isamova and Bahrom Faizulloev) give a somewhat different interpretation. They attribute the war largely to political causes, emphasising the importance of struggles for political power and crisis of the existing authority. In this view, those competing for power unleashed forces in a society they could no longer control, and social mobilisation took on a momentum of its own. International Islamist networks spotted an opening in Tajikistan, into which they could move by providing money, military training and propaganda materials.

Being in the neighbourhood of Afghanistan made this task easier. Following the withdrawal of Soviet troops, pressure from the *mujaheddin* on the Soviet-backed Najibullah government in Kabul mounted, and it fell in April 1992. The weakening of the Soviet system also resulted in the relaxation of border defences, and the border with Afghanistan become porous. This enabled the forging of connections between Afghan field commanders and Islamic political groupings in Tajikistan. Such alliances led to the penetration of weapons and ideas from across the border.<sup>57</sup>

The civil war erupted in 1992, which is when most of fighting took place. In the turmoil of 1991, Tajikistan saw three presidents in power. The presidential elections of November 1991 featured nine contenders and bitterly split the country into supporters of Rahmon Nabiev, the

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<sup>52</sup>Bess Brown, 'The Role of Public Groups in Perestroika in Central Asia,' *Report on the USSR*, January 26, 1990, p. 23.

<sup>53</sup>Bess Brown, p. 26.

<sup>54</sup> See Mark Khrustalev, *Grazhdanskaya voina v Tadjikistane: istoki i perspektivy*, Moscow, 1997.

<sup>55</sup> The Ministry of the Interior, for example, was dominated by Pamiris. Among the many scandals linked to this body was the mass misappropriation and sale of official vehicles and fraudulent deals connected to the construction of housing in the capital. In popular perception, all Pamiris were tainted by these abuses. See Akiner, *Tajikistan*, pp. 26-27; also S. Dudoignon, 'Political Parties and Forces in Tajikistan, 1989-1993', in *Tajikistan: Trials of Independence*, M-R. Djalili, F. Grare, S. Akiner (eds.), Curzon, London, 1998, p. 57.

<sup>56</sup> See Muriel Atkin, *The Subtlest Battle: Islam in Soviet Tajikistan*, Foreign Policy Research Institute, Philadelphia, 1989; Akiner, *Tajikistan*, pp. 28-33; Akiner, 'Islam, the State and Ethnicity in Central Asia in Historical Perspective', *Religion, State and Society: the Keston Journal*, vol. 24, nos. 2-3, June-September 1996, pp. 91-132.

<sup>57</sup> Relatively little is written on the role of Afghanistan in the war in Tajikistan, see, for instance, Mohammad-Reza Djalili and Frederic Grare, 'Regional Ambitions and Interests in Tajikistan: the Role of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran', in Djalili et al, *Tajikistan: the Trails of Independence*, pp. 119 – 131.

former Communist chief of Tajikistan (a northerner) and opposition candidate Davlat Khudonazarov (from Badakhshan), who was backed by the IRP and the Democratic Party. With 57 per cent of the vote, Nabiev won the elections against Khudonazarov by some 35 per cent – which the opposition refused to accept as fair – and formed a government heavily dominated by representatives of the northern Soughd and southern Kulyabi regions, to the exclusion of others. This election set in motion the train of events that led to the civil war. It underscored the danger of conducting elections in recently politicised and divided societies with no culture of compromise and a ‘winner take all’ attitude.

Feeble attempts to form a government of national reconciliation yielded little result, instead leading to a tense stand-off between pro-government and opposition supporters in Dushanbe in March 1992 at Shahidon Square and Ozodi Square. The Pamiris formed the core of the anti-government protestors, joined by the Gharmis. A rival demonstration of pro-government, anti-Islamist factions soon formed, consisting mainly of Kulyabis. The standoff continued for weeks, with each side continually provoking the other. Both sides were acquiring arms, but Nabiev reportedly refused to open fire to disperse the opposition.<sup>58</sup>

The demonstrations showed the rising power of excluded regionalist groups and exposed highlander/lowlander dividing lines. Shahidon Square brought together Gharmis from Karagetin and Kurgan-Tuybe, people from Romit and Kafornihon, Darwazis, Pamiris and people from Zerafshan, mostly of highland origins. Demonstrators at Ozodi were comprised of Kulyabis, Leninobadis, Hissoris, people from Shahr-i-Nav, Tursun-Zade, Lenin and Varzob – largely lowlanders. They came from their *kolkhozs* in buses and tractors to support their various factions, exporting their local conflicts to the capital. Furthermore, all the ministries and security organisations were split according to the regional origins of their functionaries.<sup>59</sup> Nabiev attempted to establish a National Guard, but the KGB and Interior Ministry were under Pamiri influence, while the army [the Soviet/ Russian 201<sup>st</sup> Division] was under the command of Ashurov, a Gharmi.

A third meeting on Aini Square was organised by the Youth of Dushanbe – which meant in reality by the city’s thirteen main criminal gangs – and showed the rising influence of mafia groups on politics. This trend spread to the provinces when prisons were opened in Kurgan-Tyube and Kulyab and many former inmates joined self-defence militias.

Violence between the pro-government side and the opposition erupted in April and May 1992 in Dushanbe. Both parties quickly mobilised supporters from their respective regions and formed rogue armies. The war moved to the south. After the demonstrators from the rival squares went home, ‘Islamists’ (Gharmis and Pamiris) in Kurgan-Tyube took their frustration out on the Kulyabi residents of the area. The first serious fighting broke out in June after negotiations at the Kurgan-Tyube airport failed. Islamists were sent to ‘punish’ the Kulyabis and created a ‘Salvation of the Motherland’ Headquarters. On 27 June they attacked *kolkhozs* and villages of the Vakhsh districts where resettlers from Kulyab lived and destroyed their self-defence units. Many people died and estimated 140,000 fled violence, becoming IDPs as a result.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Author’s interview with Munira Inoyatova, former Minister of Education, February 2004.

<sup>59</sup> Roy, pp. 139 – 140.

<sup>60</sup> Sayed Ahmedov, ‘Конфликты в Таджикистане: Причины и Последствия’, in Corpieters, *Ibid.*, pp. 75 – 93, p. 78.

Members of opposition parties started being harassed in Kulyab and many left the region. In Dushanbe, meanwhile, the opposition forces seized most of the capital. Reportedly, Gharmis and Pamiri ('Islamist') paramilitaries received payments for their services.<sup>61</sup> Residents of Dushanbe had little information about the fighting in the south, since the mass media was in crisis and the remaining media outlets based in Dushanbe and Khujand did not cover events in the south.<sup>62</sup> In September Dushanbe's criminal youth groups forced Rahmon Nabiev to resign at gunpoint, and only the deployment of heavy armoury by the Russian 201<sup>st</sup> Division saved the first President of independent Tajikistan from certain death.

Inter-ethnic violence had by this time erupted in the south. The situation in the south was further complicated by the fact that ethnic Uzbeks in Kurgan-Tyube, the main indigenous population of the area, suffered indiscriminate attacks from the 'Islamist' forces who suspected them of siding with the government. In September when opposition militias re-took the town of Kurgan-Tyube, they attacked the Urgut quarter, where Uzbeks of Samarqandi origin lived, and began a massive slaughter. Civilians rushed for the protection of the Russian 191 Motor Rifle Regiment, which was located at a nearby Lomonosov village. Uzbeks and others fleeing violence started to assemble in the village, while Russian officers tried to organise defences. However, on 25 September they were overpowered by Islamist militias who unleashed mass murder.<sup>63</sup>

Mobilisation is a scarcely covered theme in academic literature. Bushkov and Mikulskii explain mobilisation with reference to the features of a traditionalist society, in which individual consciousness is underdeveloped and, when it comes to fighting, archaic collective appeals resonate with the community.<sup>64</sup> Nourjanov writes that when regional and ethnic cleansing, rape, murder and land seizures started, the normative core of Tajik traditional culture (*nang*, or 'dignity') came to the fore. It required all males in a patronymic association (*avlod*) to exercise vengeance and self-assertion. It was claimed by the pro-government side that the opposition forces' practice of raping girls was meant to destroy the enemy's honour, which was paramount in a culture where a woman's honour is an important asset.

Anecdotal accounts suggest that initially funding for the conflict came from criminal groups, businessmen who accumulated cash due to economic liberalisation during *perestroika*, and from looting the population – especially the Uzbeks, who had a reputation for being better off than Tajiks. There are also accounts of funding received from Islamic sources abroad, but it is hard to obtain solid proof.

As the hostilities gained momentum, 'democratic' rhetoric on the opposition side was scaled down and Islamic slogans became more pronounced, with references to Iran and Afghanistan. This led to a counter-reaction; for example, in Soughd province mosques started to be closed down by the authorities, and mullahs were banned from public preaching, while in Pangaz district the mosque properties were actually burnt down.<sup>65</sup>

During the turmoil in the capital, on several occasions the 201<sup>st</sup> Division's military command – acting on the strength of the senior officers corps' vote but in direct violation of orders from Moscow – moved armoured vehicles to protect government buildings and apartment blocks

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<sup>61</sup> Author's interviews with Dushanbe residents at the time, Dushanbe, January 2007.

<sup>62</sup> Author's interviews with Dushanbe residents at the time, Dushanbe, January 2007.

<sup>63</sup> Bushkov and Mikulskii, *Anatomiya*, p. 64.

<sup>64</sup> Bushkov & Mikulskii, *Tajik Society*, 1992.

<sup>65</sup> Bushkov, Mikulskii, *Anatomiya*, p. 59.

where families of servicemen lived. However, the Division remained neutral, despite the fact that occasional shots have been fired.<sup>66</sup>

By the summer of 1992 the power of the central government did not reach beyond the capital. Provincial and district authorities took charge of their respective territories and declared all Union and republican enterprises the property of the regions in which they were located. Deliveries of basic commodities and supplies to and from regions were mostly suspended, as each region tried to achieve self-sufficiency. As the Communist Party and its appointees were discredited, the chairmen of provincial councils came to be in charge.<sup>67</sup>

The security sector quickly became divided. Police developed regional loyalties and disregarded the central government. In May 1992, police in Kofarnihon distributed weapons to an armed group of Mullo Qiyomuddin who planned to block the road to Kulyab in full knowledge that it would lead to further escalation. Police officers joined different paramilitary groups either individually or as units under the command of a local authority. An elite Ministry of Interior battalion made up of Pamiris was sent to Kurgan-Tyube from the capital as a separation force between Gharmis and Kulyabis, but abandoned its orders and attacked the Kulyabis instead.<sup>68</sup>

Every region tried to set up its own defence systems, and ‘headquarters’ were established in each area. They were usually comprised of the party and Soviet administrative officials, still serving representatives of law-enforcement agencies, heads of prominent *kolkhozs* or agricultural associations, and leaders of the ‘new forces’ – i.e. political parties/movements representative of the area, and strongmen or power barons who controlled local economy.<sup>69</sup> The latter two categories often overlapped. Sometimes initiatives came from the grass-roots: prompted by his fellow kinsmen, an ethnic Uzbek military officer, Mahmud Khudoberdiev, established an HQ financed and manned by the local Uzbeks in Chapaevsk, located in the Kurgan-Tyube district. When war reached the town of Kurgan-Tyube, he hijacked several tanks of the 201<sup>st</sup> Division and formed a militia to protect Uzbeks who were being subjected to ethnic cleansing. He claimed that the Uzbeks appealed to him to organise and teach them to fight after 60,000 of them were killed in the district alone.

At this point civilian and (para)military authority were interlinked. Initially, civilian authorities were in charge and could control the militias, who were regarded as ‘saviours of the motherland’. However, by August 1992 this order had broken down.

### ***Warlordism***

In the absence of a regular army, sources of defence and control available for power-brokers included patriarchal clan-based militias, law-enforcement bodies and criminal groupings.<sup>70</sup> By July 1992 no official security force remained loyal to the central government. Akiner (IPA) notes that ‘field commanders often acted autonomously, pursuing their own ambitions rather than any common group strategy. As for the population at large, ideological, regional,

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<sup>66</sup> Bushkov, Mikulskii, *Anatomiya*, p. 58.

<sup>67</sup> Aziz Niyazi, *Таджикистан: Региональные Аспекты Конфликта (1990-е годы)* (Tajikistan: Regional Dimension of the Conflict, 1990s), in Corpieters, Bruno, Malashenko, Alexei and Trenin Dmitrii (eds.), *Ethnic and Regional Conflicts in Eurasia*, vol. 1, Moscow, Ves’ Mir, 1997, pp. 51 – 74, p. 69.

<sup>68</sup> Nourjanov, 2005

<sup>69</sup> Nourjanov, 2005

<sup>70</sup> Nourjanov, 2005.

communal and generational fractures cut across one another, further fragmenting society. There were no neatly defined, easily identifiable blocs of combatants, only blurred and fluid allegiances.<sup>71</sup>

Warlordism and the proliferation of large and small groups with only loose allegiances to the main sides were a prominent feature of the civil war. According to Giustozzi, warlords exercise leadership over the military class and derive their strength from their military legitimacy. This, together with their control over a territory, in turn gives them a political role, but without the benefits of political legitimacy.<sup>72</sup> However, Tajikistan at the height of the civil war had no coherent ‘military class’ and control over territories was hugely contested, so this definition may be only applicable with certain reservations.

The proliferation of warlords often prevented the scaling down of hostilities through negotiations, given that no side could control these rogue groups who recognised no authority other than their own. The representatives of the opposition and their Kulyabi opponents signed deals on the cessation of fighting in 1992 twice (on 29 June in Kurgan-Tyube and 27 July in Khorogh), but both times the truce was violated on the day of signing by independent field commanders. Many of these warlords were attracted not so much by ideological causes as by control over lucrative local assets, such as cotton plantations, oil refineries and motor depots.<sup>73</sup> In November 1992 Kolkhozabad (in the Kurgan-Tyube province) changed hands six times between different Kulyabi-affiliated groups. The cutting off of food supplies and the influx of IDPs expelled from other areas made matters worse, and shortages of basic commodities became acute. The regional and local authorities could not cater for refugees or ensure supplies, and warlords were therefore able to step in and fulfil this function by performing marauding raids.

The origins of the warlords were diverse. Faizali Saidov, an ethnic Lokai Uzbek and a prominent commander on the pro-government side, came from a *sovkhos* near Kurgan-Tyube. Sangak Safarov, on the other hand, was a high-profile criminal who had spent 23 years in jail. Nominally working in a bar, Safarov carried considerable informal weight in Kulyab and headed a number of *gashtaks*. The only commander with a real military background was the ethnic Uzbek colonel Mahmud Khudoberdiev from Kurgan-Tyube. Some prominent Soviet officials became warlords, such as Safarali Kenjaev,<sup>74</sup> a former Transport Prosecutor and ex-chairman of Supreme Soviet of Tajikistan who emerged as a warlord in Hissar, or colonel Amirkul Asimov who had worked in the State Procuracy. The only warlord who has survived intact to this day is Suhrob Kasymov, a former school teacher with little power base of his own, who owes everything to the President.

All sides exhibited extreme violence and perpetrated terror against enemy groups.<sup>75</sup> This led to the resurrection of blood feuds as a result of patronymic associations. Personal vendettas were waged at all levels, starting with Davlat Usmon, one of the IRP leaders whose relatives were killed by Kulyabis. Faizali Saidov’s 65-year-old father was mutilated and burnt to death,

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<sup>71</sup> Akiner, IPA, p. 13.

<sup>72</sup> Antonio Giustozzi and Noor Ullah, ‘Tribes’ and Warlords in Southern Afghanistan, 1980-2005’, Crisis States Research Centre Working Papers Series 2, no. 7, LSE, September 2006.

<sup>73</sup> Kirill Nourzhanov, ‘Saviours of the Nation or Power Barons? Warlord Politics in Tajikistan’, Central Asian Survey, no. 24 (2), June 2005, pp. 109 – 130.

<sup>74</sup> Kenjaev was of complex origins: of Yaghnobi (Pamiri) origin and born in Hissar, he was raised by the father of Qazi Turajonzoda, pursued a career as a judge in Leninabad and adopted its regional identity.

<sup>75</sup> Live pregnant women’s bellies were carved out to extract unborn babies and children’s bellies were cut open and manure was put inside.

in violation of an agreed deal to exchange him for hostages duly freed by Saidov.<sup>76</sup> Saidov then unleashed a campaign of atrocities against the enemy group.

At the same time several warlords acted as protectors of the norms they considered 'right'. After the victory, the chief warlord Sangak Safarov sponsored a repatriation programme for refugees from the enemy's side to the Kabodiyon district (Kurgan-Tyube province) and visited the area to reign in rogue commanders who were harassing returning Gharmis. The returnees perceived Safarov as having been on their side.<sup>77</sup>

Criminal groups played a considerable role. In the late 1980s, four of the major criminal groups in Tajikistan were a valuable resource for those politicians who were unhappy with the leadership of the then First Secretary, Mahkamov, and enjoyed high-level political patronage. These ties were activated in the moment of danger. When President Nabiev saw that the Islamic opposition had arms and was getting stronger in Dushanbe, he panicked and allocated some weapons to Safarov, who distributed them through his network. Safarov's associates included the racketeer Yaqub Salimov, Rauf Soliev's top henchman in Dushanbe in the 1980s. Ibodullo Boimatov (an ethnic Uzbek) was a client of Salimboi-bacha, a leading criminal boss from Uzbekistan.

### ***Beginnings of a Political Process***

While the opposition consisted of a number of different parties, there was a lack of political organisation on the government (Kulyabi) side after the authority of the Communist Party collapsed and its last leader was forced out of office. This vacuum was filled by warlords who established their own movements, originally to organise defences. The main movements were the *Headquarters of the Fatherland's Salvation* led by Safarov and the *Popular Front of Hissar* led by Kenjaev. On 6 October 1992 they merged into the *Popular Front* (PF), under Safarov's leadership. The PF declared itself the only legitimate armed force. The Chairman of the Kulyab Soviet (the civilian governor of the region) refused to recognise its authority and was killed personally by Safarov.

As violence was approaching the capital, the relatively unknown Imomali Rahmon (a *sovkhos* director from Kulyab) was elected the Chairman of Supreme Council (head of state) at an extraordinary 16<sup>th</sup> session of the parliament held in Khujand (Soughd), which was dominated by the northerners and Kulyabis. The new government disbanded the Kulyab and Kurgan-Tyube provinces and merged them into a larger Khatlon one, in which the Kulyabis dominated, and appealed to Russia to intervene to restore peace. The role of warlords remained prominent: 24 field commanders attended the 16<sup>th</sup> session.<sup>78</sup>

On 10 December 1992 PF troops entered Dushanbe and destroyed opposition defences, after which a campaign of reprisals started against the Gharmi and Pamiri residents of the capital. Kofarnihon, the last opposition stronghold, fell on 27 December. With this, the active phase of the civil war was over. Acute hostilities continued only in the mountainous north-east: in Karategin (Gharm, Romit), Darvaz and Tavildara.

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<sup>76</sup> Nourjanov, 2005.

<sup>77</sup> 'Human Rights in Tajikistan in the Wake of Civil War', Report of Human Rights Watch/ Helsinki & The Inter-Republic Memorial Society, New York, December 1993.

<sup>78</sup> Nourjanov, 2005.

After the military victory of the PF, the structures of the central government were quickly restored, mainly owing to the fact that the northern managerial elite, who had not been directly involved in fighting, remained largely intact. At the same time, field commanders exercised oversight. Sangak Safarov – although he did not hold any official post – toured the country at will with his detachment of the PF, dismissing unworthy officials.

The extermination of warlords had already started by early 1993, when the war was far from over. In March Saidov and Safarov were reported to have killed each other in a shoot-out. However, there has been speculation that the government masterminded the killings, since out-of-control and crazed commanders emerged as a liability for the leadership, which was starting to seek respectability. The killings of Saidov and Safarov allowed the PF to be officially disbanded by the government. However, its legacy survived and was taken forward by three distinct groups of commanders: (1) former Safarov affiliates from Kulyab, such as Yaqub Salimov (future Minister of Interior), Gaffur Mirzoev (who became the Head of Presidential Guards in 1995), and the Cholov brothers; (2) their (mostly Uzbek) allies from other theatres of the fighting in 1992 such as Kurgan-Tyube (in the case of Khudoberdiev) and Hissar (Ibodullo Boimatov); and (3) unaffiliated gangsters.

The first external involvement came from Afghanistan. When civil war broke out, about 600 ethnic Uzbek fighters loyal to General Abdul Rashid Dostum came to aid the forces of Safarov and Saidov, and a similar number of ethnic Tajiks from Afghanistan joined the opposition troops. Russian (formerly Soviet) forces had been stationed in Tajikistan, including the 201<sup>st</sup> Motor Rifle Division of the Ministry of Defence and the Border Troops. Throughout most of 1992, the 201<sup>st</sup> Division remained broadly neutral.<sup>79</sup> However, Kulyabis procured weapons from Russian garrisons and launched a counter-attack in the south with the support of the Russian 191<sup>st</sup> Battalion stationed in Kurgan-Tyube.<sup>80</sup> Uzbek warplanes bombed opposition strongholds in Karategin and Darvaz,<sup>81</sup> killing many civilians, and Uzbekistan closed its borders to fleeing refugees even though many were of their ethnic kin. These memories are still painfully felt in Tajikistan.

### **3. From War to Peace (1993 - 1997)**

As Heathershaw notes, ‘drawing a line between war and peace in Tajikistan proves an impossible task, save for the legal definition that the war ended with the 27 June 1997 General Agreement. However, over twelve years, and three over-lapping periods between 1993 and 2005, one can see the gradual re-acquisition of legitimacy as the new regime was eventually accepted with varying degree of acquiescence at the local, regional and international levels.’<sup>82</sup> The current paper distinguishes between the periods of 1992 (full-scale war), 1993-97 (armed insurgency and instability), 1997-2000/01 (fragile peace) and 2001-present (consolidated state). For the period 1992-1997 Tajikistan can be categorised as a ‘failed state’, with persistent political violence,<sup>83</sup> and a ‘recovering state’ in the following decade.

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<sup>79</sup> Dov Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS: the cases of Moldova, Georgia and Tajikistan*, MacMillan Press in association with the Royal Institute of International Affairs, London, 2000, p. 154.

<sup>80</sup> Roy, p. 140.

<sup>81</sup> Bushkov and Mikulskii, p. 65.

<sup>82</sup> John Heathershaw, PhD dissertation ‘Peace as Complex Legitimacy: Politics, Space and Discourse in Tajikistan’s Peacebuilding Process, 2000 – 2005’, 2007, , Chapter Two ‘War and Peace in Tajikistan’, pp. 79-80.

<sup>83</sup> Following Rotberg, R. *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institute Press, 2003.

### *Opposition in Exile and on the Battlefield*

The immediate outcome of the PF victory was a campaign of reprisals that created massive displacement of Gharmis and Pamiris. Faizali Saidov unleashed terror in Kurgan-Tyube, forcing them into Afghanistan. In Hissar the cleansing of Gharmis and Pamiris also took place, but they had nowhere to flee, as the border with Uzbekistan was closed. Around 700,000 refugees, mostly civilians, fled from to Afghanistan across the Amu-Darya river. In 1993 it was estimated that further 145,000 refugees from Tajikistan were in Russia, and a comparable number in the other countries of Central Asia. During the conflict, one sixth of the population (over 778,000 people) fled Tajikistan. Quite remarkably compared to other conflicts, refugees who found shelter in Afghanistan went back in a relatively short period of time; this was despite widespread harassment, the expropriation of housing and land, and the occasional killings of returnees that were recorded in Khatlon province.<sup>84</sup> Some refugees from Tajikistan still remain in Russia, but the implicit understanding is that they will not try to return.

Being neighbours with Afghanistan has served both as a trigger for the fighting in Tajikistan and a mitigating factor, as it produced an adverse demonstration effect which in turn contributed to a desire for peace. The refugees who fled to Afghanistan found themselves in unbearable conditions in a country that was much poorer and less developed than their own. This engendered a sense of horror; the suffering that the refugees experienced in Afghanistan acted as a deterrent, as Tajiks realised that they too could follow this route if the war continued. As a result, refugees were keen to return and accept the government's rule, even if only their basic security was guaranteed.

The opposition, having suffered defeat in the lowlands, still had supporters in the mountainous areas of the country. By early 1993 the opposition was dominated by the Islamic forces, who relocated to their bases in northern Afghanistan and formed a Council of Islamic Resistance based in Tolouqan. They employed guerrilla tactics from across the border. Forces consisted of smaller sized units, often using hit-and-run tactics, as they did not form a regular army. Each field commander had his own regiment loyal to himself.

After an initial period of disarray, the opposition forces re-grouped and started to penetrate Tajikistan's territory. From spring 1993 fighters launched a number of successful attacks from across the border. In May they downed a Sukhoi-24 jet fighter using a Stinger missile, and in July raided a border post in the Shurobod district in Kulyab, killing up to 200 and taking local hostages. Opposition groups became better armed and their sense of military tactics improved, with *mujaheddin* commanders from Afghanistan sometimes supervising major operations.<sup>85</sup> Meanwhile the 201<sup>st</sup> Division lent its tanks and armed personnel carriers to the government troops for operations in the mountains.

Afghan *mujaheddin* commanders supported by Arab and Pakistani Islamists have helped the Tajik opposition to arm and train some refugees as guerrillas. Tajik, Uzbek and Pashtun commanders were all involved in aiding the IRP, with ethnicity and Tajik national solidarity seemingly playing little role. Rather their actions were dictated by Islamist ideology and support, by shifting political alignments in Kabul and by local rivalries.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> 'Human Rights in Tajikistan', pp. 36 – 45.

<sup>85</sup> For instance, commander Kori Hamidullo led a major attack on 12<sup>th</sup> border post in July 1993, in Bushkov and Mikulskii, p. 67.

<sup>86</sup> These 4 paragraphs are based on 'Human Rights in Tajikistan', pp. 31 – 33.



The two main areas where Tajik refugees lived in Afghanistan were controlled by different authorities. Until May 1993, when UNHCR began voluntary repatriation, 30,000 lived around Mazar-i-Sharif in Balkh in areas controlled by General Abdul Rashid Dostum, an ethnic Uzbek who did not allow any military training in the area he controlled. East of the Balkh region lie the provinces of Kunduz and Takhar. Takhar was controlled by Jamiat-i Islami (an Islamic Society) whose field commanders united in the Supervisory Council of the North (SCN), which was led by Ahmad Shah Massoud and had a headquarters in Tolouqan, the capital of Takhar. The Kunduz province was largely controlled by Amir Chugai, a Pashtun commander of the Ittihad-i Islami Barayi Azadi-yi Afghanistan (Islamic Union for Freedom of Afghanistan) which was financed by Arab private sources – mostly Wahhabi groups in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. The town of Imam Sahib on the Amu-Darya in northern Kunduz was controlled by ethnic Uzbek commanders of the Hizb-i Islami (Islamic Party), a radical organisation headed by Gulbiddin Hikmatyar, a Pashtun born in Imam Sahib. Alliances among these power centres shifted frequently.

Most refugees in Kunduz and Takhar received aid only from Arab and Pakistani Islamist sources, as UNHCR had withdrawn its staff due to problems with the local authorities triggered by its refusal to provide aid that indirectly supported military training. UNHCR insisted that aid sites could not be used by mujaheddin to recruit fighters among the refugees. This was a change of heart for UNHCR, as for a decade the Afghan *mujaheddin* had been practicing exactly this in UNHCR-sponsored refugee camps in Pakistan. Between 3 and 5,000 young Tajiks had undergone military training under IRP auspices in different parts of Kunduz and Takhar. The SCN trained guerrillas in Tolouqan and Amir Chagai in Kunduz, while Hikmatyar commanders provided training in Imam Sahib. Training was financed by Arab and Pakistani Islamist funds.<sup>87</sup>

Foreign financing was not the only resource for fighters: these areas of northern Afghanistan are centres of opium cultivation, and warlords have been able to use the drug trade to finance conflict and create independent power bases. Some of this revenue may have been used to help the Tajik insurgents too.

Forces supporting the Tajik opposition in Afghanistan tried to hinder UNHCR-assisted repatriation. A commander of Jamiat-i Islami urged refugees from Camp Sahi not to return, but to continue the struggle for an Islamic Tajikistan. The trucks carrying refugees from Camp Sahi back to Tajikistan were stopped by Jamiat fighters loyal to Massoud, but the dispute was resolved after general Dostum ordered tanks to move into position against the Jamiat forces. Tajik opposition commanders also sought to halt the repatriation of their fellow countrymen. Later the first acting president of Afghanistan, Sibghatullah Mujaddidi, alongside Sayed Mansur Nadiri, the leader of Afghanistan's Ismaili community, general Dostum and two of his generals, joined forces against those Islamist commanders who tried to prevent the return.

Political forces supporting the peace process in Tajikistan eventually emerged in Afghanistan on the back of anti-Taliban movement. Burhanuddin Rabbani played a major role. When Rabbani, an ethnic Tajik, took over as president of Afghanistan in 1992, the government in Dushanbe gave him official recognition and carried on recognising his government even after

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<sup>87</sup> 'Human Rights in Tajikistan in the Wake of Civil War', Report of Human Rights Watch/ Helsinki & The Inter-Republic Memorial Society, New York, December 1993.

Taliban became installed in Kabul and some powers recognised that as the legitimate government.

The Taliban's advances made a contribution to the Tajiks' willingness to negotiate, since both the government and opposition grew apprehensive of being steamrolled by advancing Pashtun Islamist warriors. President Rabbani encouraged mediation and supported the peace process, and the first face-to-face meeting between Rahmon and Nuri took place in Kabul in May 1995. The Taliban capture of Kabul in September 1996 provided further incentive for reconciliation. In December 1996 Rahmon and Nuri met again under Rabbani's sponsorship in the Afghan village of Khos Deh, where they signed a Ceasefire Protocol and took a decision on establishment of the Commission on National Reconciliation. Meanwhile the Taliban's northward advance in 1997 forced almost all Tajik exiles to return home.

From the time of Taliban's first advances in the autumn 1996, Russia supported the anti-Taliban commanders of the Northern Alliance (Dostum and Massoud) led by Rabbani, and used Uzbekistan and Tajikistan as supply routes respectively.<sup>88</sup> This inadvertently increased Russia's commitment to the ethnic Tajiks in Afghanistan by rendering support to Ahmad-Shah Massoud, who was regarded as a buffer between the CIS borders and advancing Taliban.

### *Functioning of the State*

When the Soviet Union was suddenly dissolved in December 1991, the Tajik authorities found themselves without the support and protection of the central government. They had neither a national army nor reliable internal security forces, and thus no means of enforcing law and order. Nevertheless, despite the civil war, the state did not fail to deliver political goods in every capacity. Following Rotberg's<sup>89</sup> hierarchy of positive state functions, it is possible to conclude that although the state failed to provide security and political participation, its record in maintaining institutions to adjudicate conflicts, secure property rights and enforce contracts, as well as in relation to social service delivery and regulation of the economy, was not so dismal. This suggests that even in conditions of violent conflict, state capacity is not uniform across functions.

Akiner (IPA) notes that the government in Dushanbe continued to function during the war. It even acceded to a number of international organisations, including international financial institutions. These bodies, particularly the IMF, provided support for economic restructuring and reform. Furthermore, despite the persistence of war in some areas, other parts of the country remained relatively stable. In the areas that were under government control there were some attempts at institutional and economic reform. A new constitution was adopted in November 1994, which established the division of executive, legislative and judicial powers, and the post of President was created (previously the republic was *de jure* governed by the Supreme Soviet, i.e. national parliament, and its Chair Imomali Rahmon held supreme power). Presidential elections were held in November 1994, in which the incumbent won a victory with 60 per cent against a northern candidate, Abdumalik Abdullajonov, who gained 35 per cent.

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<sup>88</sup> On Russia's policy towards Afghanistan in relation to Central Asia see Lena Jonson, 'Tajikistan in the New Central Asia,' pp. 94 – 101.

<sup>89</sup> Rotberg, 2003.

The elections were characterised by chaotic organisation and numerous procedural violations, which led some to question the outcome. However, in the view of Akiner (IPA), on the whole the elections were fair and represented a step towards stabilisation. Parliamentary elections were then held in 1995. The UN disagreed with Russia on how to qualify the presidential elections of 1994 and parliamentary ones of 1995: the UN declared them as not having even ‘the semblance of democracy’, while Russia accepted the new government and constitution as ‘legitimate’.

Rahmon managed to consolidate his position and to exert authority over the central state apparatus, thus bringing a minimal level of certainty and stability. Most importantly, the in-built resilience that state management institutions inherited from the Soviet era ensured that they continued to operate, albeit imperfectly. However, warlordism and the proliferation of dubious security structures remained a major factor hindering state consolidation and peace.

In this period, former leaders of local mafias and criminals involved in racketeering in the late Soviet era who played a prominent role in the war – and managed to survive it – got their share of power. In December 1992 when Yaqub Salimov became the Interior Minister, he put former convicts in charge of the Ministry’s departments. When he left in 1995, one-third of his men were purged from the Ministry. Those criminal bosses who did not seek formal power satisfied themselves with controlling outlying provinces, where they were *de facto* rulers in charge of major decisions. For instance in 1993 Lesha-Gorbun (aka *Hump*), head of the drug mafia in Pamir, personally granted permission to station a Kyrgyz peacekeeping battalion in ‘his’ region along the Afghan border.

Armed and security forces consisted of regiments personally loyal and accountable to their commander, who provided their upkeep. The men from the commander’s native place and with whom he fought during the war became official troops belonging to the ministry or office he came to head. For example, when Salimov came to head the Interior Ministry, his men formed Interior Ministry troops; similarly, Gaffur Mirzoyev’s 1,500 men became Presidential Guards when he was appointed as Head of Guards. The same pattern was applied to dealing with the opposition forces after the peace settlement: Mirzo Ziyoev (aka *Jaga*), a prominent commander, was appointed the Minister of Emergencies, and his forces became the Ministry’s troops. Meanwhile Suhrob Kasymov from Kulyab was appointed to command the 1<sup>st</sup> Special Operations’ Brigade of Interior Troops in the Varzob Valley outside Dushanbe, which consisted of ‘his’ men.

In addition to armed men, each commander came to control a particular economic asset. Battles over the Tajikistan Aluminium Plant (TadAZ), the country’s most important industrial facility, are illustrative of this process. Initially, Ibodullo Boimatov installed himself as a mayor of Tursun-zade and levied tolls on TadAZ, which is located in this area. However Boimatov was dismissed in 1996, and Kadyr Abdulloev came to be in control until colonel Mahmud Khudoberdiev attacked and destroyed his forces. Eventually TadAZ was taken over by Gaffur Mirzoev and remained effectively under his control until the government asserted ownership in January 2004.

Fighting periodically erupted between different brigades of the Tajik army formed on the basis of PF militias, who at times attacked each other with heavy weapons in the capital. Assassinations of high-profile political and military figures became a feature of Tajikistani politics. This continues to date, albeit on greatly reduced scale.

According to Nourjanov, the government adopted a ‘carrot-and-stick’ approach to diminishing the power of warlords: alliance, absorption and coercion.<sup>90</sup> In December 1994 Rahmon issued his first decree as president, which was on the confiscation of illegal arms and demobilisation of militias. By early 1995, 48 military units – who had formally allied themselves with the government but *de facto* operated as militias in their own right – were disbanded. However, many figures were too powerful or had been prominent war heroes, which rendered them ‘untouchable’. Furthermore, in 1995 42 out of 181 MPs were former PF men. Their status in the parliament guaranteed them immunity from prosecution, but in some cases their immunity was revoked in case they were continuing to carry out illegal activities. This happened to Hja Karimov in November 1995 and to 8 more men in 1997.

The economy was in dire straits and continued to spiral downwards as instability progressed. Tajikistan suffered devastating economic disruption not only due to the conflict but to the collapse of the Soviet economic system and its web of interdependence,<sup>91</sup> indeed the economy was severely affected by the perils of transition. In 1990-1994 output declined by an average of 20 per cent per year; the cumulative decline during this period being 69 per cent. The contraction continued, though somewhat more slowly, in 1995-1999.<sup>92</sup> However, once there had been a formal conclusion of hostilities, the government was able to embark on a policy of economic reform, take leave of the ‘rouble zone’ (Tajikistan continued to use Russian roubles because it was unable to print its own currency), introduce monetary and fiscal policies and bring inflation under control. TadAZ continued to operate, albeit at a reduced capacity because of electricity shortages, and there were signs of recovery in agriculture.<sup>93</sup>

According to Falkingham, between 1991 and 1998 government expenditure as a share of GDP fell by two-thirds (from 50 per cent to 16 per cent).<sup>94</sup> The incapacity of the government to mobilise resources resulted in public expenditure on health and education being less than a quarter of pre-independence level in real terms. Most of the poor were concentrated in GBAO (39.1 per cent) despite the fact that it contained less than 6 per cent of the country’s population and in the most populous province, Khatlon (26.8 per cent), 7 per cent of households reported that their home was damaged by war.<sup>95</sup> The city dwellers were the worst hit by the crisis, as they could not grow their own food, had no traditional heating facilities (most people lived in blocks of flats and had previously relied on central supplies) and had few skills that were tradable in the new circumstances.

The energy crisis gained momentum as Uzbekistan started to deny oil, gas and electricity to its war-torn neighbour. In 1995 the authorities advised the population through TV broadcasts that there might be severe shortages of gas and electricity in winter and that they should store timber and grass for heating. In the past Tajikistan was part of the Soviet united energy system and received energy from Uzbekistan in the cold period of the year (as Uzbekistan was responsible for energy production for the whole area). Tajikistan repaid this with

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<sup>90</sup> Nourjanov, 2005.

<sup>91</sup> In 1988 trade accounted for 41.6 % of Tajikistan’s GDP, of which 86.3 % was inter-republican; by 1991, the percentage of inter-republican trade had risen to 96.0 % (M. Kaser and S. Mehrotra, *The Central Asian Economies after Independence*, Post-Soviet Business Forum, Royal Institute of International Affairs, London 1992, pp. 63-64).

<sup>92</sup> *IMF Country Report*, pp. 8-13.

<sup>93</sup> For surveys of the economic situation after independence, see *UNDP 1995*, pp. 13-23; *UNDP 1998*, pp. 63-83; *UNDP 1999*, pp. 17-20; also *IMF Country Report*, pp. 71-76.

<sup>94</sup> Falkingham.

<sup>95</sup> Falkingham, p. 35.

electricity in summer months when it had a surplus, as well as with fresh water. Electricity grids and pipelines had been arranged accordingly. After the civil war, however, this system had been disrupted, and an alternative system is expected to emerge by 2010.

Some 700,000 people were displaced within the country itself. At the same time, massive internal displacement did not last for very long – on 31 May 1993 the head of UNHCR, Pierre-Francois Pirlot, estimated that between 70 per cent and 80 per cent of IDPs had returned to their homes, with the rest staying in Gharm and Badakhshan, areas that are difficult to access.<sup>96</sup>

Although the civil war was largely fought between different groups of ethnic Tajiks, it dealt a severe blow to inter-ethnic relations in the country, as the main minorities (Russians and Uzbeks) were seen as the better-off groups. A desire emerged to rectify the imbalance in favour of underprivileged Gharmis. Attacks on ethnic Russians and anti-Russian rhetoric escalated, with thousands fleeing as a result. According to Russian Federal Migration Service, by April 1993 300,000 out of 388,000 Slavs had left the country.<sup>97</sup>

### ***Internal Challenges to State Authority***

We can employ *coalition analysis* to explain why widespread political violence and challenges to the state authority from many quarters failed to escalate into state collapse. Coalitions are defined as alliances among social actors and groups; they provide the organisational framework for delineating who sides with whom, against whom, and over what. Coalitions bring together groups or organisations with heterogeneous goals, some of which they are willing to sacrifice for other intermediate collective goals.<sup>98</sup> In the Tajik case, although a number of strong internal opponents and regional groupings contested the regime, presenting it with serious challenges to security and authority, they were unable to form coalitions and develop enough trust in each other for a concerted collective push against the regime.

Following the PF military victory, the threat of dismemberment of the country remained acute. Kulyabis, the victors, consolidated their hold on power. From 1993-95 their representation in senior appointments increased threefold (to 42.6 per cent) and was overwhelming in military and security sector.<sup>99</sup> The north grew progressively fearful of Kulyabi domination and of the prospect of hosting more Kulyabi appointees whose attendant militias might come to loot wealthy areas.

Driven by a fear of the spillover of instability, in August 1993 the governor of Soughd (Leninobad) province, Abduljalil Homidov, ordered the blowing up of two bridges connecting Dushanbe with the north to prevent the movement of troops from the south. At first, Leninobadis tried to opt for autonomy on the basis of their economic dynamism and they enjoyed support from Tashkent in this pursuit; but this was curbed by the ruling Kulyabis in December 1993.<sup>100</sup> Following this, Leninobadis started to create parallel structures of

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<sup>96</sup> 'Human Rights in Tajikistan', p. 34.

<sup>97</sup> Quoted in Bushkov and Mikulskii, p. 66. In 2004 65,000 ethnic Russians were present in the country, including the Russian servicemen deployed at the Russian military base and in the Border Troops, - author's interview at the Russian Embassy, Dushanbe, 2004.

<sup>98</sup> Yashar, D. (1997). *Demanding Democracy: Reform and Reaction in Costa Rica and Guatemala, 1870s-1950s*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

<sup>99</sup> Nourjanov 2005.

<sup>100</sup> Roy, p. 141.

government, into which estranged members of the former northern elite were invited.<sup>101</sup> They hoped to create a north-based pole drawing on the material and human resources of the province. This, however, failed since Moscow was unwilling to support an alternative bid for power, which would undermine the fragile stability in the country as a whole.

This loss of power and influence on the part of the Leninabadis did not pass without consequence and a series of upheavals followed. After the defeat of a northern candidate, Abdumalik Abdullajonov, in a presidential race in November 1994, tensions in the north mounted and General Mamajanov, the military commander of Soughd province, led an armed revolt in January 1996.<sup>102</sup> In May of that year popular rioting broke out in the north against Kulyabi excesses. The ex-prime ministers of the early independence period, who came from the north (Abdullajonov, Samadov and Karimov) and had been pushed out of power one after another, joined forces and created a National Renaissance Party in August 1996 to defend the interests of the province.

Inter-ethnic relations on a popular level between Uzbeks and different Tajik groups also deteriorated in the late civil war period. Many Uzbeks were displaced from Gharmi-controlled areas. After PF took control of the capital and restored central authority, zones of compact Uzbek settlement in the south were left to be controlled by ethnic Uzbek field commanders because nobody trusted the Tajiks any longer. Since Uzbeks still had militias of their own, they on occasion engaged in fighting with Kulyabi and Gharmi armed groups. Sometimes Kulyabis and Gharmis (former opponents) united against the Uzbeks. Attempts to resist Uzbek marginalisation were undertaken by the Uzbek ex-Popular Front commanders. In 1996 Ibodullo Boimatov revolted in Hissar and was supported by Mahmud Khudoberdiev from Kurgan-Tyube; the revolt being also discreetly backed by Tashkent. The commanders demanded the resignation of certain notorious governmental appointees. Although the revolt was crushed and Boimatov fled to Uzbekistan, Dushanbe had to give way. In February 1996 a few infamous Kulyabis, such as Yaqub Salimov, were removed from top ranking positions.

The government in Dushanbe did not exercise full control over the territory; i.e. it did not control the north-east. Some areas, such as Tavildara, were openly rebellious. Others preserved a *de facto* autonomy, such as GBAO (which also retained a *de jure* autonomy inherited from the Soviet times). Consequently GBAO emerged as a separate source of instability that did not subside for a number of years because of its remoteness. In 1993 the GBAO self-defence units blocked government forces from entering the region. Some groups from Sunni districts adhered to the Islamist agenda and had been loyal to the IRP, while others from Ismaili districts supported the local administration, which tried to keep its distance both from the government and the opposition.<sup>103</sup> Still, the authorities in GBAO formally recognised the suzerainty of Dushanbe and the presence of Russian border troops, and lived off drug smuggling from Afghanistan, while the Aga-Khan Foundation provided humanitarian aid. Government troops did not venture into this high mountainous area, which was cut off for six months of the year.

Meanwhile, new social problems were mounting. Health and sanitation conditions deteriorated, and diseases that had been largely eliminated in the Soviet era started to come back. A cholera epidemic broke out in the rural areas around Dushanbe in 1993 and

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<sup>101</sup> Bushkov and Mikulskii, p. 69.

<sup>102</sup> Roy, p. 142.

<sup>103</sup> Niyazi, p. 70.

diphtheria followed in 1995. Hundreds of people died.<sup>104</sup> Drug trafficking transformed from a trickle to a flow: in one seizure in Shurobod district (Kulyab) bordering Afghanistan 10 tonnes of drugs were discovered in one hide-out.<sup>105</sup>

## *Development of the Peace Process*

### *Factors that facilitated peace*

First, the parties participating in the conflict had the same overarching goal. The crucial factor was that deep down there was a consensus between the warring parties regarding the end picture: they all wanted an independent and united Tajikistan to emerge out of the civil war. No region represented by the contestants mounted a serious secession bid. The IRP did not pursue the idea of an Islamic state very far and has never really defined what its Islamic agenda meant for state-building. In the end, the Islamists found the notion of a secular state acceptable, provided that religion occupied pride of place and that political representation of the Islamic constituency was ensured. There were no deep-seated historical grievances, only the more immediate concern to rectify the power imbalances of the old system.

Second, as Akiner explains, the success of the peace process was due to the fact that the state did not collapse completely during the war, managing to reconstitute itself in the territories it controlled. She notes an ongoing process of governing throughout the civil war, that resulted in the maintenance of a certain degree of continuity in post-Soviet institution-building: ‘throughout, there was a state presence, albeit with limited territorial control.’ The violence was relatively localised and only a part of the country (mainly the centre and south) was directly affected.

Third, cultural aspects, in Akiner’s view, played a role. She attributes success in ending the civil war to the following factors: the lack of a socially sanctioned culture of violence – for example, there was no tradition of bearing weapons as normal accoutrements; the absence of blood feuds or other structural forms of aggression; and the absence of deep-seated group antagonisms and historical hatreds (or myths relating to historical wrongs). Moreover, in her view the Tajiks are an Iranian people and feel isolated in the midst of a Turkic environment, which gives them a sense of common ethnic and cultural identity.<sup>106</sup>

Fourth, developments on the battlefield contributed to the move towards settlement. The fighting came to a deadlock around 1996-97, when government troops were in control of the lowlands but could not eliminate the continued threat of opposition coming from the mountains. The opposition, in its turn, made considerable advances in Karategin Valley and in the central region. By the end of 1996 it had taken Gharm, Tavildara and Komsomolabad, at one point advancing as far as 60km from Dushanbe and threatening the city itself. However, in the words of Turajonzoda, although the opposition was capable of taking the capital, it did not want a massive bloodletting and open confrontation with the Russian troops.<sup>107</sup> At the same time the opposition realised that it could not retain control of a sizeable

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<sup>104</sup> Bushkov and Mikulskii, p. 79.

<sup>105</sup> Bushkov and Mikulskii, p. 68.

<sup>106</sup> Akiner, *Tajikistan*, pp. 7-8. For a discussion of modern Tajik identity, see G. Jahangiri, ‘The Premises for the Construction of a Tajik National Identity, 1920-1930’, in *Trials of Independence*, pp. 14-41. Several of the new political activists of the late 1980s, particularly those connected with parties such as *Rastokez* and the Democratic Party of Tajikistan, made the revival of Tajik (Iranian) culture a central plank of their programs (Akiner, *Tajikistan*, p. 33).

<sup>107</sup> Quoted in Erkin Rahmatulloev, Миротворчество ООН в Таджикистане и Перспективы Превентивной

part of lowlands, conquering an entire province from which it could launch an alternative bid for power. Thus, the prospect was either protracted guerrilla warfare with uncertain prospects of winning or a compromise with the government.

A fifth factor facilitating peace was the divisibility of assets that previously seemed indivisible. The literature tells us that when collective actors are narrowly focused on ethnicity, region or religion, they are less tolerant of policies that disadvantage them. They tend to go for all-or-nothing struggles for indivisible stakes, such as control of the state, state patronage, or valuable resources and the rights associated with them. As Hirschman and Wood argue, the greater the indivisibility of asset distribution and state patronage, the more intense conflicts over rights are likely to become. The greater the intensity of conflict, the more likely that it will be resolved through violent means.<sup>108</sup> In our case the opposition was aiming at first for seemingly indivisible stakes, such as religion and regionalism. However, as negotiations proceeded and the settlement started to take shape, the opposition leaders showed remarkable interest in positions of state power that allowed them to sell lucrative appointments, control corruption opportunities and acquire a sizeable share of the drug market. The ‘indivisibility’ of their stakes thus gradually diminished, and with it so did their support base.

#### *Beginnings of the peace process*

One of the challenges of the negotiating process was the absence of an agent on the opposition side to act as a counterpart for talks with the government side. This was rooted in the very nature of the opposition, which comprised an uneasy mix of Democrats and Islamists. The problem the Islamists experienced was that they did not have people in their ranks who could effectively articulate political positions and engage in substantial talks with the government. They therefore needed the Democrats to be their voice. Indeed, the different opposition groups came to realise that they needed each other: the Islamists could fight and mobilise resources for the war, while the Democrats could undertake the negotiations.

A pivotal role was played in laying foundations for official talks by the informal Inter-Tajik Dialogue within the Framework of the Dartmouth Conference.<sup>109</sup> It was organised and facilitated by a joint US/Russian team from the Kettering Foundation (USA) and the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences. The process started in 1993 with the aim of forming a group drawn from all sides of the conflict to design strategies for its resolution. The facilitators conducted 35 dialogue meetings over a period of a decade, and several of the Dialogue participants later also took part in the official UN-chaired talks.

One reason the governmental side gave for its reluctance to negotiate with the opposition was that it was unclear who would be able to speak on behalf of various forces contesting the government. It maintained that it could not negotiate with each field commander individually, nor could it comprehend the opposition’s political demands. This became a subject of the debate during the first meetings of the Inter-Tajik Dialogue, when participants had been

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Дипломатии (UN Peacemaking in Tajikistan and Prospects for Preventive Diplomacy), Centre for Strategic and Political Studies, Moscow, 2001.

<sup>108</sup> A. Hirschman, ‘Social conflicts as pillars of democratic market societies’, in A. Hirschman, *A Propensity to Self-Subversion*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995 and Wood, E. *Forging Democracy from Below: Insurgent Transitions in South Africa and El Salvador*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

<sup>109</sup> I explore the process in greater detail in ‘Tajikistan: Peace Secured, but is this the State of our Dreams?’, in Michael Lund & Howard Wolpe (eds.) *Catalytic Engagement: Leadership Networks for Transforming Intra-state Conflicts* (provisional title), project of Woodrow Wilson International Center ‘Preventing and Rebuilding Failed States’, forthcoming.



stumbling over the dilemma of who would represent the opposition given that it was so ideologically diverse and geographically dispersed. Within two months (October-December 1993) the leaders of the different opposition factions had met in Tehran, developed a common platform and formed a Moscow-based Coordination Centre of Democratic Forces of Tajikistan in the CIS. At the fifth Dialogue meeting in January 1994 participants from the opposition groups presented this new platform – which was to become the basis for the United Tajik Opposition (UTO) alliance. In July 1994 the UTO was formally established, with Nuri at its head. The Tajik diaspora in Moscow played a constructive role in fostering cooperation by politically unifying the various strands of the opposition based both within Tajikistan and in Iran and Afghanistan. Later, they were also instrumental in engaging with the Russian official mediators and pro-government Tajiks in Moscow.

The government entered into formal talks in 1994. At the same time, it continued military activity, trying to weaken its adversaries and force them to retreat further into the mountains. The government did not hope to win an ultimate military victory, but rather sought to strengthen its hand in negotiations and force the opposition into concessions.

### ***The Role of External Powers***

Typically for a small and weak country, Tajikistan has been vulnerable to external influences and pressures. At the same time, external actors have played crucial roles in facilitating the peace process and in stabilising the security situation. The geopolitical setting was favourable to reaching a compromise. The sudden absence of rivalry between Russia and the US, which had been replaced by a sense of a new historical opportunity for working together towards peace, created a sense of common purpose. Russia, although officially supporting the government side, was able to reach out to the opposition, since many key figures found refuge in Moscow.

The geopolitical interests of Russia and Iran also proved to be complementary. While Iran had stronger ties with the moderate part of the Islamic opposition, its overall goal was ethnic solidarity; i.e. to facilitate the emergence of an independent country composed of people of Iranian origin, rather than the establishment of an Islamic state. Iran was seeking to overcome its position as a pariah in the international arena and wanted to be regarded as capable of playing a constructive role in the regional affairs.<sup>110</sup> As a result, Russia, Iran and anti-Taliban forces in Afghanistan pulled broadly in the same direction, playing important roles at critical junctures of negotiations by persuading their allies to compromise.

### ***Russia***

When clashes started in Tajikistan in spring-summer 1992, the Russian troops were left with no operational guidance from Moscow but were just instructed to maintain neutrality. The Ministry of Defence was not meant to interfere in politics, while the Foreign Ministry in charge of relations with the countries of the ‘New Abroad’ was reluctant to get involved in an internal conflict remote from Russia and was sensitive to Western suspicions about its meddling in the affairs of a newly independent state. This created a decision-making vacuum, with commanders on the ground taking decisions as they saw fit. During the 1992 clashes in

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<sup>110</sup> Edmund Herzig, ‘Regionalism, Iran and Central Asia’, *International Affairs*, (vol. 80, no. 3, May 2004), pp. 503 – 518, p. 517.

Dushanbe, the Russian garrison served as a shelter for leaders under threat and a venue for negotiations. Trade in, and seizures of, weapons and armoury were also taking place.

Moscow was slow to react to the developments in Tajikistan due to its preoccupation with more urgent problems, but in 1993 it sought to play a stabilising role. While backing Rahmon's secular government, it projected the message that the Tajik leadership needed to find a compromise with the political opposition and that sole reliance on repression would not bring peace. In August 1993 a summit of Central Asian heads of states took place in Moscow, where presidents Yeltsin and Karimov pressurised Rahmon to start negotiations with the opposition.

The MFA tried to impress upon Rahmon that it was his responsibility to seek compromise with his opponents. In 1993 Andrei Kozyrev, the Russian Foreign Minister at the time, stated that 'Russia will not try to make up for the lack of political will for a reconciliation in Tajikistan with the blood of its soldiers as it did once in Afghanistan'.<sup>111</sup> Moscow allowed the various opposition groups (mostly Democrats) in exile in Russia to operate freely when they had to flee the country. After 1995, Russian diplomacy also engaged with the opposition in exile in Iran and Afghanistan. Eugenii Primakov, an orientalist by background who succeeded Kozyrev, took a hands-on approach to negotiations and played a much more active role in the peace process, even entering into direct consultation with the UTO. In mid-1996 Primakov called for a Rahmon-Nuri summit, which occurred in December.<sup>112</sup>

The MFA also included other Central Asian countries, Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan in the negotiation process, and conducted a meeting with Sayed Abdullo Nuri in November 1993 in Tehran. On these foundations the first round of Inter-Tajik talks took place in April 1994 in Moscow, under Russian and UN mediation. In June 1994 the MFA secured a four-month ceasefire, and the third round of talks in Islamabad in October 1994 negotiated an extension of this ceasefire monitored by a joint commission. In February 1996, the two parties agreed to create an All-Tajik Consultative Forum. Moscow hosted the most important rounds of talks: the first one in 1994 and the two final ones, when the General Agreement was signed and witnessed by the then Russian President Boris Yeltsin.

Russia played a major role in peacekeeping.<sup>113</sup> At the July 1993 meeting of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, President Boris Yeltsin established a division of labour: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was to promote conflict resolution, while the Ministry of Defence and the Russian Border Service were to ensure the protection of the border with Afghanistan. A treaty on the collective protection of the Tajik-Afghan border defined as the 'CIS joint border' was adopted under Russian pressure.<sup>114</sup> Tajikistan delegated the protection of its Afghan and Chinese borders to Russia until it could develop its own forces (Russia's border troops eventually withdrew in 2005). In September 1993 the CIS Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defence established the Collective Peacekeeping Forces in Tajikistan (CIS/PKF) composed of contingents from the Russian Federation – based on the 201<sup>st</sup> Division stationed in Tajikistan – and battalions from Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and Uzbekistan. The CIS/PKF in 1993 were comprised of 25,000 Russian forces, an Uzbek

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<sup>111</sup> Andrei Kozyrev, Interview in *Izvestiya* daily, 4 August 1993.

<sup>112</sup> See Dov Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies*, pp. 163 – 168; Shirin Akiner, *Tajikistan: Disintegration or Reconciliation?*

<sup>113</sup> On analysis of Russia's role in peacekeeping in Tajikistan see Dov Lynch, *Ibid.*, 'Russian Strategy towards Tajikistan', pp. 150 – 172.

<sup>114</sup> Bushkov and Mikulskii, p. 68.

battalion of 350 and a Kyrgyz force numbering 286. In the view of Vladimir Goryaev of the UN Department of Political Affairs, the CIS/PKF was the only force that could be relied on to protect humanitarian convoys and strategic installations. Its presence had a stabilising effect and helped to ensure that heavy weapons did not fall into the hands of the combatants, thus helping to prevent further destruction and casualties. The CIS/PKF, together with the Russian Border Forces, also helped to control the transshipment of massive quantities of arms, ammunition and drugs from neighbouring Afghanistan.<sup>115</sup>

Russia's engagement in Tajikistan remains the most thoroughly researched aspect of the civil war. In the 1990s a search to uncover the 'neo-imperialist' paradigm and 'communist credentials' of the regime were the main focus of scholarly attention to Russia's relationship with Tajikistan. Neo-colonial analogies became popular.<sup>116</sup> Lena Jonson, a strong critic of Russia's role in the Tajikistan, noted Moscow's backing for the 'pro-communist' side and 'its prime concern...to support a regime that would bring stability and guarantee a continued role and influence for Russia in Tajikistan.'<sup>117</sup> A similar stance has been taken by Dov Lynch.<sup>118</sup> Others (Shirin Akiner; Vladimir Goryaev; the current author) maintain that Russia's contribution was on the whole positive, that there were no alternatives to Russian peacekeeping at the time and that neither Russia nor any other external power influenced the outcome of the civil war, but limited its duration and scale of destruction.

### *Uzbekistan*

Uzbekistan played a significant yet ambivalent role in the Tajik civil war. Initially, Tashkent backed the government side, motivated by a strong fear of the rise of political Islam – given that Islamists were becoming active in the Uzbek part of the Ferghana Valley – and of the spread of the 'holy war' into its territory. Military assistance, especially air support, greatly facilitated the Popular Front advances. Uzbek troops were engaged in armed combat and bomb raids in the Gharm region,<sup>119</sup> although Tashkent denied any such involvement. In September 1992 President Islam Karimov initiated the UN involvement in peacemaking when he publicly appealed to the UN Secretary General to address the crisis and acted as an official observer in the Inter-Tajik negotiations. Since 1993 Tashkent has officially participated in the CIS peacekeeping operation, but also pursued its own political agenda.

However, as Uzbeks and northerners became ostracised, Tashkent grew increasingly hostile. From 1995 onwards it regularly interrupted gas supplies to southern Tajikistan. The relationship between presidents Karimov and Rahmon deteriorated and to date is characterised by a high degree of distrust and disrespect. To the dismay of the Tajik leader, Karimov invited Sayed Abdullo Nuri for talks in Tashkent on two occasions in 1995, after which the Uzbek President urged Rahmon to seek accommodation with the Islamists. Karimov proposed the formation of a Tajik State Council with equal representation from all parties and regions after a total amnesty, to ensure access to power and public expression for the northerners and Uzbeks.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Adapted by the author from *Accord*, 2001.

<sup>116</sup> Whitlock, 2002, p. 191.

<sup>117</sup> Lena Jonson, *The Tajik War: a Challenge to Russian Policy*, Discussion Paper no. 74, London: RIIA, 1998, p. 9.

<sup>118</sup> Dov Lynch, 'Peacekeeping Strategies'.

<sup>119</sup> Author's interviews in Dushanbe and in Gharm with the UN national staff.

<sup>120</sup> ITAR-TASS news agency, 4 April 1995, SU/2272, G/2-3, quoted in Dov Lynch, p. 164.

In Rahmatulloev's view the role of Uzbekistan has shifted several times: from support for 'restoration of constitutional order' personified by the president Rahmon, to covert contacts with the opposition, and finally to providing backing and safe havens for co-ethnic rebels threatened by the regime.<sup>121</sup> For example, Uzbekistan gave refuge to the rebellious colonel Khudoberdiev after a failed coup in 1998. Tashkent objected initially to the 1997 Peace Accords and refused to sign it as a guarantor of the treaty, but later joined the Contact Group to support its implementation.<sup>122</sup>

At the same time, fear of Uzbekistan's domination and the 'Uzbek factor' in internal politics was shared by the government and opposition sides, becoming a unifying factor and an important driver for peace. The opposition has noted that if Russia had not supported the Rahmon government and actively engaged in peacekeeping, the door would have been opened for Uzbekistan to enforce peace on its own terms, which would have been detrimental to the Tajik state.<sup>123</sup>

### *Iran*

Iranians and Tajiks share the same Persian linguistic and cultural ancestry, but Iranians are Shi'a while Tajiks are Sunni. Tehran supported the emergence of the Tajik opposition in 1991-92. Ahmad Rashid claims that by 1992 Iran was backing a wide range of opposition parties and supplying them with money, food and military supplies. The Iranian mission in Dushanbe at the height of the civil war numbered twenty-one diplomats and some fifty unofficial personnel. Foreign diplomats claimed that the IRP was receiving air drops of weapons from Iranian aircraft and that Iranian intelligence officials played a major role in encouraging the opposition to move against Nabiev. In doing this, it sought to compete against the growing Sunni funding and support from Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and the Afghan *mujaheddin*.<sup>124</sup>

After the secular government came to power in Dushanbe in December 1992, Iran hosted moderate opposition leaders from 1993-98; however they never publicly backed the establishment of an Islamic state in Tajikistan. The interests of Russia and Iran largely coincided, as both states wished to prevent greater involvement by the Taliban, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Iran was a key sponsor of the peace negotiations and had the status of an official observer. It hosted the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> rounds of the negotiations and two meetings between Rahmon and Nuri.<sup>125</sup>

### *The UN*

UN involvement in conflict management in Tajikistan started in 1993 with the appointment of the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy.<sup>126</sup> The Russia-UN interaction over the official peace process was constructive, and negotiations were conducted with joint sponsorship. In December 1994 the UN Mission of Observers in Tajikistan (UNMOT) was established to monitor the implementation of the ceasefire. The Special Envoys/Representatives and

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<sup>121</sup> Rahmatulloev, p. 162.

<sup>122</sup> *Politics of Compromise: The Tajikistan Peace Process*, Accord: an international review of peace initiatives, issue 10, London: Conciliation Resources, 2001, p. 93.

<sup>123</sup> Author's interviews with former opposition politicians, Dushanbe, May 2006.

<sup>124</sup> Ahmad Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia*, pp. 180 – 181.

<sup>125</sup> *Politics of Compromise*, Accord, 2001 p. 92.

<sup>126</sup> On the outline of the official conflict management and civil society/ multitrack diplomacy see Slim and Hodizoda, *Ibid.*, pp. 522 – 528.

UNMOT military observers maintained regular contact with CIS/PKF commanders in order to discuss the military situation and explore options for securing a ceasefire. The Protocol on Military Issues signed in March 1997 gave CIS/PKF forces the important and delicate role of accompanying UTO units from Afghanistan to the assembly areas under the supervision of UNMOT, which they conducted successfully.<sup>127</sup>

A landmark Protocol on Military Issues, setting out the conditions and modalities for the disarmament and re-integration of opposition forces into government units, was signed during the seventh round of talks in March 1997.<sup>128</sup> In June 1997 the General Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and National Accord in Tajikistan was signed, formally ending the civil war. The Agreement provided for 30 per cent UTO representation in government executive bodies, the safe return of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), disarmament and the reintegration of opposition forces into government power structures, constitutional and electoral amendments, the adoption of an Amnesty Law, the establishment of a date for new parliamentary elections, and reform of the government. The immediate issues were the establishment of a joint Central Election Commission, the reform of national and local government on the basis of a 30 per cent UTO quota, the lifting of restrictions on opposition parties, and the freeing of imprisoned opposition members. In July, a Pact on Mutual Forgiveness was signed and endorsed by the newly formed Commission for National Reconciliation (CNR).<sup>129</sup>

#### **4. State Reconstruction after the War (1997-2000/01)**

Tajikistan did not have a chance to become a state before it descended into political violence and civil war and has been formed through a baptism of fire. The war did not represent 'development in reverse', but rather laid the foundations of the present political system. The state that emerged in Tajikistan was an outcome of the civil war, which is consistent with Tilly's argument that 'war made the state'.<sup>130</sup>

##### ***Government and Parties***

Throughout the war, the state's capacity to enforce law and order and provide public services was weakened, but not lost altogether. As soon as basic security was ensured, state authority started to gradually reassert itself. Parts of the country have not been touched by the civil war but rather have suffered due to isolation and a law-and-order vacuum; these parts and indeed the country as a whole have moved towards development fairly quickly thereafter. Economic growth in 1997-2001 averaged 7.5 per cent.

One of the important causes of the civil war was persistent disagreements over power-sharing. The 1997 Peace Agreement resolved the power-sharing dispute, as both sides realised that the other has a constituency in the country to be reckoned with. Towards the end of the immediate post-settlement phase, the political system reshaped as such: in 1999 the single

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<sup>127</sup> Gorayev in Accord, 2001, p. 36.

<sup>128</sup> For text of main documents of peace process, see *News About Peace (Documents)*, Commission on National Reconciliation, United Nations Mission of Observers in Tajikistan (UNMOT), Oli Somon Printing House, Dushanbe, 1998.

<sup>129</sup> *News About Peace*, pp. 65-67.

<sup>130</sup> Tilly, C. *Coercion, Capital and European States: AD 990-1992*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1990.

chamber legislative body (Supreme Soviet) that had been inherited from the Soviet era was transformed into a bicameral system, comprising a standing Lower House of elected deputies and an Upper House of deputies elected by the regional assemblies, as well as eight additional presidential nominees. Presidential elections were to be held every five years, but this was extended to seven years along with other constitutional changes approved by referendum in September 1999. Any citizen, regardless of gender, religion or ethnic origin, is eligible to run for the presidency. The first post-war presidential election, held in November 1999, was won by the incumbent with 97 per cent of the vote. The chief mechanism for the implementation of the Agreement was the Commission on National Reconciliation. In the post-settlement phase, the provisions of the Agreement have been largely lived up to, and the opposition has been incorporated into the government according to a quota which is to be held until the next elections. However, the deal that the parliamentary elections would be held before the presidential ones has been overturned: the president was re-elected in 1999, giving the government an upper hand in the parliamentary elections of 2000.

Administrative re-organisation was carried out in 1999, creating five administrative territories: (1) Khatlon province, which resulted from an earlier merger of Kurgan-Tyube and Kulyab; (2) Direct Rule Districts comprising the former opposition strongholds in north-east of Tavildara, Gharm and Karategin; (3) the densely-populated city of Dushanbe and its environs; (4) Sough (formerly Leninabad); and (5) the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region. The latter two survived intact from the Soviet era<sup>131</sup>. The rationale behind the re-organisation of the former opposition areas was to undermine the future possibility of a dissident movement unifying around a regional government structure, and to deprive any such movement of a potential urban base. Thus, Kurgan-Tyube was no longer a provincial capital and was to be administratively ruled from Kulyab, its arch-enemy. The Direct Rule Districts had no administrative centre or provincial government of their own, all 48 districts being directly responsible to Dushanbe. Such administrative arrangements appear to be impractical for the management of everyday regional affairs as they are vastly disproportional in population size, and are likely to alter when the regime feels more secure.

During the civil war opposition parties were outlawed, but in 1999 the ban was lifted and independent parties began to reappear. However, they faced considerable difficulties in establishing a viable electoral base. Most were small, under-funded and dominated by a single individual. They were unable to satisfy the strict criteria for official registration (a prerequisite for participation in elections). Yet six parties did qualify for registration and in February 2000 they fielded candidates in the elections to the newly created Lower House. The conduct of the elections, however, was marred by numerous irregularities.<sup>132</sup> Three parties eventually emerged as viable organisations: the People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan (the party of government), the IRP and the Communist Party. Although the IRP obtained 30 per cent of positions in the executive, this hardly reflected its real popular standing. According to Sharq's public opinion poll in Dushanbe in January 1999, 5 per cent supported the IRP, while the Communist Party scored 28 per cent.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> While it was renamed 'Sough', most ordinary people do not use the name and some do not seem aware of the name change, - author's observation while working in Sough province in 2003 – 2005.

<sup>132</sup> *Final Report, Elections to the Parliament 27 February 2000*, Republic of Tajikistan, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Warsaw 17 May 2000.

<sup>133</sup> Saodat Olimova, 'Political Islam', p. 132.

## *De Facto Politics*

The decade after the Peace Agreement has been a history of the opposition's decay. The President and his entourage were astute enough to realise that the real interests of key opposition figures that were concealed behind their proclaimed positions lay in the fulfilment of material appetites. If these were satisfied, they would rather work to support the *status quo* than seek to disrupt it. This was exactly what happened. Opposition politicians started to capitalise on the lucrative opportunities offered by the governmental positions they had acquired and began to compromise their ideological credentials. Corruption became rampant and displays of wealth by formerly austere Islamists were increasingly ostentatious. Job-selling practices flourished, as a handful of opposition figures controlled the 30 per cent quota. This, however, weakened their appeal among the former constituents. At the time of the settlement, the opposition had a real chance of making a decisive impact on the post-war development of Tajikistan; but it did not use it well. Eventually, the President used the opposition's susceptibility to corruption and enrichment to eliminate most powerful figures one by one by tempting them into opportunities that would undermine their credibility.

Gradually, most power went to Kulyabis, while northerners and the Uzbeks who actively supported the government during the war achieved few tangible benefits from the Agreement. The UN and Russia effectively supported a deal that excluded the northern region and a large Uzbek group.<sup>134</sup> A series of violent episodes erupted in 1996-97 in the Khujand district and culminated in 1998 in the armed raid and seizure of Khujand (the second city of Tajikistan) by a rebel colonel, Mahmud Khudoberdiev, who attacked from Uzbekistan. This presented a serious military challenge for the government. The attack was repelled but fear of Khudoberdiev and his forces, believed to be in hiding in Uzbekistan, persists to the day.<sup>135</sup> The revolt was crushed by the combined forces of Gaffur Mirzoev (former commander on the government side) and Mirzo Ziyoev (a former opposition leader).

By strengthening central government control over the regions (the 'power vertical'), Rahmon tried to control the balance between clans. He increasingly came to promote his own – previously inconsequential – Dangara clan from the Kulyab province, sidelining other Kulyabi clans (Parhor and Vakhsh) from which many key personalities came. Finally, as described by Jonson, 'as a result of the president's appointment policy the Leninabadis [Soughd] withdrew from politics, Pamir fell into obscurity, the Karategins were sidelined, and the Kulyabis became frustrated'.<sup>136</sup>

In describing post-war developments, Collins attaches particular significance to clan and sub-clan networks in political and social life of the country. A 'clan', according to Collins' definition, is an 'informal social institution in which actual or notional kinship based on blood or marriage forms the central bond among members.'<sup>137</sup> In Collins's view, the clans constitute a potential threat to the regime, as they form networks of political loyalties and thus may provide the power base for political opponents to the President. Saodat Olimova writes that the central government tried to control the situation by blocking the independence of

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<sup>134</sup> Kathleen Collins discusses this argument in 'Tajikistan: Bad Peace Agreements and Prolonged Civil Conflict' in Chandra Lekha Sriram & Karin Wermester (eds.), *From Promise to Practice: Strengthening UN Capacities for the Prevention of Violent Conflict*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003, pp. 292 – 293.

<sup>135</sup> Author's interviews with local observers, Dushanbe, May 2006.

<sup>136</sup> Lena Jonson, p. 130.

<sup>137</sup> Kathleen Collins, 'Clans, Pacts and Politics in Central Asia', *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 13, no. 2, (2002), pp. 137 – 52.

administrative-territorial units and preventing clans from strengthening their positions in the districts. The President is both an arbitrator between the clans and at the top of a clan pyramid.<sup>138</sup>

The current author has a different take on the matter. The argument is as follows: the *avlod* structure is an inward-looking and vertically organised system, and its main goal is to look after the well-being of its members. *Avlods* do not form horizontal alliances with other groups of *avlods* – unless a practical dispute needs to be resolved – as the system is too hierarchical to form broadly-based coalitions. Horizontal ties are maintained through male clubs but these networks on their own are too weak to result in a decisive effort in an absence of other factors. Thus, as the society is largely vertically organised, it is relatively easy for a strong leadership to govern in a ‘divide-and-rule’ fashion, as divisions are already plentiful. This explains the post-war stabilisation: although the regime’s various opponents outnumbered the government group, they could never form even a tactical alliance to foster a collective effort.

### ***The Role of Islam***

Western experts largely dismiss the role of Islam in the civil war, noting that it was fought along regional loyalties. Ahmed Rashid sums up the predominant stance of writings from the early 1990s: ‘although it [the civil war] was ostensibly between pro-communist forces and Islamic fundamentalists, in fact the long-suppressed clan, regional and ethnic rivalries in the republic had quickly come to the surface after communism’s demise.’<sup>139</sup> Roy notes that the Islamists were disconcerted by the conjuncture between Islamic radicalisation and the expression of localism. The IRP had a presence almost solely among the Gharmis. This does not mean that the Gharmis were more religious than their Kulyabi adversaries; on the contrary, these adversaries also experienced a religious revival that was confirmed by the First Secretary Mahkamov in his report to the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the CP of Tajikistan in January 1986, in which he denounced the shortcomings of atheist policy in Kulyab and Kurgan-Tyube. Rather, political affiliations were reactive: given that the Gharmi elite was in the IRP, the Kulyabis had no choice but to withdraw support from that party, with the exception of a few mullahs of particularly firm convictions.<sup>140</sup>

While Islamisation undoubtedly played a role in politicisation of grievances and initial mobilisation of the pre-war period, Islamist influence received a fresh impetus when the opposition was defeated in Tajikistan and had to flee to Afghanistan, with some leaders ending up in Iran. At this juncture international Islamist groups saw an opportunity to finance and arm the Tajik opposition to draft new recruits for their cause worldwide. Sayed Ahmedov, for instance, talks about 20 military training camps – which were mostly in Afghanistan but also in Iran, Sudan and Pakistan – where Tajik Islamic fighters were trained.<sup>141</sup> Foreign funding was provided to field commanders if they agreed to embrace an Islamist cause.

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<sup>138</sup> Saodat Olimova, ‘Vospriyatye yavleniya ‘regionalizm’ osnovnymi politicheskimi silami v Tajikistane’, in Luigi de Martino (ed.), *Tadzhikistan: optimizatsiya otnoshenii mezhdru tsentrom I regionami: vyzovy I vozmozhnosti* (Geneva: CIMERA, January 2004), pp. 104 – 105.

<sup>139</sup> Ahmed Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia: Islam or Nationalism?*, Zed Books/ Oxford University Press, London & New Jersey, 1994, p. 159.

<sup>140</sup> Olivier Roy, *The New Central Asia: the Creation of Nations*, New York University Press, New York, 2000, p. 156.

<sup>141</sup> Ahmedov, *Ibid.*, p. 80, in reference to *Narodnaya Gazeta*, 12 – 13 August 1992.



As part of the peace settlement, the General Agreement designated Tajikistan as a secular state, but allowed for a religious party to function as long as it *de jure* does not cross legal boundaries and does not undermine the *de facto* foundations of the state. This left Islamism in a subordinate position and at the mercy of the secular authorities. In Roy's view, the defeat of the Islamist movement in the civil war had two consequences: firstly, Islamism no longer appeared as an ideological alternative to Sovietism, nationalism and localism. Secondly, it also became normalised: by allying with the democrats and nationalists, the IRP appeared a legitimate actor in Tajik political life, as it represented a regionalist group that had been systematically kept out of power. The General Agreement gave a definitive legitimacy to the Islamist movement, which had by then dropped most of its Islamist ideology in favour of references to the nation and democracy.<sup>142</sup>

Under the conditions of a secular state, the IRP could not quite determine what its Islamic agenda consisted of. For example, in February 1999 Himmatzoda, one of the IRP leaders, told a republican conference that the party's goal was to create an Islamic state in which only male Muslims could be representatives in elected bodies. Minorities, atheists and women would be excluded from political process.<sup>143</sup> Others in the party had very different views, advocating that religion should have a larger role in public life and for Islam to act as a moral guide for the faithful and a basis for education, whilst at the same time arguing for an inclusive political process. Tensions between the traditionalist and modernist wings have been a feature of the post-war period, but have been reconciled through a balancing act played by Nuri, the IRP's first leader. His death in 2006, however, brought these tensions into open. In the time since the war a number of prominent party members left the IRP, including Turanjonzoda, Nuri's number two during the war. In September 1999 he appealed to the party to support the candidacy of Imomali Rahmon at the presidential elections. When the party refused to do so, he resigned. Likewise, Davlat Usmon and Karim Rahimov (known as Mulloh Abdurahim) left the party and for a while held a prominent positions in the government.

On a provincial level the Islamic orientation of seemingly irreconcilable field commanders subsided substantially, even in Karategin Valley. Following the peace agreement the former *mujaheddin* became directors of state farms and heads of enterprises, or obtained appointments in the local authority. These new roles deprived them of the advantages of being in opposition, made them share the burden of everyday management with the secular authorities and forced them to act within the secular law. In this context their ideological positions and behaviour changed radically.<sup>144</sup>

It appears that the Islamic movement was unable to sustain a mass following when the civil war was over. For example, Mirzo Zioyev, a UTO commander (his family originated from Tavildara, but Zioyev himself came from a resettlers' stock in Vakhsh) transformed himself into an Islamist warrior and cultivated a strict Wahhabi rule in the Tavildara district, enforcing Islamic order by force of arms if necessary. The terrified population obeyed. Alcohol, cigarettes, music, civic marriages and secular dress was prohibited. As soon as Zioyev was gone and became a minister in the new government, the local people returned to their normal practices. Across the former opposition areas, as the power of Islamist commanders withered away after the civil war, the population returned to the 'degree' of Islamism it had practiced before; i.e. socially conservative, but not extreme. Islamism did not

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<sup>142</sup> Roy, p. 157.

<sup>143</sup> Olimova, Saodat, 'Political Islam', p. 133.

<sup>144</sup> Olimovy, Saodat and Muzaffar, Muslim leaders, p. 18.

penetrate deep into society and many of its customs and prohibitions perished with the horrors of the civil war.

This may draw parallels with Afghanistan, where local commanders entered tactical alliances with the Taliban and vowed to embrace its agenda, but would easily abandon it when the Taliban had left the scene. Within society at large, seventy years of Soviet rule had undermined the standing of the clergy as an independent social group. Its ability to play a collective role without reference to an overall political framework provided by the state was negligible. Thus, the weakness of the clergy in Tajikistan, as compared to Afghanistan, played a stabilising role in a short term, although it may prove a liability in future if a situation arises in which radical Islamist movements challenge traditional spiritual authority.

### *Security*

The stance of the military and guerrilla groups towards peace continued to be a liability even after the General Agreement was signed. In 1997 the radical elements of the UTO, who did not recognise the Agreement, established an *Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan* (IMU)<sup>145</sup> – a militant organisation determined to pursue a holy war against the secular regime of President Karimov in Uzbekistan. The IMU maintained ties with the Taliban in Afghanistan and continued with raids from their bases in the mountainous Tavildara area. In 1999 IMU militants crossed into neighbouring Kyrgyzstan, taking Japanese hostages, and engaged with the Kyrgyz troops before attacking Uzbekistan, their ultimate target. In 2000 the IMU was persuaded to leave and was transported to Afghanistan with the help of the Russian military. It suffered a severe blow as a result of the US-led intervention in Afghanistan, where it fought alongside the Taliban against the Coalition troops. The IMU was last heard of in April 2007 in Waziristan, where it was being chased out by local Pashtun tribes.

In addition to the activities of die-hard Islamists, the criminality that flourished as a result of the war was a major issue. Racketeering, armed raids and robberies, kidnappings, drug trafficking and gun running did not go away easily after the Agreement was signed, and presented serious obstacles to peace in the initial post-settlement phase.<sup>146</sup> A number of second and third-tier commanders bent on criminality refused to disband and continued to terrorise the population. The government only achieved full control of the whole territory at the end of 2001 when the last major bandit group, that of Rahmon Sanginov (*aka* Rahmon Hitler), was eliminated. After ten years of instability, the security of ordinary citizens has been restored and maintained ever since.

Following the General Agreement, the process of disarmament and the reintegration of ex-combatants into the regular armed forces or into civilian pursuits followed. This demobilisation and reintegration was implemented by UNMOT (which since 2001 has been renamed the UN Tajikistan Office for Peacebuilding, UNTOP) and UNDP. Subsequently, some of the militias have been incorporated into the Tajik regular armed forces, which were trained and equipped by Russian troops.

In 1996 UNDP Tajikistan developed the ‘Rehabilitation, Reconstruction and Development Programme’ (RRDP) to support stabilisation of the areas damaged by the war. When the ex-combatants were formally integrated into the national army and law-enforcement agencies, in

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<sup>145</sup> On IMU see Vitaly Naumkin, *Between Pen and Rifle: Radical Islam in Central Asia*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers: 2005, pp. 37 – 126.

<sup>146</sup> Muzafar Olimov and round table members, *Межтаджикский Конфликт?* P. 60 – 61.

reality little had changed in their lives since they returned to their villages with no money and no jobs. UNTOP and UNDP, funded by the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the Norwegian government (and later also by a grant from the European Commission) designed and implemented the re-integration programme. Special Reintegration Committees (SRCs) were set up, incorporating representatives of local authorities, field commanders, the communities themselves and UNDP. The SRCs identified community needs and designed projects on the condition that they would employ ex-combatants as much as possible. By early 2000 over 1,100 were actively involved in labour-intensive rehabilitation projects. On average each project employed 18 ex-combatants. Between 2000 and 2002 127 projects were implemented, employing a total of 4,141 people in irrigation, health and sanitation, energy, agriculture, rehabilitation of schools and the building of roads and bridges.<sup>147</sup>

## **5. The Consolidated State (2001-present)**

In common with a number of other ‘transitional countries’, Tajikistan is neither a dictatorship nor heading toward democracy. To use Thomas Carothers’ terminology, it has entered a political gray zone; it developed some of the attributes of democratic political life, including a limited space for opposition parties and civil society as well as a quasi-democratic constitution. Yet it suffers from serious democratic deficits, such as poor representation of citizens’ interests, frequent abuse of law by state officials and elections of uncertain legitimacy.<sup>148</sup>

Arguably, the regime enjoyed a fair degree of legitimacy, at least until the 2008 financial crisis. This legitimacy derived from three pillars: the Soviet legacy (the idea that the Soviet Union was a good thing and when the regime acts in a Soviet-like manner, this therefore has to be good), the experience of civil war (the present is better than the recent past) and comparison with neighbouring Afghanistan (where the state barely functions and political life is a free-for-all). Legitimacy is also provided by economic output (there has been modest prosperity and the overwhelming majority of society has a stake in stability, which the regime personifies) and by reverence to status and tradition. Moreover, President Rahmon is still ultimately regarded as a peacemaker.

## **Politics**

### *Political Regime*

Since 2001 the state has reinstated itself and has been expanding its power, leaning towards full-scale authoritarianism. The provision of security remains the regime’s trump card, upon which much of its legitimacy rests. War fatigue and the desire for peace at almost any cost, reinforced by the Soviet institutional legacy, combine to make the population accept presidential rule however unrepresentative and unjust it may be. The fact that an important source of the legitimacy of the central authority depends on widespread passive acceptance, or on convergent expectations, is indicative of its fragile nature.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> See ‘*Reintegration of ex-combatants in Tajikistan*,’ UNDP Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Development Programme, Internet Forum on Conflict Prevention, 2004. Available at <http://ochaonline.un.org/DocView.asp?DocID=2379>

<sup>148</sup> Thomas Carothers, ‘The End of the Transition Paradigm’, *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 13, no. 1, January 2002, pp. 5 – 21, p. 9.

<sup>149</sup> Arrow, K.J. *The Limits of Organization*, New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1974.

In terms of the formal constitutional arrangements, the 1994 constitution and 1999 amendments give great power to the presidency, making the president head of state, head of government, guarantor of the constitution, supreme commander and head of the Security Council. He also controls the judiciary by virtue of his right to propose the judges of the Constitutional Court, the Supreme Economic Court and the Supreme Court, as well as the procurator-general and the military prosecutor.

In June 2003 a constitutional referendum allowed the president to be elected for another two 7-year terms, meaning that Rahmon can rule legally until 2020. He won the November 2006 presidential elections without challenge. The most lucrative governmental positions are dominated by the representatives of Dangara, while the northerners retain largely technical posts of no political influence. This process of power-grabbing by the presidential group has unfolded in the context of widespread popular passivity, as peace dividends outweigh a desire for pursuing demands that may risk violence.<sup>150</sup> War fatigue acts as a powerful brake on the expression of protest, however legitimate grievances might be.

The IRP used to be the second party in terms of representation, but they have lost seats in every election, as well as losing ministerial appointments in every government reshuffle. Consequently, the Communist Party became the second party in the parliament (13 per cent of votes), although the IRP claimed that it gained more votes in the 2005 elections than it was credited with. The December 2006 reshuffle saw the last of the former opposition figures leave the cabinet. In 2000 popular attitudes towards the participation of religious leaders in the affairs of the state was mixed: 27 per cent supported the idea, while 53 per cent rejected it. These proportions differed across the country: supporters of religious participation included 30 per cent of the population in Dushanbe, 22.4 per cent in Karategin Valley, 19 per cent in Soughd province, 11.4 per cent in Badakhshan and 8.8 per cent in Khatlon province.<sup>151</sup>

Developments during the time of stable peace show a decline in the role of political parties. Since 2001 a popular passivity towards political parties has started to develop: in 1999 only 9 per cent of respondents felt that parties were not needed at all, but by 2003 this figure had risen to 19 per cent. A growing constituency of party rejectionists who do not believe in the validity of political competition reflects the fact that social apathy and alienation tend to develop as authoritarian tendencies take hold. At the same time, 18 per cent of the adult population supports the existence of religious parties, while over a half are against it.<sup>152</sup>

Presently, the state in Tajikistan is less representative of regional and ethnic groups and interests than it was when the civil war broke out. Rule is largely based on the family, incorporating relatives and personal associates of the President whose loyalty he can trust. The ruling group arbitrates between different interests and groupings in society, ensuring that nobody becomes too powerful. It appears that the President only appoints those who he believes are not going to undermine him and whose corrupt interests he can control. At the same time, the state in Tajikistan represents the peace and stability that allowed society to move forward. As recent upheavals are still fresh in people's memory, the post-war period feels like a remarkable improvement.

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<sup>150</sup> The Swisspeace FAST early warning system graphs record a consistently high level of Country Stability – available at <http://www.swisspeace.org/uploads/FAST/updates>

<sup>151</sup> Olimovy, Saodat and Muzaffar, *Мусульманские Лидеры: социальная роль и авторитет* (Muslim Leaders: Social Role and (Degree of) Respect), Sharq Centre and Friedrich Ebert Foundation Roundtable, Dushanbe, 2003, p. 17.

<sup>152</sup> Muslim Leaders, p. 20.

### *Leadership and the Ruling Elite*

The presidential leadership played an important role in both the peace process and state consolidation. When Rahmon took office, he was widely regarded as a temporary figure; one of the simple country folk with no education or managerial experience to boast of. But right from the beginning of the conflict the president demonstrated good political instincts and personal courage. For example, he took up the challenge of heading the republic in 1992 after a number of more prominent politicians refused to do so. He arrived in Dushanbe soon after the Popular Front victory in December 1992, while most of the government figures stayed in Khujand because it was too dangerous to venture into the capital. He also survived a number of close assassination attempts. Furthermore, after 1995 Rahmon went to Afghanistan three times to meet with President Rabbani and the UTO leader Sayed Abdullo Nuri. In Akiner's assessment, able and decisive leadership on both sides has given sufficient authority to allow them to take difficult decisions yet retain the confidence of most of their followers.<sup>153</sup>

The President mastered the art of politics, surprising his rivals and opponents and demonstrating a good capacity to learn. While military and security matters were the prerogative of a closely-knit group of Kulyabi war heroes, civilian affairs were different. Mindful of his deficient skills in terms of how to operate the government and run the economy, the president took advice from a number of retired top officials of Soviet Tajikistan who were of Kulyabi origin – notably Sulton Mirsoshoev and Izatullo Hayoyev, the former First Secretary of the Community Party of Kulyab province and Head of the Cabinet of Ministers respectively. Hayoyev<sup>154</sup> became head of the presidential administration and even lived next door to the President, providing informal advice 'on the spot'. Thus, continuity with the Soviet governing institutions was preserved. The power of former Soviet politicians over the President's decisions in civilian matters has continued into the 2000s, although gradually he has started to rely on other affiliates instead, often from his extended family.

The President performs the function of a supreme arbiter between regional elites when their interests clash. He also acts to ensure that no contender can emerge within the recognisable political spectrum to present a challenge in the future. Rahmon enjoyed some genuine popularity during the early stabilisation period, when he was seen as responsible for bringing peace to the country. At present, popular passivity and a lack of alternatives continue to work in his favour; however, these commodities may not withstand a serious shock.

To conclude, the leadership in Tajikistan combined both predatory and developmental aims. In circumstances where the state controls – either directly or by proxy – all important productive assets, the leadership has a rational interest in ensuring that the developmental agenda is not entirely neglected, otherwise it would undermine both its sources of revenue and the legitimacy of the ruling group. This contradicts the view of 'rentier state' theories, which assume that leaders generally have predatory as opposed to developmental aims.<sup>155</sup> The state that emerged in Tajikistan is neo-patrimonial, with the high degree of reliance on patronage and political corruption that is characteristic of all developing countries undergoing processes of primitive accumulation.<sup>156</sup> Informal patron-client networks are a central feature

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<sup>153</sup> For a review of the biographies of Rahmon and Nuri see Akiner, *Tajikistan*, pp.51-53.

<sup>154</sup> At the end of 1992 Hayoyev was appointed as a governor of the newly-established Khatlon province.

<sup>155</sup> Jonathan DiJohn, 'Conceptualising the Causes and Consequences of Failed States: a Critical Review of the Literature', Background paper for the Crisis States Research Centre, London: LSE, March 2007, p. 25.

<sup>156</sup> Khan, M.H. Governance, 'Economic Growth and Development since the 1960's,' background paper for World Economic and Social Survey 2006 and Hutchcroft, P.D., "The Politics of Privilege: Assessing the Impact

of governing, and often act as a substitute for the retreating welfare state inherited from the Soviet era.

### *The Place of Minorities in the new 'system'*

There is no consensus about the nature of inter-ethnic relations after the civil war. Akiner argues that 'there was some improvement in inter-ethnic relations. It is possible this was owing to the exodus of so many non-Tajiks, which had resulted in Tajikistan become a more ethnically homogeneous state than at the time of independence'.<sup>157</sup> However, sociological polls show a less optimistic picture in that minorities readily expect to be treated as second-class citizens and be demoted in their professional appointments in order to make way for representatives of the titular group.<sup>158</sup> Indeed 78.7 per cent of respondents among ethnic minorities stated that they believe minorities to have unequal access to power and state management, while most of the Tajik respondents felt that all groups in the society have equal access.<sup>159</sup>

After massive Slav emigration, the relationship between the Tajik majority and the remaining Russian-speakers became harmonious. When the primacy of the Tajik language was secured, the Russian language nevertheless retained a prominent place in urban life: in 2002 61.8 per cent of residents of Dushanbe and 37.4 per cent of residents of Khujand stated that it was easier for them to read official information in Russian than in Tajik.<sup>160</sup> The Uzbek minority, on the other hand, became the net losers in relation to the post-war settlement. Given their significant contribution to the military victory, the Uzbeks expected to benefit more and to achieve access to the economic bloc (their traditional strength) in the new administration. Instead, they were granted next to nothing. Gradually, ethnic Uzbeks have been moved away from positions of political power and influence and in fact from government at all levels (those determined to remain have had to "Tajikisize" their names). Few concessions are made to the Uzbek language in public,<sup>161</sup> the names of Uzbek districts are being rejected in favour of Tajik names and space for the existence of the Uzbek culture is often restricted, since 'Tajikistan is a country of Aryans'<sup>162</sup> where Turkic Uzbeks are newcomers who appeared after the waves of Mongol-Tatar invasions. As relations with Uzbekistan have deteriorated, the loyalty of the Uzbek minority on the border of their kin state has become increasingly suspect. At present, the denial of access to power and resources for the Uzbek community is becoming a potential cause for a future conflict.<sup>163</sup>

### ***Political Economy***

Strong presidential authority created the initial conditions for growth. According to Akiner, since 2000 there has been progress in structural reform. Developments include land reform and the disbandment of state farms (*kolkhozs*), the privatisation of state-owned enterprises, restructuring of the energy sector, and reform of the banking system. The implementation of

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of Terms, Corruption and Clientelism on Third World Development", *Political Studies* (1997), 45, no.3, 639-658.

<sup>157</sup> Akiner, IPA.

<sup>158</sup> Borzikova,., p. 35.

<sup>159</sup> Borzikova, p. 57.

<sup>160</sup> Idiev, Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>161</sup> Uzbek schools have survived in the Uzbek-populated rural areas as a legacy of the Soviet system, - author's experience in Tajikistan during her time as a UNDP Regional Adviser for Peace and Development.

<sup>162</sup> 'Tajikistan's 'Year Of Aryan Civilization' And The Competition Of Ideologies', Pulat Shozimov, Central Asia - Caucasus Analyst October 05, 2005

<sup>163</sup> Author's field research for 'Tajikistan: Peace Secured, but is this the State of our Dreams?'

these programmes has not been perfect; but progress has been made, albeit haltingly at times. The economy has also continued to grow, albeit from a very low base: in 2004, gross domestic product (GDP) grew by 10.6 per cent in real terms. At the same time, the industrial potential which was developed during the Soviet era largely collapsed, apart from the Tajik Aluminium Plant (TADAZ) which continued to function amongst much controversy.

Since the country was emerging from both state socialism and civil war, there were no independent businesses apart from petty retail and services. Economic assets and lucrative niches that did exist were largely associated with employment in state positions. In order to get rich quick, one had to either resort to overt criminality – such as drug smuggling, kidnappings and robberies – or obtain good jobs in the state system. As the government eventually managed to topple violent crime and was in charge of appointments, it could oversee the emergence of wealth and prevent independent businessmen from becoming too powerful. This central role of the state in processes of primitive accumulation means that there are large distributional consequences of state patronage and subsidisation patterns. Moreover, as the asset-creation process is a very new one, violent intra-elite struggles over control of lucrative assets were characteristic of the early stabilisation period. However, by 2005 the presidential family had established monopolistic control over all major productive assets.

The mainstays of the Tajik economy are cotton, aluminium and mining; all areas that require significant investment, the sources for which could not be found inside the country. Foreign investors proved hard to attract, as Tajikistan was tarnished by the image of civil war. The distribution of poverty was uneven and marked by regional and seasonal variations,<sup>164</sup> but was particularly acute in the cotton producing areas, where reform was slow and farmers had high levels of debt. Apart from in agriculture, there are few jobs available for the growing population. Moreover with closed borders and low wholesale prices farming remains at a subsistence level.

The country largely survives due to the export of its labour force and remittances from migrants. According to polls, 95 per cent of young men are willing to become labour migrants<sup>165</sup> as they see few opportunities at home. High reliance on remittances from abroad leads to the creation of an economy that is heavily dependent on imports. The population has acquired cash, which the government cannot tax, and its consumption capabilities grow. It became cheaper and easier to buy imported goods than struggle to develop domestic production; hence labour migration and subsistence agriculture have become the predominant occupations for the majority of the population.

Employment opportunities in Russia, the main safety valve for Tajikistan, have also contributed to social stability. The massive migration of young men from regions traditionally supportive of the IRP has undermined the social basis for recruitment to the party,<sup>166</sup> as the most active constituency tends to go abroad. However, while emigration in this sense has contributed to stability, the emigration of professional and managerial – mainly urban – elites during the years of instability was an adverse factor. This created problems of human resources and has weakened the capacity of the state bureaucracy to function effectively. At present, the capabilities of the state are severely undermined not so much by the legacy of the

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<sup>164</sup> *UNDP 2000*, pp. 86-90.

<sup>165</sup> Idiev, p. 132.

<sup>166</sup> Olimovy, *Muslim Leaders*, p. 24.

civil war as by the brain drain of the younger educated elites and by the labour migration of the most active and entrepreneurial segments of the population.

The political economy of Tajikistan is relatively straightforward. The two main sources of income are remittances from labour migrants (about 1 million Tajiks are in Russia every year) and the drug trade. Both are not taxable by the state. The cotton industry is the major occupation of the remaining rural population and cotton is the main cash crop. Land reform has taken place, with the abolishment of *kolkhozy* and the establishment of the rural cooperatives that were set up to replace them. In reality they inherited all the drawbacks of the Soviet *kolkhoz* system without its benefits, such as the guaranteed and free supply of machinery, equipment and fuel. The state orders how much cotton farmers should grow on 'their' land, and the state still controls purchase prices for cotton.

Land distribution is a source of grievance, since land has been distributed unfairly and those with the right connections and money got better deals. Land is considered state property but is distributed among those who work upon it. There are different categories of land, such as household plots (which are usually tiny), 'presidential' land which serves as a reserve for land distribution, and *dehqon* (private) farms of varying sizes. Citizens living in rural areas are in theory entitled to long-term, inheritable leases, but many people are confused and believe that *kolkhoz* and *sovkhos* – both of which are formally abolished – still exist. If the land is not cultivated, the state reserves the right to repossess it. Independent *dehqon* farms hold about 10 per cent of all agricultural land. The cultivation of cotton has important consequences, as it leads to the power of 'futures companies' (private investors) over the cotton farmers and to considerable corruption. As farmers tend to have no start-up capital and no collateral to get loans, 'futures' provide the necessary inputs (such as petrol and fertilizers) at inflated prices against the price of 'future' harvested cotton. Often farmers are unable to pay these companies back and thus enter the debt cycle; some even end up in *de facto* serfdom as a result. In some cases distributed land came with a debt already attached to it, which farmers had to repay out of their future income. In some instances farmers were not aware of this debt, or its precise scale.

There are very few medium-scale independent businesses in the country, little local manufacturing and underdeveloped services. In theory, start-up capital for business development should be available locally due to remittances from labour migrants. In reality, however, money is mainly spent on consumption and ceremonies, and is seldom invested in revenue generating activities due to a lack of incentives. The reasons for this mostly relate to the absence of a regulatory framework, the abundance of red tape and unclear rules of the game. Often arbitrary actions on the part of the authorities contribute to the climate of uncertainty and insecurity and prevent businesspeople from taking risks they consider unacceptable.

Thus, the new bourgeoisie consists of those with connections to the state who monopolise the lucrative niches controlled by the ruling family, or by drug barons. At times these two categories overlap.

### ***Social Issues***

Society has shown a substantial capacity for peace. This is rooted in the recent experience of a functioning state, to which citizens had been accustomed and to which they sought to return. There was a belief that it was the state that should enable the process of normalisation and



regeneration to happen. Despite the civil war, ordinary people had not forgotten the things that they associated with ‘normalcy’, such as a functioning local authority, police, schools and hospitals, which they expected to return with the end of the conflict. On the whole, tolerance towards returning refugees was quite remarkable given the ferocity of the conflict. Score-settling and revenge killings did take place in the aftermath of the war, but many of those who feared reprisals fled to Russia.

One of the greatest achievements of the Soviet era was free and accessible education. This has changed dramatically in the independence period. In theory, nine years of education are compulsory. However, the education system has been in chronic decline, particularly in rural areas. School premises are often in a state of semi-ruin and lack adequate provision of teachers, schoolbooks and basic equipment. Free-fall is mitigated only by international aid targeted at the rehabilitation of school infrastructure. Although education is nominally free, parents are increasingly expected to pay teachers’ wages and to cover the costs of books and maintenance. Corruption is rife, as bribes are usually required to ensure satisfactory examination results. A UNICEF study in 2001 indicated that there was a 14 per cent drop-out rate.

Despite this, the belief in the value of education is not entirely lost in society and most parents are largely convinced that their children should go to school.<sup>167</sup> At the same time, appalling physical conditions in many rural schools and the poor quality of education makes it hard for parents to insist on continuous school attendance when conditions are so unattractive.

### *Security*

Despite the fact that the security sector looms large in the life of Tajik citizens and in the political system as a whole, individual agencies and their leaderships do not carry significant political weight. In other words, civilian control over the military and other power agencies is firmly entrenched. This in itself is an important achievement of the post-war period. Gradually, a number of key leaders from the (former) pro-government and opposition sides who had prominent appointments in the security sector have been either detained or forced out of the country. In 2004 the arrest of Gaffur Mirzoyev, a former chief of the Presidential Guard,<sup>168</sup> and the extradition of former Interior Minister Yaqub Salimov, both close Presidential allies in the past, confirmed that no-one is untouchable. The President and his immediate entourage are keen to ensure that none of his security ministers are too powerful, and that none are capable of playing an independent role should there be any further upheavals. For the leadership, the crucial issue is the security of the regime, and most of its efforts are directed at fulfilling this objective.

Since the regime is mostly interested in dealing with internal stability and bolstering its own position, unsurprisingly the Ministry of Interior is the largest and most powerful body. It numbers up to 30,000 servicemen<sup>169</sup> broadly organised according to the old Soviet structure. It has two militarised units designed for combat action, which can be used both internally and externally: OMON (a special police task force) and the rapid reaction regiment of general Sukhrob Kasymov, one of the last remaining Popular Front field commanders. Kasymov’s unit is based in Varzob, about 40km from the capital.

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<sup>167</sup> Author’s interviews with villagers in several poor outlying regions of Tajikistan during her work for UNDP, 2004.

<sup>168</sup> For profile of Mirzoev see ‘Tajikistan: Fall of Praetorian Guardsman’, IWPR, RCA, no. 306, 10 August 2004.

<sup>169</sup> Figures courtesy of UNTOP.

On balance, police capacity to deal with crime is rather remarkable: crime statistics have been consistently going down and violent crime has reduced considerably.<sup>170</sup> In contrast to the recent post-war period, fresh in the memory of many citizens, Tajikistan has become a safe place to live once again. However, the way security is provided is itself increasingly becoming a conflict-generating factor. Because the police force – as with other ministries – is desperately underfunded, it has to turn to any source of income available. Since the police works directly with the population, its ability, unlike the Ministry of Defence's, to levy various 'taxes' on individuals and on businesses is considerable, especially since it possesses the means of extortion.

The wider regional neighbourhood continues to present its own challenges. Tajikistan's relationship with Uzbekistan remains a sore point. In 1999 Uzbekistan closed and mined its borders with Tajikistan in areas that it found particularly hard to control, introduced a visa regime for Tajik citizens, accused Dushanbe of harbouring Islamic militants and severely disadvantaged the struggling Tajik economy on energy prices and transit tariffs. Afghanistan poses the most significant security problem in the region because of its instability and drug production; a sharp increase in drug cultivation in Afghanistan led to rampant trafficking through Tajikistan to the European markets. Some of the former field commanders in the Tajik civil war manage to capitalise on this trade.

### ***International Aid***

Despite grave security challenges, economic and humanitarian assistance by the international community started to be provided in 1993. The aid consisted of both food and non-food components. Tajikistan's first UN Consolidated Interagency Appeal (CAP) was prepared for 1994, and some \$225 million has been mobilised through this mechanism. The international financial institutions started to fund development even before the General Agreement was signed. For instance, since 1996 the World Bank Group has approved 17 projects for a total of US\$302.1million.<sup>171</sup> In addition, US\$1.4 million has been made available to Tajikistan for institution-building and post-conflict assistance on a grant basis. After 2001 the donor attention to Tajikistan greatly increased, following the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks on America and the US-led intervention in Afghanistan.

The international community started to deliver services to the population in many parts of the country via donor-funded community-based organisations (CBOs). Such CBOs come in many forms and on different levels: *mahalla*, village or *jamoat* (municipality), depending on how a particular development agency interprets the meaning of 'community'. Such CBOs have been established across the country but with a heavy concentration in the Karategin Valley, a former opposition stronghold, where the international presence is especially strongly felt. Some of these activities have been implemented under a 'conflict prevention' theme: for example, the Community Action Investment Program (CAIP) and Peaceful Communities' Initiative of USAID have been financing a programme in conflict mitigation at the community level. According to USAID, it 'has long been addressing sources of conflict through its ongoing sectoral programs that help to equalize access to health care, water and

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<sup>170</sup> Minister of Interior Khumdin Sharipov reported that over 130 criminal gangs and bandit groups have been suppressed, - Asia-Plus, 22 October 2004.

<sup>171</sup> These are concessional credits: 40 years repayment period, 10 year grace period and zero interest rate (with service fee of 0.75%).

energy resources, and economic opportunity; as well as to open healthy avenues for political grievances.<sup>172</sup>

Since a disparity in resource distribution between different regions of the country was one of the causes for the civil war, the donor community has targeted the areas neglected by the government to rectify the imbalances and prevent acute exclusion. The World Bank Country Assistance Strategy (CAS) for Tajikistan indicates that the inequitable distribution of resources regionally is a major issue, resulting from the need to accommodate the demands of disparate groups. The CAS has identified weak institutions and governance as a particular problem, especially at the level of local governments where officials exploit the rent-seeking opportunities that their status brings. It finds that the municipal government's capacity is limited at best, that the lack of its own budget presents an enormous hindrance and that its functions are restricted by the legal framework in place.<sup>173</sup>

The international community has added yet another layer of rules and opportunities on the top of the existing system, contributing to *institutional multiplicity*. It became the predominant employment option for the previously privileged groups, such as northerners and Pamiris, who are currently excluded from power. This, to an extent, keeps the elites content despite their inability to get into positions of real political power. Educated people from privileged backgrounds can get jobs within the international system fairly easily and can earn a good living legally, unlike underpaid civil servants who have to rely on corruption to sustain their families.

The international community has become increasingly aware of the fact that foreign aid can easily become a substitute for action by the state. As a consequence, donors have warned the government repeatedly that it needs to make more of an effort. Mathew Kahane, the then UN Resident Coordinator in Tajikistan, said in May 2003 that the disbursement of \$900 million of donor pledges would depend on whether the government showed it could fight corruption. So far, only a small proportion of this money has been received. Peter Winglee, the head of the IMF monitoring mission, has stated that the government needs to spend foreign aid more effectively and improve the low rate of implementation of projects if it wants to derive maximum benefit from financial assistance.<sup>174</sup>

## Conclusion

To sum up, the reasons for the civil war amount to a weakness of state authority, rivalry between regional (sub-national) identities and competition between secular and religious ideologies. The rapid collapse of the Soviet system and the sudden establishment of independence and instability in Afghanistan created further conditions for a crisis.

When the conflict unfolded, Tajikistan was not yet a state in any meaningful sense of the word, but rather one of the pieces that fell out of the Soviet collapse. A nation-state was established in the course of the war and became its by-product. However, the continuity and persistence of Soviet traditions was remarkable. This continuity worked both from the top down and bottom up: the state expected to rule in a certain fashion, and the population broadly accepted this familiar pattern of governance. The 'state-building approach' that one

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<sup>172</sup> [http://www.usaid.gov/locations/europe\\_eurasia/car/caip\\_pci.html](http://www.usaid.gov/locations/europe_eurasia/car/caip_pci.html)

<sup>173</sup> UNDP/World Bank, *Summary of the Community-Linked Development Workshop*, Tajikistan, Varzob, 21-22 May 2004, available at [www.undp.tj.org](http://www.undp.tj.org)

<sup>174</sup> Oxford Analytica Daily Brief, May 17, 2004.

can observe in Tajikistan since the war, rests upon three pillars: firstly, basic security has been provided; secondly, public institutions function, albeit imperfectly and with local mechanisms for the distribution of power; thirdly, the population is exhausted by the war and has a stake in the establishment of a recognisable order. Habits and expectations from the time of peace that were not entirely forgotten – the war did not last long enough for that – underpin this approach.

The state that emerged out of the remnants of the civil war is neither democratic nor inclusive, but as a development engine it somehow works. With every passing year the disruption of stability seems less and less likely. The civil war has become a taboo subject rarely mentioned in public – indeed it is only mentioned when individuals are detained for crimes committed during the years of conflict, – and it is hardly mentioned in the school curriculum. The official line is ‘forgive and forget’. In the absence of independent public debate it is hard to determine whether this approach works.

In the meantime, new challenges to stability and security are mounting. The lesson the Tajik leadership has learnt is that the public expression of grievances is the quickest road to instability and chaos, and therefore it should not be permitted. A vertically-organised system of governance, relying on a strong executive and formidable security sector, is, on the contrary, a recipe for success. However, this is easier said than done, in some measure because the state is poor and has few sources of income under its direct control that would allow it to maintain the loyalty of its agents. Nevertheless, it is an aspirational goal that the regime is trying its best to move towards.

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