

# TAJIKISTAN

Islam, **MIGRATION**,  
and ECONOMIC  
**Changes**

Marlene  
**Laruelle**  
editor

Central Asia Program  
Institute for European, Russian  
and Eurasian Studies  
Elliott School of International Affairs  
The George Washington University



CENTRAL ASIA  
PROGRAM

**TAJIKISTAN:  
ISLAM, MIGRATION,  
AND ECONOMIC CHALLENGES**

**Marlene Laruelle, editor**

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This special edition is part of a series dedicated to the 5th anniversary of the Central Asia Program.

In the past few years, Tajikistan's domestic situation has been shaped by the shrinking place given to the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRPT). The Tajik authorities used the Islamic State threat to liquidate the IRPT, the last structured opposition force, and eventually banned it in late 2015. State-sponsored narratives have been making massive—excessive—use of “Islam” as a tool to better control society (through women's dress code, for example); to denounce regional warlords and opponents; and to instrumentalize regional powers such as Iran. However, societal evolutions are much more complex than the black and white state narrative would have us believe, with migrations and youth bulge at the core of social transformations, not to mention difficulties in making the Tajik economy—from energy use to agriculture—and public finance viable.

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# PART I. THE ISLAMIC RENAISSANCE PARTY

## Interview with Muhiddin Kabiri,<sup>1</sup> Leader of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan In-Exile

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Interview by Parvina Khamidova (2016)

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*“I do not regret that we have chosen the path of tolerance and restraint”*

**Can you comment on the scandal that happened at the International Conference in Iran?<sup>2</sup> Do you think the inviting party was trying to facilitate a dialogue between you and the official representatives of the clergy of Tajikistan, or did they simply underestimate the situation?**

I myself do not understand all this hysteria about my participation in this conference. Why wasn't this note addressed to Germany, Austria, Belgium, Switzerland or the United States, where I took part in similar events? More so, as I was involved in the work of the annual conference on a regular basis, I saw that the organizers did not expect things to turn out that way, and they did not fully understand what happened. Most likely, some people [in the government of Tajikistan] were looking to cause a scandal for several reasons. Firstly, given the strained relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran, it was necessary to attract the attention of the Saudis as a potential ally before the president's trip to Riyadh and try to get some money out of them. Second, the authorities wanted to hide away from public attention some issues of the Tajik-Iranian relations, in particular, the hundreds of millions of dollars that Iranian billionaire Zanjani left in Dushanbe, which the authorities of Tajikistan do not wish to talk about. Also, they probably were

trying to divert the attention of Iran, one of the guarantors of the country's Peace Agreement,<sup>3</sup> from the clear violation, by the Tajik authorities, of the latter. By the way, in my speech at the conference and in separate meetings, I criticized Iran and other guarantors of the Peace Agreement for failure to perform their obligations before the Tajik people.

**It was very recently that the IRP, as the de facto second largest party in the country, convened its congresses and was professionally engaged in politics, recruiting young people and successfully competing with the official authorities. Today, the party is ruined and outlawed. What do you think, where was a mistake, of the party as a whole and yours as its leader?**

If we got into a difficult situation, then at some point it was due to a mistake. In the very beginning of the campaign, when the government started to break the Peace Agreement and gradually began oppressing not only us, but the entire opposition, pushing us to the sidelines of the country's social and political life, many experts, including those who are close to the corridors of power, had been telling us that the policy of tolerance and moderation will eventually turn against us. Later, with increasing pressure on the Party, similar assumptions have been expressed even by some of our supporters, who demanded a tougher response from us. They argued that we have been acting as if we were living in a society where the government has a high political culture and acts strictly in accordance with the laws and generally accepted moral and political norms. We were criticized

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1 Muhiddin Kabiri, the leader of the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP), lives in exile since March 2015. In August, the IRP has been closed down by the authorities, and classified as a terrorist organization. All of the members of the party's Political Council have been detained, and Kabiri was accused in organizing an armed rebellion attempt.

2 The Tajik Foreign Ministry, angered by Kabiri's participation at a conference held in Tehran in December 2015, has sent a note to the Iranian Embassy.

3 A document signed on June 27, 1997 that put an end to the civil war in Tajikistan.

for ignoring the fact that the current government has come to power by force and recognizes only force, in its most brutal form.

And it was by force that opposition once prompted the authorities to sit at the negotiating table. Apparently, the authorities did not forget this and all this time were thinking of revenge. Knowing about our preference to dialogue and tolerance, and abusing it amid general apathy of society towards hard and massive protests, the government has acted deceitfully. With full control both over the legislative and executive branches, the authorities could not tolerate a few members of the opposition, both in the government and parliament. This is telling that peace and coexistence with the opponents were forced upon them, and as soon as the authorities got the opportunity to get rid of the imposed peace, they did so.

We cannot say that we were so naive that we did not see this and did not understand what the government's actions led to. But we had hoped that rationality would eventually prevail, and our opponents in power at some stage, realizing the danger of these actions, would stop. Here, apparently, we were wrong. But then there is another question: what would have happened if we had acted in the same way as the authorities? A new civil war? Devastation and new casualties? Even after what has been done to the Peace Agreement and to us, I do not regret that we have chosen the path of tolerance and restraint. I am sure tomorrow our people will recognize that we made the right choice.

**When the pressure on the party began, did you make any attempt to soften the blow, to fight it by legal means?**

The Party as a whole, and I as its leader have done everything we could. A list of all our actions in this direction would take a lot of time and space, as too much has been done. After the Minutes 32-20 appeared,<sup>4</sup> I wrote two letters to the president, first as a deputy of the parliament and a second time at the request of the IRP political council, as the leader of the party. I requested a meeting with him. I believe that the topic I wanted to discuss at the meeting was already known to the other side, as I conveyed my thoughts to other high-ranked officials. Probably, there could be no legitimate and logical

answer to them and such meetings would not fit into a plan. Then, the IRP political council invited GKNB (state security committee), Interior Ministry and Prosecutor's Office, Committee for Youth, Women's Affairs and the Committee on Religious Affairs to engage in joint projects, establish trusted relations and eliminate all contradictions. Unfortunately, all our attempts have failed. During private and mostly casual meetings and conversations, some officials have expressed their regret that our constructivism does not find support and understanding at the top.

**Why do you think that nothing has worked?**

Because the decision was made at the highest level to close down the party at all costs. Of course, our opponents would like it to happen without too much noise, and would even have wanted us to self-liquidate to avoid the charges in violating the peace agreement and avoid having any black spots in history. When they began to take away the party and personal property, we were given a hint that there was a chance to change the situation. Some officials advised us to announce self-liquidation. In exchange, we were promised not only that we would be able to keep our properties, but also additional benefits, including job positions. All our arguments about national interests and law, and ultimately such notions as honor and dignity, were met with the cold response that this is all made up for the public, but a real government policy does not recognize these terms. Some of them, more well-read would refer to Machiavelli, who allowed all methods in politics, including blackmail, bribery, cruelty, and even murder.

**What can you say in response to the serious allegations put forward by the government, and generally to the fact that the Islamic Renaissance Party has been classified as a terrorist organization?**

Unfortunately, in today's world there is no common approach and a common interpretation of the concept of "terrorism," and at times the situation becomes absurd. Any opponent could be considered as a terrorist, especially if the opponent is also a Muslim and wears some Islamic clothes. Recently, at a conference, I suggested that it is necessary at the level of the UN Security Council or the UN General Assembly

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<sup>4</sup> Published in the media in 2012, the minutes of the meeting of the government №32-20 of November 24, 2011, discussed the detailed stages of how to discredit the IRP. The authorities denied the existence of such a document.

to adopt a document defining the concept. So far, with its absence, many, including dictatorial regimes, make use of the situation to delegitimize their opponents as terrorists. In fact, terrorism implies violent actions that are aimed at spreading fear. Now the question arises, who does it in Tajikistan? Is it the IRP, which was claimed to be and is still accused of being excessively tolerant and loyal, or the officials who take hostages, even the elderly and children, and force them to testify against their relatives? In other words, we believe these charges are pointless, and it is good that the international community does not take them seriously.

**Do you take any effort to help your followers and colleagues who have been imprisoned? According to international experts, there are about 200 people who have been detained, or do you have any other information?**

The problem is that there are no certain numbers of detainees. We estimated there are more than 150 people. Some relatives do not report the arrests, thinking that this will complicate the situation even more. They hope that they can somehow resolve the situation informally. By unconfirmed data, more than 200 people were detained and some have already faced charges. Of course, we do everything possible to help them. But, as the experience of Zayd Saidov<sup>5</sup> shows, as well as that of other political prisoners in Tajikistan, political and legal support does not help the fate of the people, leaving only moral and material means of support. But we still do provide all kinds of assistance.

**What kind of action do you expect from international organizations on the situation surrounding the IRP? Do you intend to apply there, if you have not done so already, or what are the results if you have already applied?**

As you know, in the summer we applied to the UN and other international organizations, as well as to guarantors of the Peace Agreement. There was a reaction from the EU, but the strongest response came from international human rights organizations, even though we did not apply to them. Amnesty

International, Freedom House, Human Rights Watch and others condemned the actions of the authorities.

**Why do you think that international organizations and guarantors of the Peace Agreement have been silent?**

We are also surprised by the inaction of the UN and the guarantors. We understand that everyone is busy resolving the ongoing conflicts in Ukraine, Syria and Yemen, but that does not mean that you can forget about old duties. In recent years, there has been a lot of criticism towards the UN and other international organizations that they only intervene after the crisis begins and cannot or do not want to prevent them. Though there are dozens of programs and centers for preventive diplomacy with multimillion-dollar budgets...

**In December, you were planning to come to Washington to participate in a roundtable on the human rights situation in Tajikistan, but could not get a visa. Can you tell us more about this? When did you learn that you would not be able to get a visa? What was the official reason for the refusal?**

Firstly, I was not denied a visa. Because I applied to the US consulate in a country in which I am not a permanent resident, and just a few days before the conference, I was told that the e-mail invitation for the interview from the consulate came just one day before the date of entry into the United States. At that time, I was outside of Germany, and was not able to, even though I wished to, get a visa in one day and arrive for the conference. Therefore, I had to participate online. Yet I am aware of other versions of why I did not go to the United States, or how I “was not let in the US.”

**On December 15, it became known that your family members were detained in Tajikistan and then released. You have linked this episode with the fact that the authorities became aware of your intention to participate in the roundtable on human rights in Washington. Do you still think so, or do you link it with the overall context of efforts to force you come back to Tajikistan?**

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<sup>5</sup> Former Minister of Industry, and a member of opposition who made an attempt to create a Party of economic development and was later convicted for a period of 26 years in prison.

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Actually, it is connected with the conference and several other meetings that are organized by our supporters, among whom were members of our family. It's not for nothing that my father and other relatives of the detainees have asked us not to meet with foreigners, organize pickets near the embassy, or speak at various events abroad. We have not been in contact with our families for a long time, for reasons of safety, and they could not know with whom and where we meet and what we do. Moreover, these are old people who do not follow politics. They said what they have been instructed to say and did so on camera.

**How do you feel after numerous episodes related to the detention, interrogation and tremendous pressure on your family back home? How do you cope with all this?**

We try to remain calm and not give in to emotions, even though it is very difficult sometimes. The other day, my 95-year-old father was detained a second time and was removed from his flight to Istanbul, where he wanted to go for medical treatment and visit grandchildren. I cannot find words to convey

all this. I received some messages that were sent by people who remained at home (our supporters and relatives). These letters are written in simple language, with mistakes, sometimes unintelligible. But they convey everything they thought and felt at the time. This should be read ... And saved for history ... These are not the notes from the siege of Leningrad, or the concentration camps of Auschwitz, but these are notes from the citizens of a legal and democratic state of the 21st century, the relatives of "enemies of the people." We and our party members are deeply inspired by the courage and perseverance of our friends under arrest.

**What are you going to do next?**

We have already held the first meeting of the IRP Political Council abroad and have set goals for the near future. We will keep our peaceful tactics, although it is becoming more difficult to control people's emotions. No wonder, why more and more young protesting people join radical and terrorist organizations. But we are doing everything to prevent the radicalization of our supporters.

# Birth and Death of Democracy in Tajikistan: Memories and Reflections about Elections from 1990 until 2016

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Muhiddin Kabiri<sup>1</sup> (2016)

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## Voting Feasts during the Soviet Period

When we talk about elections in Tajikistan and consider the history of these elections, it is worthwhile to begin with the Soviet period. In the Soviet Union, elections were not considered independent democratic institutions, but rather a tool for consolidating the legitimacy of decisions made by the Communist Party. And therefore as a rule, elections for the Soviet Supreme Council took place only after the candidates had been predetermined by Moscow. Similarly, the candidates elected for the Supreme Council of the Republic of Tajikistan were the candidates nominated by the Central Committee of the Communist Party in Dushanbe, the republic's capital. We never heard of alternative candidates; only one candidate was proposed for each position, so it is interesting that they continued to call them elections, since elections require a choice of at least two candidates. Nevertheless, during the Soviet period we did go to the polls and the whole country voted exclusively for single candidates. I do recall that our candidates for the Supreme Council of the USSR were not from Dushanbe. I remember that the candidate for our area was a Mr. Podgorny, whom no one had ever seen in Dushanbe or anywhere in Tajikistan; he was in Moscow. Nevertheless, people voted for him. I also remember that people went to elections as they might go to a concert: there was music all over town, and pilaf (the traditional rice dish) was served at each site, so elections turned into national holidays. Further, people considered it necessary to vote to fulfill one's Soviet duty. Nobody was interested in the person that was to be elected or his policies.

If people can remember elections during the Soviet period, this is what they remember as being positive: there were never any problems, no violence, and no fraud. The people's perception of elections was shaken by experiences during the early years of independence. We can say that the first free elec-

tions in Tajikistan were the elections of the Supreme Council of Tajikistan in 1990, one of the last years of the Soviet Union. When parliamentary elections were held for the first time in Tajikistan, independent candidates entered the Supreme Council, including the Kozikalon or Mufti of the Republic of Tajikistan, Hoji Akbar Turanjonzoda, and another spiritual leader from the Kulob region, Aidar Sharifzoda, as well as religious people from the Sughd oblast. Also elected to the Supreme Council were democratically minded candidates like the poet Bozor Sobir and Toirat Dzhobor, the founder and then leader of the Rastokhez movement, or Asliddin Sohbnazar, who later became leaders of democratic parties. Consequently, the parliament reflected various alternative points of view. Thus, I would consider the parliament during that time as strong and pluralistic. For ordinary people, processes in the parliament were broadcast on TV, and people were able to watch the deputies discussing various questions, follow the questions that were addressed, and observe the deputies' suggestions. Politics became very interesting to everyone. The parliament from that time is still a popular part of Tajikistan's history—a parliamentary system considered democratic and independent.

I remember as a student that during those elections I was in the pre-election team of the poet Bozor Sobir, because he was born near my settlement and he was my distant relative. He was a famous poet and a freethinker; he had always been against the Soviet system, which is one reason people loved him. Several local officials ran as opponents, some even from the party apparatus, and all of them lost to the democratic candidates. The people had voted for the alternative candidate. However, many others who entered the parliament were officials or party figures, including the current president of Tajikistan, Emomali Rahmon, who was then chairman of a *kolkhoz* (collective farm), with the local prosecutor running as his opponent. Thanks to those democratic elections—the only democratic parliamentary elections that Tajikistan experienced—Rahmon became a deputy of the Supreme Council.

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<sup>1</sup> Leader of the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (Nahzat).

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## The Only Free Elections in Tajikistan

Paradoxically, the first free parliamentary elections in Tajikistan took place in the last years of the Soviet Union, and this was the case in other Soviet republics as well. In Russia, for instance, many democratically-minded people were voted into the Supreme Council of Russia; both Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan had many oppositional deputies elected. The first free presidential elections in Tajikistan did not take place until after independence, in late 1991. In November of that year, when there were several strong candidates for the presidency of Tajikistan, the Communist Party and the Soviet *nomenklatura* backed the former Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in Tajikistan, Rahmon Nabiyev. Nabiyev had once held the top position in the country, but then was dismissed by Moscow for apparent mistakes. He was considered the most suitable figure because he was a native of the Sughd province, in the north, and therefore he had support from that region as well as from the Soviet *nomenklatura*, and they could also get support in the Kulob region in the south, which was part of an alliance with the northern part of the country. During those years we could feel a strong sense of regionalism, one of the remnants of the Soviet period.

The opposition had proposed an independent candidate, Davlat Khudonazarov, the former chairman of the Union of Cinematographers of the USSR. Khudonazarov was from Badakhshan and he was an Ismaili when it came to his *madhhab* (religious affiliation). Despite this, the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan, largely made up of Sunni Tajiks, the Democratic Party (Rastokhez Badakhshon), and all the other democratic forces supported Khudonazarov's candidacy. He won about 40 percent of the vote while the Communist Party's candidate got more than 50 percent of the votes. What is most interesting, however, is that nobody challenged the results, because everybody recognized that there had actually been a democratic and transparent election in Tajikistan. In other words, the people and the political parties participating in the process considered the elections to have been democratic. It also meant that the Tajik people were politicized enough to know the rules of the game.

When I hear of people today being portrayed as insufficiently politically educated, I do not agree, because back then no individual and no party — whether they won or lost — protested or challenged

the results of the elections. What happened, however, is that the victorious party started to realize that the opposition held considerable potential, as it had collected about 40 percent of the votes, and they could not simply ignore this potential. This is why a coalition government was created, which allowed for stronger representation. For a while, active political figures entered the government, such as Davlat Usmon, who held the post of first deputy prime minister. Other ministers were chosen from the Democratic Party and from Rastokhez, although key posts were reserved for the Communist Party and the former Soviet *nomenklatura*.

During this period, people were very tolerant and willing to cooperate. Tajikistan, for the first time since the Soviet period, set an example for constructive communication, with a common language among all political players in the country. Things went differently in other Central Asian countries and in the European part of the former Soviet Union, where heavy confrontations between political parties broke out. By 1992 conditions had become clear in all these republics: the former *nomenklatura* was back in power, this time acting in the name of presidents, as presidents were now the heads of state in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, and even Russia. Boris Yeltsin may have been the most democratic head of state among the above-mentioned new countries, but in most cases the top posts were generally held by former Communist Party members. The Tajik example, at that time considered a democratic island in the former Soviet Union and especially in Central Asia, did not please everyone. I remember that we had good, independent mass media and freedom of the press was rather well developed. In previous elections, our political parties had published their newspapers somewhere in the Baltics or in Georgia, and brought them to Tajikistan by plane. After the presidential elections, however, printing oppositional publications became easier and some opposition parties from other Central Asian republics even wished to publish their newspapers in Tajikistan.

## The Slow Death of a Democracy That Had Barely Started

Those elections, as I said, took place in the autumn of 1991. The following winter, I remember that Kazakh opposition parties and Uzbeks wanted us to print their newspapers. I do not actually remember wheth-

er this came about, but they did approach us to explore the possibilities. Printing companies agreed because the conditions in Tajikistan allowed it. In 1991 I began studies in Yemen and was observing events from far away. Thus, I did not witness how this coalition government performed, and it is difficult for me to judge, but I know one thing: Moscow and Tashkent were not pleased by this government's work, precisely because representatives of various political parties had become part of the government, and hence set a new alternative example for the region. They feared that a similar government could be demanded in Tashkent, in Alma-Ata, and in Russia as well, which would challenge their ruling elites and governments.

However, the coalition government — which was then called the government of national unity — made mistakes and did not manage to resolve the tensions among the regions, especially with regard to Kulob and Sughd (the Leninabad area of that time). Foreign forces used the situation to their advantage when they found allies in Tajikistan from among former criminals such as Sangak Safarov and Fayzali Saidov. Sangak Safarov had spent 23 years in Soviet prisons for robbery and murder. He became the leader of a new movement, a popular front that received support from Moscow and Tashkent. A whole structure was created around him, which subsequently took on the government of national unity and emerged victorious: after only eight months the government of national unity resigned. From Yemen I followed mass media reports and saw that in 1992 a meeting of the Supreme Council took place where the post of the president was abolished. Rahmon Nabiyeu had already stood down, and they appointed the chairman of the Supreme Council of Tajikistan, namely Emomali Rahmon, as head of state. Rahmon had been elected as chairman of the Supreme Council during the same session where the post of president was abolished. Sangak Safarov, who was present at this meeting even though he was not a parliamentary deputy, influenced the decision to have Rahmon appointed as chairman of the Supreme Council.

I believe that all these events occurred under the direction of Moscow and Tashkent, since the international community was not concerned about Tajikistan back then, and nobody knew what was happening there. Everyone deferred to Moscow and Tashkent since they were the strongest states in the region, and both declared that these events had been part of a fight against Islamists. Davlat Usmonov had been prime minister in the government of nation-

al unity, but all other posts were occupied by representatives of the secular political parties, yet one minister had even called the government an Islamic government. The coalition government resigned and the new leaders of the country took over, including Emomali Rahmon, who before arriving from the Sughd region to Dushanbe had visited Tashkent and Termez, and from there entered Dushanbe on Uzbek tanks. In other words, Emomali Rahmon did not arrive in Dushanbe as the democratically elected head of state, but as one installed in Dushanbe forcefully, by tanks.

After this transpired, all events in the country moved toward a civil war. The Tajik opposition dissolved and its members decided to leave Dushanbe once the popular front led by Rahmon had entered. Both Uzbek and Russian tanks were stationed in Dushanbe. Many who had been part of the government of national unity considered it necessary to leave Dushanbe and head for the mountains in Afghanistan. Thus, Rahmon was easily installed in the capital without a fight, but nevertheless on tanks. The population was waiting for the following promise by Rahmon to be fulfilled, which he had given in Khujand during the parliamentary session: "From the first day I will begin to return refugees and will cooperate with all political parties." But as soon as he entered the capital on tanks, the civil war intensified. We can say that the civil war had already started because murders and raids were being carried out against representatives of the opposition. Before Rahmon's arrival in power, many people had been supporters of the government of national unity, but once Rahmon came in, they became supporters of the opposition.

Due to the possibility of murders, robberies, and arrests, political parties and supporters of the opposition understood there was no way to work with this government and they left the country. Already at the beginning of 1993, the opposition parties had begun to consolidate in Afghanistan and in Badakhshan, and started conducting military operations against the authorities. By 1994, about 30-40 percent of Tajikistan was under the control of this opposition.

### **Organizing Post-Soviet Power**

In 1994, the first referendum on adopting the new constitution took place, and the post of president was reintroduced. The new constitution was validated

and Rahmon became president. But we, the opposition, considered this referendum and these elections unconstitutional because both took place on the same day. To summarize, in 1992 the president's post was abolished under the old constitution and we had no president until 1994, during which time the old constitution remained the law. The referendum on a new constitution was held in 1994, and on the same day presidential elections were held for a post that legally did not exist yet. If we follow the law, first a referendum is held, the results of the referendum are published, and the electoral commission announces the results. Then comes the second step: based on the new constitution, new presidential elections are announced. In 1994, however, the presidential elections took place for a post that did not yet exist. This means that the presidential elections in which Rahmon first became president were illegal. The country was still under the old Soviet constitution, albeit with several changes that had been made by the parliament. But the draft of the new constitution said that any changes to the constitution could only be made after a referendum. Furthermore, those elections took place in the middle of a civil war, when a part of the population was out of the country and when the territory under the control of the United Tajik Opposition (UTO) was not included in the referendum. Therefore, not only was the procedure legally wrong, but part of the population was also excluded and hence the results were a distortion.

Here is what actually happened. I once listened to a speech by President Rahmon during a parliamentary session in which he spoke with pathos about how democracy had developed under his leadership. When he claimed that all elections took place democratically, the head of the region, who was sitting near me, said:

Just listen, Muhiddin! How is it possible to lie that way and not to blush? I was head of the region at this election and the head of the campaign headquarters, and when we had sent votes to the Central Election Commission from our area, the chairman of Central Election Commission called me and said, "What have you done? How many votes have you sent us?" I replied: "As many votes as we had, we sent them all to you." And he said: "Listen, you have gone too far here. The region has sent me 120 percent of votes for Rahmon. But there cannot be more than 100 percent. How is this possible?" I said: "Well, sorry, then send them back, how many do you then need?" He said: "Well, for us 95 percent will be enough!" I said: "All right, I'll make it 95

percent." And then I sent 95 percent. He kept asking how I could have given him 120 percent of votes.

So there I was, in parliament, sitting next to a person who was reminiscing about this democratic figment of the imagination.

### **Voting for Peace**

The first elections we witnessed from the perspective of a political party after signing the peace agreement in June 1997 were the presidential elections of November 6, 1999. The Islamic Revival Party (Nahzat) proposed the candidacy of Davlat Usmon, who had been the deputy prime minister of the coalition government and the vice-chairman of our party. Our party decided that he had sufficient experience working with the government. Earlier we had talked about sending another candidate, Hoji Akbar Turanjonzoda, but he refused at the last minute because he decided he did not want to be the opposition's candidate. Moreover, he declared that he would support Rahmon's candidacy. So we put forward as our candidate Davlat Usmon, and he got only 2 percent of the vote. Even if those elections were not democratic by any standard, we know for sure that Rahmon would have won anyway; in 1999 people did not vote for the opposition candidate, they voted for Rahmon. Today I can understand the situation: we had just signed the peace agreement and many people connected peace and stability with Rahmon and his achievement of peace with the opposition. It was not understandable, however, why he did not trust democratic elections.

By 1999 almost all of the exiles had come home. Of course, people were still afraid, but they returned to the country filled with hope. That is why even former supporters of the opposition voted for Rahmon. His name came to be associated with the peace process and stability. (Now that Said Abdullo Nuri, the guarantor of peace from the opposition side, has died, only one candidate remains from among those who signed the peace agreement.) Everyone who witnessed the first elections and the civil war still remembers the campaign slogan: "Let's vote for peace, for stability." At that time the peace agreement and peace process meant a lot to people. Davlat Usmon, by contrast, was not a candidate with much authority in 1999. He had been a field commander; hence, instability and civil war were connected with his name.



He was not a popular person. Although I calculate that he probably got 7-10 percent of the vote, we did not challenge the election result. The most important thing was to implement the peace agreement.

Then, in 2000, Tajikistan held parliamentary elections. By that time the competition was more rigorous, and in contrast to the presidential election with two candidates, the number of candidates competing in the parliamentary elections was much higher. Each constituency put forth 6-7 candidates. These were the first parliamentary elections that both the candidates and the voters really approached with enthusiasm. I was a candidate then — probably the youngest at just 35 years old. Hence, from now on I will tell the story from my own experience.

There were six candidates in the district where I ran. There was the current chairman of the region, who was the candidate of the government, and me from the opposition, as well as four more candidates of various parties or independent candidates. We six started the pre-election campaign with jointly organized meetings. It was very cold that February. To save money, we traveled together by bus or shared cars. The local authorities organized gatherings in mosques and halls. After several joint meetings it was becoming more and more apparent that the citizens' mood was moving toward our side. We won all the public debates and increasingly the other candidates—including the government's candidate—refused to participate in the meetings. Then they pressured the Central Electoral Commission to change the meeting schedule, and separate meetings were held for each candidate. For the candidate favored by the authorities, they organized separate public meetings, invited people, and organized bus transport. At the same time our meetings stopped being organized by the committee and so we had to do it ourselves, but this did not stop people from attending our meetings. Our headquarters were convinced that we were going to win the election. I also personally felt this way when we were in meetings. I had an incredibly active young team, most of them students.

My main opponent was the founder of the website *Tojnews* and the newspaper *Nigoh*, a very talented young man who is an expert on Tajik politics today. Our campaign rivalry created an atmosphere of excitement in the district. But then he was removed by the authorities—he was a member of the People's Democratic Party, which was the party in power in Tajikistan. He ultimately ran as an independent while the authorities put up another candidate, the current

chairman of the region. After the first voting round had taken place, that same night the chairman of the electoral commission and vice-chairman of the area called me and said:

Muhiddin, I congratulate you, you have won in this district, but your victory costs us our positions. All of us have to resign now, unfortunately. You have not thought of us. You have won, but have not thought of us, now 10 people at least will be left without positions. But anyway I congratulate you, you have won. You have 50 and some percent of votes.

We began to celebrate in the headquarters, but in the morning she called again and told me:

Listen, we have recounted the votes, and there are some changes in the results. Most likely there will be a second round. In the first round nobody won. You received 47 percent, and your main opponent, the chairman of the area, 26 percent, and the others 3-5 percent. So you are ahead of the other candidates by many votes, but there will still be a second round. Nobody has gained 50 percent.

I asked her: "Didn't you declare a few hours ago that I won with more than 50 percent? Didn't you?" She replied: "No. We are receiving results from the more distant villages only now. By phone we were told one thing, but here we counted and arrived at another result."

Later I learned the full story, namely that the chief of garrison of the presidential guard had stopped the boxes of ballots en route and had looked through them by order from Dushanbe. He had brought empty ballots and so he was able to rearrange the results, taking votes away from me and forcing the members of the electoral commission to sign new protocols. This is how I lost the majority of the votes.

Apparently, he had subtracted as many votes as necessary to declare a second round. Being young and inexperienced, we accepted the revised results. Out of the four candidates with less than three percent, three supported me, so I thought victory was assured. I had not submitted an appeal or protested. I said: "Well, there will be a second round, and we will win there." But right from the beginning of the second stage of the campaign—that is, two weeks before the second round of voting—they started to exert pressure, to limit me, to frighten people with words like, "If you vote for him, the president will take offense; the president will not support your area. If you vote for him, you vote against the president."

Nevertheless, the people went to vote and they supported me. But when the results of the second round were announced, I was still at 47 percent, while he had won 53 percent, despite all the other candidates having supported me. He was then declared the winner and became a parliamentary deputy.

A similar situation occurred in five or six other regions, and the party in power won everywhere in the second round. In the first round they had not expected such a development as they could not imagine that the majority of the electorate no longer supported the government in power. In the presidential elections the people had voted for the president, and in the parliamentary elections the people voted for specific candidates, not for parties.

### **The Elections of February 2005**

When the country held parliamentary elections on February 27, 2005, the elections were no longer democratic—although the atmosphere at the time was still more democratic than it would be in future elections. Since the opposition still had militarized forces and members of our party were in the government, the ruling People's Democratic Party was restrained from exerting its full pressure on us, as they later would in 2010 and 2015. In 2005 I was a candidate again, and met the same situation as in 2000: the first days of the campaign took place in a very good atmosphere, but by the end of the electoral campaign we knew that the old scenario was repeating itself, this time without a second round. They did not want to risk a second round. Everybody wanted to get the elections over with as quickly as possible.

Despite this development, my supporters from the 2000 elections came back to support me again. I also brought new young people to my side—youths who had turned 18 over the last five years. The population of Tajikistan is young, so young people make up a lot of the voters. Again, I got about 40 percent of the vote and the party in power got more than 50 percent. However, I became a parliamentary deputy this time. I was on the party list as well as being a candidate for a district mandate. Although I did not enter parliament from the mandatory district list, I became a member of parliament through the party list because I took second place and we got two seats. Our party had received about 8 percent of the votes according to the party list.

The majority again voted for individual candidates rather than for the party, but the image of the Nahzat party had improved a bit. The reason was that over the years since signing the peace agreement, our party had been working actively in the regions and we proved that we were not a war party. Rather, we showed that the party was working on issues of education, culture, and tolerance, which is why our support became slightly stronger. But this had no effect on the final results or the overall view of the party. We got two seats in parliament—just as many as we had won in the previous period.

### **Family Voting System**

Traditional voting—family voting or group voting—has always taken place in Tajikistan. Although it is illegal, it is part of how democracy is understood here. Family voting is based on family consensus. The family decides for a candidate and delegates one person to vote for all eligible members. What is most important about this practice is that it should produce a sense that the decision of the family is valid. It is different from a head of family who forces the others to vote for a specific candidate without granting them the right to choose for themselves. For the elections of 2000 and 2005, even if people practiced family voting, it was based on family consensus.

Not all families follow family voting. I would estimate that family voting makes up between 5 percent and 10 percent of overall votes. The vast majority of people make voting decisions independently. This can lead to social tensions; during elections we have experienced an increase in conflicts because, for example, the older generation votes for a different candidate than the younger generation. We have had cases where parents were members of the People's Democratic Party (the ruling party) while their children were members of the Nahzat and there were internal conflicts in the families. I experienced such a case when one member of a government party begged me to exclude his son from my party because his membership caused problems for his job. I then told him that I could recommend his son to leave the party for the sake of his father, but I could not force him to do so. He replied, "He only listens to you. Force him out; advice is useless." Thus I talked to his son and I asked him to write an application. He said that it was his choice. He told me, "If you want to leave the party,

go ahead. I don't want to." This case was in no way an exception.

In more recent elections, family voting has become a forced practice because when a person votes for everyone, his decision is not based on consensus but on a decision he makes under pressure from the authorities.

### **Preparing for the Parliamentary Elections of 2010**

Within Nahzat, I had been elected chairman of the party and we had decided not to propose a candidate for the presidential election in 2006, but rather to participate in the elections without our own candidate. The reason for not putting up a candidate was, first, that Rahmon's popularity was very high – he was a strong candidate. Second, our party had barely begun to recover from Said Abdullo Nuri's death in August. I had become the chairman of the party only in September and the elections were in November. If I had run in the presidential elections, we would have had to face conflicts with the authorities, and I needed to focus on party-building. The presidential elections therefore had no meaning for us, and I do not even remember today in what atmosphere they took place. Rahmon had no serious challenger. All the other candidates were their parties' nominees, but during the meetings they would say: "Yes, we are candidates, but please vote for Rahmon." Today I think it was good that we did not participate, as I would surely have said: "Vote for me, not for Rahmon." And it would have meant conflicts with the authorities, because they did not tolerate and do not tolerate opposition.

However, we made very thorough preparations for the parliamentary elections of 2010. This was my task and these would be my first parliamentary elections in my position as chairman of the party. From the very beginning, we worked closely with youth, women, and various non-religious groups. We put forth a new party with a new program. In the party presidium we adopted a new seven-year program that was to last until 2013. According to it, within seven years we planned to train one hundred young leaders in parliamentary and national government. We intended to work with the youth and increase the number of party members to more than 100,000. We did not hide the program, but rather announced it openly. And the youth supported us. First of all, we had taken more young educated people into the

presidium and also increased the number of women. So when the campaign started for the parliamentary elections in 2010, we were well prepared.

We used a new concept, which even the party in power had never used. This strategy was kept secret until the very last moment, when everything was ready: posters, slogans, and strategies. Our young people had rented Mickey Mouse costumes, tiger costumes, and some other animals. Children took pictures with them. Seeing all the Mickey Mouse characters, tigers, and elephants with gifts for children, with balloons, and with flowers for women was a novelty in the streets of Dushanbe. Usually an Islamic party reads sermons in mosques and speaks to people through religious literature, but we had changed our strategy. Now the Islamic party was visible in the streets with gifts, flowers, balloons, and booklets, and the authorities did not know what to do or how to react. There was nothing wrong with what we were doing, but slowly those in power started to realize that they were about to lose the election, and that is when they started to arrest our activists.

I remember one day in the Shakhmansursky district I received an urgent call to come to the police headquarters because a group of activists had been arrested. I was a parliamentary deputy at that time, so I was able to have a discussion with the chief of police:

Me: "Why did you arrest our children? This is the electoral program."

Chief: "And why do you use Mickey Mouse clothes?"

Me: "What difference do their clothes make?"

Chief: "What is the relation of Islam to Mickey Mouse? You are an Islamic party. You are not a democratic party."

Me: "Does it matter? Mickey Mouse is a mouse, a story character. He is not a pig, which is considered forbidden in Islam. Can there be no Mickey Mouse?"

Chief: "No. What you are doing offends the religious feelings of Muslims and you have no right to do that."

Me: "All right, release the children. I will take the costumes from them."

And I went to the room where they held the arrested people. I looked at our children who were sitting there in their costumes and I said: "Do you have a zoo around here perhaps, and they have arrested all the animals? Mickey Mouse, and an elephant and a tiger and some hares have all been arrested?" The young people were sitting and laughing in their costumes, so I took a photograph, but the police took away our

devices, with these words: “No, you have no right to photograph arrested people.” I wanted to photograph the situation; it was just funny that the police had arrested all these Mickey Mouse characters. The authorities simply did not know what to do about this campaign. They had no response.

So they settled for total falsification. We considered our party had won 70 percent of the vote; in the Manchinsky region, 90 percent of the people had voted for us. Thus, I estimate that we had increased our vote by a margin of 60 percent. I was surprised when the German ambassador and other ambassadors told us: “What have you done? The majority is voting for you!” We were congratulated of course. So when two days later, after their assessment, the Central Election Commission declared that we had only received 8.2 percent of the overall vote, we were shocked. Everybody was shocked — the observers, the diplomats, our party activists. It simply could not be. We had seen the official return protocols, and in fact we still had them (protocols are signed by the election commission from each district). We decided to collect these protocols and count the total. But the authorities told us: “No, we don’t need the local protocols, we have already counted everything. You have 8 percent of the vote. You have two seats in parliament.” We said, “If this is the case, then give us the results of this district. We have the protocols signed by the officials and we would like to compare them to your protocols.” But they never showed us any of their protocols.

In this election for the first time, our party received more votes than our individual candidates did. Even if votes for individual candidates also played a role, the majority had voted for the party because the party had started to behave differently. There was a new program, one based on national, religious, and democratic values. We had formulated commitments to the people, commitments we wanted to implement once in parliament. We had promised that if we won, we would have a new country where everybody could coexist. This is what attracted people, because by 2010 many people had grown tired of the party in power. Both corruption and various difficulties had started to affect all social groups, so people really voted for us.

During the election, our party used mobile phones. In China we had bought about 2,000 mobile phones, and we purchased SIM-cards from Beeline using special offers and hence almost free of charge. With these phones we could make copies of the pro-

ocols right away. We had trained our activists so that we had about 3,000 people on call, ready to instantly send all data to headquarters. Before the central commission had reported, we already had all the results and knew the exact number of votes we had received.

We were ready to declare the preliminary result before the Central Election Commission was, but it did not take long until they came and told us, “This is illegal, you have no right to declare the preliminary results because only the Central Election Commission has the right to do so, and if you do this then all your votes will be cancelled.” Thus, we did not declare the results but we did keep the documents. We preserved copies of the various sources, but unfortunately all of that material was located in the archives of the party building that later was sealed up by the authorities.

I remember when they declared, on Tuesday after the elections, that we had only two places in parliament. We organized a republic-wide meeting of the activists of the party, and several thousands of people gathered at the party headquarters. They had come from everywhere to discuss what we should do about the results of elections. Everyone knew that our party had won, but we were also sure that the authorities would lie. Still, we had expected them to give us about 20-25 percent—of course they would never grant us 40 percent or 50 percent and certainly not 60 percent. But they had given us only 8.2 percent and this was a shock! I remember how the people, the youth, they were just standing in the hall and crying. They called for protests and all the speakers were in favor of protesting against this lawlessness by the authorities. So many thousands of people in the party headquarters were enthusiastic about the idea of protest. I myself was sitting in the office on the second floor and was being urged to organize a statement on what was happening in the hall. But I was also asked not to appear in the hall, because if I had done so, then everybody would have gone out into the streets to protest and they were already emotionally agitated. I was sitting in the office discussing and analyzing the situation with my deputies. We needed to decide what to do: protest, accept and admit defeat, or perhaps boycott parliament?

There is one very important piece of information that was decisive here. I was sitting in the office when Colonel Nazarzoda called me. Actually, he was not colonel yet but he was head of a combat training department of the Ministry of Defense – a friend of mine who was later killed because he was still a commander of the opposition. He called me and said:



Muhiddin, how are you? I know that you are sitting in the office. Our sources from your hall say there is a big crowd. The source gives us continuous reports and informs us that the situation is getting heated! I am calling from the Ministry of Defense. We are meeting in the minister's office, all the ministers are sitting here, from the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and of Security, and the deputy minister is speaking, and your friend Colonel Akhtanzoda and another friend, Colonel Gayrad, are here too, and all of us are sitting here discussing your situation – you are our only hope.

I wondered, “What hope?” He continued:

If you tell the people that you will not go out with them, they will not protest. If you agree with their requests to protest, there will be a new conflict, a new civil war. I promise you, as a friend: there is a first ring of police around your office, a second ring consisting of security forces, and a third ring from the Ministry of Defense. The only thing you will achieve is that several thousand people will be killed, and then it will all come to an end anyway. It will be just like Andijan. Do you want that? I don't want that. So you are our only hope. Your voice will be heard by all the ministers, the last word is yours now.

I asked him: “Is this an ultimatum or blackmail? What is it?”

He replied: “No, it is a reaction – it is not blackmail or an ultimatum. You are the only hope. Please, we ask you as a friend, make the people calm down.”

I replied: “All right, I will think about it and then decide whether to protest or not, but first, I urge you to remove these security rings from around our office.”

It was 10:00 am in the morning. I had already been told that the first ring was made up of civilians, then the police, then the military forces.

He said: “Even if you try to go outside of your office, you won't get any further, because something may happen there.”

I quickly called a meeting of the deputies and members of the presidium and told them about the situation, about the phone call from Nazarzoda. They believed that this was blackmail, and confirmed that there were a lot of police surrounding us, but they emphasized that they were only demanding justice, the truth, and that there was no intention of war. We would just go outside and have a demonstration. I asked them to give me some time to think and they agreed: “Well, the last word is yours. You will make the decision.”

I called Nazarzoda and told him that I wanted to play a game of billiards with him. We went to his place and played billiards for an hour, discussing the issue. I asked him: “Are you really going to shoot us? My people are boiling there, I am playing billiards with you here, and I have told my people that I would consult with very important authorities.” I had to calm myself down because I was very emotional, and decisions that are made in a state of emotion can easily turn out to be wrong decisions. He said:

Muhiddin, you know we are friends. I am now in the government, so this will be a very difficult situation, for all of us. The order has already been given—to shoot to kill if you do go out. Most likely we will shoot. Sorry, but we will do it, because I am a serviceman. I know that you are right, you have received so many votes, but I am a serviceman. We will do it. Please, don't go out so that we don't need to commit a crime.

These were his words, the colonel who later was killed. Thus I returned to my office, to the party, at about 11:30 am. They started to call for me: “People are waiting for you and the decision you made.” I then addressed the people for twenty minutes. I managed to calm people down and promised:

Give me one more chance—an opportunity to talk to Rahmon. Now if we go out to protest we will all be killed, but if we abstain we can claim all our votes. We need peace, stability, and tranquility. Yes, they have betrayed us, they have stolen our votes, but let's not boycott the parliament. We won't go out into the streets, but we will tell them firmly that they are thieves. They have stolen our votes. We know that we got more than 50 percent of the vote. We know that the people supported us, and those who are now sitting in the government have just stolen our power. But let us once again, for the sake of peace and stability, give them this power, and we will accept what they have given us, for the sake of peace and tranquility.

People were emotional, saying things like: “All right, this time we trust you, but if there is more treachery, you will be responsible, not Rahmon, because you tried to keep us calm. We trust you as the leader of the party.” Everyone went home and I received words of thanks from the government that I had managed to calm the people: “It was an error from our side that we declared 8 percent, but it is good that you have calmed the people. This saved the country from another civil war. The president and



the authorities are very grateful to you. You have acted as a patriot.”

But soon we understood that because we had conceded a democratic election, they had decided that now they could act in a different way. They began to invent new strategies, not through elections though, because they would lose again. In 2012 there was a protocol, a confidential protocol, known as 32-20, leaked by Russian media, and showing the government had elaborate a new strategy to eliminate our party.

### **Strategies to Exclude the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan**

As soon as document 32-20 appeared, the behavior of the authorities completely changed: nobody answered our calls anymore, nobody came to seminars, and we were not invited to events even though we were a parliamentary party. After 2010, I was not seen on television again. When a session of parliament was shown, I was never there. I was publicly absent. I should have appeared and should have given a speech, but I was banned; I was not invited anymore. That meant that the president had started to perceive us as direct opponents — me personally and the party as a whole. The situation had changed. I wrote a letter to the president as a deputy and asked for a meeting. I wanted to bring to his attention everything that was being done. But the society was slowly changing; the attitude toward us was changing; everybody's attitude changed. We increasingly faced negative attitudes. I sent a second letter as the chairman of the party and asked for a meeting. Again I received no response. I transmitted my messages through the chairman of the parliament and through various ministers, all of whom responded: “Sorry, we have let him know, but the response was negative. We don't know what is happening. Nobody knows what is happening.”

When I, as deputy, sent a letter concerning the voting protocols and demanded an answer for the discrepancies and stated that it was unconstitutional, the Attorney General answered: “The protocol is valid, but some items were fabricated.” I responded: “Show me the original then. As a deputy of parliament, I have a right to have access to these materials. I am ready to sign it, I will only read it and I won't make a copy. I will even read it in your presence. Show me where the fabrications are.” But he did not show me anything. It was obvious that this was the

original protocol, which the Russian mass media had published.

Why had the Russian media published a secret document about eliminating the Islamic Revival Party? At that time Tajikistan was discussing whether to charge the Russians for operating a military base in the country, as a way to prove its independence from Russia. Moscow responded by putting Dushanbe back in its place: “Look. We have access to your confidential documents. We will reveal this protocol as an example.” In other words, they could destabilize the country at any time. This was sufficient warning: Tajikistan made special allowance for Russian structures that had existed during the Soviet period and provided the military base free of charge. Basically, they agreed to everything the Russians wanted.

After these changes various types of harassment began: They destroyed our offices, burned down the cultural center in Dushanbe, and arrested our activists. I remember we had our own office in the Sughd region, and once in 2013 when we were holding a meeting of our member activists, in a hall with several hundred people, just as I began my speech, employees of the city of Khujand started to tear down the roof over my head! We asked them what the problem was, and they showed us a document stating that the city executive committee had decided to wreck the building. That very day someone had signed a document implementing the right to destroy our building where we were holding our meeting. Imagine the situation: several hundred people standing in the hall, and over their heads they are destroying the roof! I asked why this decision was made and the workers replied, “According to the city's general plan, there is going to be a garden here.”

This building had existed since the Soviet period. We had purchased it and had all the documentation. There used to be a shop in the building, but we had renovated it into offices. Everything was official. We said: “How is it possible that in the morning the mayor makes the decision and an hour later you begin to destroy the building? Give us time at least for an appeal. Show us the city's general plan that says there shall be a garden here.” They refused to talk to us and continued to tear down the building while we were holding our session. Since we did not stop our meeting, they disconnected the electricity, so the microphones went silent. Still, we did not interrupt our meeting. An hour later, dozens of women, pitiful people, were collected in the markets and brought to our office by buses. They surrounded our office and

started to shout: “You do not want peace and tranquility! Get out of here!” The chief of police came to me and said: “If I do not remove you from here right now under my protection, you will all be stoned by these women. My mission is to remove you personally from here as a parliamentary deputy, as a party leader.”

I asked him, “It looks like a new civil war. Are we enemies?”

He replied: “I don’t know. I am the chief of police of the district, but I myself do not understand what is happening. I cannot control the situation any longer. Someone from above is running the process. Sorry, but this is the situation.”

I was told by my people that the situation was dangerous, that there were people in camouflage with weapons in buses all around us. If the youth resisted these women, if even one of them was touched, they would probably have shot us. We were surrounded by armed people in camouflage, by police and by special police forces from OMON.

I said to the chief: “I came here as the deputy, to meet the people, and now you confront me with weapons. What shall I do?”

The chief replied: “We will escort you out of the city and you will go back to Dushanbe.”

As I was leaving, surrounded by policemen, those women began to throw stones at us. I did not know where they had come from.

Previously, all of my meetings, with huge crowds of people, had always been peaceful. We had never seen anything like stoning before. Suddenly people had become aggressive, and I did not understand it. It turned out that that group of women had been specially organized – today people will do anything for money. A closer look at the photographs from different protests against me, like the recent one in front of the European Commission office in Dushanbe, reveals that these are all the same women. They are nicknamed OBON (*otdel bab osobogo naznacheniiia*), and we see similar groups of women in Kyrgyzstan too, women who protest for money. They appear, are active for some months, and then disappear again.

The story of the Sughd meetings is revealing. One of the women who shouted at me during the meeting had a son who was a drug addict, and he had been arrested. She is an influential businesswoman who controls several locations in the market. When her son was arrested for drug trafficking, they also planned to confiscate all their belongings. But she is a woman with a lot of money and more than a hundred

women work for her in various places, so they told her, “If you want to save yourself from further prosecution, you just need to organize the women against that person.” People from this area began to wonder about the woman, who was previously calm and normal. They no longer recognized her. Obviously she had been pressured to behave that way.

I was removed from the city by police escort, and as soon as we left Khujand for Dushanbe I received a call from our people saying that the destruction of the office had stopped! The housing and communal services staff had left. Nobody was there any longer. Three years have passed since that day and nothing new has happened – that is, there is no garden – but the building itself has been torn down.

All of our regional offices have been destroyed in a similar way. The most active people, those who did not give up and did not break down, have been arrested. The authorities have planted drugs, religious brochures, or bullets on them – all of this just to put them in prison for terrorism and for extremism. There have even been murders, as in Badakhshan. Our leader in Badakhshan was beaten, then shot, dragged by a leg, and thrown into a trash bin. All of this was done by people in a camouflage – obviously by order of the law enforcement agencies.

### **The Opposition Unites for a Presidential Candidate**

But we did not give up, and instead prepared for the presidential elections of 2013. We decided not to put forward our own candidate from the Islamic party but instead joined other opposition parties to promote a joint candidate. Of course there were disagreements concerning the choice of a candidate, but finally we agreed on a woman, Oynikhol Bobonazarova. She is a civic activist, a lawyer by education. She was the dean of the law department at the university and earlier she had been one of the founders of the democratic movement in Tajikistan. It was our party that proposed her candidacy. This way we sent a message that we as a party had not only proposed a woman but one who was a civic activist, not a religious leader, not our own leader.

Society considered it a positive sign, and the international community welcomed the decision, but this time we were not even allowed to collect the necessary number of signatures to put forth a candidate. According to the law, a candidate needs to

collect signatures from 5 percent of all voters before the candidate can be put forward. It is a very long and wearisome procedure: first you need to get the empty sheets, which have to be approved by local authorities, and then you can start to collect signatures. If a citizen has no passport with him when signing, then the whole document goes back to the local government and they check it and set a seal. Collecting 200,000 signatures under these conditions is very difficult. And most interestingly, the candidate from the coalition was not allowed to collect signatures herself, so we collected for her.

In the end we fell short by 5,000 signatures. Several candidates of smaller parties managed to collect 200,000 signatures, so if we added all those signatures together, we would have about 30 percent of the total, but Rahmon collected several million signatures. The elections ended with 80-90 percent voting for the incumbent president. We then asked those candidates who had managed to collect the 5 percent of signatures why they had only received 2 percent of the vote. They should have received at least 5 percent and even more, but had they agreed to accept the 2 percent. According to logic, votes should be distributed at least proportionally to the number of signatures collected beforehand. Those who had managed to nominate a candidate were given a deputy in parliament. We had no candidate in the presidential elections, and it was clear by then that our candidate would never have been registered. The ruling party does not want these elections to take place with an alternative candidate; there should be several appointed candidates, who will then say: "Yes, we are candidates, but vote for the most worthy candidate."

### **Humiliation and Persecution as Pre-Election Campaign**

These elections signaled to us that we were going to be facing a difficult time, and that was exactly what happened. We prepared for the parliamentary elections of 2015 in conditions of an undeclared war against our party – there were arrests, destruction, slander. The war was also conducted in the media, with countless videos shown on television. On the major television station they pretended to show members of our party, both women and men, in their private lives and their sexual life. All of this was done to ridicule the Islamic party. The most amazing thing was that those women who were shown on television

as members of the party had been sent to us covertly to try to get registered. They came to us and said they wanted to become party members. They tried to appear adherent to our ideas, but we had our doubts. We made the right decision and did not accept them. Then we recognized them in those videos, wearing hijabs, so apparently they had been hired.

Let me pause a moment and turn to Gulmurod Halimov, former commander of the special police (OMON) of Tajikistan, who ran away and joined the Islamic State. He made a statement in a video message to explain why he left Tajikistan. He said something like this "During the electoral campaign the Minister of Internal Affairs brought together the deputies and the commanders, and he ordered us to assemble some street women, prostitutes, and purchase clothes for them, including hijabs. So once we had them clothed as Islamic women we recorded them acting as prostitutes in order to discredit the Islamic party and Muslims in general."

The whole pre-election campaign of 2015 passed this way. When we visited Kulob to hold a meeting, some people showered me with eggs and tomatoes. They did not let us hold any sessions. The same happened in Khujand. Wherever I went I faced threats and aggression, but in reality, it was one aggressive group that was brought to each place. When our people photographed them, we saw the same individuals appearing at each place, and nobody would arrest them. We protested, we showed photos, saying that my life as a deputy of parliament was in danger. Throughout this period not a single one of those people was arrested; no one was punished. A meeting we held in Kulob was particularly interesting. A group of young people attacked us and finally they were arrested because there was no other option. It turned out that they were policemen. So, they were dismissed through backdating and said that they had not worked for the police for a long time. In the end, they were fined, but it was the police force itself that paid the fines. The only reason they were found guilty was because we had proven their identities. So the local authorities had to pay the penalty for the former policemen.

Everything indicated that this was probably going to be the last election for us. I remember that in the campaign headquarters we had put up a box in order to conduct an internal poll to estimate how many seats we would get in parliament from these elections. Everybody submitted his or her guess. We even established a prize for the winner. After the

elections we opened the box and only two people had foretold that we would receive no seats. Hundreds of people had thrown in pieces of paper suggesting 2 or 5 or 10 seats. I had asked that everyone write their surname on the other side of the paper so that we could determine the winner. Do you know who won? I did. Only two persons had given the correct answer and I was one of them. Why? Because I already knew the results. Before the elections I had had a conversation with someone from the authorities. I told him that according to our forecasts we would receive five seats in parliament. He said:

Muhiddin, you have two places in the parliament now. If you receive even one place, that will mean we failed. It would mean that for all these years, three years, we have been working without any results. You will not receive any seats because we need to show that our achievements have yielded results. If you are a patriot of the homeland – and I know that you are a patriot – then you know that all this is being done for the nation, the people and the state. You understand what this all is about. After the Arab Spring we have realized that it is better not to have an Islamic party. After the elections you will have to disband the party.

I explained that banning the party would have unforeseen consequences for the government and would be tragic for the people. The existence of the Islamic opposition party was crucial for the country because it allowed oppositional forces to work within the constitutional framework, and allowed the government to keep its activities under control. But the election committee knew that the decision had already been made and that they could not change anything. I had expected this and was careful to avoid direct confrontations. We participated, because non-participation in the elections would mean acknowledgment of our own defeat. Thus, even though I knew the result, I could not announce the self-dissolution of the party just because we had ceased to exist as far as the government was concerned. We went on with the elections with the hope that at the last minute they would change their minds. We organized a very good pre-election campaign. We developed new content again, and came up with an idea of how to implement our ideas. Our people worked really hard, but it did not pay off.

By the last days of the pre-election campaign I was staying at home, almost as if under home arrest. Sometimes I went to the office, but we had no more sessions because it was already impossible to meet.

Any public meeting could end with beatings and/or arrests. We finished the pre-election campaign in a condition of an undeclared war. Then Jaloladdin Mahmoud, a member of the electoral commission from our party, was arrested. He was the only member of our party in the Central Election Commission, and one hour prior to the announcement of the election results he called me from prison. Now just think, who in the pre-trial detention center would have given him a phone? But they brought him a phone and told him to call the party leader. So he called me from prison and said: “In one hour the election results will be announced.” He started reading what they had written for him: “This is not a good place. Please, make sure nobody else ends up here. I understand that it is difficult for you, but I am sitting in a pre-trial detention center now, and I do not wish anybody else to be here, especially not you. I hope that you are a very reasonable person and you will not let other members of our party show up here with me. This is my request.”

I asked him: “How is it possible that you are speaking to me via phone from a pre-trial detention center? That is a controlled institution. Who has given you a phone?”

He said: “That is another story. I am just giving you this message.” And he switched off the phone. He was only allowed to speak long enough to read the note.

This was the signal to me, one hour prior to the election results. This was the way they sent their message that my only place would be in prison if anything happened. Half an hour later the head of the Central Election Commission announced the results. He was shaking and barely able to speak. He knew the real result, what percentage we had actually received, so when he declared that we had received 1.5 percent, he did not feel well. Everybody was shocked, but I decided not to opt for open conflict but instead to accept things as they were.

Still, I started to think about how to organize the party in the future. What would come next was a story of mass persecution of party members, followed by exile.

### **The Question of Islam in Tajik Politics**

The question of Islam and politics is a difficult one and many discussions have taken place on this subject. Religious parties can exist perfectly well within



a secular state. The question is what attitude Islam as a religion has toward elections and political parties. According to traditional religious views, political parties do not exist in Islam; the notion of a parliament in general is alien to Islam. It is a state institution that was created in the West. In the Muslim world a sultan, a caliph, or an emir rules, along with ministers. There is a council of ministers, but not a parliament. Gradually, however, Islamic politicians have come to conclude that there is no contradiction between Islam and the parliamentary system. On the contrary, in the main sources like the Qur'an and Sunnah, there are specific mentions of an advisory body. There is an *ayat* (verse) in the Qur'an that says, "Your decision shall be made in discussion, within an advisory body." In the Qur'an the Prophet himself is advised to consult the people around him, and after making a decision to hope for Allah's support. It is a compulsory condition. A parliament can fulfill that role of the advisor.

In Tajikistan at that time there were heated discussions about whether Islam had a place in politics or not. Many religious figures rejected the idea that Islam allowed for political parties. This argument was then misused by the authorities and instrumentalized in their struggle against the Islamic Revival Party. My question was: If there is no party in Islam, then wouldn't joining an existing party (Rahmon, the leader of the People's Democratic Party, is a Muslim himself after all) be equally against Islam? There was no answer to this. The discussion was a crucial one that continued until recently, when the subject was taken off the agenda because it had become normal for an Islamic party to exist. It had become normal to have an Islamic party participating in political life. Many analysts understood that such a party, which was closely working with the youth, could deal with critical moments and reduce risky situations when deeply religious people wanted to participate in political life. Indeed, such parties would prevent the youth from joining radical groups by offering them the opportunity to participate in an Islamic party within the legal framework. Further, this question does not really concern religious issues so much as stability and tolerance. It is necessary to have Islamic parties.

The question of the relationship between Islam and politics has not been important in recent years. For example, back in 2000-2005, many voters asked less about the party's platform than about whether Islam would allow the existence of a party or parliament. People wanted theoretical answers rather than

practical considerations. In 2010 and 2015 people were more interested in the party's program, not theoretical questions. They asked: "What does the party suggest? What does this party think?" This is the development I see when I look at elections in Tajikistan.

We worked in the party in such a way that activists would not perceive us as a purely religious structure. In recent years, activists began to consider us a political party. Earlier on, people could not even distinguish us from a mosque. The Islamic Party used to have many of the features of mosque. People came to us to pray and to consult us on religious questions. From our side, many members accepted this role and felt responsible for building mosques and madrasas or helping people with social projects. But in recent years we began to consider ourselves a political party, not a religious structure. People have welcomed this development, but the authorities did not want us to transform into a political organization; it was more profitable for them when people considered us a religious organization, not as a political competitor with a programmatic platform instead of sermons. They planned to keep the party as a religious structure with traditional views so that it would be easier to manipulate.

Once we developed into a political party with a program and concrete suggestions for economic, social, and cultural reforms, it spoiled the relationship with the government. This was already the case when I was elected party leader in 2006. They wanted to see the leader in traditional clothes, with traditional views, so that young people would not be attracted to the party — especially educated youth. When I became chairman, a presidential adviser at the time told me that for four days nobody dared to inform the president about the results of Nahzat's congress, because they had been ordered not to let me become the chairman and everybody had promised the president that another person would be chosen. "Since we were unable to get another candidate through," he told me, "we consulted for four days on how to report this to the president. One day he asked about the chairman of the party and we had to tell him that, unfortunately, you had become chairman of the party."

The relations between the party and the natives of Badakhshan have their own history. Initially, when the party supported Davlat Khudonazarov's candidacy, the people from Badakhshan — most of them Ismaili — closely cooperated. For our Sunni party, the Ismaili minority was among our closest partners. Later, during the civil war, the local population of



Badakhshan supported the United Tajik Opposition (UTO) led by Said Abdullo Nuri. Then, during peace talks, several representatives of Badakhshan were members of the party's delegation and joined the coalition government as a part of the opposition. Our party always had a good reputation in Badakhshan, and in recent years we were working hard there. The young people were working especially hard because we had proposed a program in which special attention was to be paid to tolerance between Islamic religious schools. Our Ismaili compatriots understood the message and received it positively.

When we conducted an internal survey in 2010 to find out the percentage of citizens in the regions who had become members of our party, we found an average of 0.8-0.9 percent of the citizens in other regions were registered members of our party. In Badakhshan, however, more than 1 percent of the population belonged to the party; in other words, we had more people from Badakhshan actively supporting us than in any other region. In total, we had about 42,000 registered members, 3,000 in Badakhshan alone. This is why the authorities paid such close attention to Badakhshan. Our chairman of the party in Badakhshan, Sabzali Mamadrizoev, was killed in 2012, much the same way that a former party leader, Imomnazar Imomnazarov, killed during an operation of security officers. Yet another chairman died under mysterious circumstances, and some claim that he was poisoned: a young man of 35 years, he just fell down and died. This means we have lost three chairmen of the party who worked in Badakhshan, and a fourth one was arrested. He is in prison now. This means that the authorities recognized Badakhshan's importance for political life in Tajikistan, and they wanted to separate Badakhshan as much as possible from our party – but I doubt they have been successful. We still have many supporters in Badakhshan and will maintain good relationships in the future.

### **The Role of International Organizations in Elections in Tajikistan**

It seems to me that international organizations never took the elections in Tajikistan seriously because the country was not at the center of their interests. Tajikistan is too small. Still, international observers have always been present for the elections. If during the first elections these observers were usually from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in

Europe (OSCE), later, observers were invited from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), from the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), from the inter-parliamentary assembly of the CIS, from the European Union (EU), and from various other international organizations. In the end, the organizations took different positions. Concerning the first elections, before 2000, we have no information on the views of international observers. From 2000 onwards, we could see that the opinions of the international observers from the CIS and the SCO strongly differed from those of the OSCE and the European Union. Observers from the CIS and Shanghai always approved the elections and recognized them as democratic and generally free, speaking only about a “few small violations” that had not greatly affected election results. However, the observers from the OSCE, especially their Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), who are specialized in elections, as well as the EU, always said that the elections had not taken place under democratic rules and consequently they questioned the results. They would deliver recommendations to the authorities of Tajikistan, who never carried out these recommendations. On the contrary, each election was worse than the one before.

Consequently, for the referendum on May 22, 2016, amending the constitution to remove the term limit on the president and to ban religious political parties, only the CIS and the SCO sent observers, while other international organizations did not even bother; they seem to have lost any belief in democratic elections in Tajikistan. For me it is as if the international organizations had conducted an undeclared boycott of this referendum.

Personally, I found that the observers for the elections of 2010 were more active than during the elections of 2015. At the beginning the observers from the CIS and SCO were limited to Dushanbe and a few other districts. But during the last elections, they visited many polling stations and they met with parties—they even visited our office. This was the first time they had come. In contrast, observers from Europe were more active earlier, in the elections of 2005 and 2010.

In general, different missions have different techniques and methods of supervision during the elections, and as a result, we have two different pictures projected in the reports. The CIS observers claim that elections have taken place democratically as always. It seems they have a report prepared in advance and

use the same one for Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan — one can see the same templates in all the reports. Observers from Europe, however, work in a more detailed way. For example, the observers for ODIHR visited Tajikistan three months prior to the elections in order to study the legislation and the atmosphere in the mass media. This means that it is not only the result on election day that counts; they look at the whole process prior to the elections. Obviously, their evaluations are more trustworthy. The observers from the CIS or the SCO appear some days before the elections, are welcomed as guests, and then are accompanied with songs and dances throughout their mission.

No matter who the observers are, their recommendations or reports do not have any effect on the results, as they are declarative and of an advisory character. Even recommendations from the ODIHR, which are given right after the elections, are rejected by local authorities. For example, the ODIHR made nearly thirty recommendations after the previous elections, and this time our authorities agreed to accept only one — namely, that the protocols will now be filled out with a pen, not a pencil. Before, the OSCE was critical of the fact that the protocols were filled out in pencil, which can be changed afterwards very easily. This time the electoral commission accepted the recommendation that protocols should be filled in by pen. On the one hand this is good. On the other hand, nobody sees these copies of the protocols that have been completed by pen, and this is bad. Earlier on, protocols filled out in pencil were circulated to observers and to candidates, but now nobody will see those documents, which minimizes the role of observers even more.

### **Concluding Remarks**

To summarize, we can see that Tajikistan moved away from free and democratic elections in the years following the end of the Soviet Union and the initial years of independence, to a completely controlled referendum in 2016. The youth participated in those early elections of 2000, 2005, and 2010 with enthusi-

asm, believing that their voice would make a difference, and despite falsification, despite the undemocratic character of those elections, they believed that it was possible to change life for the better.

Throughout the period that the Islamic Revival Party was active in Tajikistan, we — the opposition parties, youth, activists — kept saying: we have elections, maybe not the most democratic, but if we want to change our lives, it can happen only through them. This was the only way for us. Any other way would mean civil war. To be indifferent was not a way out. It is necessary to be very active, despite the undemocratic character of the elections. We have always filled people with optimism, especially religious youth. I used to tell them: “Your participation in elections is not only a civic duty, but also a religious one. You do not want to be like the Taliban, Al-Qaeda, ISIS, and others; you want to fulfill your religious duty, and that is why you have to participate in elections. Go and be active.” Therefore, many people perceived elections to be a religious duty, almost like a prayer. When the elections were obviously fraudulent, it touched them deeply. This is why many of them now join ISIS; they have been deceived too many times and now have turned to jihad and armed revolts.

Because three parliamentary and two presidential elections have already taken place in Tajikistan under conditions of total falsification, people have lost hope that their voices will be heard. There is no longer any enthusiasm, there is no euphoria for elections, and there is no longer any trust in the electoral system in Tajikistan. For the referendum of May 22, 2016, they invested all their energy to get people to participate in the referendum, but I doubt that is what really happened. I am seriously afraid that it will be very difficult to regain the trust of the citizens of Tajikistan in future elections. It is this absence of trust that triggers the growth of radicalism and extremism among the youth, because people no longer trust elections. The only way to win back the people is to assure them that their votes will be counted and their party represented accordingly in parliament. Tajikistan needs an alternative voice in parliament if the authorities want to regain the trust of the citizens.

# The 2015 Tajik Elections Online: Few Posts, Fewer Likes, Even Fewer Shares

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A.S.<sup>1</sup> (2015)

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The March 2015 parliamentary elections in Tajikistan started a new political era in the country. No more space was left even for the opposition's symbolic presence. The main opposition party, the Islamic Revival Party, had been accustomed to getting two seats in the Parliament since the peace agreement of 1997. In 2015, it lost them. In comparison to the 2010 elections, during which both parties and voters were more actively engaged in a pre-election marathon, this time the electoral atmosphere was totally absent in the country, excepting a few short monologues from the parties' leadership broadcasted by the state TV, some anti-oppositional, and pro-governmental propaganda in the print media, and a bit of engagement on social media networks. The Tajik segment of Facebook, once widely used by ordinary Tajiks as an important online platform for political, economic, and social discussions, was also devoid of vivid electoral discussions.

In spite of the shocking outcome for the opposition, all discussion of results faded in the wake of the murder of Group24's leader, Umarali Quvvatov, a few days later. In general, the lack of trust, transparency and fairness of the elections, combined with the perception that the results had already been written manually, underpinned the reasons for the passivity of the society and the political parties.

Use of Russian social media—Odnoklassniki (3,009,597 users), VKontakte (271,780), and Moi Mir (328,105) in Tajikistan was well ahead of Facebook (about 100,000) as of May 15, 2015.<sup>2</sup> In spite of this, however, Facebook continues to be the main platform for political engagement and discussion, while the Russian social networks are used mostly for fun,

meeting new friends, or for Islamic propaganda. Tajik usernames on Twitter could be counted using the fingers. Public chatrooms at new instant multimedia messaging platforms, such as Zello, Viber, WeChat, are in high rise in Tajikistan, but the political discussion in them are not studied yet.

## Parties on Paper

There are eight registered political parties in Tajikistan. The People's Democratic Party (PDPT), led by President Rahmon, has won almost all seats in the parliament since the 2005 elections. The Islamic Revival Party (IRPT) is considered the main oppositional movement. The Social-Democratic Party (SDPT), despite never having been represented in the parliament and lacking broad popular support, is considered the second-most unsystemic opposition movement.<sup>3</sup> Because it engages prominent lawyers, it frequently gives the authorities headaches. The Communist Party lost all power after independence and to date has had only two known faces, the party chairman, Shodi Shabdolov, and deputy chairman and a presidential candidate in two last presidential elections, Ismoil Talbakov, who were MPs of all parliaments until 2015. The current leadership of the Democratic Party and the Socialist Party, which experienced harsh internal battles and divisions, have supported the government to date. The Agrarian Party and the Party of Economic Reforms, both founded prior to the 2010 elections, are known to be loyal to the government.

The parties' online visibility is minimal. Only two parties—the PDPT and the IRPT—have current functional official websites. The websites of the SDPT and the Communist party no longer work. The IRPT has an official Facebook page, a Twitter account (last

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1 This author is a former Fulbright Fellow at the Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies (IERES) at the George Washington University. His research interest includes internal and regional politics, online activism, media, migration, and society in Central Asia.

2 For more about the popularity of social media in Tajikistan, see: Abdulfattoh Shafiev and Marantha Miles, "Friends, Foes, and Facebook: Blocking the Internet in Tajikistan," *Demokratizatsiya* 23, no. 3 (Summer 2015): 297-319.

3 Systemic opposition is the one created with assistance of the authorities and which plays politics inside the ruling system. Unsystemic opposition is out of the authorities' control.

post dates September 29, 2014), and YouTube videos. It used to have a public group on Facebook but no longer administers it. But it does administer its public group on Odnoklassniki with just 340 members as of May 15, 2015. The PDPT's website also runs an official Facebook page, and the party's branches in Khatlon and Sughd run their own Facebook pages. The SDPT supporters are comparatively less active in running a party's public group on Facebook. The Agrarian Party opened Facebook page on February 2015, just before the elections. The other parties have no online presence, whether in the form of websites or social media, no do their leaders have any public profiles on any social media. When the leader of the Communist Party of Tajikistan, Shodi Shabdolov, was asked by *Tojnews* about the party's absence on the Internet, he replied: "The Internet is not in our hands; it has an owner. Whenever the Internet media calls us, we talk to them, and it gets published on the Internet. But we are not able to open Facebook, gather thousands materials, and publish there. We lack the finances."<sup>4</sup>

In the world of offline media, only the PDPT and the IRPT regularly publish official newspapers, respectively, *Minbari khalq*, a weekly with about a 50,000 issue print-run, and *Najot*, with more than 4,000 print-outs. The PDPT also enjoys coverage of its events on the state broadcast media, while the IRPT members are systematically discredited by them. The independent print and online media, mostly Asia Plus website and newspaper, Ozodi website and radio, *Tojnews*, *Ozodagon*, and *Avesta* websites, *Millat*, *Nigoh* and other newspapers played an important role in keeping readers informed about electoral events. They discussed the candidates' nomination, the IRPT and SDPT challenges, voting day process, and electoral results, but offered few interviews and introductions to candidates, and few analytical materials.

The parties held their congresses to nominate candidates in mid to end of December 2014, both for the republican list, and for single mandates. The Tajik Parliament's lower palata, the *Majlisi Namoyandagon*, has 63 seats, 22 of which are on the united republican list, and the rest are elected through single-mandate constituencies from the districts. Preparation for congresses, the challenges that opposition parties face in conducting their congresses, and the lists of candidates were all things covered by the media. But

no election-related news could compare, for example, with an interview of a well-known local singer Shabnam Surayyo, or with news of the death of former warlord Suhrob Qosimov.

### Parties Online

Among the parties' own media sources, only the IRPT's website and Facebook page offered some news coverage. On its congress day, held on December 16, 2014, the IRPT organized live coverage of the congress on Zello (audio) and YouTube (video), as well as constantly informed its audience about the latest developments on Facebook and on the website. The PDPT's congress was held on December 13, 2014, but its website did not post any news about it for four days. The IRPT was the only party that announced publicly that it would use a specially created logo for the elections. Websites of both parties have Tajik and Russian versions, but the Tajik versions are far more active. The Russian version of the IRPT's website has not been updated since November 2014, while the Russian version of the PDPT website is functional.

The IRPT website also served as an independent information source for media, while the PDPT website only reports other media's news. For example, on January 7, 2015, Asia Plus posted news at 09:38 am in Russian, and at 11:26 in Tajik, citing the Central Elections Committee, that the PDPT candidates all passed the Tajik language test. Exactly the same news appeared on the PDPT's Tajik website at 11:51am and again at 2pm for the Russian version; it was simply a 'copy-paste' job. The exact story was taken from Asia Plus, even without editing orthographic mistakes. However, the PDPT's official website did not give any credit to Asia Plus for this and other copied and re-published news items. Other similar cases have been noted.

By contrast, the IRPT's website offered its own sources. For example, on January 10-11, 2015, the IRPT's website covered the nomination of its candidates from a district in Khatlon region, and from two districts in the Sughd region. All this news was used later by Asia Plus on January 12, 2015. Sometimes the IRPT's website was the only one to offer any information: for example, on January 17, 2015, the IRPT's candidate to the local council in Dushanbe was taken

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<sup>4</sup> "Shodi Shabdolov: Mo baroi tankidi president naomadaem," *Tojnews*, February 28, 2015, <http://tojnews.org/tj/news/shodi-shabdolov-mo-baroi-tankidi-prezident-naomadaem>.



to the police station with his wife and children, and the IRPT's website remained the only online source to tell this story.

Both the PDPT and the IRPT had special sections devoted to the elections on their websites. But both had different approaches on how to use the section—the PDPT displayed its election program, and the biography of its nominees; while the IRPT used it to gather all news items related to the party's preparation for the election, conducted special interviews with candidates, as well as gave the floor to other parties, such as the Democratic Party, the SDPT, and the Communist Party. The PDPT's website, by contrast, published only very negative coverage of the IRPT.

### Facebook-Friendly Campaigns

Compare to its website, the PDPT was more active on Facebook. There are several Facebook pages claiming to belong to it, but as the link to the Facebook page in the official website does not work, I focus here on the oldest and most active page. The other pages appeared a couple of months ago and have no more than few posts. In addition to its official page, the party's branches in Khatlon and Sughd provinces have their own pages. Before its congress, held on December 13, 2014, which officially started the election campaign, the PDPT's Facebook page was last updated on November 17, 2014. But, on December 16, a photo-gallery from the congress and news about it was posted, and the next day a few more posts appeared, including the text of the PDPT leader Emomali Rahmon. The rest of the time, the Facebook pages of the PDPT have mostly featured reposted links from their official websites. These posts have rarely been shared or liked.

The IRPT is also rather active on Facebook, including more reposts from its website, more shares, and more likes, and it more actively administers its Facebook page by posting direct posts. The Agrarian Party (APT) opened its Facebook page on February 25, 2015. The same day the page posted a promotional photo asking that voters choose the party on the voting ballots. That photo has enjoyed zero likes. Besides that, the page has six posts, one of them being the party's logo, two others photos of flowers, another two congratulations on Navruz and the Day of the Tajik Media, and a last one announcing the opening of English and Russian-language courses. The page has 18 likes so far (May 15, 2015) but mentions nothing

about the results of the elections, even though this party got five seats in the new parliament.

Table 1. Some Statistics Regarding the Facebook Pages of the Tajik Parties as of May 15, 2015

Page	First Post	Number of Likes
PDPT HQ	23 Jan 2013	505
PDPT Sughd	20 Feb 2015	2,171
IRPT	26 Jul 2013	6,509
APT	25 Feb 2015	18

The candidates and members from the IRPT were also fairly creative and active on Facebook. While PDPT supporters used to post pictures, logos, and brochures, like here and here, the IRPT candidates and members posted their program, official video, and even more creative videos and pictures. Their supporters also shared pictures from offline events, such as Kabiri's meeting, details to inform the audience about upcoming meetings or TV talks, or other interesting events, such as questions from the language test. Posting logos was also commonly done by IRPT supporters. From the PDPT, some of the candidates for the local councils were more active, such as a prominent Tajik taekwondo sportsman and a local journalist. Social-democratic party members were also active in posting posters. While, the IRPT's only observed language in use was Tajik, the SDPT used both Tajik and Russian, and the PDPT, while focusing more on Tajik, had posters disseminated online in Russian and also in Uzbek.

Facebook was widely used by the Tajik Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Tajikistan Embassies worldwide to cover the voting process with pictures. The Tajikistan Embassy in India adopted an even more creative approach by setting up a special Facebook event page inviting Tajiks in India to come and vote. All Facebook activities of the Tajik ministry and embassies remained very objective without naming any party at all.

### Foes on Facebook

Both the PDPT and the IRPT also "enjoyed" anti-advertising campaigns. The PDPT was mostly attacked by memes disseminated by Group24 supporters, like this one, where the meme bringing the IRPT motto says "Tajikistan is for all, not for one family;" or here, when motto of the PDPT is being used to state "We will build the future together, and sell it to China."

The IRPT was mostly attacked from fake accounts known as pro-governmental volunteer trolls.<sup>5</sup> They also used election motto and logos, like this one here, where the meme uses the IRPT's motto: "We are for Tajikistan, and Tajikistan is for all," and by "all" means Islamist terrorists adding pictures of Osama ben Laden, Abubakr Baghdadi, etc. IRPT supporters also used Facebook to publicize videos of unidentified men and police pulling their posters down from walls.

### Votes and Results: Parallel Worlds

The official results of the parliamentary elections read as follow.

*Table 2. Official Results of the Parliamentary Elections (%)*

PDPT	65.4
Agrarian Party	11.7
Party of Econ. Reforms	7.5
Socialist Party	5.5
Communist Party	2.2
Democratic Party	1.7
IRPT	1.6
SDPT	0.5

However, various online unofficial polls painted a completely different picture. A public poll conducted at VKontakte shows that 37.6% of the respondents were for the IRPT, 23.6% for the PDPT, while 27.5% said they wouldn't go to a polling station, and the remaining parties did not get more than 3% support.

The results were similar in polls conducted unofficially by the top Tajikistan media outlets. Asia Plus's poll sampled 2,142 individuals, 28% of whom were for the IRPT and 17% for the PDPT. Some 25% of voters said they would not go to vote and 12% said they would vote against all parties. The Communist

Party and the SDPT consequently received 8% and 7% of support, while the remaining parties got only 1%. The Tojnews Tajiki poll surveyed 952 votes. A majority of voters, 57%, were for the IRPT, and only 13% for PDPT. Some 19% of voters said they were against all parties, and 7% were for the SDPT. The results on Tojnews Russian website were different: the IRPT's support stood at 38%, the PDPT at 16%, the SDPT at 6%, and 29% of voters were against all parties. This poll had only 68 voters.

Radio Ozodi chose a different way to check the popularity of parties on the eve of elections. It asked 15 well-known experts to predict what a party would receive as a percentage of votes if the elections held were to be fair, and they were not to be fair. Here are results:

*Table 3. Radio Ozodi Survey (%)*

Fair Elections		Unfair Elections	
PDPT	32.7	PDPT	74.0
IRPT	28.0	IRPT	6.3
SDPT	11.5	SDPT	1.4
Communist Party	7.7	Communist Party	6.3
Agrarian Party	5.5	Agrarian Party	5.5
Democratic Party	2.9	Democratic Party	1.1
Party of Econ. Reforms	1.3	Party of Econ. Reforms	4.1
Socialist Party	1.1	Socialist Party	1.3

Even experts did not predict that the IRPT and the Communists will be kicked out of the parliament. Later Muhiddin Kabiri, head of the Islamic Revival Party, told media that in his party only him and someone else predicted they won't be given any seat in 2015 parliament. The officially announced results of the elections showed that the authorities and voters live in parallel worlds, where the power holders claim they represent the people, but the ordinary people do not care who is in power. But how long it will remain that way is an open question.

<sup>5</sup> For more information about Tajik pro-governmental troll army, see Shafiev and Miles, "Friends, Foes, and Facebook."

# A New Move in Digital Wars in Central Asia: The Tajik Islamic Party under 'Digital Porn' Attack

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A.S.<sup>1</sup> (2014)

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Tajik users of social media and state TV channels' audience have been shaken recently by the repeated appearance of a series of semi-pornographic videos depicting bearded men who are allegedly mullahs or members of the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (IRPT). Since last year approximately ten videos have been disseminated digitally through television and social media. The videos claim that Islamic clerics have been caught engaged in "immoral, illegal, shameful, non-Islamic" sexual acts and violence against women, as well as misuse of Islam to abuse vulnerable women and girls.

The Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan, the only religious party authorized on the territory of the former Soviet Union, was officially recognized after the peace agreements of 1997 that followed a five-year civil war. Today it is being transformed by officials and state-backed supporters from a symbol of tolerance and democracy into a scapegoat for the country's problems. The party boasts about 40,000 members and is considered the strongest opposition movement against incumbent president Emomali Rahmon, who has managed to stay in power through manipulated elections and changes to the constitution since 1992.

After a moderately successful campaign for parliamentary elections in 2010, which resulted only in two seats in the parliament for the official Islamists, a series of physical and legal attacks shook the IRPT. These attacks, which became known in Tajikistan under the slogan "*anti-nahzat*" (anti-Revival), are believed to be organized by the government to slow the rise of IRPT popularity even among non-religious groups. Several of the party's leaders were beaten se-

verely by unknown attackers, and dozens of propaganda articles have been published in governmental and pro-governmental media against the party and its leaders.

In the eve of upcoming parliamentary elections in Tajikistan planned for February 2015, the pressure exerted on the main opposition party shifted from beatings and jailing into discreditation of the party's image. To date, videos as a digital weapon have been used by different opposition groups to weaken the government's legitimacy among the population. Now pro-governmental groups use the same tool not only against those who actively criticize the government, but also against the IRPT, although the party is often considered to be a relatively conciliatory opposition. The new state-backed weapon against the official Islamists is a 'digital porn' attack.

## From a Lost 'Home-Made Movie' to the Launching of a 'Digital Porn' Attack

The idea behind these videos was probably born completely by accident, when a young bearded mullah from the Rudaki district, 10 kilometers from Dushanbe, recorded his copulation with a woman later introduced as his second wife using a mobile phone—which he subsequently lost.<sup>2</sup> In June 2013 his intimate video was uploaded to YouTube, Odnoklassniki, and Facebook. The video "owes" its popularity particularly to Soleh Hotamiyon, one of the most well-known "volunteer" pro-government image defenders.<sup>3</sup> Although this intimate video was quickly deleted from social media because of complaints by users, it was immediately used by pro-government social media users to discredit the IRPT and Islamic clerics in general.

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<sup>1</sup> This author is a former Fulbright Fellow at the Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies (IERES) at the George Washington University. His research interest includes internal and regional politics, online activism, media, migration, and society in Central Asia.

<sup>2</sup> "Soli kinohoi "mullo"-hoi tojik," *Radio Ozodi*, <http://www.ozodi.org/content/sexual-videos-of-tajik-clerics-exploded-internet-in-2013-year/25204768.html>.

<sup>3</sup> "Janjolbarangeztarin korbari Feysbuki tojiki kist?," *Radio Ozodi*, <http://www.ozodi.org/content/the-most-scandalious-person-on-facebook/25129772.html>.

Several more men, allegedly mullahs, were later detained for “misuse of Islam” and abusing women who come for treatment of physical and psychological illness.<sup>4</sup> On August 2013 a new video recorded by hidden camera blasted social media not only in Tajikistan, but in neighboring countries too. The video, which appeared on Tajik state TV and later disseminated in social media, shows how 46-year old Asadullo Ibrohimov (also from Rudaki district), while reciting verses from Quran, touched and rubbed a woman who came seeking treatment. During the criminal investigation it was revealed that the woman came to see the mullah seven times and decided to record starting from her fifth visit. Ibrohimov, sentenced to seven years in prison for “sexual acts against a defenseless woman” and “fraud,” admitted his “sin against Allah,” but said everything that happened was done with her consent.<sup>5</sup>

On the end of September 2013 the state TV stations, including the only kids TV channel, repeatedly showed a thirty-minute long, professionally produced and edited documentary about a detained 21-year old student, Somon Muhabbatov, who confessed to raping and killing an 8-year old boy in the remote Rasht valley.<sup>6</sup> During the civil war the Rasht valley was one of the main strongholds of the Islamist militant groups and has always been known as one of the most religiously conservative regions in Central Asia.

The state TV claimed the young student was partially educated at an underground madrassah (a religious school), and he along with other pupils were sexually assaulted while studying there. The young man stated that in the religious school they were taught about jihad and assassination, and listed the names of some of his teachers, claiming that

they were or are IRPT members. The young detainee said he intentionally killed the boy in order to provoke popular anger toward the government. The IRPT admitted that Muhabbatov had attended several party meetings but only “to gain intelligence from them.”<sup>7</sup> At the same time the party and several media organizations condemned the telecast of the video, decrying it as “political games on the eve of presidential elections,” “propaganda of immorality,” “unprofessional from the point of view of journalistic standards” and “interfering into the private area of children’s life.”<sup>8</sup>

Two months earlier, on July 2013, President Emomali Rahmon publicized several crimes supposedly committed by mullahs at his meeting with the Islamic clergy in Dushanbe, claiming that in 2012 more than 50 representatives of clergy were detained due to various crimes. He detailed one specific case of a 34-year old mullah Sobir Giyoyev, who returned from Pakistan, married a widow and later also religiously married two of his stepdaughters, the youngest one being 14-year old, who was pregnant with his child when he was sentenced to jail (sharia law does not allow marriage to stepchildren).<sup>9</sup> On February 7, 2014, another cleric, 64-year old Mahmaddullo Kholov, appeared on state TV channels accused of raping two of his teenage stepdaughters, aged 17 and 13 years old.<sup>10</sup> The older girl indicated that she had given birth by her father-in-law. The man, who was introduced as an active member of the Islamic Party, looked enough calm while admitting his crimes on television and easily repeated the reporter’s words. The reporter even suggested stoning the mullah. The Islamic Party later denied having such member and claimed that Kholov’s beard, shown on TV, was a false one.<sup>11</sup> Kholov died in prison three months later, officially from a heart attack.<sup>12</sup>

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4 “Soli kinohoi “mullo” -hoi tojik.”

5 “Mulla: “Vinovat pered Allakhom, no ne pered zakonami Tadjhikistana”” *Radio Ozodi*, <http://rus.ozodi.org/content/mullah-interview-radio-ozodi/25146478.html>.

6 State television documentary “Poybandi nafrat,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jYgtSWOS2DE>.

7 “Intiqodi shadidi HNIT az namoishi filmi “Poybandi nafrat”” *BBC Tajiki*, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/tajik/news/2013/09/130923\\_if\\_elex\\_hnit\\_islam.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/tajik/news/2013/09/130923_if_elex_hnit_islam.shtml).

8 “Intiqodi sozmonhoi ruznomanigori az pakhshi filme “nafratangez, dar televiziynuh oi davlati”” *BBC Tajiki*, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/tajik/news/2013/09/130926\\_mm\\_journalists\\_statement.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/tajik/news/2013/09/130926_mm_journalists_statement.shtml).

9 “Mulla sygral v dochki-materi,” *Gazeta.ru*, <http://www.gazeta.ru/social/2013/09/25/5669353.shtml>.

10 State television report accessible at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uxkwMv1Q51w>.

11 ““Geroy” telesyuzheta ne chlen PIVT?, ili “grubaya fal’sifikatsiya” spetssluzhb?” *Avesta*, <http://www.avesta.tj/security/23124-geroy-telesyuzheta-ne-chlen-pivt-ili-grubaya-falsifikatsiya-specsluzhb.html>.

12 “V Khudzhandskom SIZO skonchalsya Makhmadullo Kholov,” *Nahzat*, [http://nahzat.tj/russian/index.php?option=com\\_k2&view=item&id=1081:holov-pivt-sizo&Itemid=614](http://nahzat.tj/russian/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=1081:holov-pivt-sizo&Itemid=614).



## Refining Discreditation Methods

Discreditation using hidden recording of sex acts is not something new in post-Soviet republics. This tactic was used against a General Prosecutor in Russia,<sup>13</sup> against an oppositional journalist<sup>14</sup> and an activist<sup>15</sup> in Azerbaijan, and against the Mufti<sup>16</sup> in Kyrgyzstan. But the experience and methods used in Tajikistan are much wider and innovative.

Starting in April 2014, the discreditation policy shifted from direct digital war against opposition and mullahs into efforts to hide the role of state-backed groups. Several videos from a studio named *Nuri nahzat* were prepared and uploaded online. *Nahzat*, meaning “revival,” is the main word in the name of the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan and the party’s shorter name is known as *Hizbi Nahzat* (the Party of Revival). The studio claims that the IRPT top leadership secretly decided to reveal the immoral behavior of its members, which was officially denied by the party.

The first video caught an Islamic Party’s local leader, Mahmadrab Rizoiev, deputy head of IRPT branch in the Tursunzoda district, neighboring Uzbekistan in the west of the country, during a homosexual act.<sup>17</sup> The video, edited professionally, is still accessible on YouTube and Odnoklassniki under several different accounts. Here again, the IRPT denounced the video as false.<sup>18</sup> Another video disseminated the same day showed a bearded man in clerical clothing, presented as an imam of a mosque and an IRPT member, having sex with a woman in different poses, including putting her leg on the Quran.

These shocking videos from *Nuri Nahzat* studio were soon followed by a new one, where some interviewed people condemned the above-mentioned “porn heroes.”<sup>19</sup>

Dissemination of CDs with these videos in mosques was also reported.<sup>20</sup> All mosques in Tajikistan operate under the governmental Committee of Religion Affairs and the Islamic Center. The second agency has authority to appoint imams in mosques and pay them salaries from the state budget. The head of this Center, Saidmukarram Abdulkodirzoda, called on practitioners to stop disseminating the videos, and the Committee of the Religion Affairs also condemned the videos.<sup>21</sup>

Meanwhile, *Nuri Nahzat* continued releasing new sex series about an imam from the Isfara mosque in the north of the country neighboring Kyrgyzstan,<sup>22</sup> and an imam of a mosque in the Farkhor district neighboring Afghanistan, thus expanding the geography of “immoral IRPT mullahs.”<sup>23</sup> For the first time a *Nuri Nahzat* video was broadcasted by the main official TV station *Shabakai avval*. It is hard to believe that any state media would air or publish any material produced or provided by opposition. The state TV channels even in their reports from Parliament try not to give coverage to IRPT representatives, and whatever news related to IRPT or any other opposition movement published in the governmental media has been negative. The IRPT has always released statements denying the membership of “porn imams” to the party,<sup>24</sup> but they are never broadcasted by official media.

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13 David McHugh, “President Suspends Skuratov for Sex,” *The Moscow Times*, April 3, 1999, <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/president-suspends-skuratov-for-sex/278700.html>.

14 “Azerbaijani State TV Airs Sex Video of Opposition Editor,” *RFE/RL*, [http://www.rferl.org/content/Azerbaijani\\_State\\_TV\\_Airs\\_Sex\\_Video\\_Of\\_Opposition\\_Editor/2202050.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/Azerbaijani_State_TV_Airs_Sex_Video_Of_Opposition_Editor/2202050.html).

15 “Activist Barred from Leaving Azerbaijan Condemns Release of Sex Video,” *RFE/RL*, <http://www.rferl.org/content/us-citizen-barred-from-leaving-azerbaijan-nuri-sex-video/26577791.html>.

16 “Intimnoe video muftiya Kyrgyzstana,” *Radio Azadlyg*, <http://www.radioazadlyg.org/content/article/25222146.html>.

17 “Hamalai chandrasoonai ‘fabrikai javob’ ba HNIT,” *Tojnews*, <http://www.tojnews.org/hamlai-chandrasoonai-ba-hnit>.

18 “Muloqoti rohbariyati HNIT bo ‘qahramon’-i navorhoi nav dar internet,” *Ozodagon*, <http://www.ozodagon.com/15676-nit-tayid-kard-ki-rizoiev-uzvi-in-izb-ast.html>.

19 “Navori navi ‘Nuri Nahzat’ ba muqobili HNIT,” *Tojnews*, <http://www.tojnews.org/navori-navi-nuri-nahzat-ziddi-hnit-dar-youtube>.

20 “Mufti: ‘Nuri nahzat’-ro pahn nakuned!,” *Faraj*, <http://faraj.tj/main/5185-muft1251-nuri-na1203zat-ro-pa1203n-nakuned.html>.

21 “Kumitai din ‘Nuri nahzat’-ro mahkum kard,” *Tojnews*, <http://tojnews.org/kumitai-din-targibi-fahshro-az-tariqi-naorhoi-nuri-nahzat-mahkum-kard>.

22 “V YouTube poyavilas’ zapis’ ob ocherednom ‘Mullo-koldune,’” *Asia Plus*, <http://news.tj/ru/news/v-youtube-poyavilas-zapis-ob-ocherednom-mullo-koldune>.

23 “Namoiishi navori mahramonai imome az Lolazori Farkhor dar TV-hoi davlati,” *Ozodagon*, <http://www.ozodagon.com/17697-namoiishi-navori-mahramonai-imome-az-lolazori-farkhor-dar-tv-oi-davlat.html>.

24 “PIVT otreagiroyal na ocherednoy videorolik *Nuri nahzat*,” *Radio Ozodi*, <http://rus.ozodi.org/content/article/25409497.html>; “HNIT nashri navori ‘Mulloye az Lolazor’-ro gayriakhloqi khond,” *Radio Ozodi*, <http://www.ozodi.org/content/article/26540859.html>.

## Temporary Election Games or Long-Term Strategy?

The first bricks of the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan were laid forty years ago, in the underground life of the 1970s. As a key member of the United Tajik Opposition (UTO) the party participated in the civil war that tore the country apart from 1992 to 1997. The peace agreement signed in Moscow in 1997 allowed the IRPT's legal registration in the country, with promises of a 30% quota of all government positions. The quota was eventually ignored, and seats for opposition officials were replaced by Rahmon's cronyism. The government policy of "peaceful cohabitation" was abandoned after the good results of the IRPT in 2010 parliamentary elections: officially the party won 8% of the vote, but IRPT claims it had four to five times more votes than the declared number.<sup>25</sup> The Tajik state's failure in fighting poverty, high economic dependence on labor migration, corruption, and absence of rule of law explains that voters, including non-religious segments of population, demonstrate their resentment by voting for IRPT.

On the eve of parliamentary elections, slated for February 2015, the government seems afraid of losing control. Muhiddin Kabiri, the popular leader of the IRPT, is a pioneering politician who avidly uses both Facebook and Russian social networks. It was via Facebook that he kindly answered my one simple question about pressures—"why?"—by explaining:

"The 2010 elections showed that our party has a strong position in society. Therefore, the current pressures have only one explanation—upcoming elections. [The government] also might feel its own weakness, it cannot strengthen its positions among the people, and the only way it sees to do this is by weakening others."<sup>26</sup>

However, the Islamic Party is not the only opposition party hit by a new wave of repressions. This list includes the imprisoning of prominent businessman Zayd Saidov after he announced the creation of the "New Tajikistan" party;<sup>27</sup> the detention of two of his three lawyers, one of whom is a known activist, Shuhrat Quدراتov, deputy head of the Social Democratic Party;<sup>28</sup> on-going investigations against two of Saidov's sons;<sup>29</sup> and recent pressure on emigrated leaders of Group24, Umarali Quvvatov and Sharofiddin Gadoev.<sup>30</sup>

But pressures against the IRPT have a much longer history. In February 2012 a Russian website, *Polyarnaya zvezda*, published minutes from a secret meeting (known by the name "Protocol 32-20") during which President Rahmon instructed security services how to put step by step pressure on the Islamic party.<sup>31</sup> Later Tajikistan's General Prosecutor's Office officially admitted that the secret meeting was held, but accused the Russian website of falsifying the meeting's minutes.<sup>32</sup>

Taking into account that the Islamic Party has no influence with TV or radio stations in the country (as they either belong to the state or deeply controlled by the government), as well as the inability to effectively respond online, the party's self-defense does not reach all those who watched the videos. One of the main Tajik-speaking news portals, Ozodi, recorded that its top visited article in 2013 was an article detailing a sex scandal involving a mullah, outdoing news about the detention of opposition leaders in Moscow and Dubai, or presidential elections.<sup>33</sup>

Immoral videos are not the sole reason for IRPT's waning popular support. The party appeared unable to defend even its own active members from beatings, jail, and murder in police stations. The conciliatory tone of IPRT main political figures makes them look like a puppet opposition. This

25 "HNIT va intikhoboti 2010: oyo natijahoi voqe'i dark shudaand?," *Millat*, [http://www.millat.tj/siyosat/1811-hnit\\_va\\_intikhoboti\\_\\_345.html](http://www.millat.tj/siyosat/1811-hnit_va_intikhoboti__345.html).

26 Author's interview with Muhiddin Kabiri, IRPT leader, through Facebook.

27 "Qarori nihoi sud: 26 soli zindon ba Zayd Saidov," *Faraj*, <http://faraj.tj/security/3924-1178aziyai-so1203ibkori-bozdoshstshuda-murofi-ai-ni1203oii-sud-1207araen-dorad.html>.

28 "Videoi bozdoshthi Shuhrat Quدراتov - dar TV-hoi Tojikiston," *Radio Ozodi*, <http://www.ozodi.mobi/a/anticorruption-agency-explain-shuhrat-quدراتov-arrest/25466829.html>.

29 "Sanjishi izdivoji 5 sol peshi pisari Zayd Saidov az sui Ojonsi," *Radio Ozodi*, <http://www.ozodi.mobi/a/anticorruption-agency-investigates-earlier-marriage-of-zaid-saidovs-son/26553032.html>.

30 "Guruhi 24ro Sudi Oli guruhi ekstremisti e'lon kard," *Jahonnamo TV*, <http://jahonnamo.tj/ijtimo/8066-guruhi-24-ro-sudi-oli-guruhi-ekstremisti-e-lon-kard.html>.

31 "Tadzhikistan nakanune revolyutsii," *Polyarnaya zvezda*, March 1, 2012, <http://www.zvezda.ru/geo/2012/03/01/rachmon.htm>.

32 "Genprokuratura Tadzhikistana: Protokol 32-20 byl inogo soderzhaniya," *Asia Plus*, <http://news.tj/ru/news/genprokuratura-tadzhikistana-protokol-32-20-by-l-inogo-soderzhaniya>.

33 "Behtarinhoy Ozodi dar soli 2013," *Radio Ozodi*, <http://www.ozodi.org/content/ozodis-most-visited-and-most-commented-articles-in-2013-updated/25208943.html>.

perception is a growing trend fostered by the rise of new, more radical oppositional movements, such as Umarali Quvvatov's Gruppya-24, which openly calls for regime change. The state's decision to focus discreditation on issues related to morality and sexuality may raise negative views towards IRPT members and mullahs, but it also complements the ban on teaching Islam at homes and mosques, and the one on selling audio and video records of preaching.

### **Conclusions**

It remains difficult to decisively draw conclusions about the final goal of this digital attack strategy. Is its aim solely to target the IRPT as the main opposi-

tion party and weaken its popular support in preparation of the parliamentary elections? More people in Tajikistan are losing faith in fair elections and political change, and a growing part of the youth is pushing for a more radical opposition, closer to a fundamental interpretation of political Islam than to the moderate Islamo-nationalism advocated by the IRPT. Or does the government hope to reach the broader goal of pushing people away from mosques and religion in general? An anti-Islam policy—forbidding minors and women from attending mosques, prayer in the public places, and beards and hijab in schools—in a deeply Muslim country will only lead to a political and societal impasse, even more so when the economic situation of households remain largely dependent on labor migration, and therefore a difficult geopolitical context.

# Political Islam in Tajikistan after Formation of the IS

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Igor Rotar<sup>1</sup> (2015)

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## A “Slap” to Rakhmon

A large-scale scandal broke out in Tajikistan at the end of May. The disappeared Commander of a special police unit (OMON) under the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Tajikistan, Colonel Gulmurod Halimov, suddenly appeared in a YouTube video, uploaded on May 27. In his video message, the former OMON Commander admitted that he joined the ranks of the Islamic State (IS) and stated that “the brothers will return with weapons” and will fight against those who suppress Islam. He urged his countrymen and, in particular, migrant workers in Russia “not to be slaves,” and “to join the jihad.” Halimov said that while working for the state authorities he was disappointed in his colleagues and in the leadership of the country who try to denigrate Islam through lies and slander. According to the former commando, believers in Tajikistan are not allowed to pray, and it is forbidden for women to wear a hijab.<sup>2</sup>

“Colonel Halimov is a man with strong charisma and energy that especially appeals to the people of his age. The generation of forty year olds has spoken—the people who don’t have the significant experience of living in the Soviet Tajikistan, and who received their education and were brought up in post-Soviet Central Asia. This is a very important point. These people are offended by duplicity, cynicism and permissiveness of power—we are primarily talking about the Tajik government”—states Arkady Dubnov, a Russian journalist and a well-known expert on Central Asia.<sup>3</sup>

It is important to note that Gulmorod Halimov gained his fame in 2012 during a military operation in Pamir. It was then that Halimov was noticed by the

president’s son Rustam Emomali, who is considered to be the most likely successor to his father. Because of Halimov’s importance the scandal was a large-scale one.<sup>4</sup>

With the approval of the country’s top officials, Halimov had both power and wealth (by Tajik standards). The fact that he has joined the Islamists is a slap in the face to the current regime in Dushanbe. Due to his physical strength and courage, Halimov is respected by some groups of Tajik youth, and certainly his actions will cause many young people in the country to think about the possibility of joining IS. In his video message Halimov deliberately spoke in Russian, and one can expect that his words will affect not only the Tajiks, but also the citizens of other Central Asian republics as well as Central Asian migrant workers in Russia.

According to the Minister of Internal Affairs of Tajikistan, Ramazon Rahimzod, 386 citizens of Tajikistan are involved in the fighting in Syria and Iraq. According to him, about 40 of these people left the country along with their families. Though, for a republic with a population of more than 8 million people this is more than a modest figure.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, according to Nusrat Nazarov, also known as Abu Holid Kulob, one of the leaders of the Tajiks fighting on the side of the IS in Syria, there are more than 2,000 Tajiks in the ranks of IS. “You see them here and you feel as if you are in Tajikistan. If this continues, there will be no one left in Tajikistan; they will all come to fight in Syria.” —said Nazarov.<sup>6</sup>

It is difficult to argue how true Nazarov’s statements are; however, it is clear that there are some IS supporters in Tajikistan. The organization probably enjoys popularity among some uneducated young Tajiks. This popularity is caused both by poor economic situation in the country, and a sharp deterioration of the economic situation in Russia. After the value of the dollar against the ruble has more than

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1 Igor Rotar is a famous Russian journalist now living in the United States, specialized on Central Asia and more globally on ethnic and religious issues in the former Soviet space. He publishes regularly for *Rosbalt*, *Novye izvestiya*, and published during several years for the Jamestown Foundation and Forum 18.

2 Information Agency Fergana, May 28, 2015.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Tajik news agency Asia-Plus, January 29, 2015.

6 Ibid.



doubled, working in the former “feeding” country was not the best option for the people of Tajikistan, and some of them are thinking about the possibility of joining IS for purely material considerations. Moreover, among Central Asian migrants in Russia there are extremely active recruiters for the war in Syria. A significant portion of the Tajik citizens recruited to fight in Syria were recruited during their migration work in Russia.<sup>7</sup>

Tajik authorities are trying to reduce the risk of a flow of volunteers to Syria from Tajikistan. Thus, the Supreme Court of Tajikistan defined IS as a terrorist organization and banned its activities in the country. The Council of Ulema of the Islamic Centre (Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Tajikistan) issued a fatwa, according to which the IS was declared *haram* (sinful) and engagement in jihad in the ranks of this organization was considered to be a great sin. The fatwa’s justification reads as follows: “IS is committing anti-Islamic acts, including declaring those who disagree with them to be wrong believers. Violence against Muslim children and women, massacres, bombings in mosques, the revival of slavery and plunder of the population has always been alien to Islam.”<sup>8</sup>

### Imam-Khatibs as Civil Servants

It is difficult not to agree with Gulmorod Halimov’s opinion that Tajik authorities violate the rights of believers. Religious repression by Tajik authorities has quite a long history. According to the Tajik Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations of 2009, the country introduced a quota for the number of mosques and all of them have to be registered. Religious education at home is forbidden. In 2011, Tajik President Emomali Rakhmon signed a bill banning minors from attending mosques, as well as from participating in any religious activities, except for funerals.<sup>9</sup>

Since January 2014 the imams in central mosques have been paid by the state. In the same year, as prescribed by the Committee on Religious Affairs, the

Imam-Khatibs were designated to wear a single uniform. As instructed by the Committee, preaching in all mosques is approved by the Council of Ulemas of the Islamic Center. In practice, Muslim clerics in Tajikistan have turned into entirely state-controlled bureaucrats.<sup>10</sup>

Muhiddin Kabiri, the Chairman of the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan, stated: “In reality, serious restrictions on the freedom of Muslims in Tajikistan took place before the advent of the Islamic State. The formation of IS has only intensified a long-standing trend of repression against Muslims and has allowed the leadership of Tajikistan to openly take total control of the life of believers in the country. Tajik authorities, however, as well as the leaders in some of the other Central Asian republics have decided that the international atmosphere today favors a stricter religious policy. There is a fear of IS, in fact, and this fear sometimes gets blown up and generalized to all who bear the name ‘Islamic.’ Everyone, including the West, is interested in stability in Central Asia, albeit at the expense of civil rights violations. Obedient dictators are more convenient than the free and not very obedient people.”

However, Muhiddin Kabiri also notes that some forms of government persecution of Muslims after the formation of the IS are becoming more radical. Thus, in May several dozen bearded men were detained in Tajikistan and after identification and fingerprinting were forcibly shaved.<sup>11</sup> Women in hijabs were also detained and police also visited stores selling religious clothing and told merchants that hijabs are now forbidden to sell.<sup>12</sup>

However, undoubtedly the most serious persecution of Muslims in Tajikistan after the formation of IS was the state’s campaign against the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan. On July 9, the Tajik Prosecutor General’s Office stated that the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) was no longer consider a registered political party, as by law a condition of its existence is the presence of members in most regions of the republic. The prosecutor’s statement came out a few days after the political council of the IRP appealed to President Emomali Rakhmon with an open

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7 BBC Russian Service, August 17, 2015.

8 Tajik news agency “Ozodogon,” June 2, 2015.

9 Forum-18, March 3, 2015.

10 Ibid.

11 Forum-18, May 6, 2015.

12 Forum-18, April 1, 2015.

letter, which lists all the harassment the party members experienced from government agencies.<sup>13</sup>

According to its exiled chairman, Muhiddin Kabiri, because of the falsification of the election results, for the first time the IRP received no seats in parliament after the parliamentary elections of March 1. Mr. Kabiri clearly explains this failure as a result of the machinations of the authorities, which he, however, was not about to confront. “We had hoped that the government, having the parliament without opposition, would stop at that. Unfortunately, we were wrong - after the elections, harassment and pressure on us only increased,” said Muhiddin Kabiri.

Kabiri believes that this policy is a terrible mistake of the authorities and recalls that the bloody civil war in Tajikistan was the result of the oppression of the Islamic Renaissance Party. “Instead of attacking us, the authorities should use us as allies in the fight against radical Islamists—such as Hizb-ut-Tahrir and the Islamic State,” persuades Kabiri. “By driving us virtually underground, the authorities actually give the ‘green light’ to radical Islam. This is the same situation as on the eve of the civil war in Tajikistan.”

It is important to note that Kabiri—well-shaven and fluent in Russian—belongs to the most moderate wing of the IRP. On the eve of and during the civil war, the IRP was headed by people with far more radical views. In 1991, the historical leader of the IRP, Abdulohi Nuri, told the author that in the future Tajikistan should become an Islamic state (today the IRP does not set this goal for itself). In autumn of 1992, the IRP proclaimed the Gharm Islamic Republic in a number of settlements in Karategin, although because of ongoing military action it was merely an empty statement. However, in the villages controlled by the opposition (as the author can attest, as he repeatedly visited Karategin during the time of the civil war) people tended to comply with certain provisions of sharia law. Women were required to wear the hijab in public. People accused of crimes were beaten in the mosques, and not with a stick (as it should be under sharia law), but with the shell of a hand grenade. For smoking they issued 20 lashes with the grenade shell, for drinking alcohol—40, for adultery—100. In some villages, those who “violated the law” spent a few days in a closed tank. If the victim began to show displeasure, the Mujahideen

threw stones against the walls of the tank, and the person sitting in it often suffered from torn eardrums as a result.<sup>14</sup> None of these practices are part of the IRP’s toolkit today.

### What’s Next?

After the conversation of the author with Mukhidin Kabiri, the confrontation between the Tajik authorities and the IRP has become even tenser. The authorities accused the deputy Defense Minister and former field commander of the Tajik opposition Abdukhalim Nazarzoda of attacking militia posts and a military headquarters near Dushanbe on September 4. As a result of an antiterrorist operation, the rebellious general was killed in mountains near Dushanbe. According to the version of the Tajik General Attorney’s office, Nazarzoda was directed by Mukhidin Kabiri, who organized “more than 20 criminal groups.” Kabiri denied any connection of the IRP with the events of September 4. “To arrange an international search through Interpol, they should first connect me with this revolt with which we have nothing to do”—stated the leader of the Islamic Party.

Most likely, after the authorities have actually driven the IRP underground, their stance will be much more radical and many of its members may decide to utilize the same methods as during the civil war. The external conditions for the new troubles today are even more favorable than two decades ago. The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan has officially announced its alliance with IS. Among IMU combatants there are quite a few citizens of Tajikistan. Currently, the fighting in Afghanistan is taking place directly next to the Tajik-Afghan border. And besides the Taliban, the IMU is fighting against the Afghan government forces.<sup>15</sup>

A particularly critical situation is developing in the Pamirs. The Tajik-Afghan border is largely unguarded here. Bordering with Afghanistan and Gharm, the Darwaz district of Pamir is one of the main strongholds of the IRP. The IMU militants could penetrate Darwaz from Afghanistan, where they would be supported by a significant segment of the population, and from there they could go on the offensive on the border with Darwaz Karategin,

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<sup>13</sup> *Information Agency Fergana*, July 10, 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Igor Rotar, *Pod zelenym znamenem: islamskie radikalny v Rossii i SNG* (Moscow: AIRO-XX, 2001).

<sup>15</sup> *Interfax*, August 4, 2015.

which is also home to a significant number of IRP supporters.

Even if we assume that the rebels will not be able to take full control of Darwaz and Karategin, the probability of breaking through the border is quite high. Note that breakthroughs of militias from Afghanistan in this area and their clashes with the Tajik army occurred fairly regularly in previous years. However, after the IMU joined the Islamic State and with the potential for the IRP to go underground, the situation becomes much more dangerous. However,

unlike in 1992, the Kremlin holds a distinct position of power in Tajikistan and will certainly help Dushanbe in the case of an uprising in the country. On the other hand, steeped in the Ukrainian conflict, Vladimir Putin may simply not have enough power to intervene in the Tajik confusion as well. The external background for destabilization of the situation in Tajikistan is even more favorable than it was in the 1990s. Although, occupied by the war in Syria and Iraq, IS might simply not have enough forces to open the Central Asian front.

## PART II. ISLAM AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN POLICIES

### Female Virtue, Religion and State Ideology in Tajikistan

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Hélène Thibault<sup>1</sup> (2016)

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Since independence in 1991, Tajikistan's authorities have been trying to promote a unifying ideology that could inspire the whole nation. National unity is particularly challenging in this country that has been wounded by a five-year civil war (1992-1997). As religiosity has become more prevalent over the years, the authorities have tried to thwart the growth of Islam by promoting a conservative ideology devoid of Islamic content, resting on imagined national traditions, national purity and ancient wisdom. Interestingly, the female figure has become increasingly instrumental in the state's national discourse. Patronizing moral recommendations focus mainly on female clothing and virtue, which have come to embody national values. The role of women in the transmission of family and patriotic values is celebrated, yet discourses hide a difficult reality for Tajik women who are deeply affected by poverty, labor migration, and social and state pressure.

#### Channeling Tajik Islam

On the one hand, authorities have tried to instrumentalize religion for legitimacy purposes, though its use is carefully limited. Officially, the state is secular, but the special role of the Hanafi school of Islam is underlined in the *Law on Freedom of Conscience*

and *religious Organizations*. The year 2009 was dedicated to the Great Imam (Imomi Azam) Abu Hanifa, the founder of Hanafism, which is the official religious teaching of Tajikistan.<sup>2</sup> An omnipresent figure in Tajikistan, President Emomali Rahmon regularly includes modest references to religion in his official addresses to the nation. Every year, presidential speeches congratulate citizens at the beginning and end of Ramadan and at the occasion of Idi Fitri and Idi Qurbon. In his Presidential inaugural speech in November 2006, Rakhmon underlined the importance of maintaining a secular state, yet swore an oath in the name of Allah and of the land. Even so, the Tajik president rarely refers to his own beliefs and does not appear to be very religious himself.<sup>3</sup> When Islam is evoked, it is presented as an integral part of Tajik culture and according to the President: "separating the Islamic faith from the national culture [...] is a mistake."<sup>4</sup>

After some unsuccessful attempts to promote the Aryan and Zoroastrian heritage in the mid-2000s, the authorities are still looking for an inspiring secular ideology. In the spring 2015, at the occasion of his annual meeting with the country's intelligentsia, the president summoned them to develop a secular ideology that takes into account "in priority, the principle of secularism, the development of national and secular thinking, respect for state language, history, and progressive tendencies of the national culture."<sup>5</sup> In this regard, controversial legal measures meant to promote national values were adopted, such as the *Law on Parental Responsibility in the Upbringing and*

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1 Hélène Thibault is a postdoctoral researcher at the Canada Research Chair in Religious Pluralism and Ethnicity and the Centre for International Studies at the Université de Montréal, Canada. She has worked on Central Asian issues since 2005, specializing in religion, national identity and Soviet legacy. Her most recent publications have appeared in *Eurostudies* and *Studies in Religion*. Her book, *Transforming Tajikistan: State-building and Islam in Post-Soviet Central Asia*, is published by I.B. Tauris in 2016.

2 Avaz Yudalshev, "Hanafi School Recognized as Official Religion of Tajikistan," *Asia Plus*, March 5, 2009, <http://www.news.tj/en/news/hanafi-school-recognized-official-religion-tajikistan>.

3 A video in which Emomali Rahmon is seen looking drunk and singing at his son's wedding in 2007 surfaced on Youtube in June 2013. As a result, the authorities shut down the country's Youtube access for several days. Tohir Pallaev, "YouTube Blocked in Tajikistan After Video of President Dancing Goes Viral," *Global Voices*, May 27, 2013, <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2013/05/27/tajikistan-famous-wedding-singer-splits-opinion/>.

4 Leonid Chigrin and Ato Hamdam, *Dnevnyaya zvezda Imomi Azama* (Dushanbe: Irfon, 2009), 12.

5 <http://www.prezident.tj/ru/node/8463>.



*Education of Children*, introduced in 2011. It includes provisions on the transmission of “national values.” In particular, Article 8 invites parents or tutors to give children names that have “national consonance”<sup>6</sup> and holds parents responsible for raising children “in the spirit of the love and respect for the Motherland and national values.”

Picture 1. Example of an Official Outfit for Tajik Imams



Source: RFE/RL

In May 2015, a bill that would forbid the registration of names considered too Arabic was being discussed but was not yet adopted. If so, registry offices would “not register names that are incorrect or alien to the local culture, including names denoting objects, flora and fauna, as well as names of Arabic origin.”<sup>7</sup> Other articles of the law are greatly interfering with parenting. For instance, parents should forbid children to carry cell phones to school, wear jewellery, and let children under twenty years old (the legal age is 18) go out at night in entertainment centres such as internet cafes and bars.

On the other hand, authorities have subordinated religion to the point that practices are now carefully regulated and the clergy under tight state control. Restrictions concern the prohibition of private unsanctioned religious lessons, of children’s participation in religious ceremonies at the exception of funerals, and of women’s access to mosques. In the meantime, religious education has become inaccessible as most madrassas (religious schools) are now closed, with the exception of the Islamic Institute in Dushanbe. Foreign Islamic education requires a special permission from the authorities, which have not hesitated to repatriate by force nearly 2,000 Tajik students from Islamic countries in 2010. Access to the annual *Hajj* has been limited to citizens over 35 years old. The Department of Religious Affairs has increased its influence on religious life by approving the nomination of imams, the erection of mosques by preparing a list of approved or suggested topics for Friday sermons, and by delivering permits for citizens who wish to organize private religious classes. Finally, as of 2014, imams have the obligation to wear state-made religious robes and receive their salary from the state.<sup>8</sup>

More significantly, authorities are trying to channel religious beliefs by establishing religious standards and making them compatible with national values. They promote an Islam defined as ‘traditional’ and ‘legitimate,’ which refers to historical figures in opposition to an Islam presented as ‘radical’ and ‘dangerous’ tainted by foreign influences. The process of establishing a national Islam implies the discard of other trends deemed extremist or antagonistic to national values. Colonel Zikrullo Saidzoda of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, declared in August 2015 that Tajiks must stay away from foreign Islamic trends and that those who do not pray according to the principles of the Hanafi branch of Islam could be interrogated.<sup>9</sup>

A number of Islamic organizations have been added to the list of terrorist organizations and over the years, thousands of people have been prosecuted and condemned for their involvement in one of

6 Already, in 1990 the Communist Party’s First Secretary had set up a committee composed of historians and linguists to produce a list of non-religious patriotic names. Dilip Hiro, *Between Marx and Muhammad. The Changing Face of Central Asia* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1995), 209.

7 David Trilling, “Tajikistan debates ban on Arabic names as part of crackdown on Islam,” *The Guardian*, May 8, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/08/tajikistan-islam-arabic-names-crackdown>.

8 Roja Assadi, “Tajik government pays salaries to Imams for first time,” *BBC News*, March 17, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-26579613>.

9 “Polkovnik MVD: vsyakiy, kto deystvuet ne po Khanafitskomu mazhabu, budet doproshen,” *Radio Ozodi*, August 7, 2015, <http://rus.ozodi.org/content/article/27176052.html>.

the banned organizations. In 2014 alone, Tajikistan's General Prosecutor opened 348 cases on charges of extremism and radicalism or for their support or promotion.<sup>10</sup> Some of the organizations are known for their violent actions while others such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Hizb ut-Tahrir may hold fundamentalist views but are non-violent organizations. The last one added on the list is the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (IRPT), due to its alleged involvement in an assault against a military compound near Dushanbe in September 2015. Dozens of IRPT members went into exile and another dozen are awaiting trial in Tajikistan. As one of the main stakeholders in the 1997 Peace Agreements, the main opposition force, and the standard bearer of moderate political Islam, the ban of the IRPT is of extreme significance.<sup>11</sup> Even though Tajik society is not on the verge of radicalization, the Islamic Revival Party's disappearance may jeopardize the stability of the country. Finally, the subordination of religion is accompanied by anti-religious propaganda that became especially virulent after 2010. What is denigrated is not Islam *per se* but the strict adherence to Islamic principles, especially religious education and clothing.

### The Reinvention of Tradition

In the early years of the Bolshevik revolution, the liberation of women from centuries-old patriarchal oppression was a priority for the Soviet authorities. The promotion of women's rights had two objectives: to ensure the equality of rights for men and women, but perhaps even more importantly, to undermine the Islamic clergy and religious traditions. The forced unveiling of women, called *Hujum*, literally, the 'assault,' provoked serious backlashes but in the end, coercion and propaganda provided results and in the last days of the USSR, barely any Central Asian women, at the exception of elderly ones, were cov-

ering their heads. A very similar dynamic is at play in today's Tajikistan.<sup>12</sup> Once again, the female apparel, and more broadly, the female figure, embody the secular and progressive character of the nation and is used to delegitimize strict religious practices. Yet, if women are accused of propagating extremist ideas if they wear a hijab, they are also criticized for dressing up in European 'sexy' clothes that betray national values. To a lesser extent, men's appearance, especially the beard, also falls under state scrutiny. Such recurrent patronizing state discourses are used to define and impose a proper behavior in line with an idealized conception of a secular society. The issue of concordance between morality and national traditions not only tells us about Tajik politics, it also exemplifies the difficulties of nation-building in post-Soviet countries.

Though they are still a minority, the number of women who wear hijabs in Tajikistan is increasing year after year and this has become a matter of concern for the authorities. Several public figures have publicly criticized women's clothing style, either 'Islamic' or 'European.' In 2007, Abdudjabbor Rakhmonov, the Minister of Education (2005-2012), introduced a decree that forbids women to wear hijabs in educational institutions. The decree also compels young women to dress "in accordance with their status and national traditions," and avoid clothes that are "provocative," for instance tight jeans and miniskirts.<sup>13</sup> Attacks against the hijab reached a new level in the fall of 2010, when Rakhmonov publicly condemned parents who send their children to study with mullahs as well as women who wear the hijab, going as far as to call these women "monkeys."<sup>14</sup> When he became Rector of the Pedagogical University in Dushanbe in 2012, Rakhmonov issued a decree instructing female future professors to wear high heels (maximum height of 3 cm) so that they look more professional and feel more confident.<sup>15</sup> Even the Council of Ulemas, Tajikistan's quasi-of-

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10 "Country Reports on Terrorism: South and Central Asia," US Bureau of Counterterrorism, 2014, <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2014/239408.htm>.

11 H el ene Thibault, "The Islamic Renaissance Party's downfall and its consequences for Tajikistan's stability," *Registan*, August 7, 2015, <http://registan.net/2015/07/08/the-islamic-renaissance-partys-downfall-and-its-consequences-for-tajikistans-stability/>.

12 H el ene Thibault, "The Soviet Secularization Project in Central Asia: Accommodation and Institutional Legacies," *Eurostudia* 10, no. 1 (2015): 11-31.

13 Sally Peck, "Tajikistan bans miniskirts and head scarves," *The Telegraph*, April 18, 2007, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/1549005/Tajikistan-bans-miniskirts-and-head-scarves.html>.

14 "Rakhmonov: Pust' vashikh detey uchat mully," *Asia Plus*, September 17, 2015, <http://news.tj/ru/newspaper/article/rakhmonov-pust-vashikh-dei-uchat-mully-audio>.

15 "V pedagogicheskom universitete vveden zapret na vysokie kabluki," *Radio Ozodi*, March 27, 2013, <http://rus.ozodi.org/content/article/24940302.html>.

ficial clergy, recommended women to wear Islamic clothes that conform to the national culture, and not those of Iran, Turkey, and other Arabic countries.<sup>16</sup> In the spring 2015, it was reported that a number of prostitutes wear hijabs in order to avoid public or police harassment.<sup>17</sup> The story was picked up by the authorities, and used to delegitimize the veil once again. In August 2015, Mahmadsaid Ubaidulloev, Dushanbe's Mayor, declared war against foreign clothing and even instructed relevant state bodies to put an end to the import and sale of foreign clothing in Dushanbe.<sup>18</sup>

In August 2015, even Colonel Zikrullo Saidzoda of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, felt compelled to criticize women for wearing "European-style clothes," and suggested them to wear "traditional clothes."<sup>19</sup> In May, the mayor of Khujand in northern Tajikistan announced the organization of a series of meetings with women to discuss ways to dress properly, in accordance to national traditions. He also underlined the need to conduct raids in clothing stores in order to prevent the selling of Afghan and Iranian clothes.<sup>20</sup> The President himself has associated the hijab to extremist ideas in a recent speech delivered at the occasion of Mother's Day in 2015. The President condemned women who wore foreign clothing, saying that they were propagating extremist ideas in the country.

Although the President maintains that ethnographic studies prove how since ancient times, Tajik people always had beautiful female clothes and that women and girls never wore black clothes, the definition of what represents 'tradition' is problematic. What the authorities refer to as a 'traditional or national clothes' is a colorful outfit composed of baggy pants worn underneath a long loose dress with short or long sleeves. Yet, before the Bolshevik revolution, women living in the sedentary regions of Central Asia such as present-day Uzbekistan and Tajikistan used to wear burqa-like robes called *paranja* or *chavchan* that covered the whole body including the face until the Soviets launched the *Hujum* campaign in the late 1920s. Therefore, the 'traditional clothes' politicians

refer to are in fact Soviet clothes. The use of pre-colonial legacies requires a distortion of history that authorities are willing to make so that it fits the nationalist secular programme they are promoting.

Picture 2. Samarkand, 1910. Traditional/Pre-Soviet clothes?



Source: Sergei M. Prokudin-Gorskii Collection at the Library of Congress

Picture 3. Khujand 2011. Traditional/Soviet clothes?



Source: Photo credit Hélène Thibault

In return, men's clothes are never evoked. In Tajikistan, most men dress in regular shirts, pants, jackets and ties, which do not seem to betray nation-

16 "Tadzhikistan: Sovet ulemov prizyvaet zhenshchin nosit' tol'ko natsional'nyuy odezhdu," *Fergana News*, September 30, 2010, <http://www.fergananews.com/news.php?id=15647>.

17 Ganjinai Ganj and Farangis Najibullah, "Tajik Prostitutes Seek Protection in the Hijab," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, March 14, 2015, <http://www.rferl.org/content/tajikistan-prostitutes-hijab/26900935.html>.

18 Avaz Yuldashev, "Mer Dushanbe "ob"yavil voynu" chuzhdoy tadzhikam odezhde," *Asia Plus*, August 20, 2015, <http://news.tj/ru/news/mer-dushanbe-obyavil-voinu-chuzhdoi-tadzhikam-odezhde>.

19 *Radio Ozodi*, August 7, 2015.

20 Bakhrom Fayzullayev, "Na severe Tadzhikistana noshenie khidzhaba vzyali pod kontrol'," *Asia Plus*, March 27, 2015, <http://news.tj/ru/news/na-severe-tadzhikistana-noshenie-khidzhaba-vzyali-pod-kontrol>.



al traditions despite their 'European' origin. Yet, over the years, there have been many reports concerning police harassment toward bearded men, and even reports of some being forced to shave their beard.<sup>21</sup> In 2009, the Council of Ulemas even established a norm for the length of beards, which should not exceed the length of a fist.<sup>22</sup>

Dressing-up has become a patriotic affair in Tajikistan. In addition to their appearance, women's virtue should also incarnate patriotic values and participate to state-building. In his speech at the occasion of Mother's Day in May 2015, Rahmon labelled mothers as guardians of the mother tongue and talked at length about the sanctity of women, and how maternal authority fosters the future builders of the state and society. In the authorities' point of view, women bear a lot of responsibilities, both domestic and public. However, they are exercised in less than ultimate conditions as the country's socio-economic situation remains highly problematic.

### Women under Pressure

Labor migration in Central Asia is a phenomenon of extreme significance, especially for Tajikistan. According to the Russian Federal Migration Service, as of January 2015, there were 999,169 migrants from Tajikistan residing in Russia, including 182,262 women.<sup>23</sup> In 2014, 41% of the Tajik GDP came from the revenues of migrant workers, making Tajikistan one of the most remittance-dependent countries in the world.<sup>24</sup> Labor migration introduces new social dynamics within Tajikistan. In the absence of men, women are compelled to play more important roles as they become the families' and sometimes communities' main pillars. Labor migration also has an impact on the structure of the family due to the increasing number of divorces. In Sunni Islam, men can divorce their wives by saying "Talaq" three times

and many migrants end up divorcing over the phone while in Russia. In April 2011, the Council of Ulemas of Tajikistan announced its intention to issue a fatwa that would ban so-called SMS-divorces<sup>25</sup>. In 2013 alone, more than 1,700 women sought help from the Committee on Women and Family Affairs and the Council of Ulemas to resolve such litigations. Yet, in January 2014, the Council announced that it could not stop the phenomenon and concluded that it was not contrary to Sharia.<sup>26</sup> Alone with children, without money, and with few economic opportunities, women sometimes have no choice but to become a man's second or third wife. This might be one of the factors that encourage the rise of polygamy in Tajikistan, even if it is illegal.

The evolving structure of the Tajik family model is perhaps one of the reasons why the government designated 2015 the Year of the Family and planned on adopting a series of measures to support families. The President also announced that a new topic, "culture of family life," was in preparation and would be introduced in schools to prepare the youth to adult life. The government has also adopted a law that outlaws consanguineous marriages since it was reported that there are 26,430 disabled children in Tajikistan and 35% of these were born in consanguineous marriages.<sup>27</sup>

Whereas millions of Tajik men endure the burden of labor migration, Tajik women suffer pressure at multiple levels: state, social and economic. Poverty is widespread and touches around 47% of the population. Access to quality healthcare and education is limited and affects the healthy development of communities. In winter time, citizens in rural areas have access to only three to four hours of electricity a day, which greatly reduces the quality of life. What is especially alarming is the rapid increase of suicide rates, especially among young women. The national suicide rate in Tajikistan among the youth (15-19 years old) increased 63% from 2.8 to 4.5 (per

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21 "V Tadjikistane militsionery nasil'no pobrili borodacha," *Radio Azattyk*, April 1, 2015, <http://rus.azattyk.org/content/news/26932033.html>.

22 "Sovet ulemov Tadjikistana opredelil, kakoy dolzhna byt' boroda u mestnykh musul'man," *NewsRu*, November 22, 2012, <http://www.newsru.com/religy/21nov2012/barba.html>.

23 "Ofitsial'nye dannye FMS o provergli slukhi o massovom vyezde trudovykh migrantov," *Fergana News*, January 23, 2015, <http://www.fergananews.com/news/23008>.

24 <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.DT.GD.ZS>.

25 Farangis Najibullah, "Tajik Fatwa Bans SMS-Divorce," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, April 11, 2011, [http://www.rferl.org/content/tajik\\_fatwa\\_bans\\_sms\\_divorces/3553754.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/tajik_fatwa_bans_sms_divorces/3553754.html).

26 "Sovet ulemov: Shariat dopuskaet SMS-razvody," *Radio Ozodi*, January 22, 2014, <http://rus.ozodi.org/content/sms-divorces-are-allowed/25238766.html>.

27 "V Tadjikistane podgotovlen zakonproekt, zapreshchayushchiy rodstvennye braki," *Radio Ozodi*, June 18, 2015, <http://rus.ozodi.org/content/article/27079037.html>.



100,000) between 2008 and 2010. Female suicide rates increased 176%, from 1.9 to 5.2 (per 100,000), while males experienced only a 6% increase, from 3.6 to 3.9. In 2011, more than 200 women committed suicide in the northern province of Sughd alone, which has a population of around 2.2 million. The reasons cited are poverty, lack of life perspectives and domestic violence.<sup>28</sup>

A survey conducted in 2012 reported that 25% of women in Sughd had suffered from violence perpetrated by their spouse while only 12% reported such cases in the central region called District under Republican Subordination.<sup>29</sup> The actual numbers might be higher since domestic violence is often perpetrated by in-laws. The government passed a Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence in 2013 that might encourage women to denounce abuses and change the widespread perception that domestic violence is somehow acceptable. Finally, another sign of distress is the exposure of a number of horrendous cases of infanticides since 2008, to a point where journalists are wondering if this is turning into a somber pattern.<sup>30</sup> These gloomy numbers reflect the social and economic distress that is

prevalent in today's Tajikistan, which especially affects women.

## Conclusion

Rahmon's Mothers Day's speech in 2015 insisted on the importance of the mother described as a unique creature "who swings the cradle with one hand and with the other, the planet." Such paternalistic rhetoric conveys the message that women are responsible for the perpetuation of the nation through the appropriate upbringing of children as well as through the display of proper social behavior, such as the celebration of national values and the rejection of foreign influence. Overall, citizens are encouraged to act in conformity with national values and according to the President, "there is no greater sin than the betrayal of parents and of the Motherland."<sup>31</sup> Yet, the tightening of state control over not only politics and religion, but over ways of being in the world on a day-to-day basis increases the pressure on citizens, especially women. Eventually, such patronizing practices can only foster resentment toward a privileged and commanding political elite.

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28 "Study of Prevalence and Dynamics of Suicide among Children and Young People (12-24 Years of Age) in Sughd Region, Tajikistan," United Nations Children's Fund, Dushanbe, 2013, [http://ki.se/sites/default/files/suicide\\_study\\_report\\_for\\_web\\_eng1.pdf](http://ki.se/sites/default/files/suicide_study_report_for_web_eng1.pdf).

29 "The DHS Program - Tajikistan 2012," USAID, <http://dhsprogram.com/publications/publication-FR279-DHS-Final-Reports.cfm>.

30 "U ubiystva - zhenskoe litso. V Tadjikistane snova mat' ubila svoego rebenka," *Asia Plus*, November 12, 2015, <http://www.news.tj/ru/news/ubiistva-zhenskoe-litso-v-tadjikistane-snova-mat-ubila-svoego-rebenka>.

31 Emomali Rahmon, "Vystuplenie po sluchayu Dnya materi," March 6, 2015, <http://www.president.tj/ru/node/8400>.

# Rasht Revisited: Five Years after the Conflict

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Eric Hamrin and Edward Lemon<sup>1,2</sup>(2015)

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The two weeks of violence that attracted international attention to Tajikistan last month, with government forces waging pitched battles with supporters of a former defense ministry official, echoed a conflict from the country's past. Five Septembers ago, militants in mountains east of Dushanbe were similarly engaged in a life-and-death struggle with the regime. In that case, as in the recent events, officials tarred their opponents as "terrorists" and "rebels" and foreign observers largely regurgitated the accusation. But the similarity between the 2010-11 conflict in Rasht and the 2015 conflict in Romit,<sup>3</sup> and between these events and other outbreaks of violence in the past decade, lies in their role as steps in the consolidation of power of President Emomali Rahmon's regime.<sup>4</sup>

Rather than newly emergent threats entirely independent from the state, the government's opponents were primarily individuals with a history of engagement with the state, including some who had even occupied state positions. Competition internal to the state generated these conflicts, which the regime used to legitimize the removal of perceived threats to its power.

The Rasht conflict was rooted in intra-elite struggles dating back to the post-civil war period. The government's linkage of its security operation to the fight against "international terrorism" and "radical Islam" masked other more significant driving factors, namely domestic political score settling and the control of resources, primarily coal. Since the conflict ended, the regime has continued to consolidate its power in Rasht, having co-opted local commanders and using the creation of a perceived threat of terrorism to justify a strong security presence. Far from be-

ing a hotbed of extremism, however, Rasht has produced just one documented militant fighting in Syria and Iraq, and the vast majority of alleged members of Tajikistan's leading home-grown terrorist organization have been arrested outside Rasht. The extension of state power in Rasht has far more to do with domestic politics and economics than with fighting terrorism and radical Islam.

## Background

After the 1997 accords ending Tajikistan's civil war, intra-elite struggles over wealth and power wracked the fractious post-conflict state. To consolidate its position, Rahmon's regime marginalized and neutralized potential threats. This struggle took two distinct avenues. First, the regime moved against commanders who had refused to accept the peace deal. The campaigns against these anti-accord elements had largely ended by 2001.<sup>5</sup> In this campaign, several former UTO commanders who had joined the government fought for the regime.

The second avenue of struggle, against many of those who *supported* the peace, continues even today. Initially, the regime used a mixture of coercion and co-optation to form fractious alliances with former commanders. Many of them were based in Rasht, a former UTO stronghold where the government held only nominal control. A number of commanders from Rasht held top government positions. Mirzokhuja Nizomov headed the Customs Committee and later held a senior position on the Border Protection Committee. Salamsho Muhabatshoev from Vanj was appointed Chairman of the Committee on Oil and Gas in 1997. The UTO's former military chief, Mirzo Ziyoev ("Jaga"), became Minister of Emergency Situations in 1998. Democratic Party

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1 Eric Hamrin has worked for various international organizations in Tajikistan.

2 Edward Lemon is doctoral candidate at the University of Exeter, where he researches the relationships between security, migration and religion.

3 The conflict with Nazarzoda crested in Romit, though it began in Dushanbe and Vakhdat. We use "Rasht" to refer to Rasht, Nurobod, Tojikobod, Jirgatal, and Tavildara districts, an area including both the Rasht and Vakhyo (Tavildara) valleys. The region was historically known as Karotegin and as the Gharm *oblast* (region) between 1921 and 1955. We use "Gharm" to denote the central administrative town of Rasht district.

4 We use the surname "Rahmon" throughout, though it was "Rahmonov" until 2007.

5 The regime accused former interior minister Yakub Salimov of plotting a coup in 1997. He fled to Russia, was detained in 2003, then extradited to Tajikistan and imprisoned in 2005. The army repelled former Popular Front commander Mahmud Khudoyberdiev's invasion of Sughd in 1998. In 2001 the security services killed warlord Rahmon "Hitler" Sanginov, who had terrorized Dushanbe's outskirts for several years.

leader Mahmadruci Iskandarov headed state energy company Tojkgaz from 2001. Mirzokhuja Ahmadov (“Belgi”) headed the local office of the anti-organized crime directorate (UBOP) of the interior ministry (MVD). Another commander, Nemat Azizov, headed the Tavildara division of the Ministry of Emergency Situations.

When the government decided to privatize the land in Rasht in 2002, much of it was bought by the commanders.<sup>6</sup> As well as holding government posts, the warlords dictated local politics and accumulated wealth. A review of Mahmadruci Iskandarov’s brother Shoh’s activities typifies the ways in which power remained decentralized in post-conflict Tajikistan.<sup>7</sup> A mid-level commander from an influential family, Shoh commanded 400 men during the civil war.<sup>8</sup> After the war he became commander of the border guards in Jirgital. He allegedly controlled the drug flow to Kyrgyzstan, managed the Nazar-Ailok coal mine in Hoit, as well as trade in vodka and potatoes.<sup>9</sup>

The first major step in the neutralization of those who had agreed to the peace was in 2003, when Mahmadruci Iskandarov spoke out against Rahmon’s constitutional referendum. Rahmon fired Iskandarov from his post. He returned to his native Tojikobod with fellow commander Sadamsho Muhhabatshoev.<sup>10</sup> In April 2004 Iskandarov published an appeal to parliament urging it not to keep Rahmon in power. The statement ended with the following warning: “We are no longer afraid. If you don’t stop, we know where you live. You won’t be able to divide us into Kulobis, Gharmis, Leninobodis and Hissoris anymore.”<sup>11</sup> In August, armed men attacked government build-

ings in Tojikobod, and Iskandarov was implicated. Around this time he fled to Russia. In May 2005 he was abducted near Moscow and transferred to Tajikistan; he was subsequently sentenced to 23 years in jail.<sup>12</sup> His ally Muhhabatshoev stepped back from politics and now heads the Wrestling Federation of Tajikistan.

In subsequent years, the other commanders saw their power wane. In 2006, Jaga lost his ministerial post and returned to Tavildara. Nizomov retired in 2006.<sup>13</sup> Two years later, the head of the special purpose police unit (OMON), Colonel Oleg Zakharchenko, attempted to arrest Belgi and was shot and killed by his men.<sup>14</sup> Rahmon visited the region and reportedly pardoned Belgi, at the same time disbanding his police unit. Belgi accepted land and money in exchange for retreating from politics.<sup>15</sup>

Although Jaga and Belgi retired, they retained much of their influence in the region. In May 2009, the regime used the kidnapping of three soldiers in Darvoz by an armed group led by Jaga associate Nemat Azizov as an opportunity to move against Jaga. The government accused Azizov and Mirzo Jaga of being involved in drug trafficking from Afghanistan to Kyrgyzstan via Tavildara.<sup>16</sup> Under the cover of an anti-narcotics sweep, the government launched a campaign against the Tavildara leaders on May 15. On July 8, an armed group tried to take control of Tavildara itself; the MVD alleged that Azizov and Jaga were involved in the violence.<sup>17</sup> Police repelled the group and shot four of its members dead. On July 11, Jaga was arrested and then killed in mysterious circumstances. According to the official account,

6 Laurence Markowitz, *State Erosion: Unlootable Resources and Unruly Elites in Central Asia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), 94.

7 For another example, see Wiegmann’s description of Nemat Azizov’s control of the Childara jamoat in Tavildara; Gunda Wiegmann, “Socio-political change in Tajikistan” (Ph.D. diss., Hamburg University, 2009), 144.

8 Stina Torjesen, Christina Wille, and S. Neil MacFarlane, “Tajikistan’s Road to Stability: Reduction in Small Arms Proliferation and Remaining Challenges,” *Small Arms Survey* (2005): 78.

9 Wiegmann, “Socio-political change in Tajikistan,” 182.

10 *Ibid.*, 135.

11 Kirill Nourzhanov, “Saviours of the nation or robber barons? Warlord politics in Tajikistan,” *Central Asian Survey* 24, no. 2 (2005): 126.

12 For more information on this case, see: “Case of Iskandarov vs Russia,” European Court of Human Rights, February 21, 2011, [http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-100485#{"itemid":\["001-100485"\]}](http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-100485#{).

13 Roche notes that Nizomov lost influence due to his close relationship with the regime following the civil war, see: Sophie Roche, *Domesticating Youth: Youth Bulges and Their Socio-political Implications in Tajikistan* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2014), 86. During the 2010 conflict in Rasht, Nizomov fled to Russia. Roche speculates that he was acting as a government informant.

14 For a more detailed description of this incident and the reaction of Tajik security services, see: “Tajikistan: The Changing Insurgent Threats,” *Asia Report* No. 205, International Crisis Group (ICG), 2011.

15 “M. Ahmadov: My dostanem ikh i v pravitel’stve,” *Asia-Plus*, January 12, 2011, <http://news.tj/ru/newspaper/article/m-ahmadov-my-dostanem-ikh-i-v-pravitelstve>.

16 On August 5, Safina TV, a channel owned by Rahmon’s daughter, aired police footage of the interrogation of two of Azizov’s brothers, arrested on August 3. They both cited Mirzo Jaga as their group’s leader.

17 Saodat Muhbatsho, “Tajikistan: Mysterious Death Raises Concerns about Militant Returns,” *EurasiaNet*, July 13, 2009, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav071409.shtml>.

released in a joint statement by the MVD and State Committee on National Security (GKNB), Jaga had agreed to reveal the militants' hidden arms caches and to negotiate their surrender, after which Azizov's group accused him of betrayal and shot him.<sup>18</sup> The government declared the operation to be a success on August 4. Eleven militants were dead, including Azizov (killed on July 29), and twenty were detained.

### Prison Break and Ambush

On August 20, 2010, forty-six of those arrested in Tavildara in 2009 were sentenced to between ten years and life in prison on charges of terrorism, illegal arms possession, and murder. Within three days, twenty-five prisoners, most of whom had just been sentenced, escaped from a maximum-security prison in Dushanbe. Among them were Nemat Azizov's brothers, Jaga's sons, and the brother of Ghaffar Mirzoev, the former head of the Presidential Guard, removed from his post in 2004. There were also four Dagestanis, one Russian, two Uzbekistanis, and four Afghans.

Rahmon ordered a nationwide security operation, putting the border guards on high alert and setting up police checkpoints around the country. On September 19, a military convoy came under attack in Kamarob gorge, north of Gharm, with the loss of thirty-five servicemen.<sup>19</sup> The defense ministry blamed Belgi and two other former UTO commanders, Abdullo Rahimov ("Mullo Abdullo") and Alovuddin Davlatov ("Ali Bedaki"), for the attack.<sup>20</sup> With the Zakarchenko murder case reopened earlier in the year, and the new charge, Belgi became fair game, despite his informal pardon in 2008.<sup>21</sup> On September 23, two thousand troops entered Rasht. The previous day,

Belgi narrowly escaped when a helicopter gunship destroyed his house, killing five people. On October 14, he accepted a government offer of amnesty and laid down his arms with thirty of his supporters.

The regime framed the conflict as being perpetrated by international terrorists influenced by radical Islam.<sup>22</sup> Violence in Rasht allowed the regime to legitimize a wider crackdown on unofficial Islam and the region's only faith-based political party, the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT). Police arrested Bedaki's brother Husniddin, an IRPT member, on September 10. Days later, police abducted another party deputy in Rasht. On October 22, police raided the IRPT's central office, warning the party to stop holding prayer meetings in the building. A day later, the women's mosque in the headquarters burned down.

The government attempted to monopolize the production of information about the conflict. Mobile phone services in Rasht did not work for over two months, and outsiders were restricted from traveling to the area. The official narrative, however, contained several discrepancies. After bombing Belgi's house, for example, the security services claimed "international terrorists" were killed, but locals allege the victims were ethnic Kyrgyz construction workers from Jirgital.<sup>23</sup> When journalists challenged the official narrative, the regime blocked four websites and prevented three newspapers from being published. Although these kinds of measures would become routine in later years, at the time they were unprecedented in scope.

Eventually, the government managed to enforce relative stability in the region. Ali Bedaki was captured near Gharm on January 4, 2011, and likely extrajudicially executed.<sup>24</sup> A more significant and

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18 Analysts have noted numerous inconsistencies in the government's account of events. Sodiqov notes that whereas the Tajik authorities reported that Ziyoev was killed on July 11, [www.centrasia.ru](http://www.centrasia.ru) broke the news of his death on July 10. See: Alexander Sodiqov, "High Profile Death Raises Questions in Tajikistan," *CACI-Analyst*, August 19, 2009, <http://old.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/5164>.

19 The government suffered another setback on October 6 when an Mi-8 helicopter carrying the GKNB's elite Alpha division crash-landed, killing twenty-eight soldiers. Although the defense ministry claimed the helicopter "crashed due to technical reasons," locals reported seeing RPG fire ICG, "Changing Insurgent Threats."

20 Abdullo refused to accept the 1997 peace deal and fled to Afghanistan in 2000. After fighting for the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, he returned to Tajikistan in 2009. Press dubbed him "the Tajik Bin Laden." Bedaki was a minor commander who served in Belgi's UBOP unit.

21 Both Bedaki and one of the escapees, "Kamol" Ibragimov, were also suspects in the murder case. See: "MVD RT rasprostranilo ofitsial'noe zayavlenie po povodu "Garmskogo intsidenta," *Asia-Plus*, February 5, 2008, <http://asiaplus.tj/ru/news/mvd-rt-rasprostranilo-ofitsialnoe-zayavlenie-po-povodu-garmskogo-intsidenta>.

22 Edward Lemon, "Mediating the Conflict in the Rasht Valley: The Hegemonic Narrative and Anti-hegemonic Articulations," *Central Asian Affairs* 1, no. 2 (2013): 247-72.

23 John Heathershaw and Sophie Roche, "The Conflict in Tajikistan—Not Really about Radical Islam," *Open Democracy*, October 19, 2010, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/john-heathershaw-sophie-roche/conflict-in-tajikistan-%E2%80%93-not-really-about-radical-islam>.

24 Officials originally said Bedaki was killed in a gun battle. A month later, footage emerged online showing Bedaki being interrogated. See: Alexander Sodiqov and Payam Foroughi, "An Extrajudicial Execution in Tajikistan," *CACI-Analyst*, January 11, 2011, <http://old.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/5696>.



symbolic victory came three months later when government forces killed Mullo Abdullo in the village of Samsolik in Nurobod district. In November, the final prison escapee, a brother of Mirzo Ziyoev, was recaptured.

Picture 1. Belgi Neighbor's House Hit by Copter Attack, 2010



### Rasht since 2011

Judging by its absence from international headlines, Rasht has been quiet since Abdullo's April 2011 death and the wrap-up of the prison escapee hunt. This apparent peace, however, masks the continuation of the government's consolidation of power in the region, complete with recurrences of conflict. The details of the picture are unclear but suggestive of ongoing elite maneuvering.

Dushanbe initially enacted some "soft power" measures in Rasht, but these may have been superficial. In January 2011, while security operations continued, Rahmon directed his ministers to implement an economic development plan for Rasht. The idea of a comprehensive effort seems to have disappeared, as local interlocutors were unaware of the plan.<sup>25</sup> Most

of the reported initiatives have consisted of building construction, projects that may entail the corruption rampant in that sector. One of the plan components, better access to state TV and radio (via the installation of several dozen transmitters in March 2011), only expanded the reach of government propaganda. The president's administration also delivered food and clothing at least once.<sup>26</sup> Signs of significant change in Rasht are lacking, however; the region today remains impoverished and its residents dependent on labor migrant remittances.

In contrast, Dushanbe's application of "hard power" was tangible. After the 2010-11 conflict, new military and law enforcement structures sprung up throughout the region, and the security presence has remained heavy. The military established an outpost at the entrance to Kamarob in August 2011, while new police buildings opened in Tojikobod, Navobod, and Hoit.<sup>27</sup> The GKNB headquarters in Gharm received a new facility, across from a new MVD-owned restaurant. The National Guard stationed a special forces unit in Navobod,<sup>28</sup> while OMON special police forces deployed throughout the valley.

In at least one case, residents openly reacted to the increasing security presence. In 2013, nearly two dozen families occupying land belonging to an old Soviet seismology center were ordered to evacuate, as the MVD planned to build there. The families appealed to the interior minister, and later, in a rare show of public protest in Tajikistan, gathered in front of the administration building to appeal to local authorities, but to no avail. OMON personnel began construction in April 2014.<sup>29</sup>

The government implicitly justified the security presence as a response to an ongoing threat. In May 2013, during the interior minister's visit to Rasht, the MVD website claimed there remained people in the region who wanted to "destabilize the situation," and that detecting and neutralizing them was a min-

25 Author conversations, 2011. Rahmon's appointment, also in January 2011, of a southerner as Rasht district chairman may have hurt the effort. The chairman gained a reputation for being difficult and uninterested in local well-being.

26 Avaz Yuldashev, "E. Rakhmon okazal blagotvoritel'nyu pomoshch' zhitelyam Rashta," *Asia-Plus*, June 26, 2013, <http://news.tj/ru/node/154746>.

27 Avaz Yuldashev, "Emomali Rakhmon otkryl Tsentral'nyy stadion Tadjikabada," *Asia-Plus*, September 26, 2013, <http://news.tj/ru/node/172062>; Avaz Yuldashev, "Emomali Rakhmon otbyl v Rashtskuyu dolinu," *Asia-Plus*, September 25, 2013, <http://news.tj/ru/node/171973>; Avaz Yuldashev, "Glava MVD Tadjikistana prizval rashtskikh militsionerov vyyavit' i obezvredivit' ekstremistov i terroristorov," *Asia-Plus*, May 7, 2013, <http://www.asiaplus.tj/ru/news/glava-mvd-tadjikistana-prizval-rashtskikh-militsionerov-vyyavit-i-obezvredivit-ekstremistov-i-te>.

28 "Emomali Rakhmon "v gostyakh" u Mirzokhudzhi Ahmadova," *Radio Ozodi*, September 25, 2013, <http://rus.ozodi.org/content/article/25116854.html>.

29 "Tsentral'nyy seysmologii v Rashte peredan MVD Tadjikistana. Kuda devat'sya zhitelyam?," *Radio Ozodi*, March 13, 2014, <http://rus.ozodi.org/content/article/25295121.html>; "Kuda devat'sya zhitelyam meteostantsii v Rashte?," *Radio Ozodi*, April 12, 2014, <http://rus.ozodi.org/content/article/25330645.html>; "Kuda podat'sya zhitelyam seysmologicheskogo tsentra?," June 28, 2014, <http://rus.ozodi.org/content/article/25438570.html>.



istry priority.<sup>30</sup> That summer, a large number of police reportedly deployed to comb the mountains for pathways formerly used by militants.<sup>31</sup> In September, Rahmon claimed in a speech that “hundreds of young people, including from the Rasht valley, are being educated at terrorist schools in Pakistan’s Waziristan Province.”<sup>32</sup>

Old foes proved useful in maintaining the perception of threat. Though Mullo Abdullo was dead, for example, his specter was kept alive. During the first half of 2013, according to the interior minister, police detained four members of Abdullo’s group.<sup>33</sup> Between late 2014 and early 2015, two men allegedly connected to Abdullo were detained abroad and transferred to Tajikistan.<sup>34</sup> An Abdullo link even appeared among the many allegations against businessman Zayd Saidov, arrested after forming a political party initiative committee in early 2013 and later sentenced to a long prison term.<sup>35</sup>

Amid the strong security presence, both Shoh and Belgi managed to survive, demonstrating—at least in the short term—the durability of their October 2010 bargain. Many of their supporters were given jobs in the MVD’s new Rasht-region directorate. Shoh was appointed deputy head.

In September 2011, Shoh told press he was unafraid of meeting the same fate as other former UTO members, as he had done nothing wrong.<sup>36</sup> In fact, he had reason to be confident, judging by rumors that his actions in 2010 had endeared him to Rahmon. Shoh apparently returned the sentiment: in 2012, the front of his house in Jirgatal sported a picture of the president.<sup>37</sup> And he continued to serve the government

well, as he and his men took part in actions against alleged criminal groups in GBAO in July 2012, after which he was made a general.<sup>38</sup> More recently, he has served as police commander in Tursunzoda, west of Dushanbe.

Belgi, the old nemesis of the security apparatus, did not receive a formal government appointment after the October 2010 deal, contrary to initial reports. As the interior minister explained in July 2011, the investigation into his case was ongoing, but if it were dismissed, “he may be accepted for employment with the Interior Ministry forces, and we will find a suitable position for him.”<sup>39</sup>

For a while, Belgi dropped out of the spotlight, presumably tending to his potato farm. Between autumn 2012 and the following spring, however, several of his former fighters were arrested on a variety of charges, including illegal arms possession and drug trafficking. Belgi spoke to press about the campaign. His former deputy claimed such “hunts” were taking place weekly, and that the detainees were being “beaten and tortured, and forced to confess.” Some of them had helped in the pursuit of Bedaki and Abdullo. The arrests called into question the amnesty the fighters had received.<sup>40</sup>

A few months later an event occurred that remains one of Tajikistan’s unsolved mysteries. Near the village of Hoit, unidentified men found coal mine director Nuriddin Temirov asleep in his office, shot him dead, then used a noise grenade to ward off responders. Temirov, a Gharmi raised in Khatlon, had reportedly been handpicked by Rahmon’s powerful brother-in-law Hasan Asadullozoda in 2008 to serve

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30 Yuldashev, “Head of Tajikistan’s MVD.”

31 Author communication with local interlocutor, July 2013.

32 Tajik television, September 27, 2013.

33 Avaz Yuldashev, “MVD: S nachala goda zaderzhany 4 chlena bandformirovaniya Mullo Abdullo,” *Asia-Plus*, July 19, 2013, <http://asiaplus.tj/ru/news/mvd-s-nachala-goda-zaderzhany-4-chlena-bandformirovaniya-mullo-abdullo>.

34 “V Bishkeke zaderzhan grazhdanin Tadzhi-kistana - chlen “Gruppy 24”” *Asia-Plus*, November 21, 2014, <http://news.tj/ru/news/v-bishkeke-zaderzhan-grazhdanin-tadzhikistana-chlen-gruppy-24>; Mavzuna Abdulloeva, “Zhitel’ Kulyaba propagandiroval idei “Dzhamoati tablig” v mechetyakh,” *Asia-Plus*, March 17, 2015, <http://news.tj/ru/news/zhitel-kulyaba-propagandiroval-idei-dzhamoati-tablig-v-mechetyakh>; “V Ekaterinburge sotrudniki Interpola zaderzhali podozrevaemogo v sovershenii tyazhkogo prestupleniya na territorii Tadzhi-kistana,” Russian Interior Ministry (Sverdlovsk), March 19, 2015, <https://66.mvd.ru/news/item/3225471/>.

35 Abdumalik Kadirov, “Emerging Force in Tajik Politics Arrested,” IWPR: Global Voices Central Asia, May 20, 2013, <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/emerging-force-tajik-politics-arrested>. Incidentally, Saidov also hailed from Rasht.

36 Olga Tutubalina, “Shokh Iskandarov: “Ya ne predatel”,” *Asia-Plus*, September 23, 2011, <http://news.tj/ru/news/shokh-iskandarov-ya-ne-predatel>.

37 Author communication with local interlocutor, September 2012.

38 “Shokh Iskandarov pokinul dom mestnoy zhitel’nitsy v Horoge,” *Radio Ozodi*, August 7, 2012, <http://rus.ozodi.org/content/article/24669161.html>; “Shokh Iskandarov stal generalom,” *Radio Ozodi*, September 14, 2012, <http://rus.ozodi.org/content/article/24708105.html>.

39 Avaz Yuldashev, “Mirzokhudzha Ahmadov mozhet vernut’sya v ryady tadzhikskoy militsii,” *Asia-Plus*, July 20, 2011, <http://asiaplus.tj/ru/news/mirzokhudzha-akhmadov-mozhet-vernutsya-v-ryady-tadzhikskoi-militsii>.

40 “MVD kommentiruet zaderzhanie storonnikov Mirzokhudzhi Ahmadova,” *Radio Ozodi*, May 4, 2013, <http://rus.ozodi.org/content/article/24976404.html>.

as a link between Dushanbe and locals. Rumors arose that the murder motive was control of a share in the coal deposit, with one anonymous official noting that a lot of money was at stake, due to the conversion of large enterprises in Tajikistan to coal use.<sup>41</sup> (We address the issue of coal control below.)

The motive may be evident, but the benefactor from Temirov's death is unclear. He was said to be related to Shoh, but one of the first people questioned, the previous mine director, was also considered close to Shoh. Both Shoh himself, as well as Belgi, were reportedly questioned.<sup>42</sup>

The government never publically identified and prosecuted any culprits. The lack of closure suggests the possibility that the murder was sanctioned from above. Adding greater intrigue is the fact that just days after the murder, Belgi received a formal appointment as a defense ministry advisor.<sup>43</sup>

If Belgi was being repaid for some involvement in the incident, it is not clear he had achieved the full grace of the authorities: when Rahmon visited Rasht later that month, he opted to skip tea at Belgi's house, despite the fact that Belgi had reportedly prepared for days and even slaughtered a sheep in the president's honor. Rahmon instead instructed Belgi to provide two tons of potatoes for a new boarding school. Belgi accepted the slight philosophically, describing to press the benefit of living in Rasht at peace with the adage, "You can't earn bread with weapons (*Oruszhie na khleb ne zarabotaesh*)."<sup>44</sup>

Belgi and Shoh, presumably deployed by the government, were spotted in northern Tajikistan follow-

ing cross-border violence with Kyrgyzstan in January 2014.<sup>45</sup> In early 2015, Belgi endorsed Rahmon's ruling Popular Democratic Party of Tajikistan before the March parliamentary elections.<sup>46</sup> In July, Shoh condemned the IRPT for appealing to internationals for relief from government persecution.<sup>47</sup>

Though not as dramatic as their actions in 2010-11, Belgi and Shoh's statements furthered a major Rahmon objective: the neutralization of the IRPT. Rasht, an IRPT stronghold, has been the locus for many of the anti-IRPT measures in recent years, which picked up nationwide in early 2013, ahead of the presidential election. That September, a state television program told the story of an 8-year-old murdered in Rasht, allegedly by an IRPT member, who confessed to the camera and added that he himself was raped by IRPT members.<sup>48</sup>

Anti-IRPT measures escalated in 2014, as authorities began to tie Islamic political participation to the threat of the Islamic State (IS), and after the 2015 elections the IRPT held no seats in parliament, for the first time since the civil war. Its fortunes then plummeted, with members renouncing the party in droves (under pressure, party leaders claim), including the heads of branches in several Rasht districts.<sup>49</sup> The government's anti-IRPT campaign climaxed in recent months, with the justice ministry calling party activities illegal in late August, the state media's accusation in September that IRPT chairman Muhiddin Kabiri planned a coup d'état with the renegade general Abduhalim Nazarzoda, and the arrest of high-ranking IRPT officials.

41 Haidar Shodiev, "Ubiystvo na Nazar-Ayloke (stat'ya)," *Asia-Plus*, September 19, 2013, <http://news.tj/ru/news/ubiystvo-na-nazar-ailoke-statya>.

42 "Deputat Tursunbay Bakir uulu predlagat posmertno nagradit' pogibshogo grazhdanina Tadjikistana Nuriddina Temirova," *Ozodagon*, September 6, 2013, <http://catoday.org/centrasia/kgru/10210-deputat-tursunbay-bakir-uulu-predlagat-posmertno-nagradit-pogibshogo-grazhdanina-tadjikistana-nuriddina-temirova.html>; "Sledstvie doprosilo eks-direktora mestorozhdeniya "Nazarajlok"," *Radio Ozodi*, September 24, 2013, <http://rus.ozodi.org/content/nazarayloq-witnesses-transferred-dushanbe-/25115770.html>; "Emomali Rakhmon "v gostyakh" u Mirzokhudzhi Ahmadova."

43 "Mirzokhudzha Ahmadov "poluchil kreslo"," *Ozodagon*, September 4, 2013, <http://catoday.org/centrasia/tjru/10174-mirzokhudzha-ahmadov-poluchil-kreslo.html>.

44 "Emomali Rakhmon "v gostyakh" u Mirzokhudzhi Ahmadova"; "Mirzokhudzha Akhmadov – dekhkanin v doline somneniy," *Radio Ozodi*, September 27, 2013, <http://rus.ozodi.org/content/mirzokhudzha-ahmadov-former-warlord-became-a-farmer/25119578.html>.

45 "Nota kirgizskikh vlastey po povodu Shokha Iskandarova," *Radio Ozodi*, January 30, 2014, <http://rus.ozodi.org/content/kyrgyzs-protests-shoh-iskandarov/25247538.html>. Shoh refused to confirm his presence to press. Later in the year Belgi claimed to have retired in December 2013; Mavzuna Abdulloeva, "Mirzokhudzha Akhmadov: Ya nakhozhus' na pensii uzhe pochti god," *Asia-Plus*, September 29, 2014, <http://www2.asiaplus.tj/ru/news/mirzokhudzha-akhmadov-ya-nakhozhus-na-pensii-uzhe-pochti-god>.

46 Mirzo Salimpour, "Dukhovenstvo Rashta: "Golosuyte za partiyu Ego Prevoskhoditel'stva!"," *Radio Ozodi*, February 27, 2015, <http://rus.ozodi.org/content/article/26872806.html>.

47 "Minyust Tadjikistana pro obrashchenie PIVT v OON: Nikto ne imeet prava vmeshivat'sya v dela Tadjikistana," *Ozodagon*, July 16, 2015, <http://catoday.org/centrasia/20891-minyust-tadjikistana-pro-obraschenie-pivt-v-oon-nikto-ne-imeet-prava-vmeshivatsya-v-dela-tadjikistana.html>.

48 "PIVT: Telefilm "Shabakay avval" - neobosnovannaya lozh, napravlennaya protiv partii," *Asia-Plus*, September 23, 2013, <http://asiaplus.tj/ru/news/pivt-telefilm-shabakay-avval-neobosnovannaya-lozh-napravlennaya-protiv-partii>; "Mediaorganizatsii raskritikovali rukovodstvo gosudarstvennykh kanalov televideiya," *Radio Ozodi*, September 26, 2013, <http://rus.ozodi.org/content/media-critisise-tajik-tv-policy-/25118140.html>.

49 Avaz Yuldashev, "Lidery regional'nykh yacheek PIVT pokidayut ryady partii," *Asia-Plus*, June 22, 2015, <http://news.tj/ru/node/210335>.

If the IRPT in fact disappears from the political scene, with its members' activities forced underground, what will this mean for Rasht? Given the government's long-promoted narrative of the extremist threat in Rasht and the presence of former UTO commanders who could serve as foci for mobilization, one might expect extremism to be on the rise in Rasht. Such an assumption, however, requires critical scrutiny.

### Hotbed of Extremism?

Despite being portrayed by the government as a hotbed of extremism, Rasht has produced relatively few militants in recent years compared to other parts of Tajikistan. The regime blamed home-grown terrorist organization Jamaat Ansarullah (JA) for the events of 2010-11. Its elusive leader Amriddin Tabarov was born near Samsolik in Rasht and fought with the opposition during the civil war.<sup>50</sup> A website ascribed to the group claimed responsibility for the September 3, 2010 suicide bombing in Khujand.<sup>51</sup> And its flag was allegedly found in Mullo Abdullo's base after he was killed in April 2011. Although the group maintains an online presence and released a video in 2012 calling for attacks in Tajikistan, like other extremist groups it appears to have limited societal support.<sup>52</sup> The regime accused the organization of co-plotting attacks in Dushanbe ahead of the 2013 presidential elections.<sup>53</sup>

More recently, the security services have linked the group to the Islamic State. In November 2014, police arrested 12 alleged JA members and accused them of recruiting residents of Sughd to fight in Syria.<sup>54</sup> Given the opacity, corruption, and politici-

zation of Tajikistan's judicial system, such claims are impossible to verify. Despite its origins in Rasht, the vast majority of accused JA members have been arrested in Sughd.<sup>55</sup> Its links to the region, then, remain limited.

Although IS enjoys greater support among Tajiks than JA does, very few young men from Rasht have gone to fight in Syria and Iraq. The MVD estimates that 500 citizens have travelled to fight for IS.<sup>56</sup> Only 124 of these cases have been reported in the media. Of these, birthplace information exists for 83 fighters, just one of whom comes from Rasht.<sup>57</sup>

In a January 2015 video, an Iraq-based Islamic State fighter claiming to be from Samsolik and calling himself Abu Umariyon said he had asked for permission from IS leadership to invade Tajikistan and called on militants from JA and Central Asian Islamist group Jundallah to "forget their pride" and join IS.<sup>58</sup> Samsolik, as noted above, was where security forces killed Mullo Abdullo and over a dozen of his fighters in April 2011. All but one of these fighters was from Nurobad district. The previous October, security services had arrested local imam Zaynolobuddin Mannonov and accused him of having received a "religious and terrorist education" in Pakistan and "sowing the seeds of conflict, hostility, distrust, and discord among [Rasht] residents."<sup>59</sup> If Samsolik was indeed a center of militancy, it is an exception rather than a rule; the rest of Rasht has not been a source of militants in recent years.

### A Matter of Controlling Coal?

Illustrating the complexity of the Rasht conflict and the hazard of readily adopting a terrorism/extremism

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50 Limited information on the emergence of JA exists. See: Mark Vinson, "A Look at Tajikistan's Jamaat Ansarullah Leader Amriddin Tabarov," *Militant Leadership Monitor*, August 7, 2013, [http://mlm.jamestown.org/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=41236#.VgAtA99Viko](http://mlm.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=41236#.VgAtA99Viko).

51 "Terakt v Hudzhande mogli sovershit' boeviki Islamskogo dvizheniya Uzbekistana," *Vesti*, September 3, 2010, <http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=390105>.

52 Until 2013 the group posted stories about global Islamist causes on its website, Irshod.com. Now it is most active on social media sites Odnoklassniki and VKontakte.

53 Avaz Yuldashev, "Terroristy hoteli vzorvat' Dushanbe v kanun prezidentskikh vyborov," *Asia-Plus*, September 25, 2013, <http://news.tj/ru/news/terroristy-khoteli-vzorvat-dushanbe-v-kanun-prezidentskikh-vyborov>.

54 Mavlouda Rafieva, "Twelve Alleged Members of Jamaat Ansarullah Detained in Sughd," *Asia-Plus*, November 12, 2014, <http://news.tj/en/news/twelve-alleged-members-jamaat-ansarullah-detained-sughd>.

55 Author's compilation of arrest reports published in *Asia-Plus* and *Radio Ozodi* between January 2012 and August 2015.

56 "At Least 500 Tajiks Fighting Alongside IS – Interior Ministry," *Interfax*, July 25, 2015, <http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=12194>.

57 Compare this with Kulob, which has a smaller population but twenty-three recorded fighters.

58 Samsolik is a *jamoat* (the smallest local government division) with a population of just over 6,000. "Boeviki "Islamskogo gosudarstva" ugrozhayut Tadjikistanu "dzhikhadom," *Radio Ozodi*, January 4, 2015, <http://rus.ozodi.org/content/article/26775997.html>.

59 Tajik Television First Channel, Dushanbe, in Tajik, 1300, October 23, 2010. The cleric's son, Manouchehr Mannonov, was among those killed with Mullo Abdullo.

narrative is a factor neglected in most descriptions of the conflict: the *economic* issue of control of resources, in this case, coal.

Both Belgi and Shoh were rumored to have stakes in the Nazar-Ailok coal mine, northeast of Gharm, which contains a world-class deposit of anthracite, a high-quality coal useful for steel making and other purposes. For years, the coal was mostly sold locally for heating fuel.<sup>60</sup>

Picture 2. Coal Mine Road, Kamarob



Around 2007 new interests began to intrude on Nazar-Ailok. A British firm, Saddleback Corporation Ltd., gained a stake in the western half of the deposit and began building a road through the Kamarob gorge to reach it. Saddleback's chairman, Alastair Ralston-Saul, had a long and tumultuous background in mining in Tajikistan, complete with allegations of corruption, and in mid-2007 the company was re-

portedly in "discussions" with Hasan Asadullozoda, Rahmon's brother-in-law.<sup>61</sup> One of Tajikistan's wealthiest men, Hasan had a stake in nearly every economic sector and was rumored to manage the Rahmon family's cash flow. It was during this period that Hasan reportedly handpicked Nuriddin Temirov as director of the Nazaraailok mine (Temirov would later be murdered, as we have seen). "KiTaKa," a joint Chinese-Tajik-Kazakh company operating at Nazar-Ailok, entered into discussions with the state-owned Tajik Aluminum Company (Talco) regarding the latter using the mine's coal.<sup>62</sup> Hasan has long been rumored to control Talco's profits.<sup>63</sup>

Global coal prices peaked in these years, raising the stakes in the control of Tajikistan's coal deposits.<sup>64</sup> The Tajik government engaged in much discussion of making a concerted effort to increase coal production and convert large enterprises to coal use.<sup>65</sup> Over the next eight years, over 200 enterprises would switch to coal.<sup>66</sup> After the brutal 2007-08 winter that saw widespread electricity blackouts and a humanitarian crisis, the government and international community paid even more attention to energy security, in which coal would play a role.<sup>67</sup>

Violent incidents in Rasht can be plausibly linked to coal. After the attempted arrest of Belgi in February 2008, the MVD alleged that men under his command had participated in an attack the previous August on vehicles and personnel belonging to the coal company KiTaKa, perhaps provoked by the intrusion of outsiders into the coal trade. According to one theory, the regime relegated a share of the mine

60 John Heathershaw and Sophie Roche, "Islam and Political Violence in Tajikistan: An Ethnographic Perspective on the Causes and Consequences of the 2010 Armed Conflict in the Kamarob Gorge," *Ethnopolitics Papers* No. 8, March 2011, 11.

61 Aram Roston, "All That Glitters: Alastair Ralston-Saul Is Looking to Strike It Rich in the Republic of Tajikistan," Maclean's Archive, February 18, 2002, [http://www.gulf-intl.com/articles/article\\_maclean.pdf](http://www.gulf-intl.com/articles/article_maclean.pdf); "Strange Goings-on at Gulf International Minerals Culminate in Resignation of Founder and CEO," *Minesite*, February 25, 2004; Gulf International Minerals, Ltd. release, June 30, 2004; John Helmer, "Jacko Saddles up for Tajik Gold," *Mineweb*, September 12, 2007, <http://www.mineweb.com/archive/jacko-saddles-up-for-tajik-gold/>.

62 "Talco pereydet na mestnyy ugol, vlozhiv sredstva v Nazaraylok," *Avesta*, May 18, 2007, <http://www.avesta.tj/business/516-d.html>.

63 David Trilling, "Tajikistan's Cash Cow: Enough Milk to Go Around?," *Eurasianet*, June 10, 2014, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/68491>.

64 "Historical Coal Prices and Price Chart," *InfoMine*, <http://www.infomine.com/investment/metal-prices/coal/all/>. In a series of articles, Ralston-Saul described the enormous potential value in Nazaraailok; see Alastair Ralston-Saul and Jan Ketelaar, "Energy Resources in Central Asia," *CoalTrans*, November/December 2009, <http://content.yudu.com/Library/A11bff/CoaltransInternation/resources/26.htm>; Alastair Ralston-Saul and Jan Ketelaar, "Kaftar Hona Anthracite," *International Mining*, September 2009, 64-66, <http://www.infomine.com/publications/docs/InternationalMining/Saul2009.pdf>; Alastair Ralston-Saul and Jan Ketelaar, "Anthracite Deposits of Tajikistan," *Steel Times International*, January/February 2010, [http://www.saddlebackcorp.co.uk/pdfs/SteelTimes\\_Jan2010.PDF](http://www.saddlebackcorp.co.uk/pdfs/SteelTimes_Jan2010.PDF).

65 "In Tajikistan, a Lump of Coal Is Not Such a Bad Thing," Wikileaks, May 30, 2007, [https://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07DUSHANBE778\\_a.html](https://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07DUSHANBE778_a.html).

66 Pairav Chorshanbiev, "V Tadjikistane s nachala goda dobyto bolee 400 tys. tonn uglya," *Asia-Plus*, August 6, 2015, <http://news.tj/ru/news/v-tadjikistane-s-nachala-goda-dobyto-bolee-400-tys-tonn-uglya>.

67 "USTDA Grant Supports Coal Mining and Power Plant Project in Tajikistan," U.S. Trade and Development Agency, August 25, 2008, [http://www.ustda.gov/news/pressreleases/2008/EuropeEurasia/Tajikistan/TajikistanCoal\\_082508.asp](http://www.ustda.gov/news/pressreleases/2008/EuropeEurasia/Tajikistan/TajikistanCoal_082508.asp); "Strategy for Tajikistan," European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, January 26, 2009, <http://www.ebrd.com/downloads/about/policies/tajikistan-2009.pdf>.



to Belgi to “keep Rasht quiet,” an arrangement that broke down in 2010 due to a “misunderstanding.”<sup>68</sup> The events of that fall, in which the government initially pressured both Belgi and Shoh, and during which militants in the Kamarob gorge reportedly occupied Saddleback’s operating camp,<sup>69</sup> may have influenced the arrangement of actors on the ground. That November, just two months after discussing plans to build a second access road, Ralston-Saul left his position to become an independent mining consultant,<sup>70</sup> and in March, even as the security operation was ongoing, Chinese company Kaisun Group bought out Saddleback’s stake in Nazar-Ailok and two other mines.<sup>71</sup>

In subsequent years, Tajikistan’s commitment to coal grew, with Rahmon calling for doubling production, and more enterprises transferring to coal use, often with Chinese assistance,<sup>72</sup> for which at least one company reportedly received access to coal resources.<sup>73</sup> In 2013, another Chinese firm, Up Energy, moved to purchase the mine stakes from Kaisun.<sup>74</sup> Soon afterward, a Tajik government resolution labeled Nazar-Ailok “of strategic importance,” one of two among the country’s 14 mines.<sup>75</sup> Later that year, as we have seen, mine director Temirov was murdered. Around the same time, a government expert specifically mentioned Nazar-Ailok while saying that coal could help Talco’s faltering aluminum production,<sup>76</sup> a trend likely of particular concern to the ruling family. The picture is sketchy, but these events suggest the ongoing salience of coal resource control in the dynamics shaping Rasht’s relationship to the center and outside interests.

## A Continuity of Conflict

Evidence for the hypothesis that coal has partially driven the conflicts in Rasht indicates that the terrorism/extremism narrative, promoted by the government and widely adopted by international actors, is weaker than an alternative, more nuanced view that the episodes of Rasht violence in the past decade and a half have primarily concerned local politics and economics, i.e., a continuation of the civil war by other means. The 1997 peace, which relied on formal and informal divisions of political and economic spoils among the Kulobi and Gharmi/Pamiri elites, only inaugurated a new period of conflict, in which Rahmon’s actions against Mahmadruci Iskandarov in 2003 were the first major attempt to neutralize the Rasht-affiliated powerbrokers who supported the peace but whom the regime viewed as threats. One by one over the ensuing years, all of the major Rasht-affiliated figures would be killed, imprisoned, retired, or co-opted.

Picture 3. New GKNB Building in Gharm, 2011



68 Tutubalina, “Shokh Iskandarov.” Shoh claimed the state had sole control of the mine.

69 Author communication with local interlocutor, September 2011.

70 The new road, extending from “less-hazardous roads,” presumably would need to depart from Hoit, i.e., Shoh’s area of control. See: Alex Hawkes, “Mountainous Mining: The Saddleback Story,” *Mining-technology.com*, September 23, 2013, <http://www.mining-technology.com/features/feature96427>; Alastair Ralston-Saul, LinkedIn profile, <https://www.linkedin.com/pub/alastair-ralston-saul/33/717/2b9>.

71 “Kaisun Energy Acquires Saddleback Mining Limited,” *ACNNewswire*, March 16, 2011, <http://en.acnnewswire.com/press-release/english/6177/kaisun-energy-acquires-saddleback-mining-limited>.

72 Chorshanbiev, “V Tadjikistane s nachala goda dobyto bolee 400 tys. tonn uglja”; Pairav Chorshanbiev, “Dobycha uglja v Tadjikistane uvelichilas’ pochti v dva raza,” *Asia-Plus*, July 22, 2014, <http://asiaplus.tj/ru/news/dobycha-uglja-v-tadjikistane-uvelichilas-pochti-v-dva-raza>.

73 Said Yakhoyev, “Energy Policy Options for the Rasht Valley,” *Central Asia Fellowship Papers*, August 2014, 5, fn. 8, <http://centralasiaprogram.org/blog/2014/08/05/energy-policy-options-for-the-rasht-valley-2/>.

74 “Up Energy Development Group Limited Aims to Be the Substantial Scale of Integrated Energy Conglomerate with Circulative Economy Model,” *ACNNewswire*, January 17, 2013, <http://en.acnnewswire.com/press-release/english/12028/up-energy-development-group-limited-aims-to-be-the-substantial-scale-of-integrated-energy-conglomerate-with-circulative-economy-model>.

75 Pairav Chorshanbiev, “Salomzoda: My zastavim gornyakov rabotat’ s uchedom soblyudeniya pravil bezopasnosti,” *Asia-Plus*, July 11, 2014, <http://news.tj/ru/news/salomzoda-my-zastavim-gornyakov-rabotat-s-uchedom-soblyudeniya-pravil-bezopasnosti>.

76 “Ekspert: Energeticheskaya bezopasnost’ “Talko” - v koksuyushchemsya uglje,” *Asia-Plus*, August 14, 2013, <http://asiaplus.tj/ru/news/ekspert-energeticheskaya-bezopasnost-talko-v-koksuyushchemsya-ugle>.



Seen in this context, the 2010-11 violence is part of a continuity of conflict with the overall trajectory of a strengthening regime, an episode in intra-elite struggle characterized by shifting alliances whose details are invisible to all but the actors involved. Seen *outside* of this context, the events appeared to foreigners as an introduction of international terrorism into a country whose stability was thus in question and required propping up through outside interventions, such as economic or security assistance, or counter-radicalization programs. Viewed as part of a continuity, however, the conflict lends itself to no such obvious conclusions.

Emphasis on the “international terrorist threat” angle has enabled outside observers to pay less attention to a more mundane aspect of the conflict, and that is the largely untold story of human rights violations that security forces are alleged to have committed, against not only armed foes (e.g., the possible extrajudicial killings of Jaga and Bedaki) but also civilians, via occupation of homes, arrests and interrogations of relatives of fighters, collateral residential

building damage,<sup>77</sup> closed-access trials with procedural violations, the imposition of a massive security presence, and blockage of information and communications. While the elites have contended over power, many citizens have suffered.

As evident this past month from the regime’s operation against “renegade general” Abduhalim Nazarzoda, the process of power consolidation and score settling in Tajikistan is not yet over. The post-conflict Tajik state continues to generate conflict from within, which the regime uses to remove perceived threats to its power. Ironically, Nazarzoda is supposed to have played a role in earlier years in the neutralization or co-optation of Rasht figures: in the downfall of Mahmadrusi Iskandarov and the deal with Shoh. That he nevertheless became the latest victim of Rahmon’s anti-opposition campaign should cause renewed concern for Shoh, Belgi, and other former UTO figures who have reached *modi vivendi* with the government. If history is any guide, they are unlikely to enjoy long, peaceful retirements.

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77 Several homes near Belgi’s were damaged in the attack. This and other details in the sentence (other than facts regarding the security presence and communications blockage, referenced earlier in the paper) are from author communication with interlocutors in Tajikistan, 2011-2013.

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# Public and State Responses to ISIS Messaging: Tajikistan

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Noah Tucker<sup>1</sup> (2016)

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## Overview: ISIS Messaging to Tajiks

According to January 2016 estimates from the government of Tajikistan, a total of up to 1,000 Tajikistani citizens have traveled to Syria or Iraq to fight in the conflict zone since the violence began – no confirmed estimates are available for how many of that total continue to fight or have been killed, incapacitated, or left the combat zone. In contrast to Uzbeks who have joined the conflict on sometimes opposing sides, Tajikistanis appear to almost uniformly join ISIS. Unlike their Uzbek or Russian-language counterparts, Tajiks fighting in ISIS have no dedicated official media outlet or spokesmen, but instead rely primarily on a changing series of “celebrity” commanders who interact with independent journalists and religious leaders in Tajikistan, sometimes directly. Relatively more independent media in Tajikistan and well-developed social media networks, especially among migrant workers and opposition members, mean that messages of high-profile Tajik members of ISIS – including defected OMON Commander Gulmurad Halimov – have sparked intense discussion and are shared and debated in online media commentary and on social networking sites.

In contrast to Uzbekistan, where the identity of commanders and even of some groups like the al-Bukhoriy Brigade are rarely the subject of public discussion or media coverage, high-profile Tajik militants in ISIS become well known in Tajikistan and some, as in the case of Halimov and Raqqa-province Tajik commander Abu Holid Kulobi, have reached an almost celebrity status. Spectacular claims by Kulobi include that 2000 Tajiks were fighting in the ranks of the Islamic state in March 2015, and that “even American Indians” would be converted to Islam and live within the borders of the Caliphate. Personal death threats to Tajikistani journalists who covered ISIS in a negative light and threats to secular oppo-

sition members attracted significant attention in the first half of 2015 (social media and independent press sources report that Kulobi was killed in Syria in June 2015).

The unity of Tajiks fighting for ISIS stands in contrast to Uzbeks, the majority of whom appear to fight as part of several groups allied with Jabhat al Nusra around Aleppo that are at war with the “Islamic State.” This unity may likely explain why personal and regional connections appear to also be relatively more important. According to Ed Lemon, a British researcher who has done long-term work on Tajik participation in the conflict, most militants who document their participation through social media have personal connections to others who joined ISIS before them and helped recruit them into the organization. Tajik government sources support this observation, noting on multiple occasions within the last year that the majority of Tajikistani citizens who join the conflict are from Khatlon Province and had personal connections.

The presence of independent online media in Tajikistan – such as Dialog.tj, Ozadagon, Asia Plus, the IRPT website Najot Online (until it was banned in September 2015) and other independent opposition sites and social media – creates another unique contrast between Tajikistan and the other states in the region. Within this space for more public debate about ISIS, nearly all sources – state, independent, and public – consistently described an “increasing” trend of Tajik youth joining ISIS and the conflict in Syria, even in cases like the Halimov defection on which the state press remained largely silent. The political opposition based in exile in Russia or Turkey sometimes describes ISIS as a competitor, a potential threat, and an outcome of repression and persecution against the registered Islamic opposition party, the IRPT. The IRPT and its supporters have routinely warned the government that as they are increasingly limited, repressed, and now banned, disaffected young members may turn to ISIS or other extremist groups because they lack an alternative outlet and are shut out of the political process.

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<sup>1</sup> Noah Tucker is a CAP associate and managing editor at Registan.net. He received a B.A. in History from Hope College and a M.A. in Russian, East European and Central Asian Studies at Harvard University. Noah is the lead researcher on the Central Asia Digital Islam Project and previously worked on the Harvard/Carnegie Islam project.

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Picture 1. Colonel Gulmurod Halimov



The public defection of Tajikistan's OMON (Special Operations Police Forces) commander, Colonel Gulmurod Halimov, to ISIS in May 2015 sparked perhaps the most intense debate on social media and in independent news outlets about ISIS until now and became a defining moment in public discourse about the group. Tajikistani independent press sources and social media activists claimed Halimov was responsible for the security of the presidential family and was close to Rahmon; the video he released in May announcing his new allegiance calls on Tajiks – especially the significant portion of the young male population living in Russia as “slaves” – to join the Islamic State. Halimov spoke directly to the camera (above) addressing President Rahmon and other Tajik officials with the promise “we are coming for you.” While responses to the Halimov defection online were overwhelmingly negative, several influential opposition figures noted that his choice to join “the opposition” by allying with a foreign militant group in Syria signaled the final marginalization of the IRPT and peaceful domestic opposition from an Islamic party.

Halimov reviews his own resume in the video and makes special note of attending training sessions in the United States, claiming to have made multiple trips to locations including “the Blackwater military base.” He claims that in the United States, he saw how U.S. soldiers are “trained to kill Muslims” and, addressing the camera again, Halimov says to Americans: “We are coming to your cities, we will come into your homes and we will kill you.” He asks Tajikistani police officers and military personnel if they are truly “ready to die” for a state that orders them to strip women of their hijab and “opposes Islam.” Halimov claims he personally witnessed police being ordered to create a fake documentary film

showing women wearing hijab engaged in activities forbidden in Islam, including drinking and “sexually immoral” acts. He describes this and the state's other “anti-Islamic policies” as “democracy” and asks soldiers and police how they can call themselves Muslims and support those policies.

The video – and news coverage from independent sources about the video message – dominated Tajikistani media during the week it was released in May and went viral on social media. YouTube administrators quickly removed copies of the message, citing violations of the terms of service agreement; discussion of ISIS and conspiracy theories about who is truly “behind” the group dominated many independent Tajikistani social media forums through the summer of 2015. In one of the largest, for example, in the “Tajikistan” closed group on Facebook (30,000+ members) in late June (at perhaps the height of ISIS discussion as a topic of focus), roughly 30 percent of posts discussed ISIS or other Islamic groups perceived to be affiliated with ISIS – often more than any other single topic.

Subsequent media releases, including a video denying claims by Tajik officials that he had “gone out of his mind” and rumors on 22 June that Halimov was killed in a rocket attack in Syria while meeting with well-known Chechen ISIS commander Umar al Shishani, have continued to make him and ISIS objects of intense social media attention and independent press coverage even though no new videos featuring him were released for the rest of the year.<sup>2</sup>

### Tajikistani State Responses

State responses to ISIS messaging and to the presence of Tajikistani citizens in ISIS emphasize claims that the Islamic State threatens Tajikistan's physical borders and consistently attempt to tie the Iraq and Syria-based terrorist organization to Tajikistan's domestic opposition – particularly the IRPT – and “foreign” Islamic practices that state officials deem inconsistent with Tajik national traditions, including beards for young men and hijab (fully covering the hair and neck rather than only the back of the head in what the government defines as “Tajik” style). Moreover, responses by state officials and government-sponsored clerics frequently cite conspiracy

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<sup>2</sup> A photo of Halimov in a hospital bed was reportedly released on a social networking page associated with his name in June, ostensibly to show he was still alive.

Map 1. A Handmade Map of ISIS's Alleged Plan of Attack on Central Asia



A handmade map of ISIS's alleged plan of attack on Central Asia inspired by Tajikistani and Russian media coverage and shared in Tajik networks on Facebook.

theories that attempt to tie ISIS and all “foreign Islam” to the United States and Israel, and claim that the “advance” of ISIS to the borders of Tajikistan through Afghanistan and the defection of Halimov are part of a Western plot to “destabilize” the country. The state’s overall message is that Tajiks are lured into joining ISIS as part of a grand conspiracy to undermine Tajikistan and Tajik “national values” that these messages contrast to allegedly “foreign Islamic values” – including religious expression in public spaces and political groups organized around religious lines like the IRPT. State media and officials tied the brief “revolt” led by Deputy Defense Minister Abdulhalim Nazarzoda in September – allegedly in collaboration with the IRPT, though no previous connections between Nazarzoda and the IRPT had been identified – to similarly vague “foreign sponsors,” drawing a difficult to follow line of alleged conspiracy between all of these unrelated actors supposedly working together toward a common goal of “destabilizing the situation in Tajikistan.”

Although the IRPT has a history in Tajikistan that predates independence, state officials and state-owned media routinely attempt to portray the party as a foreign organization or a “sleeping agent” for foreign sponsors, including the Sunni Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and the Shia government of Iran; during the campaign season for the March 2015 parliamentary elections, state actors began to routinely pursue a similar tactic attempting to tie the IRPT to ISIS, claiming since early 2015 that ISIS had built up

a heavy presence of militants just across the Afghan border and was effectively prepared to invade if the IRPT made gains in the election. After the party was fully cut out of government for the first time in violation of the 1997 peace accords, the state resumed a campaign of harsh pressure against local leaders and members, claiming that members are joining the ISIS and had created an alliance between the two groups.

More broadly than targeted attacks on the IRPT, the state policies on religious expression increasingly affect everyday life of Tajik Muslims, and since the beginning of 2015 have more and more often come to be justified by the threat of ISIS. A renewed 2015 media campaign against hijab (cited above by Halimov) and up to 13,000 incidents of police forcibly shaving men’s beards are justified by Tajik officials by tying these superficial expressions of piety to “Salafism.” The state continued to take measures to limit other forms of religious expression, including prayer in any public spaces (legally defined essentially as any space that is not a mosque or private home), a ban that authorities reiterated for special additional daily prayers for the Ramadan fast. Minors have been banned from attending religious services since 2011, and in early 2016 Tajik authorities banned citizens under 40 years of age from travelling to perform the Hajj, one of the five pillars of basic Islamic practice.

One of the single most impactful – and zealously enforced – recent requirements is the law mandating state-approval for sermons in mosques. Initiated in 2011, the regulation mandates the creation of topic lists and has been increasingly applied for the full text of Friday sermons. This regulation, more than perhaps any other, prompted the resignation of many of the country’s most popular and influential clerics, including Kulobi imam Hoji Mirzo, effectively driving them “underground.” The state used “approved” sermons from high-ranking religious officials to condemn the IRPT and other popular religious figures throughout 2015, as well as to issue statements about ISIS that promote national identity and patriotism rather than attempting to challenge the militant group’s heretical theology. Chief of the Khatlon Province Council of Ulama, Saidjoni Sorbonkhujja, for example, acknowledged in May that a disproportionate number of young people from his province travel to Syria to join ISIS, but blamed their “lack of gratitude” for “peace and stability in their homeland” and asserted that ISIS is a front for U.S. and Israeli intelligence agencies. These policies have had the likely unintended effect of forcing several of the most pop-



Picture 2. State-Approval Certificate for Sermons in Mosques



Picture 3. Expertly-Photoshopped Meme with Rustam Gulov



ular clerics – who as we will see below have led the way in countering ISIS messaging from a religious perspective – to cut back their public activity to make way for state-appointed imams who are directed to counter ISIS ideology from a nationalist perspective instead of on its own religious terms.

Interestingly, external criticism of policies that restrict Islamic dress or public religious practice even from other Muslim sources are similarly attributed to “U.S. and Israeli plots.” The UK-based Farsi-language satellite television station *Wesel-e Haq*, for example, and other Islamic media available over satellite and the Internet are condemned as “Western intelligence operations” when they criticize violations of religious freedom in Tajikistan. State-sponsored responses, such as a recent article in the government-run *Jumhuriyat* propose to combat these Western conspiracies, including ISIS, chiefly by efforts to increase “national pride” among Tajikistani citizens by adding national history courses in school and airing patriotic documentaries on state television. Overall, the state’s response to what it describes as a growing phenomenon of its citizens fighting and dying in the Syrian civil war has been to insist that there is only one remedy: citizens must be “more Tajik” and “less Muslim,” largely turning a blind eye to the factors that international experts argue are truly fueling the flow of foreign fighters into Syria and Iraq.

**Public Responses to ISIS and to State Policies**

Public responses to ISIS messaging and state policies that claim to counteract it are difficult to gauge through objective opinion polling or fieldwork, but

social media provides an imperfect (but extremely valuable) window into discourse among citizens online – particularly because much of the ISIS messaging and an increasing amount of the state’s counter messaging campaigns happen online and target Internet users. Social media users from Tajikistan – many of whom live and work abroad as migrants – have reacted very strongly against both ISIS messaging and the Tajikistani government’s campaigns to police expressions of Islamic belief, organizing sophisticated campaigns to protest and mock state policies that many argue backfire and may in fact facilitate ISIS recruiting. The vast majority of users oppose the Islamic state and appear to take seriously rumors of imminent invasion from Afghanistan, but at the same time many practicing Muslims resent what they believe are the state’s insinuations that their faith and loyalty to their fellow countrymen are in necessary conflict to one another.

The online protests began in early 2015, when security officials in Soghd province inadvertently poured gasoline on the brewing controversy over forced beard-shaving when they detained and cut off the beard of Rustam Gulov, one of the country’s most prominent bloggers, who attracted international attention when he wrote about his own experience. Anonymous social media activists began a campaign to mock the unofficial restrictions, creating a false rumor (spread by expertly-photoshopped memes like the one left) that the government had begun to register and tax beards via local police stations and issue permits for facial hair. The story quickly evolved to cover hijab as well, as convincingly faked (or leaked, above) official beard and hijab “permits” allegedly slated for introduction by the Committee for



Religious Affairs began to circulate virally on Tajik social media, prompting embarrassed denials from the authorities after they created a storm of backlash online.

It should be noted, however, that a significant number of social media users also accept and perpetuate conspiracies that claim ISIS – and all other violent Islamist extremist organizations – are “fronts” created by the United States or Israel to win control of natural resources in the Middle East or create turmoil in the Islamic world. Russian media and state-owned information outlets play an important role in shaping public perceptions of ISIS and the U.S.

Picture 4. A Typical Halimov Conspiracy Meme from Tajik Language Facebook Networks



A typical Halimov conspiracy meme from Tajik language Facebook networks – the fleeing figure at left is “the Muslims of Syria.” The puppet is captioned with a play on words with Gulmorod Halimov’s name “Colonel Immoral Traitor” (Polkovniki Gurmrohi Khoin).

Responses to the Halimov defection, for example, frequently interpreted it in the context of a global conspiracy controlled by the United States. In spite of Halimov’s own claims that his training in the United States only nurtured resentment toward the West and informed his decision to join the Islamic State, social media users and pundits cited his training in the US – and even his rumored longstanding interest in Salafi Islam – as evidence that he is acting only as a puppet of the United States.

Russian state-controlled media sources and Russian pundits are frequently cited as sources of “evidence” for ISIS conspiracy theories, especially those that claim the group is a secret operation of

the US government or Israel. Russian stories posted to Tajik public Facebook groups attempting to sway users with similar conspiracy theories frequently cite Islamic authorities or leaders from Muslim-majority countries in an attempt to portray the US specifically as an enemy of Muslims. Russian sources consistently cite unsourced rumors or “special intelligence” that report thousands of ISIS militants are preparing an invasion of Tajikistan just across the border between Khatlon province and Afghanistan – a southern border of the Collective Security Treaty Organization and a frontier territory for which the Russian Federation has long pressured the Tajikistani government to cede the authority over border security.

### Other Voices: Independent Clerics and Repentant Returnees

As discussed above, several of the most publicly respected Tajik clerics have been pushed out of the state-sponsored system of registered mosques, including former Kulobi imam Hoji Mirzo and Eshoni Nuriddin (Turajonzada), but continue to exert significant influence on society, especially online. Both continue to work, preach, and teach without state approval or despite being forced into exile, and these and other prominent independent clerics have played an important role in discourses condemning ISIS – Hoji Mirzo is the only prominent Muslim cleric in Central Asia to engage with members of ISIS directly in debate. Social media users widely shared and commented on a recording of a phone conversation between Hoji Mirzo and ISIS Tajik militant Abu Holid Kulobi, for example, in which Kulobi asks Mirzo to join jihad in Syria. Mirzo responds that the conflict in Syria is not a legitimate jihad, and encouraged Kulobi to return to his homeland and turn himself in an amnesty plea. He notes that Tajiks working in Russia frequently contact him to ask his advice about whether or not they should join the conflict in Syria, and to ask why the government conducts “anit-hijab” policies that Mirzo says he cannot defend. Many social media users and independent commentators, for their part, question why the state forbids its most effective Islamic counterweights to ISIS’s messages from preaching in mosques or appearing on television.

While no change appears to be forthcoming on these policies, the Tajikistani state has attempted to show a changed approach to returnees, granting at

least six Tajikistani citizens who had participated in the conflict in Syria amnesty from newly passed legislation criminalizing participation in a foreign conflict; several agreed to publicly speak out about their ordeal and mistreatment at the hands of ISIS. Twenty-two year old Rizvon Akhmedov and another young Tajik, Farrukh Sharifov, were among at least six currently reported Tajikistani citizens to take advantage of an amnesty offer for those who leave ISIS voluntarily and surrender to Tajik representatives in Turkey and other neighboring states. Sharifov and Akhmedov have told their story on television and in talks around the country, warning others of the brutality they witnessed inside the Islamic State that motivated them to leave after choosing to join while working as migrant laborers in Russia. In the view of many Tajikistanis at least on social media, allowing returnees to speak for themselves and granting them amnesty may be the only effective response to the ISIS threat adopted by the Tajikistani government so far and one that appears to enjoy broad public support.

### **Policy Takeaway**

Tajikistan's heavy-handed tactics that attempt to police religious devotion and external acts of expression in order to counter foreign-based terrorist organizations – particularly the ban on the IPRT and large-scale closure of mosques and madrassas in Tajikistan – have the potential to be deeply counterproductive. These tactics alienate people of faith who otherwise have no dispute with the government of Tajikistan and undermine key local-level community institutions that provided public goods and services the state in many cases lacked capacity to provide.

Focus on domestic religious practices and politics similarly fails to respond to the known recruiting mechanisms that draw Tajiks into the Syrian conflict and into ISIS in particular. Tajikistan's Institute for Strategic Studies as recently as January 2016 acknowledged that at least 80% of successful recruiting targets migrant laborers living abroad, primarily in Russia. Economic and demographic pressures that have created the situation in which Tajikistan has become the world's most remittance-dependent economy therefore play a key (if not *the* key) role in the problem of ISIS recruiting of Tajiks – not because recruits are financially motivated to join ISIS, but more likely because their economic troubles force them into a deeply precarious situation far removed from community and religious supports that might protect them at home, making them both vulnerable to and accessible for recruiters in Russia, Turkey, and other foreign states that lack the will or capacity to monitor Tajik-language recruiting or protect Tajik migrant communities.

Tajikistan's media environment – particularly including social media – is deeply conspiratorial and ridden with deliberate misinformation from multiple actors. Although independent media is more robust in Tajikistan than in some neighboring countries, social media users in particular are conscious that they are told multiple and often conflicting versions of every story, but do not generally have sources of information that the broader public can agree on as objective. Non-state initiatives that could help the public discern fact from misinformation, and news from propaganda, could significantly help Tajikistani citizens organize themselves to act to defend their own interests and help counteract the attempts of foreign actors – including ISIS – to recruit or mobilize Tajikistanis.

# Iran and Tajikistan: A Story of Love and Hate

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A.S.<sup>1</sup> (2016)

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Muhiddin Kabiri, chairman of the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (IRPT), labelled as a “terrorist” in his country since his party was officially banned in September 2015, ended the year visiting Iran and meeting the most influential Iranian political figure – Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei. Tehran’s move angered Dushanbe and was followed by an official protest, naming Iran a “supporter of terrorism,” as well as a sea of Soviet-style propagandist articles in official media aimed at vilifying Iran. At the same time, President of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon paid an official visit to the main rival of Iran in the region, Saudi Arabia, and returned with unprecedented business contracts. This visit coincided with the escalation of tensions in the Iranian-Saudi relationship. Is Iran going to bet again on the Islamic opposition in Tajik politics? Was it Iran’s answer to recent pressures over Islam in Tajikistan or to the visit of the Tajik president to Saudi Arabia? Or it is a simple strategy to avoid putting all their eggs in one basket as Russia does in Central Asia?

## Tajikistan, the Missed ‘Little Iran’

Iran has a history of both winning hearts and losing them in Tajikistan. The height of this love was in the end of 1980s, when perestroika in the Soviet Union gave a chance for Tajiks to look for their historical and cultural shared roots with Iran. At that time, many among the Tajik intelligentsia were looking at Iran as a country with a great culture. They wanted to change the name of Tajikistan’s national language from Tajik into Farsi, as well as the script from Cyrillic into Arabic, but they had no clue about the confessional difference between Sunni and Shia. At that time, Iran was already marginalized on the international scene and was still recovering from a de-

cade of war with Iraq. However, it was quick to use its linguistic and historical proximity with Tajikistan to its advantage. Tehran recognized the independence of the country and was the very first to open an embassy in Dushanbe in January 1992. Tajik elites were generously invited to visit Iran as part of various exchange programs.

At the end of 1992, Tajikistan entered into a bloody civil war. Tehran gave refuge and support to the leaders of the Democratic-Islamic coalition of the Tajik opposition, and was therefore considered to be a pro-Islamic actor. However, it also contributed a critical role in helping peace discussions: Tehran hosted several rounds of the Tajik peace negotiations in 1994, 1995, and 1997, bringing both sides to the discussion table. President Rahmon paid an official visit to Tehran in 1995 and opened an embassy there. But seen from Dushanbe, Moscow was a more reliable ally than Tehran, and any kind of pan-Persian nationalism was rapidly shut down by the authorities.

## Friendship Forever?

Rahmon’s personal friendship with former Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad gave a new breath for Tajik-Iranian relations. During his visit to Iran in January 2006, Rahmon met Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, who introduced Iran as “the sincere friend of Tajikistan,” and stated, “The Islamic Republic will do its best to support the development and progress of Tajikistan.” After that, mutual visits at different levels intensified; economic relationships were taken to a new, higher level. Iran started implementing giant economic and infrastructural projects in Tajikistan, such as building hydropower stations, roads, and tunnels, even if the quality of these construction projects was relatively low. Tehran also helped Iranian businessmen to conquer the Tajik market and open small and middle-scale factories. Iranian products and companies were widely represented in the Tajik business landscape.

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<sup>1</sup> This author is a former Fulbright Fellow at the Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies (IERES) at the George Washington University. His research interest includes internal and regional politics, online activism, media, migration, and society in Central Asia.

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The Iranian business sector rushed into Tajikistan not in the name of any kind of pan-Persian solidarity, but because the economic sanctions imposed on Iran were dramatically limiting the availability of foreign markets for Iranian businesses.

In return, officials in Dushanbe raised their voice in support of the Iranian atomic program. Rahmon declared for instance: “We support Iran’s peaceful atomic program. All issues related to this case should be solved only through peaceful negotiations and using various diplomatic methods.” Dushanbe also started actively promoting Iran’s membership into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. During that time, a younger generation of Tajiks, more Islamized, worried about the modest, but still perceptible, conversion of Tajiks into Shi’a. Fear of Iran’s influence (Iranophobia), became intrinsically linked to fear of Shi’a propaganda (Shi’aphobia).

For years, Tajik authorities played their relationship to Iran well. They benefitted economically from close relations with Tehran, but at the same time accused their own domestic opposition of welcoming Shi’a’s spread in Tajikistan. Emerging voices inspired by Salafi influences began vividly criticizing the Islamic Revival Party leaders as well as prominent Islamic clerics, such as the Turajonzoda brothers, for being too open to Shi’a. Here too, the Tajik authorities were able to play both cards; they imprisoned those who they identified as Salafi, but they kept their narrative against the IRPT and the Turajonzoda family. The most recent example of this ideological weapon against the IRPT was a statement by the long-silent former Tajik OMON commander, Colonel Gulmurod Halimov, who defected to become an IS fighter and accused Muhiddin Kabiri of converting to Shi’a.

### **Kabiri for Iran: A New Ally or Just a Pawn?**

In December 2015, the IRPT leader was invited to participate in an international conference called “Islamic Unity” held by the Iranian authorities in Tehran. Seats allocated to Kabiri were right next to the official delegation from Tajikistan. This was a strange decision by the Iranian organizers because the IRPT had already been declared a terrorist organization by Tajik authorities.

Tajik authorities rapidly sent official protests against Tehran’s invitation of a “terrorist” party to an international conference. The Iranian ambassador

to Dushanbe, Hojjatullah Fighani, was called to the Tajik Ministry of Foreign Affairs and given a letter of protest. The Tajik MFA declared: “The Ministry notes with regret that Muhiddin Kabiri, former chairman of an extremist and terrorist Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan, who is under investigation by Interpol for a coup attempt, was also invited to the conference. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan does not think that this move of the conference organizers is acceptable, and states that this type of approach to enemies of the Tajik state and nation can harm the good relations between the Republic of Tajikistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran.”

Saidmukarram Abduqodirzoda, Head of the Council of Ulemas of Tajikistan has been ridiculed for sitting next to Kabiri and shaking hands with him during the conference. Upon return from Iran, he devoted the very first of his Friday prayers in Dushanbe to this case. On January 1, 2016 he stated: “Iran openly supports enemies of the Tajik nation. We never feuded with any state or nation, but we also want others to be friends, not only in words.” Abdughaffor Yousoufov, Head of the Analytical Department at the Tajik state religious committee, published a similar statement, asking, “Does Iran respect the position and laws of a brotherly country, calling Tajikistan a friend, a brother, sharing the same culture and nation and religion?”

Tajik state and pro-state media were fueled by articles condemning Iran; the Tajik pro-government troll army in the social media published memes targeting Kabiri and Iranian clerics. Surprisingly, former OMON commander, Colonel Halimov, who has been long silent since leaving Tajikistan for the Islamic State, appeared again joining the army of those who labelled Kabiri as Shia.

The first response from Tehran to all these Tajik protests was a publication by the Iranian media of a picture showing Kabiri shaking hands and talking with the Iranian spiritual leader Seyyed Ali Khamenei.

In recent years, Dushanbe has been skillfully using the West’s indifference to silence its opposition and build an artificial civil society, protesting somewhat spontaneously against Western policies. For instance, state media pressure turned into organized small-scale protests near the embassies of the United States for granting asylum to former prime minister Abdumalik Abdullojonov. The state media also criticized the United Kingdom when its ambassador travelled to the Badakhshan region after the 2012



*Picture 1. Supreme Leader of Iran Ali Khamenei (Left) with Muhiddin Kabiri, Leader of the IRPT*



*Source: Fars News Agency*

military clashes, and Germany for allowing Tajik opposition activists to hold protests there. But “young patriots” and “brave Tajik mothers” did not protest in front of the Iranian Embassy in Dushanbe for having invited Kabiri.

### **Iran-Saudi Games in Tajikistan**

Tajikistan mostly relies on Russia politically and China economically. However, it still needs Iranian support at times, especially to stand against Uzbekistan’s pressures. But the Tajik authorities seem to understand that they can find other allies in the Islamic world, as seen with the official visit of President Rahmon to Saudi Arabia.

Iran and Saudi Arabia play against each other not only in the Middle East—Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Bahrain, etc.—but in other arenas too, such as Afghanistan and Tajikistan. Despite the official ban of the Saudi ideology of Wahhabism in Tajikistan and the limited economic and political interests of the rich Gulf Arabs toward Central Asia, the latest cable leaks by Wikileaks from the Saudi Arabian Embassy in Dushanbe demonstrated that most Saudi activities in the country are focused on decreasing the influence of Iran. Even if Riyadh does not enjoy the same cultural or historical closeness to Tajiks, it will not pass up the chance to cut Tehran from one of its close allies, especially when Iran does not have many friends to choose from.

During his trip to Saudi Arabia, President Rahmon met King Salman, performed the Hajj, gained permission to enter Kaaba with all of his family, and returned with several cooperation contracts

and a promise from the Islamic Development Bank of \$108 million to build highways in the east of country. This amount might be nothing for Saudis, but it means a lot for Tajikistan, both economically and politically. Economically, the country is in crisis due to the decrease in migrants’ remittances from Russia, and any additional money is crucial. Politically, Emomali Rahmon has shown to the Iranians that his trip to Saudi Arabia was fruitful, bringing back with him more money than the Islamic Development Bank has given Dushanbe since 2002 (slightly more than \$80 million).

### **Dushanbe Moves, Dushanbe Wins?**

The Tajik authorities reacted emotionally to Kabiri’s invitation from Tehran, and they might have regretted it if the Iranian leadership had decided to take a more open stance in supporting the IRPT. But Tehran decided that it needs support from the Tajik authorities more than a weak Islamic opposition in exile. Two weeks after inviting Kabiri to Tehran, Iran’s Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohammad Javad Zarif sent a letter to his Tajik counterpart noting that Tehran wants “to strengthen national unity in Tajikistan and is ready to cooperate in fighting extremism in the region.” The letter followed the Iranian’s parliament’s ratification of a security deal with Tajikistan.

This little diplomatic victory of a small and poor Tajikistan over a regional power such as Iran is particularly remarkable, especially at a time when Iran is out of sanctions and getting a large array of new friends. Dushanbe has been able to benefit from the wars of influence between Iran and Gulf countries, in particular Saudi Arabia, over the region. Dushanbe can also now demand Tehran’s silence over controversial Iranian businessman Babak Zanjani.

Iran has a century-long past as a regional hegemon and has been willing to stand up against the West for decades. In the country’s small diplomatic tensions with Tajikistan, is Iran going to take one step back without the aim of taking two steps forward? If Tehran decided that Kabiri is useless, then the game is over for him. However, if the Tajik authorities’ emotional response to the Kabiri invitation has offended Iran, or if the Iranian government does not get all it wants from Dushanbe, the show will go on.

## PART III. YOUTH AND MIGRANTS AT THE CORE OF THE SOCIETY

### Together on the Move. Tajik Migrants in Olympic Sochi<sup>1</sup>

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**Zamira Djabarova, Rut Perez-Studer,  
and Sheila Aminmadani (2012)**

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This paper is part of a project “Together on the Move,” which consists of two parts:

1. A traditional qualitative research that sought to identify existing organizing efforts among labor migrants from Tajikistan in Russia for the protection of their rights, and ways in which their efforts could be enhanced, specifically in Sochi. Being the location of the next Winter Olympics in 2014, Sochi is building massive structures within short period of time, with such pressures it is paramount that migrants’ rights are protected. The research covered circular migrants in Dushanbe and Soghd regions as well as active labor migrants in Moscow, Saint-Petersburg, and Sochi.
2. An action research, whose goal was to enhance opportunities for organizing community groups amongst Central Asian labor migrants in Russia, with a focus on citizens of Tajikistan, through the use of photography and graphic design. The project also aimed at developing opportunities where migrants, through using their photographs, could express their views, interests, and needs. The project recruited eight migrants who took photography classes over a course of three weeks, and who were then introduced to a number of non-profit and mass media organizations in order to promote their work.

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In Sochi, where there were difficulties in getting access to a larger number of migrants, we interviewed a smaller number of migrants, one of whom is Yusuf,<sup>2</sup> whose story is in many ways representative of issues that many Tajik labor migrants face in Russia and what they go through at a personal level.

Yusuf, a brigade leader who has been working in Sochi for two years (and ten years in Russia), tells me his migration experience as we walk along the river Sochinka. It’s an unusually cool day for Sochi in the middle of June. Yusuf is wearing classic jeans and a button-down white shirt which sets him apart from the majority of migrants who choose more colorful and elaborate outfits. A man-bag that he carries with him at all times is one of the traits that indicate that he is a migrant, having to always carry his documents with him. He proudly shows me his passport, registration card, and his “permit” (that allows him to work in Russia).

“I am not afraid anymore,” he tells me, “if they stop me in the street I show them my documents and they let me go. Though there are some members of the police who either don’t know the new rules about permits or just choose to take me to the police station anyway. Well, they have a right to keep me for three hours ... then they let me go.”

Starting in July 2010, migrant workers from countries that have a visa-free system with Russia (including Tajikistan) can legally work for individuals on the basis of a permit. Initially it is issued for 1-3 months, but can be extended for up to one year. Permits also provide the basis for the duration of time that a migrant can reside in Russia, in the absence of which they can only stay for a maximum period of 90 days.

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1 Research for this article was supported in part by a fellowship from IREX (International Research & Exchanges Board) with funds provided by the United States Department of State through the Title VIII Program. Neither of these organizations are responsible for the views expressed herein.

2 Some migrants’ names have been changed for protection from possible repercussions to them or their families.

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Picture 1. Yusuf Showing His Documents



Source: Picture made by Rut Perez-Studer in Sochi, Russia, 2012

Though permits are relatively new, they have already helped obtain documented work for over one million migrants. Tajik migrants hold the second most number of permits (206,398) followed by Uzbek migrants who hold half of the total permits given out (478,691) since the law took effect in 2010.<sup>3</sup>

I first met Yusuf at the office of a Tajik diaspora organization in the center of Sochi, where he had come to process permits for his fellow migrant workers. Among other services the diaspora association 'Sodeistvie,' for a fee, arranges the submission of documentation needed for permits to the local department of the Federal Migration Service (FMS). When I asked Yusuf why he could not do it on his own, he said he could, but his co-workers could not, either because of language barriers or because they have to be at work during FMS office hours.

The monthly fee for a permit is 1,000 Russian Rubles (about US\$35), whilst the fee charged by various go-betweens (such as the diaspora association and others) is anywhere between 300-1,000 Rubles. The IOM (International Organization for Migration) reports, however, that there is a relatively easy process of applying for and obtaining permits, which has allowed for the majority of them to be issued direct-

ly to migrants, thus eliminating the need for go-betweens who, hitherto, had been essential in obtaining work permits in what was a complex process.<sup>4</sup>

Yusuf is 31 years old, and has spent the last ten years in Russia. He is one of eight children. Although he is not the oldest, he is unofficially the designated leader of his six brothers and sister. He looks much older than his age and has a natural charisma that draws people to him. In Sochi he has also taken on the role of leader/caretaker, whereby he looks after the nine men in his crew. He makes sure they all have jobs, documents, roofs over their heads, and that they save enough money to send home. Yusuf's advantage is that he speaks Russian quite well, which he soon learned after arriving in Moscow. Overall, many migrants learn and understand Russian after spending a few years there, but many are too shy to speak it and are never able to improve their speaking levels to be able to express and defend themselves adequately.

Picture 2. An Officer is Questioning a Migrant over His Documents



Source: Picture made by Rut Perez-Studer in Sochi, Russia, 2012

For the past four months, Yusuf has been living with nine co-workers in an unfinished cottage on the outskirts of Sochi, where two out of the four rooms are only just in habitable condition. "It's a bit cramped," he says, "but it's good, we have a kitchen, a shower... it's good. In the mornings, even if each person takes 15-20 minutes, the last person in line has to wait a couple hours for his turn. But we make it work." Three of the guys in his group are his blood relatives.

<sup>3</sup> "Praktika ispol'zovaniya patentov na rabotu u chastnykh lits inostrannymi grazhdanami – trudyashchimisya migrantami v Rossiyskoy Federatsii (rezul'taty issledovaniya)," IOM, Moscow, 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Interviews with experts in Tajikistan and Russia, including representatives of IOM, Migration and Law Center in Moscow, and Trade Union of Labor Migrants in Construction Sector.



Six years ago Yusuf married a beautiful traditional Tajik girl; the daughter of a mullah, who is, in Yusuf's words, "very modest and undemanding." They now have two little girls, one and two years of age. They are all back in Tajikistan, and he visits them every winter, where he spends 2-3 months. "I miss the summers of Tajikistan, since 2002 I have only spent one summer there, and that was in 2006. I miss our summer fruits ... I had to miss the births of my two children." He talks to them every other day.

When I ask Yusuf if he could bring them to Sochi, he says it would be very expensive and difficult. "I could of course have my family in one of the rooms in the cottage, and have the rest of the guys in the other, but, then if one of the guys says something to her or looks at her differently, I'd have to beat them both up." When I challenge that way of thinking and say that it would not be her fault, he responds: "well I know it would not be her fault because she is a very modest woman, but that's how it's been done, and I would have to do it even if I didn't want to."

Just like many others, Yusuf plans to go back to Tajikistan once he saves enough money to buy (or build) a house for his family and a few pieces of construction equipment which he hopes would help generate income back in Tajikistan. He has given himself until he is 35 to achieve these goals. He sends money home on a regular basis. While we are out walking and talking, he quickly pulls out a receipt showing that he had transferred 70,000 Rubles (over US\$2,000) that very morning. This is the money from his entire crew he tells me. "I send it to my brother in Dushanbe who keeps the majority of the money and gives out what's needed to their families. This way, when [the migrants] go back home, they have money saved—otherwise their families will spend everything."

When asked about some of his most difficult moments in Russia, he tells me the story of when he and his brigade (a different crew at the time) had built an entire four-story house outside Moscow in just six months. He goes on to tell me that, "one day the go-between guy who was from Belarus disappeared, we refused to leave the premises, demanding our earnings ... We went to the owner and he swore that he had paid the go-between and then called the security guard to kick us out. It was a lot of money, six months' worth of work done by all ten of us... but we were new to Russia, so we had to let it go."

When meeting with diasporas the NGOs providing legal services and the Migration Service of Tajikistan all stated that one of the biggest cases of abuse is to do with unpaid wages, an issue that takes up the majority of their time. The primary reason this occurs is that migrants rarely work based on contracts. Therefore, labor relations are normally governed through verbal agreements. For a set fee, many of these organizations (except for some of the non-profit organizations who may do it for free) work on getting the money owed to migrants in order to make a profit for themselves. They predominantly utilize informal mediation practices where they call the employer/go-between/debtor, introduce themselves, and request payment. Russian legislation prosecutes anyone hiring undocumented migrants, which is why many of the employers, to avoid problems with the Russian Federal Migration Service, pay off their debt after a few calls/meetings.

*Picture 3. Working on Roof<sup>5</sup>*



*Source: Picture made by Rut Perez-Studer at Olympic construction site, Russia, 2012*

While I was talking to the head of the diaspora association 'Sodeistvie' in Sochi, Midov Farrukh, two Tajik migrants in their early twenties came in and requested Farrukh's help in getting their unpaid and overdue wages. Farrukh took down the employer's and the migrants' information and promised to call them back. I asked the migrants what the problem was and they told me that their employer (to whom

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<sup>5</sup> These workers are working on top of a six-story building with no tie downs for safety in the event of a fall. We witnessed various safety issues on construction sites.



they referred to as the “Serb,” as there are many contractors from Serbia active in Sochi) had initially been paying them on a normal basis, but then decided to withhold their last wages for no fault of their own, as they had carried out the work that was agreed upon. Farrukh did not even ask them if they had a contract or any other documents proving their labor agreements, as he already knew they did not. Cases of non-payment of wages are very common in Sochi, and even more so at the Olympic sites. The Russian state-owned company Olympstroy, solely created for the purposes of building and preparing the sites for the Olympics in and around Sochi, is responsible for coordinating the process of construction.

Picture 4. Working in the Rain



Source: Picture made by Rut Perez-Studer in Sochi, Russia, 2012

Officially, on its website it has enlisted 42 general contractors for building 400 of the Olympic projects. Each of these contractors has many partners as well as subcontractors, making it nearly impossible or extremely difficult to trace who the responsible party would be if such a labor dispute arose. Each entity starts pointing fingers at another and the case dies.<sup>6</sup> Officially registered organizations (such as diaspora and non-profit organizations) that try to go through official-formal routes take time to retrieve the lost wages (or lost earnings) and sometimes they cannot get them paid. At other times, agencies do not follow through, or even deceive migrants by keeping larger parts of owed payments than originally agreed upon. Those migrant workers who cannot or do not want to wait for help or have been “scarred” by deceit, go to gangs or informal networks, whose gang members, usually from the Caucasus, charge up to 50 percent

of the money owed to the migrants. “They are expensive, but they are fast, and guaranteed,” said a migrant worker from Tajikistan. Others, who do not want to pay such a steep fee, organize their own informal networks, where, upon need, they call each other up, and collectively threaten the debtor with destroying the work that has already been done, destroying supplies that still need to be installed, or by taking away their essential documents (passports, or car certificates) or keys, vowing that they will not release them until the migrant or migrants get paid their due wages.

Contracts for migrant workers are hard to come by, for several reasons:

- Russian legislation sets an annual quota for hiring a foreign workforce. While there are an estimated nine million migrant workers currently in Russia, the annual quota is about 1.7 million, making it difficult for employers and migrant workers alike to obtain legal permits.
- When having official labor contracts/agreements, employers are obliged to pay taxes (including social security) for each employee they hire. Undocumented migrants become a much cheaper alternative.
- Job opportunities in the informal sector pay much more than any formal contract positions that may exist.

Prior to that, he had had a work permit and a contract which had been arranged by the company that hired him. However, he had only been paid 50 Rubles an hour. With such pay he would only make US\$400 a month, not enough to send home to his parents, wife, and four children as well as cover his living expenses while working in Russia. Given that people not working documented in Russia can only stay up to 90 days, Iqbol’s employer pays for his ticket to Khujand every three months, where he spends a couple of days until the next flight back to Sochi. Even though he has now been in Khujand twice (as the tickets to this destination in Tajikistan from Sochi are the cheapest (US\$150), he has not seen his family for three years. He cannot travel from Khujand to Khorog (the town where his family resides), because it requires both time and money, and his employer wants him back immediately. Tickets to Dushanbe (where he could potentially catch a quick flight to Khorog) are much

<sup>6</sup> Interview with freelance journalist Dmitriy Doe.

more expensive, and besides, his employer would not pay, and Iqbol himself cannot afford it.

Picture 5. Living Conditions 1<sup>7</sup>



Source: Picture made by Zamira Djabarova at Olympic site, Russia, 2012

For example, Iqbol, a migrant worker from the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region of Tajikistan, has been working for the past six months for 100 Rubles an hour at an Olympic site in Sochi. By working ten hours a day, and with hardly any days off, he makes 28-30,000 Rubles a month (about US\$800).

Picture 6. Living Conditions 2<sup>8</sup>



Source: Anonymous picture, Sochi, Russia, 2012

Flights from Dushanbe to Moscow are the most expensive (compared to all other Tajikistan-Russia destinations), at over US\$500 one way. This is almost twice as expensive as flying from Bishkek to Moscow and at least 30 percent more expensive than flying from Tashkent, both comparable in terms of distance from Moscow. Even in a market where there are about

twenty active airlines, Tajikistan manages to dictate the fares. According to a representative of a Russian airline in Dushanbe (who requested to remain anonymous), Tajik airlines set a fare and the Russian airlines always need to be slightly higher. “The only time where we can sell cheaper tickets is when we sell them well in advance, because Tajik airlines can only set their flight times up to a month in advance (due to inability to plan).”<sup>9</sup> Prices for tickets are also set seasonally; in the summer when the traffic is mostly incoming to Russia, the costs of Russia-bound flights are much higher than those incoming to Tajikistan.

Many migrants cannot afford such fares, which has resulted in the setting-up of special microcredit programs in Tajikistan as well as in Russia. These programs provide loans for “migrant expenses.” Interest rates run as high as 20-26 percent. Depending upon the size of the loans, the applicant migrants can be approved in three ways: based on collateral, a collective group guarantee, or a guarantor’s letter. As noted by a representative of a microcredit organization in Saint-Petersburg, Mol Bulak, Tajiks are among the most favored customers as they are disciplined and mostly pay on time. One of the requirements for getting a loan is having a job. Given that the majority of migrants only have informal jobs, the microcredit organization is satisfied with photos of the job site and confirmation (even made verbally) from co-workers and the management. When asked what strategies they have if customers are not able to pay, Rustam, who is also a deputy at the Tajik diaspora association ‘Ajam’ grinned, saying “well, we have collection agencies that will make sure they pay.”

We arrive at the beach, as our interview with Yusuf continues. It’s the high season in Sochi and the rocky beach is full of people. We sit at a café on the beach, and as we watch a group of young men (that appear to be migrants) having fun at the beach, we discuss how here in Sochi, due to a mixed native population, migrants do not stand out as much. The locals are much more open to inter-ethnic relations and coexistence, which is evident during daily encounters. Yusuf confirms that people are much friendlier toward migrants here, especially compared to Moscow where one feels watched all the time.

7 These are shipping containers stacked two high and serve as the living quarters (for winter and summer) of migrants working on some of the Olympic sites. There is only one window at the end of each container.

8 These shipping containers are lined with bunk beds, and house at least 10 people. These people often times sleep in shifts; rotating out of the beds for each work/sleep cycle.

9 It should be noted that such allegations were denied by the representative of Tajik Air in Saint Petersburg. Instead he noted that the high prices are due to the high fuel prices (export tariffs imposed by Russia) and airport fees (in Tajikistan).

Picture 7. *Playing in the Water*



Source: Picture made by Zamira Djabarova in Sochi, Russia, 2012

We are almost certain that the group in the water are migrants, realizing that they maintain certain characteristics of migrants at the beach: they are usually in groups of 3-4, never bring any beachwear (suits, towels, etc.), go for a very short swim in their undergarments, dry themselves quickly while standing around on the beach in the sun, then dress and leave.

Yusuf tells us that we should refrain from swimming or going into the sea, but if we must, then we should go to the beaches where there are more waves and that are located further away from downtown Sochi. Apparently, the head of the general contractors on one of the sites Yusuf had worked on told him that sewage in Sochi has limited treatment and is released deep into the Black Sea. The sewage system in Sochi was built in the 1930s and is a subject of much discussion among locals and tourists who blame it for various infections.<sup>10</sup> Modernization of the sewage system is one of the Olympic infrastructure projects currently underway.

It is getting dark and we ask Yusuf if it is all right for him to be out this late because we have recently learned through the media that, based on the decision of the City Anti-terrorist Committee,<sup>11</sup> migrant workers, after hours, are only allowed to be in groups and accompanied by a so-called leader. A new rule issued in late June 2012 limits migrants' mobility, despite guarantees for freedom of movement given by the Constitution of the Russian Federation. Its enforcement is unclear, there also being confusion

over what "after-hours" means exactly and who the "leader" is. Yusuf is not too worried about it, but says that once enforced it could be a serious problem for migrants and an additional source of income for the police and migration services. "Migrants work long hours and finish work late, after hours they can be just on their way home," he says.

On our way out we pass by the entrance of the Park Rivera, the central park of Sochi, where the police are conducting one of their raids, pulling aside all young men that look non-Russian. A few days after arriving in Sochi, we were invited by the Tajik diaspora to join them in a public "meeting" held by the city administration on migration issues. When we arrived in the late afternoon at the plaza, on the opposite side of the street, outside the newest commercial mall, were a dozen "security" units ranging from the regular military and Special Forces, to local police and others. On the other side of the street was a military band tuning their instruments. They began with what appeared to be a rehearsal for an official parade. We looked around for what was to be the public discussion on migration within the plaza, but saw no one. A quarter of an hour later on the southwest corner of the plaza we saw the arrival of a handful of state and media personnel following a group of what appeared to be state officials, as well as police officers of higher rank. Representatives of various diasporas were present as well. These new groups set themselves up with a microphone on the opposite side of the units and began to address the crowd. The chief of police gave a speech about the need for keeping Sochi streets safe from crime, which is especially important given the large numbers of migrant workers in town and therefore the higher crime rates. He then went on to enumerate crimes that had taken place over the past week. It should be noted that none of the named suspects had Central Asian names. When they were finished with their speeches, the captain of the police and deputy Mayor of Sochi asked the forces to follow through with their orders and keep Sochi safe.

The units began their previously rehearsed parade in front of the officials, saluted them, and then went away to conduct their duties in search of migrants. For the rest of our stay in Sochi we were witnesses to the systematic singling out of migrants throughout the city.

<sup>10</sup> Discussed in a number of blogs, including: [privetsochi.ru/blog](http://privetsochi.ru/blog), [maksportal.ru](http://maksportal.ru) (July 2012).

<sup>11</sup> "Gastarbajteram zapretili gulyat' bez starshego," *Sochi 24*, July 3, 2012, <http://sochi-24.ru/obshchestvo/gastarbajteram-zapretili-gulyat-bez-starshego.201273.51545.html>.



Picture 8. Deputy in Meeting. The Deputy Mayor, Nikolai Pelikh, Addressing the Chief Officers as a Member of the Tajik Diaspora Listens on



Source: Picture made by Rut Perez-Studer in Sochi, Russia, 2012

As an example, at a park entrance on a Friday evening, we observed that after a brief conversation with three migrants, police officers took their documents and walked toward a booth where the men were left standing outside. After a few moments the officers returned and had them escorted to an unmarked minivan half a block down the street, away from the crowds coming in and out of the park.

We noticed the deputy mayor (who had given a speech on the day of the “public meeting” in the plaza) and the head of the department of cooperation with the law enforcement agencies, Nikolai Pelikh, present at the operation. They were wearing casual khaki pants and a red polo shirt and were speaking to the officers-in-charge.

Picture 9. Park Raid<sup>12</sup>



Source: Picture made by Rut Perez-Studer in Sochi, Russia, 2012

The next morning, local mass media proudly reported that 200 migrants were recorded as having committed violations of migration law and other legislation during the city raid organized by the city administration.

Yusuf’s story is representative of many of the issues that Tajik migrants face in Sochi and other parts of Russia. Construction of the Olympic sites in Sochi is behind schedule, so more and more migrants are being brought in to speed up the construction process. Yet, these same people are seen as a threat to security, to be expelled from Sochi in time for the opening of the Olympic Games. One could not stop thinking of Sergio Arau’s film *A Day without a Mexican*, in which, one morning, all Mexicans disappear from California, a disaster that threatens the economic, political, and social well-being of the State.

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12 These migrants have had their documents confiscated and are being led away to an unmarked minivan.

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# From Pamirs to the outside World: Seeking Decent Jobs

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Kavikas Kuhistoni<sup>1</sup> (2014)

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## Migration, a Dangerous Rite of Passage

The remote Pamiri village of Pashor, situated in the Shugnan region, recently received its worst news about one of its migrant workers: 32-year-old Shohdzhon Rakhmatshoev was brutally murdered while abroad. This news has outraged people. The incident unfolded as follows: On the evening of December 26, the body of a murdered man was found on General Antonov Street in Moscow. As reported at the time in the Russian media, the murder was committed with extreme brutality. The man's throat was cut and the body riddled with 25 stab wounds. During the investigation it was discovered that the victim was Shohdzhon Rakhmatshoev, a citizen of Tajikistan. Unfortunately, Rakhmatshoev's body and face were so badly mutilated that identifying him took quite some time. Further investigation revealed that the crime had been committed by a group of radical Russian nationalists.

On December 28, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Tajikistan, concerned by this brutal murder, handed a protest note to the Russian Embassy in Tajikistan demanding a thorough investigation into the murder, a speedy arrest, and swift punishment for the culprits. Moscow prosecutors did act by filing a criminal case over the murder, however four months have passed with no results.

Pashor villagers say that when Shohdzhon's body was returned home, they deliberately hid the cause of his death to his aging parents, opting rather to tell them that their son had passed away as a result of food poisoning. Shohdzhon had worked in Moscow for the past five years. He, along with his three brothers, had been one of the thousands of migrant workers from Badakhshan working in Russia. One month prior to his murder he was married to a girl from his village who had also come looking for work in Moscow.

Shohdzhon's brothers bitterly recall that his tragic death came at the end of his honeymoon.

According to them, xenophobia is on the rise in Moscow, and there is particularly strong hatred toward Central Asian migrants. They also say that there is no escape: to sit at home without work is not an option. They need to work in order to support and provide for their families. Thus, they continue to leave home for Russia.

The Migration Service of the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan recently stated that in 2013 the bodies of about 600 Tajik citizens were returned home, dead of various causes in foreign lands, mainly Russia. This is an average of almost two bodies per day. Islam Rakhmatullaev, a chief specialist of the Migration Service, believes that this is a high figure. He says that the figure "includes 67 Tajik citizens killed by violence, (and) 238 dead from diseases." According to Jafar Ozodbekov, deputy head of the migration service of the Ministry of Labor, Migration, and Protection in GBAO, there were 54 individuals from Pamir killed in Russia in 2013. In the first two months of 2014 five bodies have already arrived from Russia, of which two are homicides.

Referring to the increasing deaths amongst migrant workers, Jafar Ozodbekov stated his belief that labor migration to Russia has become more dangerous for Tajiks. The number of migrants who are tragically killed in Russian cities is increasing from year to year. However, the number of people migrating to Russia and other CIS countries is also increasing.

In early March of this year, the Federal Migration Service of Russia published a memo on foreign nationals living on the territory of the Russian Federation. According to it, as of March 2014, there were roughly 1,034,000 Tajik citizens in Russia (while Tajikistan's total population is only about 8 million). This includes roughly 854,000 men and more than 180,000 women. According to the Migration Service of Tajikistan, about 800,000 Tajik citizens left the country in search of work in 2013. Among them, about 33,000 are recorded as residents of Badakhshan, of which men constitute an overwhelming majority. However, according to unofficial data, the current total number of migrant workers from Badakhshan is around 80,000 people.

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<sup>1</sup> Ph.D., independent journalist, Khorog.

## **Main Reasons for Migration**

Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO) is part of the Republic of Tajikistan. This is the only autonomous region in the republic. It was legislated into existence on January 2, 1925 by central decree of the USSR. Badakhshan borders three countries with different styles and levels of development and political structures. It borders Kyrgyzstan to the north, China to the east, and Afghanistan to the south and to the west. The total area of Badakhshan is 64,200 km<sup>2</sup> (44.9% of the territory of Tajikistan). The city of Khorog, an administrative center with a population of about 30,000 people, is located 527 km east of the capital city of Dushanbe.

The GBAO has a population of 200,260 people (according to the 2010 census) and is characterized by ethnic and religious diversity. According to the census, 94% of the population of GBAO is Tajik and 5.8% Kyrgyz. Tajik Pamiri live mainly in the western part of the region (historical Badakhshan), subdivided into several ethnic and religious groups; the bulk of the Pamiri (about 60% of the population) speak ancient languages from the Eastern Iranian branch: Shugni, Rushan, Ishkoshim, Wakhan, and Yazgulem. Most of the Pamiri who live in Shugnon, Rushan, Roshtqala, Ishkoshim, and partly those in the Darvoz districts, adhere to the Shia Muslim strand of Islam. Darvoz and Vanj people, as well as the population from the Ishkashim district of Badakhshan all speak local (Badakhshani) Tajik-Persian dialects. Vanj, most of Darvoz, Yazgulem, and Kyrgyz from Eastern Pamir adhere to Sunni Islam.

Today many people from Badakhshan live outside the region. Even in pre-Soviet times labor migration from Darvoz and Vanj to outside regions was high. In addition, during the Soviet era, people from Darvoz, Vanj, and Rushon were resettled by the regime in the valleys and cotton growing regions of southern Khatlon. As for Pamiri Ismaili, the bulk of their migration took place during the Soviet era when they constituted a significant part of the Tajik intelligentsia based in the capital. During the civil war (1992-7) many of them were forced to return to Badakhshan. There is a sizeable diaspora of Pamiri Ismaili that still lives in Dushanbe, Khujand, and Khatlon.

Mamadou Alimshoev, head of the Department of History, Archeology, and Ethnography in the Humanities Institute of the Academy of Sciences in GBAO, believes that there are currently several fac-

tors that are forcing the Pamiri population to migrate. According to him, Pamir, with its natural geographic and climatic conditions, is considered to be the "hardest" region in Tajikistan. Its available land, which is not arable, can feed a farmer for a maximum of six months. It is impossible to grow enough vegetables and fruits in the mountains to create a commercial supply. Another reason that pushes people to leave is the complete absence of industrial and commercial enterprises. During Soviet times Khorog was home to twelve manufacturing and industrial enterprises, while today none of them are operational. Due to the distance of the region from large industrial and cultural centers and the small market of the GBAO, private business is developing very slowly.

According to Alim Sherzamonov, chairman of the Gorno-Badakhshan office of the Social Democratic Party of Tajikistan, migration growth is also affected by domestic political intrigues. During Soviet times the Pamiri worked in almost all regions of the country, but mainly in the capital, including in government institutions, former party organizations, and law enforcement agencies. After the Rakhmon clan came to power as a result of the civil war, the Pamiri was turned into a major ethnic group and thereafter largely denied access to positions in the central authorities and to employment in government agencies. Additionally, there are only a limited number of job opportunities for them within law enforcement agencies. They do not have businesses anywhere in the country except in the territory of Badakhshan. Therefore, many good specialists in different sectors from Badakhshan have been forced to leave Tajikistan in search of decent work. The low salaries that government employees receive, and their express dissatisfaction with it, also accounts for the increasing migration of teachers from Pamir.

## **Remittances Role in GBAO Economy**

According to the main department of the Statistics Agency under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan in Badakhshan, about 1,000 new jobs were created in the region in 2013, which is a 5% increase as compared with the previous year. Most of the employment was created in small business, trade, and the service industries. Average monthly wages in these sectors range, according to the same source, between \$200 and \$300. However, given the very high unemployment rate in Tajikistan, this salary is not

enough to suspend voluntary labor migration, which continues to develop, mainly in remote, underdeveloped, and poor regions such as Badakhshan.

According to the Federal Migration Service of Russia, men constitute almost 83% of the total number of those leaving the country. Asadbek Amonbekov, head of an independent community in Bidiz, in the Roshtqala district, says that today the migration of young women is a much more frequent occurrence than in the past. According to him, this can be explained by the fact that many young men leave home to work in Russia and forget about or neglect their families back home, or they indulge in alcohol and do not send money home to support them. Women then leave for Russia to “take control” of their husbands and at the same time take on small jobs to accumulate more savings. Many couples also migrate together to save money for their children’s education.

Economists calculated that in 2013, thanks to an increasing number of migrants, the volume of remittances sent by individuals to Tajikistan increased by almost 12% as compared with 2012. Remittances amounted to 49.6% of GDP in Tajikistan, which, according to the Statistics Agency, was just over 40.5 billion Somoni. According to the Agency for Statistics under the President of Tajikistan, this same year individuals sent 20.1 billion Somoni, or about \$4.2 billion to Tajikistan as compared to \$3.7 billion the year before. According to a branch of the National Bank of Tajikistan in Badakhshan, in 2013 local banks received \$58 million from individuals working abroad, which exceeds the total budget of the region.

### **The Marriage Issue: Looking for a “Russian Woman”**

One of the most important and pressing social issues to have arisen with labor migration, is the high number of young people who choose not to return to Tajikistan because they get married to Russian and other non-Tajik women. Alidin Bakhtibekov, a father from the remote Bidiz village, says that all three of his sons who went to work in Russia married Russian women. “I have not seen my sons for a long time. They almost never come to visit us,” says Alidin. “I talk to them only by phone. Two of them already have children who attend schools, but we have not yet seen our grandchildren. I don’t know why they

don’t come to us with their families. It may be very expensive or maybe their wives do not want to come.”

Bidiz is a typical, small Tajik village. Most of its residents live on money that is sent to them by relatives working abroad. Asadbek Amonbekov, a leader of the local community, said that out of the roughly 3,200 residents, 763 individuals, or over 23%, are migrant workers. According to him, to date, 26 young migrants are living in a civil marriage with Russian women. Of these, only six marriages are officially registered in Tajikistan.

According to historian Mamadou Alimshoev, voluntary labor migration from Badakhshan has a negative impact on demographics. Not only is there an increase in marriages between Tajik men and Russian and other European women, but some Tajik women, including natives from Pamir, are increasingly marrying Russians and men from other countries as well. According to him, such assimilation could have a terrible outcome for the nation’s future, particularly for Pamiri minorities.

Hushvakt Aydarov, one of the leaders of the Tajik diaspora in Russia and chairman of the Sverdlovsk Oblast regional public organization “Didor,” affirms that men who marry Russian women prefer to stay in their wives’ homeland, and their children often forget their national identity. They completely accept the character, manners, and psychology of their host country, retaining nothing at all Pamiri. “These children do not belong to us. They all are almost entirely Russian: they have Russian culture, language and mentality. Only their names and color of their hair remain Tajik,” concludes Aydarov.

### **Simplified Citizenship Procedures Will Favor Migration**

At the end of March 2014, the Russian State Duma ratified the protocol amending the Russian-Tajik intergovernmental agreement, which envisages the issuance of a three-year work permit for Tajik citizens on the territory of the Russian Federation. A similar procedure for issuing work permits for nationals of other foreign states with which Russia has a visa-free regime provides a work permit for no longer than one year.

Additionally, according to the memorandum on migration, signed by the leaders of Tajikistan and Russia in Dushanbe on January 14, 2014, Tajik citizens will have an extended period of up to fifteen days in

which to complete their registration in Russia. After recent events in Ukraine and Crimea, the Russian Federation also urgently announced plans to introduce a simplified procedure for obtaining Russian citizenship. The Russian State Duma will soon review expediting procedures for obtaining Russian citizenship by Russian-speaking residents of CIS countries. This review has become a subject of serious debate in many different circles in Tajikistan. Many experts believe that the adoption of these amendments will have a negative impact on the future of their country.

Alisher Azizov, a former engineer and teacher who has worked in Russia for about ten years, says that many Tajik migrants were ready to pay as much as \$5,000 to obtain a Russian passport. But these attempts would often fail because there were too many interested parties, while the quota allocated by the Russian government for new citizens was relatively small. Speaking about his own social, economic, and political situation, Azizov said it is easier to apply for jobs in Russia as a Russian citizen than as a citizen of Tajikistan. "I am sure that the majority of Tajik migrants in Russia, some of whom are qualified specialists and for whom Russian language is like a second mother tongue, would be happy to get Russian citizenship," he says. "For our Tajiks, who are temporarily or permanently residing in the Russian Federation, it is better and safer to be a citizen of this country. When you are a [Russian] citizen, you get higher salaries, decent social packages, and easier access to schools for kids."

Many experts fear that a simplified procedure for obtaining Russian citizenship will trigger an outflow of many entrepreneurs, investors, and other rare specialists from the country. As a result, Tajikistan may also lose young and highly qualified cadres to be trained in Russian universities.

Local analysts often believe that people from the post-Soviet countries who live in a Russian-speaking environment have a different "mentality," wherein the social, economic, and educational characteristics differ from those who speak and think in their national languages. Russian-speaking people, especially in Central Asian countries, are more loyal toward Russia and more critical toward their own government. Historian Mamad Alimshoev says that there are fears that if this law is adopted, the number of Russian-speaking migrants will double, causing

more damage to country's economy and potentially to its political unity. He believes that if previously there was an outflow of qualified Russian-speaking cadres, that number will now be increased at the expense of local cadres unable to find employment in their country. Moreover, by simplifying procedures for obtaining citizenship after the Crimean crisis, Russia will strengthen its geopolitical influence in many former Soviet republics, including Tajikistan. In this case, the increase of Russian citizens at the expense of its CIS neighbors will give Moscow greater political leverage in the future.

It should be noted that the Pamir is one of the regions of Central Asia that in 1895 sought a voluntary union with Russia to protect it from continuing Afghan pressure. Another historical fact that connects this remote mountainous region with Russia is that people from the right bank of Panj River (currently, GBAO) accepted Russian citizenship at the request of the governor-general of Turkestan in 1904. According to unofficial data, today around 20% of the native people of this region live in the Russian Federation, and many speak fluent Russian. Most have lived and worked in Russia for over a decade. Azizov says that for such people Russia, which provides them with work and a decent salary, has already become more of a home than their native country.

Currently there is a tendency among Tajiks, including those from Pamir, to settle in Russia, especially in the suburbs of big cities. According to Alimshoev, diasporas are officially beginning to form, whereas before they had acted aimlessly and erratically. In the cities of Moscow, St. Petersburg, Vladikavkaz, Novosibirsk, Krasnodar, Tver, Kemerovo, and so on, there are already many officially registered Tajik-Pamiri diasporas. In addition to providing protection over the legal interests of their countrymen, these organizations are engaged in finding employment for migrants and schools and preschools for their children. Many of them have also become noticeable contributors to raising the socio-economic level of the Pamir region. According to the migration service of the Ministry of Labor, Migration and Protection, in 2013 these associations provided substantial financial assistance to the organization of cultural, educational, and sports activities as well as to the development of local infrastructure in Badakhshan.



# Youth Radicalization in Tajikistan: Causes, Consequences, and Challenges to Address

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**Safovudin Jaborov<sup>1</sup> (2013)**

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There are different factors that serve to make Tajikistan's security vulnerable, not least the challenges in the wake of the international coalition's withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2014. However, this paper argues that more attention needs to be paid to domestic issues, and in particular youth unemployment. Rather than considering youth as a threat to stability in Tajikistan, this paper focuses on how youth mobilization could be of economic, political, and social benefit to the country through the creation of employment opportunities.

A young person should be able to get a decent job according to his or her individual human capital. Indeed, society should be able to provide adequate and equal opportunities for youth to find suitable employment according to their potentials and skills. Failure to provide such opportunities runs the risk of radicalizing a generation, and fueling instability.

While factors such as promotion of social justice and income equality, civil society and family, particularly the role of women, are important for stability, this paper emphasizes employment-based solutions to prevent so-called "youth radicalization." It also highlights the importance of the provision of freedom of religious expression and adequate opportunities for religious education within the country as measures that could mitigate the alleged religious radicalization among the youth.

Research shows that while a large cohort of youth effectively engaged in the economic and political life of society is considered an advantage, if neglected and discriminated against, youth can become a source of instability and fuel insurgency under conditions of political fragility.<sup>2</sup>

This paper aims to demonstrate the following:

- Contrary to the narrative about spillovers from Afghanistan, domestic issues are the most pressing elements to be addressed by the Tajik authorities and international donors;
- Alleged youth radicalization is a complex phenomenon that cannot be analyzed solely from a religious angle: "radicalization" can also be secular, in the form of participating in criminal activities or street violence;
- The youth bulge is a key issue for the future of the country;
- Youth unemployment and lack of opportunities to receive a moderate religious education are the main drivers of youth radicalization.

## Tajikistan's Socio-Economic Woes

Whilst many countries around the world, particularly developed nations, are facing the problem of a quickly aging population, 70 percent of the population of Tajikistan are under the age of 30. The average Tajik citizen is 25 years old; and about 2.7 million people, or 35 percent of the population, are between 14 and 30 years old.<sup>3</sup>

Economic decline linked to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the subsequent civil war, the collapse of the labor market, and the high population growth rate during the 1990s have all considerably contributed to rising poverty levels. According to the World Bank, in 1999 the national poverty rate<sup>4</sup> in Tajikistan was 96 percent of the population. Since the early 2000s the economy of the country has recovered somewhat and has started to show a positive growth rate. Indeed, by the end of 2012 the poverty rate had dropped to 40 percent of the population.<sup>5</sup> Despite these improvements, the country still has very limited economic resources. Most of the textile, food, and other heavy and light industries did not re-

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1 Russian-Tajik (Slavic) University, Dushanbe.

2 Henrik Urdal, "The Devil in the Demographics: The Effect of Youth Bulges on Domestic Armed Conflict, 1950-2000," *The World Bank Social Development Paper* No. 14, July 2004.

3 National Program on Social Development of Youth in the Republic of Tajikistan for the period 2013-2015.

cover after the decline of the 1990s, while the only industrial giant in the country, the Tajik Aluminum Company, has very limited employment capacity—around 10,000 employees.<sup>6</sup> The agricultural sector, where more than half of the country's workforce is employed,<sup>7</sup> does not have the capacity to create enough jobs to meet fast growing labor supply and is in any case unattractive on account of the very low wages.

Thus, despite Tajikistan's steady growth over the last decade, the country is not creating sufficient jobs for its population. This is contrary to appearances. Indeed in 2012, officially registered unemployment<sup>8</sup> in Tajikistan stood at only 2.5 percent,<sup>9</sup> ostensibly one of the lowest in the world, while most developed countries such as the United States, Germany, and Japan, and the majority of middle income countries, for example Russia, China, and Kazakhstan, have a much higher unemployment rate. Official unemployment is low because only a very small fraction of unemployed persons undergo the official registration process, a real administrative burden.

Registration does not help to find a decent job; many simply do not know that there is an unemployment benefit package available; and, in any case, the amount of money is so low as to be considered worthless by the majority of people concerned. In fact, as of May 2013, out of 56,700 officially registered unemployed people in the country, only 1,500 had received unemployment benefits.<sup>10</sup> In sum, the official statistics on unemployment do not describe the reality, which consists of hundreds of thousands of unemployed and underemployed people seeking jobs.

The other limitation of employment data is that official statistics do not take into consideration

underemployment, which is a key dimension of Tajikistan's socio-economic environment. This underemployment manifests itself in two different ways. First, tens of thousands of doctors, teachers, engineers, and others with secondary technical or tertiary education, are overqualified for the more menial jobs they are employed in. This category, which may feel humiliated by a lack of social recognition, has been among the first to emigrate, in the hope that another country would offer better prospects for social promotion. The second group of underemployed people is comprised of the rural population working in the agricultural sector. They do not possess specific diplomas that could be useful on the job market, but the wages generated by the harvests are largely insufficient to live decently.

In most countries unemployment is greater among the younger than older generations. This is also true for Tajikistan where the unemployment rate among the youth is extremely high. According to the National Program on Social Development of Youth in the Republic of Tajikistan for the period of 2013-2015, 55 percent of the youth in Tajikistan are considered as unemployed. This figure clearly suggests that there is a large gap between the officially registered unemployment rate (2.5 percent) and reality. This state program highlights the importance of promoting youth employment as a measure for preventing youth radicalization. Nonetheless, it fails to envisage concrete activities to address this issue, and does not offer realistic strategies to redress the following: the lack of opportunities available for preferential business loans; the absence of access to mortgage loans; the shortage of employment opportunities; and the lack of entrepreneurial capacity among the youth.<sup>11</sup>

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4 According to the World Bank's Global Poverty Working Group: "National poverty rate is the percentage of the population living below the national poverty line. National estimates are based on population-weighted subgroup estimates from household surveys." Data are based on World Bank's country poverty assessments and country Poverty Reduction Strategies, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.NAHC/countries/TJ?display=graph>.

5 "Tajikistan: Sustaining Growth, Sharing Prosperity," *Tajikistan Economic Report* No. 3, World Bank, April 2013.

6 "Osnovnye napravleniya razvitiya proizvodstvenno-ekonomicheskoy i finansovoy deyatel'nosti GUP Tadzhijskaya Alyuminievaya Kompaniya za 9 mesyatshev 2010 goda, v sravnenii s 9 mesyatsami 2009 goda," Tajik Aluminium Company, [http://www.talco.com.tj/UserFiles/ru\\_2009.pdf](http://www.talco.com.tj/UserFiles/ru_2009.pdf).

7 Souleymane Coulibaly, "Shifting Comparative Advantages in Tajikistan: Implications for Growth Strategy," *The World Bank Policy Research Working Paper* No. 6125, World Bank, July 2012.

8 According to the Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan: "An unemployed [person], registered by the state employment services is a person out of work, looking for work, and according to the existing procedures has received the official status of being unemployed issued by the state employment agencies."

9 Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2013; "Tajikistan: Sustaining Growth, Sharing Prosperity," *Tajikistan Economic Report* No. 3, World Bank, April 2013.

10 Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2013.

11 National Program on Social Development of Youth in the Republic of Tajikistan for the period of 2013-2015.

The socio-economic conditions afflicting the country have affected the majority of households. The only safety valve available for Tajik households has been found in emigration. Today, according to Tajik statistics, around 500,000 Tajiks work as labor migrants abroad;<sup>12</sup> however, independent sources put this figure as high as one million, which would mean that between a quarter and half of the male workforce, with some regional variation and depending on methods of calculation, are abroad for several months a year, or even several consecutive years. Tajik migrants predominantly head for Russia, where they face a difficult social situation, a lack of support from the authorities and the administration, and even violent xenophobia.<sup>13</sup> Migrant workers can earn at least four times as much in Russia as back home, but also are often victims of racist attacks, police brutality, unsafe work conditions, and contracts made on false premises.<sup>14</sup> According to the World Bank, the value of remittances received by Tajikistan in 2011 was around US\$ 3 billion, which is equal to 47 percent of the country's GDP. This figure as a ratio of remittances to GDP is the highest in the world.<sup>15</sup>

Labor migration thus plays a key role in poverty reduction and social and macroeconomic stability. However, underemployment is also part of the migration pattern, as many of the migrants work in jobs they are not qualified for, or only on a seasonal basis.<sup>16</sup> Some migrants come back to Tajikistan with new skills acquired whilst abroad; such migrants are still only in the minority, however.<sup>17</sup> Young people are more inclined to migrate as they have invested less in their home country, and have fewer family obligations.<sup>18</sup> Building a life back home, including purchasing a house and raising a family, necessitate the acquiring of preliminary capital. Thus, migration is now considered almost as a rite of initiation to adult-

hood. Indeed, around two-thirds of Tajik migrants are between 20 and 39 years of age.<sup>19</sup>

The youth in Tajikistan are worse off than their parents. They exhibit higher rates of illiteracy, unemployment, and poorer health—and they are more likely to be victims or perpetrators of violence. The national average school enrolment rate was only 61.1 percent in 2001, compared to nearly 100 percent before 1991. Many students enroll but fail to attend school for the majority of the school year. Measuring attendance is difficult, but in some areas as many as 45 percent of pupils fail to regularly attend school. Experts suggest that there has been a large, albeit unrecorded, surge in illiteracy.<sup>20</sup> This directly impacts young people's employability at home, and decreases their skills on the job market abroad.

### Youth Radicalization: Religion and Beyond

While the socio-economic situation of the youth should be the Tajik authorities' main concern, the official narrative prefers to focus on the risk of spill-overs from Afghanistan and on so-called religious radicalization.

These fears are based on several incidents of extremist action that have occurred over the last 15 years—ranging from the incursions of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan in the summers of 1999 and 2000, to the violence witnessed in the Rasht Valley in 2008-2010. There have also been some isolated terrorist activities, which have added to the picture of ongoing radicalization. In September 3, 2010, a car bomb was detonated at a garrison of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Khujand; this was the first confirmed suicide attack in the country, killing one police officer and injuring a further 25.<sup>21</sup> On January 19,

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12 Agency of Statistics under the President of the Republic Tajikistan, 2012.

13 Melissa Kerr Chioyenda, "Tajik Labour Migration to Russia: Tajik Responses to Migrant Vulnerability and Russian State Policies," *The Eurasia Studies Society Journal* 2, no. 1 (February 2013).

14 Genesee Keevil, "Tajikistan: Migrant Laborers Dying to Work in Russia," *Eurasianet*, February 26, 2013, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/66602>.

15 "Migration and Development Brief No. 20," World Bank, April 19, 2013.

16 Gianni Betti and Lars Lundgren, "The impact of remittances and equivalence scales on poverty in Tajikistan," *Central Asian Survey* 31, no. 4 (2012): 395-408.

17 Saodat Olimova, "To Stay or not to Stay. The Global Economic Crisis and Return Migration to Tajikistan," in *Migration and Social Upheaval as the Face of Globalization in Central Asia*, ed. Marlene Laruelle (London: Brill, 2013), 65-86.

18 Alexander M. Danzer and Oleksiy Ivaschenko, "Migration patterns in a remittances dependent economy: Evidence from Tajikistan during the global financial crisis," *Migration Letters* 7, no. 2 (2010): 190-202.

19 Martha Brill Olcott, *Tajikistan's Difficult Development Path* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012).

20 "Youth in Central Asia: Losing the new generation," *Asia Report* No. 66, International Crisis Group, October 2003.

21 Christopher Swift, "Militant Pathways: Local Radicalization and Regional Migration in Central Asia," *CTC Sentinel* 4, no. 11/12 (2011).

2013, a terrorist suspect carried out a suicide attack in Istaravshan, also in the north of the country.<sup>22</sup>

Another recent development pointing to Islamic radicalism in Tajikistan is related to the emergence of the hitherto unknown radical group “Jamoati Ansorulloh,” which seems to have links with graduates from Pakistani madrasas who have returned to Tajikistan. If previously only two main radical groups, namely Hizb ut-Tahrir and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, were known, now Ansorulloh. The three groups call for *jihad* against the current government.<sup>23</sup>

To deal with the alleged expansion of religious radicalism the authorities have adopted questionable policies that actually serve to exacerbate popular resentment. The 2009 Religion Law establishes onerous and intrusive registration requirements for all religious groups; criminalizes unregistered religious activity as well as private religious education; and sets strict limits on the number and size of mosques.<sup>24</sup> A state license is now required to conduct religious instruction, and both parents must give written permission for children aged between 7 and 18 to receive such instruction. Only registered central mosques can set up basic educational groups, but local mosques cannot.<sup>25</sup> These measures therefore restrict accessibility of religious education for the majority of youths not living in proximity to a central mosque, particularly in rural areas. Furthermore, a 2011 Law on Parental Responsibility banned minors from any organized religious activity except in official religious institutions.<sup>26</sup> All women, young men under the age of 18 are now forbidden to attend mosques.

These measures are intended to prevent youth radicalism; however, they result in pushing youth underground and turning them toward the Internet and other information spheres, where they can be embraced by radical groups.<sup>27</sup> A lack of opportunities to obtain a religious education within the country also

pushes young Tajiks to seek such education abroad. Schools with free religious education and board in Pakistan, where teaching is mostly Salafi, are attractive for those who cannot afford payment for their education. They train future *mujahideen* from not only Pakistan and Afghanistan, but also from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, southern Russia, and Turkey.<sup>28</sup>

However, while denouncing and flagging up the risk of the religious radicalization of the country's youth, the authorities omit to give a precise definition of this so-called radicalization. Indeed, terrorist violence is very rare in the country and does not have the support of the vast majority of the population. Pursuing an underground religious education is considered by the authorities as a sign of “radicalization,” which means that the definition is very broad, blurred, and used as a political category.

However, there are more cases of what could be called “secular radicalism.” Particular attention should indeed be paid to other forms of discontent expressed by Tajikistan's youth. In September 2006, for instance, a planned concert in Dushanbe by the popular Iranian-Swedish singer Arash failed to go ahead, which resulted in a small group of young men spontaneously walking toward the presidential palace to demonstrate their discontent, while others started rioting in the stadium and later vandalized buses and shops and got into skirmishes with the police.<sup>29</sup> Another vivid case of youth discontent and rioting relates to the fans of the Kulob-based “Ravshan” football team. In June 14, 2011, after losing a game to the Dushanbe-based “Istiklol” club, Ravshan fans invaded the pitch and clashed with police, players, and officials; shortly thereafter in another incident in Dushanbe on June 23, Ravshan fans again took to the streets.<sup>30</sup>

Violence at events—whether sport or music related—is not specific to Tajikistan and is frequent in some European countries. It does reveal, however,

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22 “Na severe Tadzhiqistana podozrevaemy v terrorizme sovershil samopodryv,” *Newtj.ru*, January 26, 2013, <http://news.tj/ru/news/na-severe-tadzhiqistana-podozrevaemyi-v-terrorizme-sovershil-samopodryv>.

23 Avaz Yuldoshev, “Jamoati ansorullo tojikonro ba jihod-davat mekunad,” *Asia-Plus*, September 16, 2011, <http://news.tj/tj/news/amoati-ansorullo-ikonro-ba-i-od-davat-mekunad>.

24 “Annual Report 2013,” United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, 158.

25 *Ibid.*, 193.

26 *Ibid.*, 158.

27 Transcript of Mr. Kabiri's speech and discussion at the Central Asia Program, George Washington University, *Voices from Central Asia* No. 8, November 2012.

28 Jessica Stern, *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 224.

29 Sophie Roche, “From youth bulge to conflict: the case of Tajikistan,” *Central Asian Survey* 29, no. 4 (2010): 405–19.

30 “Tajikistan: Football Furor Opens Window on Political Discontent,” *Eurasianet's Weekly Digest*, August 15, 2011, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/64044>.



a venting of frustration among certain elements of youth and a certain acceptance of collective violence. Youth violence should therefore be understood as more of a global phenomenon, one that could contribute to destabilizing regimes and calls for political changes through street activism.

### Is the “Youth Bulge” Theory Applicable to Tajikistan?

The “youth bulge” theory refers to a combination of a sizeable male youth population with a lack of regular employment opportunities. Since the mid-1990s, a large body of research has confirmed the close statistical correlation between the likelihood of conflict, especially civil strife, and the size of a society’s youth bulge.<sup>31</sup> According to Richard Cincotta, from the 1970s through the 1990s, more than 90 percent of all societal conflicts broke out in countries whose populations displayed a “youthful” age structure with a median age of 25 years or less. And wherever civil and ethnic wars emerged, they tended to persist.<sup>32</sup> Henrik Urdal has also explored possible links between youth bulges and violent conflict through empirical tests, which attempt to model under what conditions and

what kinds of contexts youth bulges can cause armed conflict. He posits that youth bulges increase the risk of domestic armed conflict, especially under conditions of economic stagnation.<sup>33</sup>

The youth bulge theory seems to have been validated by the Arab Uprising of 2011. Some researchers point to the roots of discontent in those countries which experienced unrest in their levels of poverty.<sup>34</sup> Others emphasize the high fertility rate and ratio of youths as a proportion of the population.<sup>35</sup> While some analysts suggest that the lack of democracy and opportunities for social mobility is a threat to social and political stability, others suggest that specifically youth un(under)employment is a main threat—not only to authoritarian regimes, but also democratic governments.<sup>36</sup>

What, therefore, are the possibilities of similar unrest occurring in Central Asian countries? This would be not so much a direct chain reaction from the Arab Uprising, but rather following a similar model stemming from an expression of discontent. Some advocate cultural and political differences, and argue that Arab Islam is portrayed in Central Asia as extreme, and any fundamentalist activity in the name of a literal reading of Islam as retrograde and dangerous.<sup>37</sup> However, there are close socio-economic

Table 1. Selected Social Indicators with Relevance Concerning the Potential for Unrest

	Total Population (Millions)	The “Youth Bulge”		Share of Population Engaged in Labor Migration (% of the Population)	Access to Information and Communications Technology (% of the Population)	
		Population Share ≤14 Yrs. Old (%)	Share of Adolescents (10-19 Yrs. Old, %)		Internet Penetration	Mobile Phones
Azerbaijan	8,411	25.8	18	15.9	35.99	99.4
Uzbekistan	26,593	33.2	22	8.1	20	76.34
Tajikistan	7.53	39	24	11.8	11.55	86.37
Tunisia	10,102	25.9	18	10.2	35.99	106,04
Syria	19,043	36.9	21	15	20.7	57.3
Egypt	74,033	33.6	20	3.7-5	26.74	87.11

Source: Bruno De Cordier, “Can an Arab Uprising Scenario also Happen in Southern Eurasia? A Cross-cutting Look at Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan,” *Central Asia Research Papers*, No. 2, October 2012

31 Neil Howe and Richard Jackson, “Battle of the (Youth) Bulge,” *The National Interest*, July/August 2008, 33.

32 Richard Cincotta, “Youth Bulges and Societal Conflicts: Have Peace Support Operations Made a Difference?,” *Stimson.org*, August 16, 2011, <http://www.stimson.org/spotlight/youth-bulges-and-societal-conflicts-have-peace-support-operations-made-a-difference/>.

33 Urdal, “The Devil in the Demographics.”

34 Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty* (London: Profile Books Ltd., 2012).

35 Howe and Jackson, “Battle of the (Youth) Bulge,” 33.

36 Olumide Taiwo and Nelipher Moyo, “The Crisis in Tunisia: Africa’s Youth Unemployment Time-Bomb,” *The Brookings Institution*, January 26, 2011, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2011/01/26-tunisia-youth-taiwo>.

37 Scott Radnitz, “Yawning Through the Arab Spring: Resilient regimes in Central Asia and the Caucasus,” *PONARS Eurasia Memo* No. 179, The George Washington University, September 2011.

parallels between these regions. For instance, Tunisia and Jordan, on the one hand, and Tajikistan on the other, heavily depend on labor migration and associated remittances, and all three are experiencing a high population growth rate as well as a high level of unemployment.

Although in his paper De Cordier did not analyze specifically the effect of youth unemployment and its relation to possible unrest in Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, he has identified the pattern of youth bulge, a lack of employment and entrepreneurial opportunities, and associated labor migration in these countries as similar to several countries of the Arab Uprising (see the table above).

### **The Youth Radicalization/Unemployment Correlation and Its Mitigating Factors**

Several factors help us to gain a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between the official narrative on youth radicalization and Tajikistan's socio-economic situation.

First, youth radicalization is a convenient term used by the authorities to denounce what is seen as a possible threat to the regime's stability. However, younger generations born after the fall of the Soviet Union will take over the reins of power within the next one or two decades. The youthfulness of the population is thus a source of political hope, of social change, and of technological and intellectual innovation in a globalized world. The country's youth should also be seen as a positive harbinger of social change, not a challenge to security.

Youth's capacity to revolutionize the current social order can be a constructive element in the future of Tajikistan as a whole, and be disruptive only for the ruling elites.

Second, alleged religious radicalization is a complex phenomenon, which includes very diverse elements that are not necessarily linked to any kind of use of violence, for instance the adoption of more conservative mores, especially in gender relations and the status of women, or a more literal but apolitical reading of Islam. That Islam will, in one way or another, become a more prominent cultural element

in everyday life and the public space in Tajikistan is not linked to any "radicalization": it may also arrive peacefully at the behest of the majority of the population. Statistically only a very small minority of youth are interested in using religious arguments as the basis for an ideological legitimacy that challenges the current social order through espousal of violence.

Third, the lack of job prospects for the majority of Tajiks is a key issue for the future of the country, but it is not necessarily linked to any religious radicalization. A rise in unemployment makes it easier for "malleable" young people to be recruited to various causes.<sup>38</sup> In the case of Tajikistan, this could include criminalized activities related to drug-trafficking and participating in private militias in the employ of local power brokers, rather than flocking to extremist religious groups as such.

Fourth, even if the memory of the civil war is a mitigating factor serving as a reminder of the dangers of collective violence, the youngest generation does not remember the extreme hardships and difficulties endured.<sup>39</sup> Many "older" people remember the impact of violence on their everyday life and are ready to avoid new instabilities at any price—the specter of which the government plays to its advantage. But Tajikistan's youth have no direct, personal experience of violence, and therefore are more prone to use recourse to violence as a way of expressing social discontent, as evidenced by riots at football stadiums and music events.

And last but not least, labor migration is considered as a safety valve for youth discontentment.<sup>40</sup> However, the argument that large-scale emigration serves to dampen political discontent is false, as is shown by the case of Tunisia. Its large immigrant population in Europe, especially France, did not prevent resentment at home from spilling over into violence. In any case, there are clear links between emigration and "radicalization," as demonstrated by those young Muslims who become terrorists despite having lived or even grown up in Europe or the United States.

Even if information is scarce, it seems that religious groups such as Tabligh Jamaat and Hizb ut-Tahrir, which espouses non-violence, are influential among Central Asian migrant networks in Russia. The way Russian politicians use anti-migrant rhet-

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38 Mara Hvistendahl, "Young and Restless Can Be a Volatile Mix: A new theory proposes that swelling groups of young people, or 'youth bulges,' lead to conflict," *The American Association for the Advancement of Science* 333 (2011): 552-54.

39 Olcott, *Tajikistan's Difficult Development Path*.

40 Urdal, "The Devil in the Demographics."

oric for their own electoral purposes by playing the xenophobia card, as shown recently in the Moscow municipal campaign<sup>41</sup> fosters resentment among migrants, who may then resort to street violence (riots between young Russian nationalists and North Caucasians are recurrent, albeit not—yet—involving Central Asians). While this may feed into anti-Russian nationalist sentiment, it may also spur an interest in Islamic rhetoric. Youth can therefore be “radicalized” politically and/or religiously during migration.

## Conclusions

Tajikistan faces a broad range of security threats, of which several are linked to underdevelopment and poverty. The country has a huge youth bulge that represents a “demographic gift” because a high number of young people offers a solid human capital base on which economies can grow and prosper—provided that there is a positive enabling institutional and economic environment in place.<sup>42</sup> Neglected, youth may become a main source of political change, for better or worse. What is sure, is that the lack of educational and employment opportunities for Tajikistan’s youth can lead to instability, whether secular or religious in nature.<sup>43</sup>

While the Arab Uprising has had no direct influence or impact on Tajikistan per se, the country’s political, social, and economic developments nonetheless require the serious attention of government officials, the research community, non-governmental organizations, and international organizations. Youth bulge and youth un(under)employment are definitely significant issues facing the country. In addition, existing policy toward religious activity should be revised—, at present, it suffers from “overregulation.” The combination of both political and economic causes, such as unemployment and restriction of freedom of religious expression, could push part of the youth to be more receptive to movements that present Islam as an alternative political solution.

## Recommendations

Consequently, based on the established argument that a well-educated and employed youth is less likely to join radical groups or to promote political change by force, this paper suggests that job creation and establishment of a sound system of employment security within Tajikistan is the main tool to prevent the country from collapsing economically, and, in the future, from religious or secular ideologies promoting instability. Accordingly:

1. The responsible government authority for youth affairs, namely the Committee for Youth Affairs, Sport, and Tourism under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, should develop a comprehensive long-term “National Youth Employment Promotion Program” which:

- Focuses on improving the skills of youth, including literacy and vocational skills;
- Promotes youth entrepreneurship by launching systems of public business incubators to encourage and assist young businesses established by youth, including special funds to finance start-ups by young entrepreneurs and subsidized credit provision programs for youth; and, further, which promotes self-employment and small businesses, which should be backed up by adequate training and financial support;
- Establishes a system through which all state-owned businesses and government agencies provide internship programs for young professionals about to graduate from educational institutions, including setting up a mandatory percentage of youth to be hired during their recruitment processes.

2. The “National Youth Employment Promotion Program” should be properly integrated with the existing National Development Strategy and other macroeconomic and sectoral policies in order to avoid treating youth employment problems in isolation and thus neglecting the influence of na-

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41 “Kandidaty v mery vyskazalis’ po voprosu migratsionnoy politiki,” *Moskva-24*, August 16, 2013, <http://news.mail.ru/inregions/moscow/90/politics/14364468/>.

42 Navtej Dhillon and Tarik Yousef, *Generation in Waiting: The Unfulfilled Promise of Young People in the Middle East* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution Press, 2009).

43 Jos Boonstra and Natalia Shapovalova, “Thinking security, doing development? The security-development nexus in European policies towards Tajikistan,” *EUCAM Working Paper* No. 12, December 2012.

tional socio-economic framework conditions. This Program could be developed with the assistance of development agencies such as the International Labor Organization, which has very valuable experience in this field, and supported by other donor agencies and countries. The Program should be publicly discussed and developed through participatory methods engaging the government, public and private sector, as well as NGOs and international donor organizations;

3. International donor and financial institution policies, programs, and projects should not be revenue centered, as they tend to create a rent which is captured by the ruling elites; rather this must be job-centered.

4. Taking into account the magnitude and significance of labor migration, the government and international development agencies should expend special efforts at establishing safer labor migration procedures and conditions for the country's youth.

5. In order to mitigate religious tension and avoid religious radicalization, the government should dras-

tically revise its religious policy. In this regard, the Committee on Religious Affairs of Tajikistan should work on:

- Abolishing the recently adopted regulations that forbid private religious practice and ban youths under the age of 18 from visiting mosques;
- Increasing the number of officially registered religious schools in each region (Sogd, Kulyab, Kurgant'yube, Khorog, and Rasht) as this will prevent youths from looking for the opportunity of religious study abroad;
- Creating/Assisting in the creation of additional Islamic Institutes (or branches of the Dushanbe Islamic Institute) with at least one in each major regional center (Sogd and Khatlon oblasts);
- Facilitating the revision and abolishment of the ban on women from attending mosques by the Council of Ulama (Supreme Islamic Council) of Tajikistan.



## PART IV. A FRAGILE ECONOMIC STRUCTURE

### Energy Policy Options for the Rasht Valley

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**Said Yakhojev<sup>1</sup> (2014)**

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This paper examines whether local rural governments in Tajikistan can develop their own energy policies that would address seasonal energy shortages. There are three main barriers to local energy solutions: 1) a lack of resources; 2) project management and service delivery systems; and 3) a lack of authority. To overcome these obstacles local governments need to move away from reliance on centralized electricity generation and instead develop specific small scale solutions targeted at individual consumers. I argue for small, locally manageable projects that use modern technologies. I also call for a central role of the private sector - both in terms of early consumers of distributed energy as well as the implementers and drivers of the commercialization of distributed energy services. In this paper I review policy and financing options to promote the decentralization of energy in the Rasht Valley.

Seasonal energy shortages disproportionately affect Tajikistan's energy consumers in rural areas and small towns. Such shortages have profoundly negative impacts on the quality of life of people in these areas. The recurrent seasonal energy deficits are the result of the country's over-dependence on hydropower. To overcome these systemic problems would require substantial capital investments and political decisions to change the energy governance structures in the country, both of which will be difficult to accomplish. In addition, those most affected by energy shortages - rural area populations - have very little say in energy management issues at the national level. This paper examines what local rural governments

can do to develop local solutions that can respond to their seasonal energy shortages.

I believe that the reason that solutions to the energy shortages in the rural areas have been so elusive is because decision makers operate within a narrow set of options in terms of technology, economics and the organization of energy services delivery. Emphasis on hydropower as well as donor dependency has limited opportunities for local authorities. The primacy of centrally state-led energy policies may have discouraged the development of smaller, locally appropriate solutions.

Although current efforts at the local level to invest in large hydropower plants are economically, technically and environmentally justified, such efforts should not crowd-out other technologies, and sources of energy. This paper examines such alternative energy solutions and policies, and focuses on the role and capabilities of district level authorities.

#### The State of Energy in Tajikistan

Due to its mountainous topography, Tajikistan has historically concentrated its energy producing assets around hydropower electricity generation. Over 94% of the country's energy is produced by hydropower.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, hydropower plants are vulnerable to seasonal changes in water flows and between October and April suffer great capacity reductions due to reduced flows as high-elevation mountainous creeks, which feed hydropower reservoirs, freeze. In addition, it is precisely during those months that there is a great demand for electricity (up by 300-400%), mostly for heating purposes. The supply-demand mismatch results in energy deficits. Hence, in

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<sup>1</sup> Said Yakhojev holds master's degrees in Political Science from OSCE Academy and in International Peacebuilding from the University of Notre Dame. Said's interest and experience are in good governance in the extractive industries and its linkages to conflict. He has worked at a non-profit Bank Information Center in Washington, D.C. where he promoted transparency and sustainable policies of the international financial institutions investing in extractive industries. He works at the OSCE Office in Tajikistan promoting development policies and cross-border trade. During his fellowship he studied the ways Tajik rural administrations could answer their energy needs based on the example of the Rasht Valley.

<sup>2</sup> In 2012, 99% of country electricity was generated by hydropower. Artur Kochnakyan et al., "Tajikistan: Financial Assessment of Barki Tojik," World Bank, October 2013, [www.wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2013/12/27/000461832\\_20131227152407/Rendered/PDF/836960WP0BT0Fi0ox0382105B00PUBLIC0.pdf](http://www.wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2013/12/27/000461832_20131227152407/Rendered/PDF/836960WP0BT0Fi0ox0382105B00PUBLIC0.pdf).

response to these deficits the government instituted a load shedding regime which limits electricity to rural areas, certain energy efficient businesses, and smaller towns to 5-7 hours per day.

In most situations, hydropower-dependent states use fossil fuels to generate power when hydropower cannot meet its demand. Tajikistan lacks substantial natural gas and oil reserves and needs to import electricity and natural gas from Uzbekistan. However, since 2013 Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have not been able to agree on prices of gas delivery.

In addition, political decisions guide energy distribution in the country and explain energy shortages in the rural areas. For example, the Tajik Aluminum Company (TALCO), which consumes around 40% of generated electricity, does not face power limitations during the winter months and, until July 2014, enjoyed one of the country's lowest electricity prices (1.7 c/kWh). It is clear that electricity allocation in Tajikistan favors urban consumers and big, state-run firms, while rural residents and smaller commercial consumers face regular power cuts. In addition, many irrigation pumps, the third largest power consuming group, pay only a very nominal price at 0.37 cents/kWh during summer seasons. Finally, the government determines electricity prices. Unfortunately this is a non-transparent process which does not reflect true market prices, or the true costs of electricity production.

## Ongoing Efforts to Address Energy Challenges and Their Limits

### 1. National State-Led Solutions and Donor-Supported Local Solutions

A review of energy projects recently prioritized by the government clearly points to favoring large hydro and coal-fired power plants, including capital repairs to existing capacities. A 2010 World Bank study also prioritizes capital repairs at existing plants, followed by the building of a number of medium-to-large hydro and coal power plants. Both the government and the Multilateral Development Bank prioritize, and

eventually fund, infrastructure projects that can export surplus electricity as part of a World Bank sponsored Electricity Transmission and Trade Project for Central and South Asia, or CASA-1000 project. There is wide-spread recognition of the necessity to reduce losses in the electricity industry (currently over 15%, twice the industry average) as well as to increase efficiencies at TALCO. The World Bank has also urged an increase in electricity prices to cover the cost of electricity, fund proper maintenance, and attract investments.<sup>3</sup>

So far, solutions to the energy needs follow six main strands:

1) *Staple solutions*. The creation of additional mid- and large scale hydropower plants, because of the efficiencies of scale they offer, from domestic, renewable, and abundant resources. Some priority projects have already been realized: Sangtuda 1 (670 MW installed, 273 MW operating) and Sangtuda 2 (220 MW designed, 70 to 120 MW operating) hydropower plants (HPP).

2) *Loss reduction measures*. State programs target increasing efficiency, and some loss reduction measures have been adopted. In 2011, a national program on effective use of hydropower and energy efficiency called for gradual repairs, upgrades, and efficiency measures in the electricity industry, and for the immediate transition to energy efficient light bulbs and standards.<sup>4</sup> TALCO in particular needs to reduce waste from transmission and consumption.

3) *Mini-hydropower*. At a local level, UNDP, Islamic Development Bank,<sup>5</sup> Swiss Development cooperation, and the government have made progress with community scale mini-hydropower projects in rural areas.<sup>6</sup> To meet the basic needs of the poor inexpensively (in per project terms) and quickly, UNDP-funded mini HPPs directly benefit underserved communities and are managed by them. Many mini-HPPs continue to operate in winter. However, due to their small size (ten to hundred kW), such HPPs can only effectively provide illumination and other small power needs. The World Bank estimates that generally hydropower plants operate only at 30% and for smaller ones at times only at 10% of summer capac-

3 Daryl Fields et al., "Tajikistan's Winter Energy Crisis: Electricity Supply and Demand Alternatives," World Bank, 2012, <http://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/TAJ-winter-energy-27112012-Eng.pdf>.

4 Programma po effektivnomu ispol'zovaniyu gidroenergeticheskikh resursov i energosberezheniyu na 2012-2016 gg.

5 "Mini Hydropower Plants Brighten Rural Tajikistan," *IDB Success Story Series* No. 9, 2013, [http://www.isdb.org/irj/go/km/docs/documents/IDBDevelopments/Attachments/Projects/9\\_IDB\\_SuccessStory9\\_Tajikistan\\_Mini\\_Hydropower.pdf](http://www.isdb.org/irj/go/km/docs/documents/IDBDevelopments/Attachments/Projects/9_IDB_SuccessStory9_Tajikistan_Mini_Hydropower.pdf).

6 "Tajikistan: Accelerating Progress toward the MDGs by Improving Access to Energy," UNDP, Dushanbe, 2010, [http://www.ua.undp.org/content/dam/tajikistan/docs/library/UNDP\\_TJK\\_%20APT\\_the\\_MDGs\\_by\\_Access\\_to\\_Energy\\_eng.pdf](http://www.ua.undp.org/content/dam/tajikistan/docs/library/UNDP_TJK_%20APT_the_MDGs_by_Access_to_Energy_eng.pdf).

ity.<sup>7</sup> Although very small hydropower is not a complete solution for rural consumers, they nevertheless remain affordable, environmentally sound, practical solutions.

4) *Revitalize the coal industry.* The lack of gas imports has compelled the government to look for ways to re-start the coal industry and re-tool plants for coal operation.<sup>8</sup> Coal allows the decoupling of the heating service from the power grid. Many large industries are also switching to coal gasification. Tajikistan inaugurated a 200 MB coal-fired thermal power plant (currently operating at 50 MW capacities) in Dushanbe in 2013. Although controversial because of its location and environmental impacts (based in residential area near a botanical garden and public parks) the plant should add firm generating capacity and heating. Another much larger plant, the Shurob 600 MW coal-fired power plant, is scheduled to start operating near coal deposits in Shurob in northern Tajikistan with the funding of Malaysian investors. The development of new coal power plants marks a diversification from hydropower and begins to address heating needs of consumers in urban areas.

5) *Import natural gas or discover and develop domestic resources.* Natural gas is vital for industry and can supply electricity and heating effectively. In terms of the development of domestic resources, Canadian-British Tethys Petroleum declared a potential find at Bokhtar concession area in the southern Tajikistan in 2011. It sold its rights to the much larger French Total and Chinese CNPC companies to verify the discovery, and, if possible, develop the area. Negotiations also continue on natural gas and electricity imports from Turkmenistan, and on a natural gas pipeline to China through Tajikistan.

6) *Policy measures to promote renewable energy.* In 2007, a law was adopted to recognize the potential of renewable energies, and allow national utilities to

purchase electricity generated by new generating capacities.

Overall, the exploration and import of hydrocarbons are implemented either with the state's own resources and capacities or by foreign companies under contract with the state. Tajikistan's main partners in this regard are China, Russia, and Iran. Major investments have been made including Sangtuda 2 (BOT arrangement by Iranian company), Sangtuda 1 (joint venture with Russia UES), and Dushanbe 2 coal plant (engineering and construction arrangement with Chinese Tebian Electrical Apparatus Stock Co.).<sup>9</sup> Such arrangements are not always purely commercial. For instance, Sangtuda 2 produces power at prices above current average tariff.<sup>10</sup>

Mini-hydropower projects are predominantly state and donor funded.<sup>11</sup> That said, there have also been some micro-plants built with local resources. The most famous example of this is Pamir Energy, a public-private partnership built by the Aga-Khan network in the autonomous Gorno-Badakhshan province. The company establishment was in essence a cross between a commercial and donor financed project. Reportedly, Pamir Energy operates in a more commercially sustainable and transparent manner than *Barki Tojik*, the state-run utility.

## 2. Barriers for Local, Sustainable Energy Generation: No Market Environment

Despite the many actors involved, the energy industry in Tajikistan is not financially self-sustainable. A careful review of projects and programs reveals that the energy industry depends heavily on external financing, for several reasons.

### 2.1 Lack of Competitive Energy Market

International Financial Institutions and other experts that have analyzed the energy sector in Tajikistan point out that the industry is severely underfunded. Investments are unlikely because the electricity price

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7 "Tajikistan's Winter Energy Crisis."

8 Coal extraction has its impetus in recurrent natural gas supply price disagreements with Uzbekistan, which finally led to suspension of natural gas supply on 31 December 2012. Although residents never received natural gas, key industrial facilities relied on imported gas for operation. Zarina Ergasheva, "Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have not yet reached agreement on gas shipments for 2014," *Asia Plus*, January 14, 2014, <http://news.tj/en/news/tajikistan-and-uzbekistan-have-not-yet-reached-agreement-gas-shipments-2014>.

9 The arrangement stipulated access to Chinese companies to coal resources in lieu of the company building a power plant. Such resource-for-infrastructure arrangement common for Chinese investments elsewhere, interestingly, bypasses many perils of *management of sale* of services in Tajikistan, as described further.

10 "Tajikistan's Winter Energy Crisis."

11 Number of reported micro to small hydropower plants in operation vary. TajHydro reports 155 were installed in 2012, 50 of which were not operating. See "World Small Hydropower Development Report 2013. Tajikistan," [http://www.smallhydropowerworld.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/pdf/Asia\\_Central/WSHPDR\\_2013\\_Tajikistan.pdf](http://www.smallhydropowerworld.org/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf/Asia_Central/WSHPDR_2013_Tajikistan.pdf).

es are (intentionally) kept low. Funds are inadequate even to ensure adequate maintenance of existing assets. This situation also makes the sector unattractive for commercial investments. The average tariff in 2013 was 27% below the cost of generation,<sup>12</sup> at 2.1 cents/kWh for residential users and at 4 cents/kWh for commercial users (depending on the currency exchange rate). At these rates, Tajikistan's electricity prices are among the lowest in the world. This compares to non-expert estimates of average power prices of 8 cents/kWh in China, 10 cents/kWh in Russia, 12 cents/kWh in the United States, and even higher prices in Europe.<sup>13</sup> For foreign investors, Tajikistan's low electricity prices make investment in new generation plants unattractive.

In addition to historically low power prices the *Barki Tojik* plant manages to collect only 85% of its bills and receives cash only for 63% of energy supplied.<sup>14</sup> Due to its poor financial state, the utility occasionally falls behind on payments to independent power producers, such as the Tajik-Russian Sangtuda 1 power plant. While the average resident of Tajikistan may feel the burden of high electricity prices, for investors that possess funding and technology the current prices are unprofitable.

## 2.2 Regulatory Challenges

Apart from fundamental market conditions, investors currently cannot reliably estimate the long-term feasibility of projects because the government determines electricity prices in an ad-hoc and non-transparent manner. Electricity prices are kept low to shield the population from sudden cost burdens but also to subsidize TALCO and pumped irrigation needed for agriculture. While theoretically hydropower could be economically viable and competitive if there were a gradual increase in prices and consumption, the inability to predict prices on a 10-20 year horizon discourages investment from the private sector.

In addition to relatively low and unpredictable prices, any potential investor considering generating electricity will have to sell it to the national utility,

which has a poor payment history to power producers and hence makes such investments risky. The two privately operated hydropower plants continuously face non-payment from the national utility. As of March 2014, the Sangtuda 1 plant indicated that it had payment arrears of \$82.7 million on the \$207 million-worth of electricity supplied to the utility.<sup>15</sup> The jointly funded Iranian-Tajik Sangtuda 2 power plant operates at half the capacity and had to seize operations for three months in 2014 citing 'technical issues' and non-payment from *Barki Tojik*.

Furthermore, those investors considering mid-to larger hydropower projects (which are encouraged by the state) bear the risk of considerable upfront sunk cost in civil works and infrastructure. Unlike more common gas-fired power plants that are cheaper and faster to put into operation, large hydropower plants take years to build before they can produce power. Other important barriers reported by businesses are security of investor rights, the state of the infrastructure, management capacity, and the availability of partner institutions to work with.

One implication of these regulatory peculiarities and market-limitations is limited access to finance (investments), arguably the largest impediment to increasing generation. Foreign financiers are loath to finance high risk, long-term investments, while local banks shy away from long-term projects and typically charge interest at 22-30%.<sup>16</sup> These risks and consequently the high cost of capital make many potential projects economically unfeasible in the current environment.<sup>17</sup>

## A Closer Look at Rural Challenges: The Rasht Valley

During the winter energy season (October - March), the Rasht Valley districts (Nurabad, Tavildara, Rasht, Tajikabad, and Jirgital) are officially allocated around 6-10 hours of electricity daily, much like other rural areas and smaller towns in the country. In practice, in the winter of 2014 5 hours were provided on aver-

12 Figures are for 2012. "Tajikistan's Winter Energy Crisis."

13 Lindsay Wilson, "Average electricity prices around the world: \$/kWh," Shrinking That Footprint, <http://shrinkthatfootprint.com/average-electricity-prices-kwh#Px7uf6L7J0iAcIqG.99><http://shrinkthatfootprint.com/average-electricity-prices-kwh>.

14 "Tajikistan's Winter Energy Crisis."

15 Sangtuda 1 HPP official website, generating output and consumer pages, <http://www.sangtuda.com/consumer>.

16 Low- to typical interest rates at commercial banks in Tajikistan in 2013.

17 "Renewable energy investment platform of UNEP/EIB, overview of program goals and approaches," Climate Policy Initiative, 2013, [http://climate-policyinitiative.org/sgg/files/2013/10/Kreibiehl\\_UNEP.pdf](http://climate-policyinitiative.org/sgg/files/2013/10/Kreibiehl_UNEP.pdf).



age.<sup>18</sup> Independent reports on actual power availability, including citizen produced reports, indicate that in the especially cold months electricity availability is only between only 1.5 – 4 hours a day.<sup>19</sup> Power is allocated in certain amounts and local authorities determine its distribution within their districts and the specific hours when it will be available to consumers. As a result, with the onset of the cold weather and given the power limitations, people turn to coal, wood, and other biomass, which brings with it environmental (deforestation among others) and health-related problems.

The price of coal fluctuates substantially throughout the year and ranges between \$70 in early fall to \$160 per ton at the end of the heating season in February. An average household consumes between 2 – 4 tons per heating season. Firewood therefore is a primary heating fuel at \$350 per truckload. Local residents generally report that heating and energy expenses in the winter can consume up to 50% or more of a household's monthly income.<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, due to lack of reliable electricity, and especially during daylight, many small business suffer because they are not viable unless fully productive. Mercy Corps reports called attention to business closures in winter when power was available only for 1 or 1.5 hours a day. Hence, local banks are less likely to loan to businesses, which may suffer from poor productivity.<sup>21</sup> In addition to the general challenges facing energy investments outlined earlier, rural communities are further constrained by limited resources and decision-making authority.

### 1. What Is Local Government Authority over Energy Matters?

Local level governments usually rely or assist on energy solutions provided by the central authorities.

Local officials have no authority over large hydropower plants or electricity imports. They have a limited authority with regard to loss reduction strategies on their territory and often lack the funding to implement such measures. They can request financial assistance or donor funding for mini-hydropower

projects and distribute power over the grid to target poor households, however, they cannot own or independently develop coal resources. They can only allocate coal for heating purposes to public entities such as schools, hospitals, and government buildings.<sup>22</sup> Districts also have no authority in changing power allocations at the national level, or influencing electricity prices. Finally, they do not have the opportunity to purchase power from independent producers for lack of IPPs and their reliance on the national utility for grid access.

Thus, local governments have a limited ability to influence the overall investment climate in the country. Since they do not set electricity prices, they cannot raise or adjust them to attract businesses, nor can they change how electricity is distributed at the national level. Their local budgets are insufficient to invest in energy projects in any significant way, even if they are free to attract additional resources.

As a result, the Rasht Valley remains heavily dependent on foreign assistance. Donor or central government help is by far the predominant way to address problems, including energy shortages. As a result, attempts to find local solutions to energy will have to circumvent or mitigate the following main obstacles: economic-financial barriers, (which includes access to upfront capital, low tariffs, and interest rates); limited organizational models (including lack of business to actually implement projects, lack of financing, supportive environment, etc.); and a limited authority to exercise their initiative.

### 2. Uncovering Opportunities at Local Level: Revisiting Needs and Constraints in Energy Services

A reason why it has been difficult to make greater progress in addressing energy shortages is the narrow focus on hydropower by state authorities and foreign donors. The centralized energy policy means that local needs are not prioritized or effectively met. In addition, the absence of an independent energy industry limits the variety of technologies employed to meet these different energy needs. Finally, the pri-

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18 "Zimnie reytingi elektrosnabzheniya," *Asia Plus*, February 13, 2014, <http://news.tj/ru/news/zimnie-reytingi-elektrosnabzheniya>.

19 Information delivered regularly at [www.barknest.tj](http://www.barknest.tj).

20 "Social and Economic Impact of Small Hydropower Plants in Rasht Valley," OSCE, Dushanbe, 2013. Unpublished draft report. In 2007 coal prices topped at \$400 per ton: "Beware of Garm! Winter in Central Tajikistan," *Wikileaks*, January 31, 2007, [https://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07DUSHANBE162\\_a.html](https://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07DUSHANBE162_a.html).

21 "Social and Economic Impact of Small Hydropower Plants in Rasht Valley." The OSCE report indicates that an estimated 850 small enterprises in rural areas of Tajikistan cease operations with the onset of electricity limitations and suggesting an agricultural productivity loss of up to 30%.

22 Interviews with Rasht and Tajikabad government authorities in 2012; "Social and Economic Impact of Small Hydropower Plants in Rasht Valley."

macy of the government in dealing with investors in the energy industry also limits the variety of service providers and restricts awareness of alternative energy opportunities at the local level.

### 2.1 Focusing on Heating Needs

One area where local officials can make a palpable difference within their area of authority is in heating services. They would benefit from focusing on heating because winter power demand surges are primarily due to use of power for residential heating. The fluctuating fuel costs are a significant financial burden for Rasht Valley households.

Local governments are well placed to improve heating energy needs. Amendments to the Law on Self-Governance of Townships and Villages give responsibility over communal services, including seasonal heating services, to local governments. According to the amendments, community structures and district governments now have the authority and legal right to arrange or manage district heating services at the township and village level. Furthermore, unlike electricity services, local stakeholders are allowed to regulate the terms of service delivery – including fees, ownership and rules. These rights should allow local authorities to better match service to local needs and realities. In addition, the Laws on Investments, the Law on Concessions and the Law on Public-Private Partnership created a legal basis for local governments to foster private investments in service delivery, and to outsource these services to independent operators.

Furthermore, unlike electricity, fuel for heating can be sourced locally. For instance, the Rasht district boasts the anthracite deposit from Nazar-Aylok (whose resources supply coal for retail consumers); biogas, wastes, and other organic fuels can also be obtained locally. Additionally, unlike electricity, coal can be imported either from other parts of the country or from neighboring Kyrgyzstan if a shortage or price-advantages exists. Since in many ways combustible energy resources are amenable to local management, it thus makes sense to focus on heating needs at the local level.

Technical implementation of heating systems are localized and often managed by local governments. District heating, which consists of community or town-scale boilers that circulate water to con-

sumers through pipes, is a standard heating solution elsewhere, but currently not practiced in the Rasht Valley.

The most compelling argument for action on distribution level is the opportunity to produce electricity together with heating in Combined Heat and Power (CHP) generation technologies. CHP technology relies on combustible fuels to generate electricity and utilizes waste heat for industrial processing or residential heating. CHP technology can be 60-70% efficient, compared with 30% efficiency for the production of power or heating separately. CHP technology considerably economizes fuel when both heat and electricity are required, such as during the winter. Unlike small hydropower plants that suffer from reduced flows in cold seasons, CHP plants' output matches energy demand *in form* and *in time*: in winter, CHP produces more power as well as more heat, better satisfying seasonal residential demand. Modern small CHP plants and micro-turbines also enable regulating output for increased power or increased heat generation.

Tajikistan's municipalities and entrepreneurs may also benefit from widespread use of syngas- and biogas- fired technologies. Such generators can range from tens of KW to low-MW in power range and costs starting below \$100,000. Of course, smaller technologies and their deployment in rural areas will likely be expensive relative to local income levels. Biomass fired power generation can be costly. The International Renewable Energy Agency's world survey found biomass fired plants to cost between 6 to 21 cents per KW/h of electricity produced.<sup>23</sup> The average electricity cost was in the low-teens per kW/h, which is double the current rate in Tajikistan. However, for Tajikistan's commercial users who will pay about 6 cents/kW for national grid electricity from mid-2014, the cost of biogas energy approaches feasible levels.

Arguments against spending resources on district heating in rural areas, such as the Rasht Valley, merit consideration. District heating is not commonly used in rural areas because of economic inefficiencies. Due to the dispersion of consumers over larger territory, the expense of pipe laying and heat loss may not be justifiable. District heating works well in compact, multistory energy efficient buildings in urban location. Furthermore, incomes of consumers and

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<sup>23</sup> "Biomass for Power Generation. Renewable Energy Technologies: Cost Analysis Series, Volume 1: Power Sector," IRENA, June 2012, [http://www.Irena.Org/Documentdownloads/Publications/Re\\_Technologies\\_Cost\\_Analysis-Biomass.Pdf](http://www.Irena.Org/Documentdownloads/Publications/Re_Technologies_Cost_Analysis-Biomass.Pdf).

budgets of municipalities in rural areas are limited for costly infrastructure investment.

Finally, generating local electricity by means of small, distributed CHP plants produce electricity at a significantly higher cost – several times more expensive than what residents are currently paying, and they may not be able to afford the increase. A US brand micro turbine producer, Capstone, provides gas turbines at an investment of \$2,000-2,500 per each kW installed, or more than double the investment required for a hydropower plant, not counting the cost of fuel.<sup>24</sup> To be economical, CHP technologies need to provide power and heat to industrial users with extensive year-round heating needs.

Although these limitations are true, there is a lack research on district heating in rural and suburban areas in Tajikistan. This prevents a balanced evaluation of the different options. For instance, limited districted heating may be viable in Rasht townships and villages given the dense, compact, and narrow layout of the villages in this valley, unlike the more expansive villages in the rural northern countries. Moreover, higher costs of CHP supplied electricity may be acceptable for some consumers when no alternatives are available, or when higher cost of power is justifiable, for instance for commercial users.

## 2.2 Promoting a Variety of Technologies by Catering to Different Consumer Groups

Promoting energy solutions separately for each consumer category is another way to find opportunities for local solutions. Few small energy-generating establishments exist in rural Tajikistan, largely because the power they produce will have to feed into the national grid at prices standardized for all consumers. This renders small energy generating plants impractical and uneconomical. Although the energy distributed by generation plants is more expensive, businesses may be willing to pay higher rates in order to keep running. Today, Tajikistan's centralized electricity policy does not provide for such an option.

On July 1, 2014 power prices increased 15%; for commercial and industrial consumers it reached 6.2 cents/kWh adjusted to the exchange rate (from 4.5-5

cents/kWh). At 6 cents per kWh the price approaches the lowest US commercial user rates: 5.5-6.6 cents per kWh.<sup>25</sup> It is likely that electricity tariffs will continue to increase, at 10-15% every two to three years as has been the trend thus far. As rates increase, new technologies become more attractive. If selling power directly to commercial users was possible, many technologies would be feasible. Smaller hydropower plants would be commercially feasible and attractive. Diesel generators, syngas micro turbines, and small coal-fired thermal power plants would be justified in terms of cost of electricity produced as well as in the reliability they offer during cold winter months. Their small size and modularity would allow for the sale of power only to the highest paying consumers, as opposed to being designed for grid scale application.

Newer, distributed technologies such as mini-Organic Rankin Cycle (ORC) turbines can be implemented to produce electricity from waste or low heat, as low as 80-90 C, such as the heat by-product of boilers or industry. In the Rasht Valley, mini- ORC turbines can be installed in the proposed cement plant, allowing it to operate throughout the year. Mini-ORC turbines of only 10-30 kW can be used with biomass or/and coal-fired distributed district or building boiler plants. ORC turbines best match rural needs: they produce more electrical output with greater heating ability. Clearly ORC turbines are a more expensive option than the alternatives and would require long-term, concessional financing to be viable. However, where alternative electricity sources are lacking and waste heat is available from small industry and heating needs, ORC turbines merit a serious consideration.

Another distributed technology deployable with limited funding, scale, and risk is solar photovoltaic systems (PV). Solar PV could become appropriate for commercial consumers, particularly as business' ability to pay higher rates converge with falling PV prices. In 2014, Chinese and South-East Asian firms made photovoltaic systems that cost \$0.6 - 0.8 per watt per module. Considering 30-50% average module share in total system costs (work, wiring, batteries, inverters, etc.), solar PV would cost between \$1.6-2.6/watt.<sup>26</sup> Even today, the lowest cost grid-connected PV

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24 See CCC-Energy group of companies. Ukrainian distributor of distributed generation technologies based in Kiev, [http://cccenergo.com/-\\_%D0%B-C%D0%B8%D0%BA%D1%80%D0%BE-%D1%82%D1%83%D1%80%D0%B1%D0%B8%D0%BD%D1%8B\\_capstone](http://cccenergo.com/-_%D0%B-C%D0%B8%D0%BA%D1%80%D0%BE-%D1%82%D1%83%D1%80%D0%B1%D0%B8%D0%BD%D1%8B_capstone).

25 "Electric Power Monthly," Energy Information Administration, January 2014, [http://www.eia.gov/electricity/monthly/epm\\_table\\_grapher.cfm?t=epmt\\_5\\_6\\_a](http://www.eia.gov/electricity/monthly/epm_table_grapher.cfm?t=epmt_5_6_a).

26 Figures of 0.6 -0.8 cents per watt are from multiple sources. For instance, see "Free Solar Panel Price Survey," *Ecobusinesslinks*, May 20, 2014, <http://www.ecobusinesslinks.com/surveys/free-solar-panel-price-survey/>. See also "Photovoltaic System Pricing Trends: Historical, Recent, and Near-Term Projections 2013 Edition," National Renewable Energy Laboratory, July 2013, <http://emp.lbl.gov/sites/all/files/presentation.pdf>.

system approaches the costs of more expensive small hydropower plants.<sup>27</sup>

Solar PV is a feasible option for individual businesses to deploy independently as needed. Unlike all other energy technologies, the cost of PV (at least in the United States) was falling precipitously at 14% per year. If such price trends continue, the least expensive South Asian PV systems would cost \$0.5 per watt, while high-efficiency US-made modules around \$0.6-0.7 per watt in just 4 years, or around \$1,000-1,500 per kW of capacity for the entire system. At such price levels, solar PV will rival small hydropower plants in terms of deployment affordability.

Solar power is not entirely new for Central Asia. In 2013, Uzbekistan and Asian Development Bank commenced an assessment for a 100 MW, utility-scale Samarkand Solar Power project. Results of the study and success of the project should inform similar projects in Tajikistan. Yet, solar energy's promise requires an adequate supportive environment. Without state tax and duty waivers, streamlined and inexpensive grid connections and permitting procedures, competition, and access to finance it will remain an exotic technology. For decision-makers in the Rasht Valley, now is the time to advocate for state subsidies and streamlining permits to lower the solar affordability threshold, and make sure that the region benefits from solar first.

Another locally deployable, distributed, and low-cost technology for agricultural water users is wind power. Wind technology may have the potential to meet irrigation needs when grid-powered irrigation pumps are inoperable. Due to its elevated topography, Tajikistan relies heavily on pumped irrigation to lift water to higher lands and foothills. However, in Rasht Valley, swaths of land have been abandoned due to inoperable pump stations, or unreliable supply due to the limited supply of electricity. Farmers may lose up to 30% of potential income due to late or inconsistent irrigation in early spring when electricity rationing is still in force.

Wind electricity has been neglected in Tajikistan. Feasibility assessments relied on 1989 wind data for speeds of over 5 m/s at 30m heights. These parameters are now outdated: modern commercial wind turbines are built 60-90m tall, and can start operating at speeds as low as 3.5 m/s. A single modern 80m high turbine can deliver 1.5 MW of power in good wind

location, or could supply power to over 1,000 Rasht Valley households. Although more costly and more intermittent compared to hydropower, the cost of wind energy has been falling, and now is the cheapest and fastest growing renewable energy technology.

Although wind generation may be feasible in certain areas of the country, seemingly wider and more accessible than wind generated electricity is using wind for water pumping. Unlike more expensive and sophisticated wind generators designed to produce electricity, wind pumps are much simpler and operate at lower wind speeds, starting at just 2.5 m/sec, the average yearly speed for Rasht district. Wind pumps are typically shorter at 9-10m, simpler, and considerably more affordable at \$3,500-6,000 for a standard multi-blade wind pump. In addition, unlike electricity, water can be economically stored or intermittently supplied for irrigation. Despite these benefits, and the fact that wind pumps have been instrumental in agriculture in the US, Europe, Australia, Kenya, and China, Tajikistan does not employ wind power to irrigate its high lands.

## Overcoming Organizational Barriers and Financing Limitations

### 1. The Need for Energy Services Companies

Many of the community or municipal-scale energy solutions are unrealistic without locally based energy service companies (ESCOs) to assume technical maintenance and financial management over many years. The lack of energy companies prevents investment (even when funding would otherwise be available), as financial institutions expect to deal with established, technically experienced, financially healthy, and transparent companies. Experts and financiers familiar with energy in Tajikistan have been pointing to the lack of established ownership structures. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development specialists concede that investment in rural energy is often not possible due to the lack of suitable private sector enterprises.

The state monopoly in electricity distribution, and to a large extent the monopoly in energy generation, inhibits local energy services. The electricity supply is monopolized by the state utility *Barki Tojik* and the heating services in rural areas are managed by

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<sup>27</sup> Importantly, this does not mean that the electricity itself per each kW/h will be comparable with hydropower. Hydropower produced electricity will likely be still cheaper.



state communal service *Khojagii Manziliyu Kamunali* (KMK). Both services are financially unsustainable without continuous budgetary support from the central government and they are unable to deliver services effectively in rural areas. KMK has now focused only on water and to a limited extent sewage management and has cast away its space-heating function.<sup>28</sup> Due to their precarious financial health, these utilities are unable to offer tailored services in every community, and to secure financial stability. On the other extreme, consumers left to generate their own electricity or heating are forced to become their own bankers, engineers, and regulators.

Apart from technical management and ability to attract capital (better than state enterprises or individuals), ESCOs also play a crucial role in helping consumers spread the costs of accessing energy. The best example is the rapid spread of solar panels, in large part, due to lease models, or zero-down payments expected from the consumer. In such 'zero-down payment' models, an energy service company or a third-party investor installs solar panels on a consumer's property at no cost to the consumer; the company or the investor then sells power to the consumer (under a long term Power Purchasing Agreement) or arranges a long-term lease of the panels. The arrangement allows consumers to pay only for the electricity consumed as they would a utility bill, or pay a pre-determined monthly lease fee. With no upfront cost, or need to offer collateral, many more consumers can access renewable energy and thus expand the size of the potential renewable energy market.

The remarkable speed and spread of residential solar panels around the world (but not yet in Tajikistan) over the last five years can be attributed to state incentives and above mentioned business models that spread out the upfront cost to the consumer. Although there are a limited number of renewable energy companies in Tajikistan, the country currently lacks integrated energy service providers, which would offer energy as well as access to finance, marketing, and maintenance services. Irrespective of technology, it is apparent that for localized, small distributed energy solutions, entrepreneurship is a prerequisite. Recognizing the broader conditions

(business, regulatory) necessary to achieve energy security in their communities, local authorities should not only attempt to launch security specific energy projects through donor assistance, but also work to enable the emergence of ESCOs. It is through them that access to finance and technology can be secured.

## 2. Regulatory and Fiscal Options for Local Authorities

Municipalities or local authorities could apply several policy and regulatory mechanisms to promote distributed energy services.<sup>29</sup> These can be fiscal incentives, direct budgetary investments, and establishing amendable regulatory norms, including mandatory standards that facilitate adoption of distributed generation.

### *Championing Concessions*

A common way for a government to implement a public energy project is by attracting business in Built-Own-Operate (BOO) and Built-Own-Transfer (BOT) arrangements. The investment arrangement implies foreign (in the case of Tajikistan) or joint companies investing in and operating energy services for a set number of years for profit or fee. In theory, such arrangements would be used to deploy a modern district heating system. For instance, the Nurabad district capital Sarband, as well as the city of Garm, the administrative capital of the Rasht Valley, has population densities that would be amendable for district heating. Economically, district heating would be most feasible in Sarband, where rapid residential construction is occurring and the town's emerging multi-story buildings may offer efficient population densities to justify district heating.

However, the small size and weak economies of the localities will make it hard to attract investors, especially foreign investors. Social services and municipal heating are always among the least profitable of the municipal services. Hence the government should consider implementing projects directly with borrowed money or with its own financing. This option would be most challenging to arrange in the short term since EBRD market studies indicated high costs of energy for consumers, at around 300-400 Tajik somoni (US\$60-80) per heating month, a rate

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28 Interview with International City/County Management Association, currently conducting feasibility studies on municipal service reforms in Tajikistan, April 10, 2014.

29 See "Sustainable energy regulation and policymaking for Africa: Regulatory and policy options to encourage development of renewable energy," *Training Manual* No. 9, REEEP/UNIDO, 2005; "Community energy association – utilities and financing: Renewable energy guide for local governments in British Columbia," Community Energy Association of British Columbia, Vancouver, 2008.

few residents could afford.<sup>30</sup> Despite disappointing studies by EBRD, the cost of heating using simpler, coal technology should be more affordable and be considered by the district administrations.

Regardless of whether local authorities wish to borrow funds or to attract businesses, they will need to put in place a clear, predictable and economically justifiable regulatory framework to offer heating services on a commercial basis, and they have to put regulatory frameworks into place.

#### *Regulatory Measures: Price Regulation*

District governments may be in better positions to broker predictable prices for heating services. Local governments can make an effort and spend resources to create an enabling regulatory framework for private participation in heating services. To foster private initiatives and to assist independent energy service providers, authorities will have to meet the following key pre-requisites:

- Assure long-term licenses or concessions to operate a service (10-15 years).
- Facilitate regular collection of fees (combining with power bill collection to reduce costs, allowing disconnects, protect low-income families).
- Ensure non-interference in business in a discretionary manner by removing mechanisms by which individual public servants can influence businesses, now common in the Rasht Valley.
- Help potential businesses secure fuel by facilitating or pre-arranging long-term coal procurement and contract mine operators. The four district heads, especially the head of the Rasht District, can support heating or CHP initiatives by collectively securing long-term coal and coal-dust purchase contracts from the Nazaralok deposit. A long-term coal purchase agreement will be essential to encouraging independent heat-providers, whether simple boiler stations or more advanced CHP projects.

- Set and communicate tariff formulas. Local authorities will need to offer a flexible framework for price setting. Research on heating prices in post-Soviet Russia with similar political and economic conditions to Tajikistan offers guidance. Z. Zakharova identifies seven principles of price setting – agreement between stakeholders, non-politicization, cost-recovery and economic justification, consistency and predictability, uniformity of price for similar types of users, and transparency in price setting.<sup>31</sup> Terms of service provision, state assistance, information on the public's willingness to pay, and price setting will have to be determined and clearly communicated to attract local entrepreneurs into the heating service delivery sector.

#### *Regulation: Incentives and Quotas for Renewables and Building Codes*

Local authorities can opt to require hybrid fuel-solar heating designs to reduce long-term costs to consumers and environmental impacts when public monies are involved. They can further uphold the primacy of overuse of the solar fuel heat supply by subsidizing solar collector capital costs. Predictable, long-term price structures should offer energy service company's incentives to reduce use of coal to maximize their own profits.

Local government involvement in solarization is also justified. Solar heating is arguably the second most appropriate, and one of the least utilized renewable technologies in Tajikistan.<sup>32</sup> The Rasht Valley's government offers favorable conditions for solar technology: high elevations (Gharm is 1,200 meters above sea level) and high-insolation (300 sun days per country average, fewer in the Rasht Valley). Solar collectors can deliver water heated up to 50 °C from low temperatures, which is suitable for hot water requirements. Finally, solar water heating is a simple technology, with a high potential to generate local employment.

Local governments can foster widespread adoption of solar heating units either by subsidizing ac-

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30 Interview with EBRD Office in Dushanbe, communal services expert, 10 July 2014. Due to restriction on coal financing, and lack of natural gas, EBRD heating scenario involved electricity boilers.

31 Zhanna Zakharova, "Mekhanizm tarifnogo regulirovaniya v teplosnabzhenii munitsipalnogo obrazovaniya" (Ph.D. Diss., Vladimirov State University, 2005).

32 Haris Doukas, "Promoting renewables in the energy sector of Tajikistan," *Renewable Energy* 39, no. 1 (2012): 411-18.

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quisition costs (\$300/standard unit), or by creating artificial demand paired with incentives to benefit from economies of scale. In China, Rizhao offers an example of a city driven by the universal adoption of solar and other renewable technologies through mandatory measures and subsidies for manufacturers. Although, forcing residents to acquire a particular technology may not be the right approach for Tajikistan, Rizhao's experience nevertheless demonstrates that with concerted efforts municipalities can reduce costs of energy-efficiency and renewable technologies.

Local authorities can also institute building codes favoring future adoption of renewable energy, starting with solar water heating compatibilities and building efficiencies. Such building codes should necessarily be first applied to public and commercial buildings. Local authorities' immediate priorities would be to request that international financial institutions fund preliminary feasibility studies for modern hybrid district heating systems. A proactive approach is essential as investors and central governments are unlikely to consider such district heating for the Rasht Valley as a priority. The nascent EBRD and World Bank initiatives to re-habilitate centralized heating services will also prioritize larger towns. In this light, local authorities' key contribution is one of vision and championship.

#### *Tax Incentives*

A Waiver of the Value Added Tax (VAT), and the import duties would make energy equipment imports more affordable by around 18%. At present, only imports of hydropower equipment and parts enjoy VAT and duty-free treatment. Other types of renewable technologies do not enjoy specific tax incentives. The Rasht Valley governments can lobby national authorities to introduce similar incentives for other renewable technologies, as well as for small conventional distributed energy equipment. This can be done through a proposal to the Parliamentary committee on the environment in charge of promoting a green economy. In addition, local authorities can push the agenda through the Consultative Council on Investment on Improvement of Climate to which they have been recently admitted.

#### *State Investments*

State-funded energy projects in hydropower are planned and implemented by the state utility *Barki Tojik* and the Ministry of Energy and Industry. To promote private investment in local energy production, local governments may consider offering matching investments or one-time capital expense subsidies to lower the entry barrier for independent power producers. At present, local authorities do not have funds available for such purposes. Local officials may request that central authorities institute subventions - targeted matching grants for independent power producers which demonstrate feasibility and financially sustainable energy delivery. The policy should encourage private participation in energy projects and lower state expenses to delivery. However, rules and prices for the energy produced have to be set definitively and in advance. In the short-term, matching subventions may work only for micro-hydro (non-grid electricity) or heating services as striking attractive power prices with the national utility is unlikely at current national prices.

#### *Bonds*

Bond issuing is not feasible. Public bond issuance is not practiced in Tajikistan and low public trust in government would likely prevent voluntary bond purchases.<sup>33</sup>

#### *Equipment Leasing*

Leasing smaller equipment can be more affordable and appropriate and is recommended for smaller municipalities with limited financing or investments needs.<sup>34</sup> Around the world, lease purchasing and vendor financing was instrumental in the spread of residential solar power. The leasing market in Tajikistan is predominantly in services with high-cost imported equipment such as construction machinery, while market for low-cost equipment and consumer goods is undeveloped. Leasing may be feasible for deployment of micro-turbines, diesel and other bio- or syngas fired generators. Leasing would also be amenable for renewable distributed technologies such as solar water heaters and solar PV as such systems are commonly deployed through such instruments. Local governments can either benefit from leasing to im-

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33 The 2010 highly controversial Rogun shares campaign, a mandatory and onerous public cash collection that was halted only after IMF's involvement, effectively deters any future market approach to public bond issuance.

34 Guidelines for Financing Municipal Energy Efficiency. Projects in the Commonwealth of Independent States. Renewable Energy & Energy Efficiency Partnership, March 2007, [http://www.munee.org/files/Financing\\_Guidelines\\_FINAL\\_Eng.pdf](http://www.munee.org/files/Financing_Guidelines_FINAL_Eng.pdf).

plement projects directly, or champion and arrange for streamlined access to leasing services for entrepreneurs. They can facilitate the spread of small energy equipment leasing by offering or requesting that national authorities offer sovereign guarantees for leased equipment.

#### *Revolving Funds*

Revolving funds are set up by municipalities and governments to provide sustainable, long-term re-investment in energy technologies and energy efficiency. In Tajikistan, the United Nations and science community has advocated for the creation of a National Trust Fund for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency, but funding has not yet been provided. The Rasht Valley authorities would benefit from a national fund, rather than instituting their own funds.

#### *Creating Space for Local ESCOs*

To help local entrepreneurs offer energy services, the district governments could help remove known barriers for private energy providers, especially easing access to long-term financing. District governments' policy support could focus on specific targets: spreading the cost of investment for companies and investors, and reducing the cost of energy equipment through import waivers. To help spread the cost the governments may request that the banking sector and international financial institutions introduce consumer lease financing. Governments may also petition for tax waivers on imports of small, decentralized energy equipment. For instance, importation of solar panels would benefit from VAT and duty waivers that would make panels 20% less costly for the end consumer.

#### *Long Term Vision: Leveraging Extractive Industries*

In terms of capital involved, mining is likely the largest business and tax-payer in the Rasht Valley. If investments are secured, mining companies are likely to play a critical role in the local economy. Mining operations often choose to generate their own electricity, motivated by the desire for independence and because of cost considerations. In such cases, local

authorities can partner with mining companies to save on energy-related investments. A mine operator can reduce costs, while communities benefits from (supplemental) access to power.

Offering incentives to the mine operator to invest in greater electricity production than necessary for the mine and to allow for the sale of excess power to communities would be important in this regard. This approach works when transmissions from the generating unit to the local communities are available and justifiable. Local communities benefit if they are in mini-grids, or if the mine operator supplied power benefits to important users in the community.<sup>35</sup> The mine can be an anchor customer for independently produced or state-owned power projects. Mine owners can purchase electricity via a long-term power purchasing agreement, with rest capacity sold to community consumers.<sup>36</sup> A single large customer such as a mine can justify and speed-up investments in power generation that would be difficult to implement otherwise. This approach also works when transmission lines to the mine and consumers are available and justifiable. There are also joint investments, or one of the variations of public-private partnership, where state and mine owners jointly invest in a shared energy project. Naturally, such arrangements work best if mine projects are in their early stages, to allow joint planning of infrastructure investments.

Fortunately, there is an ongoing, but limited, operation at the Nazar Aylok anthracite deposit in the Rasht district, and potential investment in the Rumri gold mine in the Tavildara district. These early stage projects offer an opportunity to explore a partnership or a joint investment around electricity generation. Considering the mountainous topography, mines in the Rasht Valley are likely to self-generate power (e.g. Nazar Aylok is at 2,000-4000 meters of altitude). It is likely therefore that coal-based or run-of-the-river hydropower generation will be used. In both scenarios, a public partnership may be beneficial: a mine-located, coal fired power plant would offer winter supply reliability, at least for critical customers; a hydropower's long-life is likely to operate even after a mine is decommissioned, and will continue to benefit the local economy.

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35 Perrine Toledano, Sophie Thomashausen, Nicolas Maennling, and Alpa Shah, "A framework to approach shared use of mining-related infrastructure," Draft for public consultation, Vale Columbia Center, 2014.

36 Ibid.



### *Earmarking Mineral Royalties for Renewable Energy*

In a more ambitious, forward looking initiative, the Rasht Valley's local legislative councils may propose to the Parliament's Environment Committee and Energy Committee legislation providing for a partial earmarking of 1% of the (national) government's take from mining projects taking place in the districts for renewable energy needs of local communities. The earmark must be partial and not exclude other state investments in renewable energy. Such funds can be hosted at the National Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Trust Fund as proposed by the government and the United Nations, but earmarked for the Rasht Valley's needs.

Such a territorially-binding allocation structure should be justified on the basis of compensating for the localized environmental impacts from mining (air and water pollution, risk of cyanide contamination, etc.), and applying non-renewable resources for local productivity gains through access to energy services. Territorially-bound funding allocations prioritize the energy needs of the most disadvantaged mountainous communities. Finally, coal-royalty earmarked funding helps to balance the growing use of coal with proportionate funding for renewable technologies.

This may be an auspicious moment to propose the initiative for Parliament's deliberation as its committees consider ways to foster growth of a green economy in the country.

### *3. Financing Options for Local Authorities*

Regardless of policy options or choice of projects, public officials in the Rasht Valley government administration also face the challenge of arranging for funding for policy measures. Limited funding, or awareness of other investment or funding resources, limits options available to local decision makers. This section reviews financing options for local government officials.

#### *Competitive Grants*

The Global Environmental Facility (GEF)'s Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF) is one of the lesser known resources available for climate change mitigation. Local governments can approach national GEF teams to jointly prepare proposals to implement

CHP projects where applicable. Projects that increase efficiency and autonomy of irrigation would likely be eligible for GEF co-financing. GEF small-grants-funding can be used for feasibility studies and local planning activities that demonstrate conservation and adaptation to climate change. In the Rasht Valley activities that reduce deforestation would be eligible.

#### *Commercial Investments*

The Dutch development bank FMO invests in emerging and developing markets, including in small energy projects. Its portfolio includes renewable energies as well as rural, off-grid projects. FMO offers relatively long-term (up to 12 years) equity and debt investment. It also manages special funds, for instance the Dutch government-administered Infrastructure Development Fund, which invests in infrastructure projects in developing countries, including in the energy sector. The Fund invests up to €15.5 million and half that amount in equity. Long-term financing for up to 20 years is available. Grants may be available to prepare and enable new projects.

The Islamic Development Bank (IDB), which has already invested in hydropower in Tajikistan, invests in private and public entities such as district governments. It offers leasing and installment sales products, which are well suited to purchase generators or other energy equipment. Leasing would allow deployment of bio- and syngas generators with limited upfront investments. Leasing or installment sales would be suited for commercial and residential photovoltaic. IDB has already financed rural solar systems through micro-lending schemes in Bangladesh. IDB's installment sale allows purchase of generating equipment from the bank and subsequent repayment over a period up to 20 years. The mark-up (equiv. of interest rate) rate is 5.1% per year, significantly lower than Tajikistan's current interest rates. However, IDB requires sovereign or other high-credibility guarantees.<sup>37</sup>

Main international financial institutions like the World Bank, International Finance Corporation, and EBRD have policies that prevent or limit investment in coal-fired projects. For example, in 2014, the Dutch government decided not to fund new coal power plants abroad anymore. Most realistically, coal energy projects will be either financed or exchanged for resources by Chinese companies, following the

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<sup>37</sup> Islamic Development Bank official website, see <http://www.isdb.org/irj/portal/anonymouse?NavigationTarget=navurl://9bb63065f8ef-f2260ac5751221bbfaeb>.

model of Tebian Electric's CHP plant implementation in Dushanbe.

#### *Export Promoting Agencies*

The Export Import Bank of China, EXIM, offers two products which may be relevant for stakeholders in the Rasht Valley: Preferential loans – a part of China's official development aid, and Export Buyer's Credit – loans to companies or governments purchasing Chinese products or services. EXIM Bank usually finances large projects, but offers lower than average market interest rates and thus can be suitable for capital intensive projects. One study comparing EXIM Bank with international financial institutions and US Exim Bank (albeit focusing on Latin America and Africa) found that the former offered lower interest rates, no policy conditionality and fewer industry and social-environmental requirements. China EXIM Bank's conditions were mandatory purchase of Chinese manufactured goods. In 2012, China EXIM Bank's annual interest rates for large loans were at 2-4 percent.<sup>38</sup>

Considering that other international financial institutions are unlikely to sponsor coal projects, the widespread use of coal gasification and small scale generation in China and the fact that Tajikistan will most likely procure equipment in China – EXIM Bank is the best candidate for coal projects in the Rasht Valley. Chinese concessional loans require official bilateral agreements, so local governments are limited when it comes to investigating opportunities and proposing projects to national authorities.

Buyers of energy equipment and services can also take advantage of an exporting country's assistance program. In the United States, the Small-Business Administration extends favorable credit guarantees for American companies that export energy equipment or services to Tajikistan. The agency guarantees up to 90% of the amount a US company will borrow to complete a deal with Tajikistan. US Trade Development Agency (USTDA) offers conditional grants for feasibility studies of particular energy projects. However, such grants are reserved for larger investments and US companies need to be involved.

The Swiss government offers technical assistance and assessment funding for sustainable infrastructure projects through the Asian Development

Bank. Local governments can request such resources to evaluate feasibility of CHP, solar, and other innovative technologies. Islamic Development Bank also offers technical assistance, in the form of grants or long-term (up to 16 years) interest free loans. Heads of governments may begin to develop and narrow options for more diversified and localized energy solutions by requesting assistance with technical assessment. While most international financial institutions may not support coal-based solutions, ISDB and China's EXIM bank may be less stringent when it comes to coal projects.

*Table 1. Technology and Policy Measures vs. Financing Sources*

<b>Heating (Coal)</b>	<b>Solar and Wind</b>	<b>Mixed Projects &amp; CHP</b>	<b>Feasibility Studies</b>
China EXIM IDB	IFIs * KfW MFO* IDB	IDB ECAs / China EXIM Manufacturers	IDB Swiss Fund GEF IFIs
<i>Future Opportunities</i>			
Vendor Finance	<i>Possibly:</i> local banks and MFI	<i>Possibly:</i> IFIs GEF	<i>Large Projects:</i> USTDA IFIs

International financial institutions have further practical limitations on where they invest and this restricts the possibilities for them in the Rasht Valley:

- Most IFI no longer finance coal related projects. Competitive grant financing from UNGEF and World Bank Climate Finance are mostly targeted at Least Developed Countries.
- EBRD restricts investments to urban areas with populations over 15,000. Most urban areas of the Rasht Valley as delineated in this paper would not be eligible for EBRD public financing.
- Direct private sector investment from IFC or EBRD requires stringent financial transparency, solvency, and experience of the company, significantly limiting or rendering ineligible newer companies interested in offering energy services to the Rasht Valley.

38 Kevin P. Gallagher, Amos Irwin, and Katherine Koleski, "The New Banks in Town: Chinese Finance in Latin America," *Inter-American Dialogue*, March 2012, <http://www.thedialogue.org/PublicationFiles/TheNewBanksinTown-FullTextnewversion.pdf>.

## Recommended Measures

Local authorities should focus on heating as a key need and service that lies within their area of competency. For local power generation, in addition to hydropower, other technologies should be explored that present lower costs and risks to investors, that are modular for small-scale deployment, and that are adaptable for a local private sector so as to allow for commercial sustainability. Small combined heat and power, coal gasified generation, and solar technologies should be considered. Wind power should be considered in water pumping, rather than for its power generating application.

*To support the development of heating services, local governments should focus on developing regulatory frameworks to enable investment in heat supply.* They will have to formulate and facilitate licensing procedures, minimum service quality requirements, formulate policies that ensure state non-interference and property rights, and propose predictable, flexible price structures. Based on local conditions, authorities can propose a standard model Energy Purchase Agreement that would govern heat sales to residential, commercial, and public consumers. As part of this effort, governments should promote the use of co-generation of power in heating application. They can do that by facilitating the sale of power, and reducing risks through local guarantees and arranging access to favorable financing. Local authorities should facilitate a predictable supply of coal.

*The Nurabad and Rasht districts should consider centralized district heating.* Following work on the regulatory frameworks for heating, both local governments may request that national authorities and development agencies fund initial feasibility studies for small-scale district heating systems under BOT and BOO arrangements. The Islamic Development Bank, Swiss Infrastructure Fund, and international financial institutions should be requested to finance feasibility studies. If feasible, the districts should propose the preparation for tender process. The district administration's task is to champion the need for district heating in their communities; organize broad-based consultation with their constituencies to ensure that the project addresses energy needs at affordable prices; to propose and support technical solutions that integrate co-generation of power. Coal-based solutions will require administrative measures to develop relations with the Chinese export import bank and other agencies

(through national authorities), as well as the Islamic Development Bank.

*Beyond their authority, local government should advocate for national incentives.* Local authorities should outline a package of local incentives, in the form of land concessions and infrastructure concessions or co-investments. A separate request to national authorities should propose economically and socially justified packages of incentives and subventions that could aid investments in heating services; these may include duty-free imports for small boiler/CHP equipment, accelerated depreciations, and assigning heat supply as a form of production activity to benefit from existing tax breaks. In addition, to support the diffusion of decentralized electricity generation, local governments should advocate for state incentives and energy-specific financial products for energy projects on behalf of and together with the private sector. The strategy should focus first on meeting commercial consumers who can afford the higher costs of distributed technology.

The five districts of the Rasht Valley should request that parliament, the national consultative council, and national government consider duty and tax waivers for solar technologies, with the idea of reducing costs of Solar PV for rural consumers. Simultaneously, they should request that development agencies fund a study of the economic impacts and effects on the commercial-adoption of solar PV given state subventions. In partnership with other national stakeholders the district administration should approach state banks and multilateral development banks about putting in place concessional *lease finance programs* for solar, and other distributed energy technologies. The Islamic Development Bank is the most likely partner where installment sale and lease finance are core financial products. Introducing lease models in Tajikistan will likely be the government's biggest benefit of decentralized solutions for their districts and the nation at large.

*Local authorities need to demonstrate their wish to benefit from potential mining energy infrastructures, and to propose appropriate budget planning.* Local governments can also pro-actively consider potential models and feasibility assessments in partnership with Pamir Energy, potential mine developers, the Ministry of Energy, and the national utility. International Financial Corporation can advise how to arrange power purchase agreements or joint investments in ways that would benefit the public and be attractive for private mine developers. Ultimately,

it will be up to each district head's prowess and initiative to convince mine operators and national authorities to make power sharing with local customers possible.

Table 2. Policy Activity Map

Seek Assistance	Technical & Policy Assistance	Centralized \$\$\$ Projects	Mid-range Decentralized	Decentralized \$ Projects	Local Gov. Responsibility
Immediate term					
National government, Parliament				Solar duty and tax waiver	
National government, MFA		Sovereign guarantees			Request support
IDB, IFIs local banking industry			Long-term lease		Propose policy. Negotiate. Request sovereign guarantees.
Local and Nation businesses. Consultative Council	Regulatory improvements for ESCO				Assume responsibility. Convene Propose policy
Mid term					
Own resources, IFI and development agen.	Local regulatory framework for heating				Assume responsibility
IFIs, ECAs		BOT/concessions for heating and power projects			
IDB, China EXIM private banks		... involving coal	Decentralized CHP Power co-generation at boilers, industry		Propose policy
IFIs through local banks, MFI*				Long-term loans for solar and wind (to ESCO) or residents	Propose policy
Long term					
Government, Parliament	Mining proceeds earmarking				Propose policy



# Policy and Institutional Change for Economic Performance and Social Justice in Pasture Management: Comparing Experience in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan<sup>1</sup>

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**Safovudin Jaborov,<sup>2</sup> Asyl Undeland,<sup>3</sup> and Altynai Achilova<sup>4</sup> (2016)**

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Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan face similar development challenges as the two poorest post-Soviet countries and share many geographical and socioeconomic similarities. Both are rural, agricultural, mountainous and landlocked, with underdeveloped economic and social infrastructures. Agriculture is a significant contributor to the countries' GDPs as well as an important source of income and subsistence for rural populations. Livestock husbandry is a critical source of income for rural households and holds specific cultural and traditional value for both nations, as it is a measure for prosperity as well as part of all traditional and sacral celebrations and events. However, weak governmental policy, ineffective institutions, a lack of appropriate knowledge and skills among rural residents on animal husbandry practices, a shortage of cultivated fodder and combined feedstuff, and fast growing livestock numbers place enormous pressure on natural pasture resources in both countries. In addition to the environmental degradation of soil and vegetation of grasslands, poorly managed pasture use can lead to land grabbing by powerful and wealthier individuals while fueling conflicts in communities over access to the resource.

While both countries have implemented pasture management reforms, Kyrgyzstan was first to adopt a pasture law and has progressed in the institutional establishment and development of legislation. Tajikistan's reform path pursued the same objectives but has been slower to improve conditions. In this regard, the objective of this study is to understand the role policy and institutions play in pasture management in Tajikistan, and to support ongoing re-

forms based on the lessons learned in neighboring Kyrgyzstan. While the countries have differences in political economy and their social and cultural environments, Tajikistan can evaluate Kyrgyzstan's experience to help implement better results.

Tajikistan has not yet successfully formulated a policy vision for pasture management, developed efficient legislation, or established appropriate institutions at the local and national level that could lead to change and ensure it is achieving increasing livestock productivity and thus incomes. The sustainability of reforms in Tajikistan in such a poor governance setting is also risky. To advance reforms, the country needs to have a clear vision of the pasture-tenure systems, strengthen the legislative base, and build relevant institutions to implement the reforms effectively.

## Methodology

The study is based on a desk review of data and documents available on livestock and pasture management in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. All three co-authors are deeply engaged in advancing pasture management reforms in both countries, and have first-hand experience and a deep understanding of the underlying challenges for reforms. The co-authors compared information in databases of surveys conducted by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) projects in both countries. IFAD livestock and pasture development projects in these countries are not nationwide but operate in only livestock-intensive areas. The projects share objectives of facilitating livestock-based economic growth by using resources sustainably, through improved management at the national level, transferring knowledge, and building users' institutions to empower them in responsible governance of the resource. The projects

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<sup>1</sup> This project was completed thanks to a start-up grant from Open Society Foundations in the framework of the Central Asia – Azerbaijan Fellowship Program at the George Washington University.

<sup>2</sup> Livestock and Pasture Development Project Coordinator, IFAD, Tajikistan.

<sup>3</sup> Social scientist, 4710 Quebec St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20016, United States.

<sup>4</sup> Dipartimento di Comunicazione e Ricerca Sociale (Department of Communication and Social Research), University of Rome, La Sapienza.

also facilitate pasture management reforms in both countries to ensure social justice in pasture management. Surveys were conducted in 2014 with sampling of 510 households in the Naryn and Issyk-Kul regions of Kyrgyzstan and 500 households in the Khatlon region of Tajikistan.

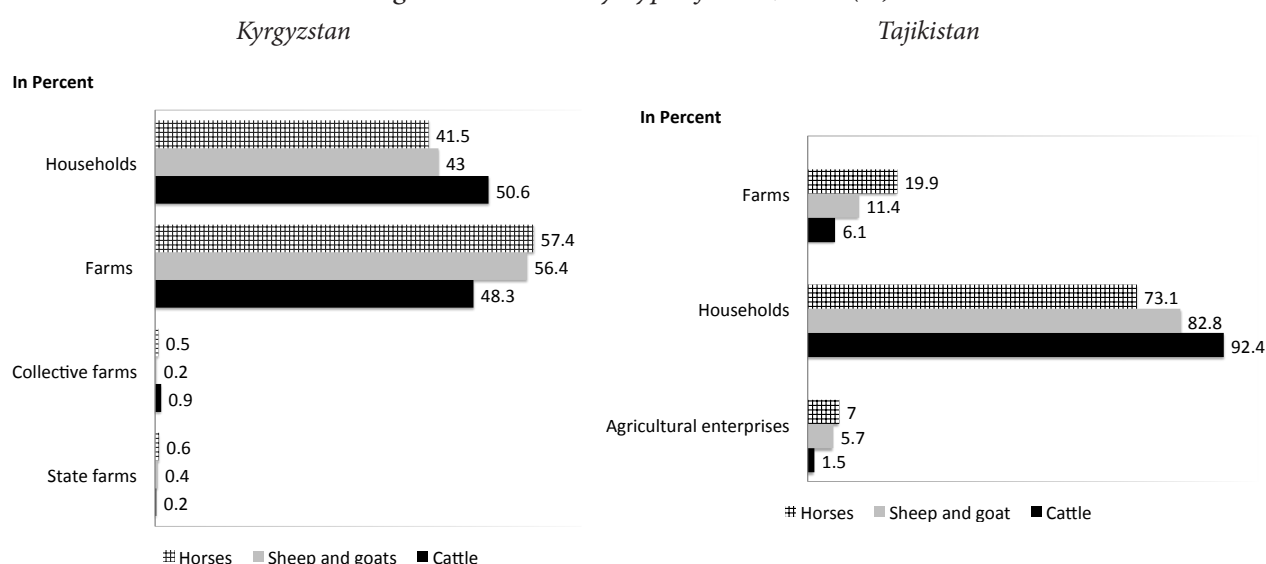
### Context

The Kyrgyz Republic and the Republic of Tajikistan share many similarities. These are small, mountainous neighboring countries landlocked in Central Asia, with populations of 6.1 million and 8.3 million respectively in 2015. The economies of both countries are underdeveloped, largely agrarian, and highly dependent on other countries and remittances from labor migrants. Various anecdotal data suggest that more than a million people left their respective countries looking for labor migration, heading mostly to Russia. Both are in the 10 top remittances-receiving countries, with migrant transfers of about US\$3.7bln in Tajikistan and US\$1.7bln in Kyrgyzstan in 2015. They also rank high in terms of remittances' share in GDP: remittances make up the equivalent of 41 percent of GDP in Tajikistan and 31 percent of GDP in Kyrgyzstan in 2015,<sup>5</sup> making these countries extremely vulnerable to external factors, especially to recessions in the migrants' destination countries.

Poverty levels in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are pervasive, reaching 30.6 and 32 percent respectively according to 2014 World Bank data. Both countries were part of the Soviet Union until 1991, and since then are trying to build independent economies. Tajikistan suffered a civil war from 1992 till 1997, which delayed the country's development. Kyrgyzstan had two major political unrests, which resulted in ousting the presidents in 2005 and 2010.

Both countries rely on agriculture not for economic growth (agriculture contributes less than a third of GDP<sup>6</sup>), but as a source of income and food security for about 65 percent of population who live in rural areas. Agriculture production is largely concentrated in smallholder farms, which are mostly subsistence and semi-subsistence family-based farms with small surplus productions sold at market. In Kyrgyzstan in 2013 about half of all meat and dairy products were supplied to the markets by rural households and another half by farms (Figure 1A). In Tajikistan, households are responsible for the production of over 80 percent of livestock (Figure 1BB), which shows that livestock is more oriented towards commercial purposes in Kyrgyzstan, compared to its subsistence nature in Tajikistan. The process of transforming household farming into real farming—where agriculture is a major source of income and not a supplement to other incomes—is happening in Tajikistan as well, but in a slower pace.

Figure 1. Livestock by Type of Farm, 2013 (%)



Source: National statistics committees of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan

<sup>5</sup> "Migration and Remittances Factbook 2016," World Bank, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Sebastien Peyrouse, "The multiple paradoxes of the agriculture issue in Central Asia," *EUCAM Working Paper* No. 6, November 2009.

Livestock in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan is still based mostly on grazing natural pastures. Very limited numbers of farms, usually large commercial farms, supply livestock in winter with compound feed. Farmers in both countries prefer to graze livestock on natural pastures starting from April-May until October and then keep them in sheds with supplemental hay. Even in the winter months livestock graze around villages. This is a cheap but unproductive way of rearing livestock for consumption. Mountain agro-pastoralism occupies the largest area of land use and has the comparative advantage in an extensive mountainous land-use setting.<sup>7</sup> As Table 1 shows, permanent pastures in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan constitute 87 percent and 69 percent of total agricultural land, respectively. With limited arable land—in both countries it constitutes less than 7 percent—high fragmentation, as well as a shortage of irrigation water, livestock plays an important role in the countries' and households' economies, serving as a coping mechanism.

At the same time, traditional livestock systems are different in areas targeted by the IFAD projects. Kyrgyzstan's northern provinces of Naryn and Issyk-Kul are traditionally livestock communities, where livestock is a mandatory part of all traditional and religious celebrations and events, giving it special cultural and traditional value. The livestock system there is based on mobility, with vertical transhumance grazing not only an economic activity but a lifestyle of nomadic people. Tajiks in the Khatlon and Kulob zones are more sedentary and traditionally engaged more in cropping and gardening and less in livestock. Livestock rearing is mostly for consumption purposes there, with few farmers focusing on it as commercial activity.

However in terms of land ownership, in Kyrgyzstan about 88 percent of interviewed households own farming land, but less than 30 percent of interviewed households own such land in Tajikistan. Households in both countries own or rent an average of 2 hectares (ha) of arable land. At the same time the maximum land owned in a Tajik household is 135 ha, while in a Kyrgyz one it is 16 ha, showing that the land-privatization process has been implemented more evenly in Kyrgyzstan, where every household received about the same land share per person.

In Tajikistan, remnants of old Soviet collective farms are reorganized into cooperatives or associa-

tions, with Soviet operational arrangements: members of cooperatives work for the farm, receive payment in kind (in flour, vegetables, fruits), but in no way participate in the decision-making process. Since the end of the Soviet period land ownership in Tajikistan has evolved, with new sets of regulations regarding the formal possession and use of pastures, but traditional informal practices continue. Our analysis shows that influential and wealthier villagers can gain more control over the more valuable pastures, arable lands and water resources.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the pasture law stipulates that pasture-land use certificates are issued based on the type and number of livestock. However, in reality there are many cases when, despite of the owned number of livestock, individual households obtained pasture use rights for large pasture plots while other smallholders have no opportunity for fair access to the pastures that their ancestors used for centuries. This is one of the main challenges for social justice in pasture-management practices in Tajikistan.

The number of livestock held by households in targeted communities of the two countries shows important differences in the livestock systems: Tajikistan's households own half less livestock than households in Kyrgyzstan in general, with 3.8 animals per household (Figure 2). The data shows that Tajik households prefer cattle, which mostly graze around villages and are kept in the home shed. The Kyrgyz prefer sheep, which they take to the remote summer pastures for 5-7 months. Even when overall ownership of various households' assets is lower in Tajikistan, there are significantly more cases of barn and shed ownership than in Kyrgyzstan (Figure 3), because livestock are held in the backyard, partially due to poor access to pasture resources.

The productivity of livestock seems to be significantly lower in Tajikistan than in Kyrgyzstan. According to the IFAD projects' surveys, the lactation period of cows in target districts is low, with 94 percent of interviewed households reporting cows' lactation period at less than 180 days. At the same time, about 45 percent of households in communities of Kyrgyzstan targeted by IFAD reported higher than 180 days of lactation. The majority of Tajik households in IFAD communities interviewed reported a yield of about 2 liters of milk per day, while the majority of Kyrgyz households gain about 6 liters a day.

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7 Carol Kerven et al., "Pastoralism and Farming in Central Asia's Mountains: A Research Review," Mountain Societies Research Centre, University of Central Asia, 2011.

8 Kerven et al., "Pastoralism and Farming in Central Asia's Mountains."

Table 1. Land Use by Agricultural Type

	Total Area (sq km)	Agricultural Land (% of Total Area)			Arable Land (% of Total Area)			Permanent Pastures		
	2008	1992	2000	2007	1992	2000	2007	sq km	% of Total Area	% of Agric. Land
Kyrgyzstan	191,800	52.6	55.9	55.9	6.9	7.1	6.7	93,650	49	87
Tajikistan	139,960	32.1	32.7	32.7	6.1	5.6	5.1	31,980	23	69

Source: Kerven, C., Steimann, B. Ashley, L., Dear, Ch. and Inamur Rahim, *Pastoralism and Farming in Central Asia's Mountains: A Research Review* (Mountain Societies Research Centre, University of Central Asia, 2011).

Table 2. Livestock in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (In Thousands)

Year/Livestock	1990	2000	2004	2006	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Kyrgyzstan											
Cattle	1,711	1,470	1,583	1,701	1,860	1,942	1,965	2,022	2,066	2,122	2,202
Sheep and Goats	9,996	3,799	3,773	4,046	4,502	4,816	5,038	5,288	5,424	5,641	5,829
Horses	313	354	347	347	362	372	378	388	399	407	432
Tajikistan											
Cattle	1,351*	1,062	1,304	1,423	1,799	1,830	1,897	2,011	2,044	2,099	2,262
Sheep and Goats	3,355*	2,222	2,816	3,161	4,147	4,200	4,395	4,003	4,733	4,923	5,057
Horses	52	72	75	76	77	76	76	77	77	77	78

Source: Compiled from data of National Statistical Committees of Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan

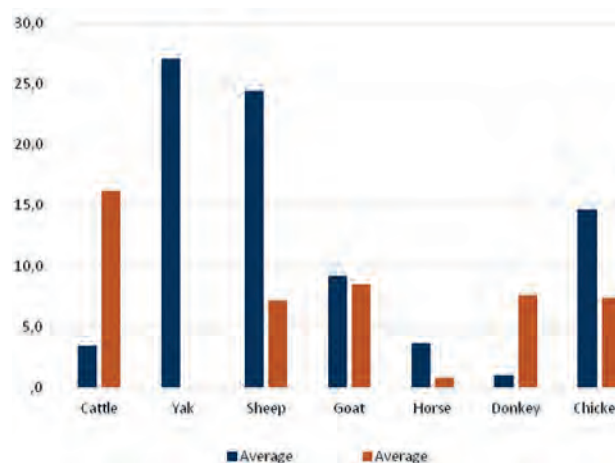
\* Data from Report of The Tajikistan Emergency Agriculture and Livestock Rapid Assessment, 2008, based on data of Tajik Ministry of Agriculture.

Though there is steady growth in the number of livestock in both countries, livestock and pasture productivity remains the main concern in Tajikistan's agricultural sector. A shortage of winter feed forces smallholders for early grazing practices, which ultimately threatens pasture productivity. Decreasing land area size and yields caused a collapse in the production of cultivated feed crops in Tajikistan. Between 1991 and 2000 the total cultivated feed available to livestock in Tajikistan fell by 79 percent.<sup>9</sup>

The major finding in regards to livestock in both countries is that livestock in Kyrgyzstan has been quickly becoming a commercial activity, while in Tajikistan it is still more for subsistence. This can be partially explained by a shortage of land ownership by Tajik farmers and limited access to pastures. While the overall context in the target areas for development of livestock is similar in both countries, in Kyrgyzstan households tend more towards grazing natural pastures, while in Tajikistan households

tend to prefer to keep livestock in pastures near their houses.

Figure 2. Average Number of Livestock per Household in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan

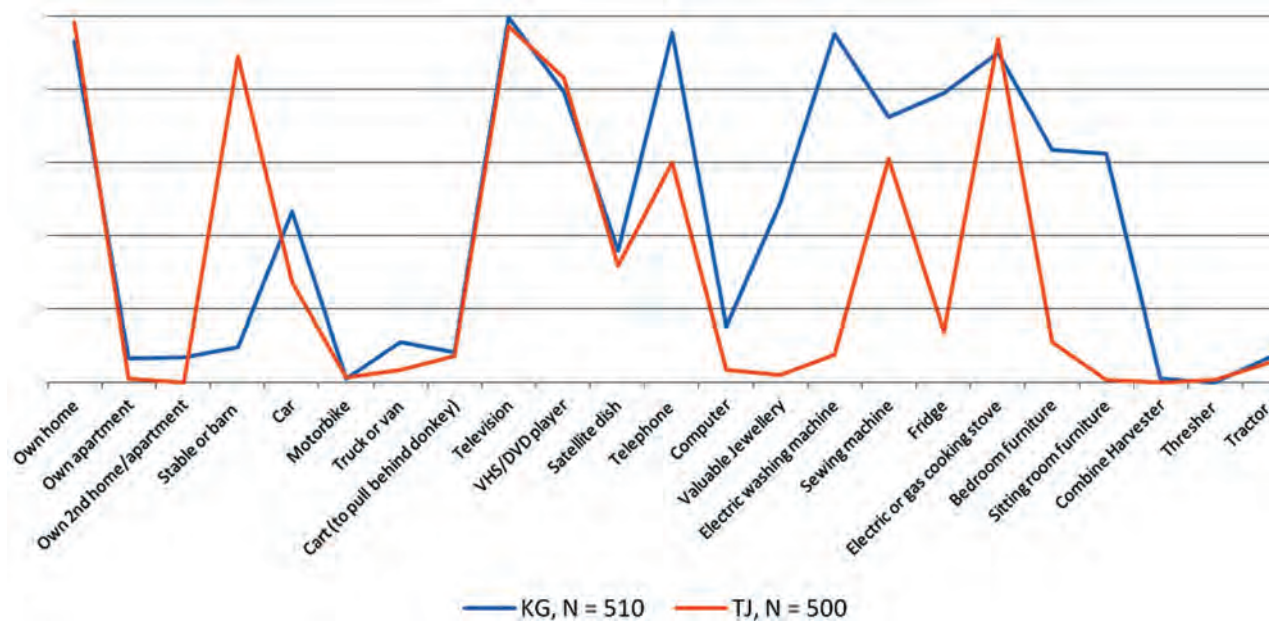


Source: Baseline survey in LMDP (Kyrgyzstan) and LPDP (Tajikistan) funded by IFAD, 2014

<sup>9</sup> David Sedik, "The feed-livestock nexus in Tajikistan: Livestock development policy in transition," FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia Policy Studies on Rural Transition, 2009.



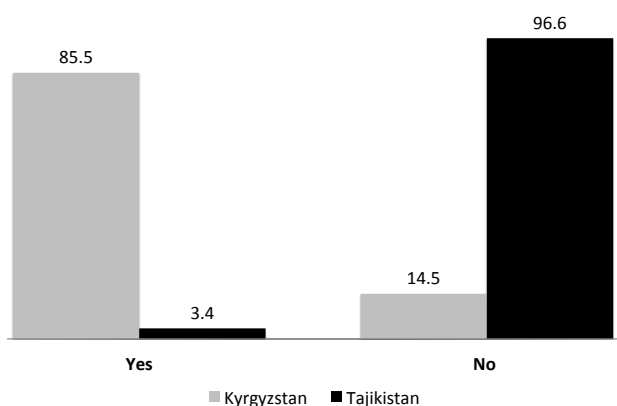
Figure 3. Ownership of Assets by Households in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan



Source: Baseline survey in LMDP (Kyrgyzstan) and LPDP (Tajikistan) funded by IFAD, 2014

The tendency in Tajikistan to keep animals in sheds year round can be partially explained by the limited access to pastures. Thus, the LPDP survey in both countries revealed huge differences in access to pastureland: more than 96 percent of interviewees said that they do not have the right to use pastures, while less than 15 percent have limited access to pastures in Kyrgyzstan. Pasture access in Kyrgyzstan is easier and seems to contribute to the commercialization of the livestock sub-sector.

Figure 4. Use of Pastures or Acquired Rights to Pastures



Source: Baseline survey in LMDP (Kyrgyzstan) and LPDP (Tajikistan) funded by IFAD, 2014

### Pasture Reforms Overview

#### Kyrgyzstan

To boost livestock productivity, provide fair access to pastures, mitigate conflicts among users, and ensure environmentally sustainable use, the governments of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan revised existing management policies and pasture-tenure systems. These reforms have been launched with support from the World Bank, IFAD, and bilateral donors. As a result of several years of piloting and stakeholders' discussions, Kyrgyzstan adopted a new pasture law in 2009. Tajikistan followed in 2013, with similarities aimed at decentralizing pasture management to the lowest administrative level and to pasture users' associations. However, the pace and outcomes of the reform processes in two countries have been different.

With the collapse of the collective farms in Kyrgyzstan in early 1990s, arable land was privatized by their members' households, when individuals employed earlier in collectives received equal land share. Each member of former collective farms was entitled to land share and assets share in the form of livestock, machinery, facilities and other equipment. All arable land in Kyrgyzstan was privatized by the end of the 1990s and each household received a share of irrigated, dry lands and hay land. The size of plots varied depending on availability of land in the area. Pastures remained state owned and have been man-

aged by state authorities at three levels: regional state administrations managed remotely from villages' pastures, which were used for grazing in summer period; district authorities managed pastures that were in the middle belt of the mountains and were used in spring-fall; and local governments (*aiyl okmotu*) managed village pastures that were grazed during winter period.

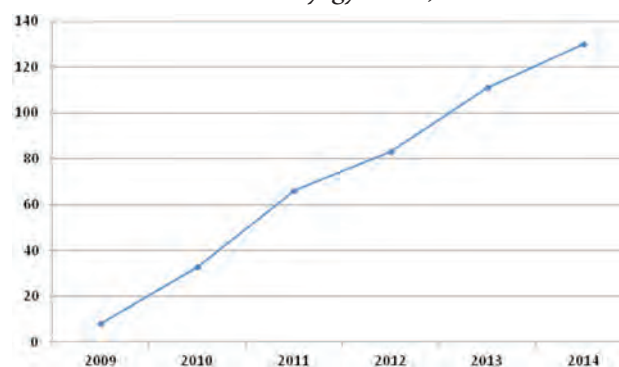
Pastures by law were supposed to be leased by these authorities for 5-10 years through competitive auctions and subleases were not allowed. Payments for pasture use were based on land area leased and paid to the respective authorities. Such a fragmented management system was not conducive for effective and sustainable use and created many issues with corruption and uneven access. Pastures all over the country were leased by wealthier people who were equipped to participate in auctions and then subleased these pastures informally to communities. Payment based on land area led to overgrazing of pastures, because people leased a small area and grazed livestock beyond its carrying capacity. Such overgrazing and degradation of pastures was especially severe near villages, and pasture fees were not collected properly.

The pasture law adopted in 2009 completely changed the management structure. Though pasture resources remain under state control, the management function devolved to local governments. The law went even further, giving communities the right to form users' unions to manage pasture resources. To ensure sustainable use, pasture users have to elaborate and enforce pasture management plans for 3-5 years, and payment based on number of animal heads to promote mobility and avoid resource degradation.

Pasture management reforms in Kyrgyzstan were led by the Pasture Department under the Ministry of Agriculture and Melioration, which elaborated policies, formulated legislation and monitored work on the ground. It played crucial role in the changes. These reforms are still at the initial stage; pasture users' unions are still young institutions and need long-term support to strengthen. However, there are already results, such as an increase in the collection of pasture fees, in investments in pasture improvements and infrastructure, and the number of conflicts has dramatically decreased. According to the Pasture Department collection of pasture-use

fees significantly increased between 2009 and 2014. In 2014, collection of pasture-use fees reached 130 million Kyrgyz soms which is more than 15 times higher than in 2009 when the reforms were launched. Significant investments in pasture infrastructure were made from 2010 to 2014: more than 1,000 bridges for moving cattle to distant pastures were built and/or renovated, more than 7,000 km of roads were built and/or renovated, and more than 400 water points (interceptor ditches) were built and/or rehabilitated.

Figure 5. Collection of Pasture Fees in Kyrgyzstan (In Million Kyrgyz Som)



Source: Pasture Department under the Ministry of Agriculture of Kyrgyz Republic Tajikistan

Despite of the recognized importance of the role of livestock husbandry for both poverty alleviation in rural areas and for natural resource protection, sustainable pasture management until recently was not included in the policies, strategies or plans for natural resource use and forest management in Tajikistan.<sup>10</sup> Tajikistan only started pasture reforms a few years ago following Kyrgyz model, with an aim to devolve management to the local level. However, these reforms suffer from a piecemeal approach and have not yet brought expected outcomes.

Pastures in Tajikistan during Soviet times were also managed by the state and collective farms. With the arable land privatization and restructuring of these farms into smaller units, many pasturelands were left *de facto* outside of any oversight and have been grazed on an "open access" basis. Following the experience of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan's government decided to adopt a pasture law in March 2013. The initial draft of the law was quite similar to the 2009 Pasture law in Kyrgyzstan that gave more power, functions and responsibilities to users' groups at the village level with the intention of empowering them

<sup>10</sup> "Tajikistan Environmental Performance Review," Second Review Synopsis, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, United Nations, New York and Geneva, 2012.

to sustainably and efficiently manage this resource. However, this policy met significant opposition from vested interests and high-level politicians.<sup>11</sup> Thus the

law was significantly revised from the Kyrgyz prototype after reviews in the government and parliament (Table 3).

*Table 3. Key Differences in the Pasture Legal Framework in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan*

<b>Kyrgyzstan</b>	<b>Tajikistan</b>	<b>Implications</b>
Pastures are state owned and the state has the responsibility to develop policy and legislation and oversee management and use. The Ministry of Agriculture, specifically the Pasture Department, is the authorized state body.	Pastures are state owned and the state has the responsibility to develop policy and legislation and oversee management and use. On August 2015, the State Committee for Land Management and Geodesy of Tajikistan was assigned as an authorized state body responsible for the pasture management and the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Tajikistan was assigned as an authorized state body responsible for the pasture use.	Though recently the government has assigned responsible bodies for pasture management and use in Tajikistan, there is ambiguity with two agencies managing one resource, and no capacity in these agencies to advance pasture-management reforms in the country. Projects lack ownership and thus sustainability.
The pasture management function devolved to the lowest level of government: rural municipalities, which have the right to devolve it further to users' groups. No direct individual access to pasture allocation is allowed; it is done only via users' groups to ensure transparency and equity.	Pasture management was devolved to the commissions at the district level, which do not exist. These commissions are to be established but there are no clear regulations about how they should be formed.	Committees to be established at the district level in Tajikistan have no supplemental regulations on decision-making powers and processes, functions, responsibilities, or rights. They have to be funded to develop comprehensive pasture-management plans. This did not happen and they do not exist outside of the projects' areas, making the pasture-management arrangement unsustainable.
Pasture Users' Unions (PUU) are made up of all members of the community by law. Access to pastures is only through the membership in the PUU.	Access to pasture use can be either through Pasture Users' Unions as a community based group of users, or individually: any user within or outside of the community can apply for a pasture lease.	The condition in the pasture law of Tajikistan undermines the incentive to establish community groups, and better-off farmers continue to get better access directly. The PUU as an institution does not work because of a lack of incentives or requirements for users to access pasture-lease rights through that institution.
PUU are responsible for pasture management and collecting fees. PUU collects pasture use fees to be directed towards implementation of the pasture management plans.	PUU can apply to district committees to obtain lease rights to pasture land. The pasture land tax goes to district level authorities. No pasture use fees are required.	PUU in Tajikistan have no financial basis to manage or improve pasture-lands.

The new pasture law as it was adopted by Tajikistan's government in 2013 is confusing: it does not provide stakeholders an institutional framework or mechanisms. Implementing agencies, stakeholders and beneficiaries face uncertainty about implementation strategies and mechanisms and the func-

tions and responsibilities of partners and beneficiaries. At the same time, the Ministry of Agriculture faces challenges in developing a policy and legal framework of regulations and guidelines to support implementation of this Pasture law.<sup>12</sup> IFAD and the government of Tajikistan's funded a Livestock and

<sup>11</sup> Andreas Wilkes, *Institutional analysis on pasture management in Tajikistan* (Freiburg: UNIQUE Forestry and Land Use GmbH, October 2014).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

Pasture Development Project aimed to provide technical support to the Ministry of Agriculture to review and revise the Pasture law and introduce relevant and necessary changes to strengthen the bases of fair and sustainable pasture management in the country. The project's proposed amendments mainly addressed the role of the Pasture Users Unions (PUUs) with the ambition of strengthening their role in pasture management and in the decision-making process, and attempted to clarify ambiguous clauses and articles of the existing version of the law. In total, more than twenty amendments, including the establishment of a National Pasture Development Fund to generate and accumulate finances for pasture improvements, were proposed to the Tajik government and parliament for review.

The experience of the LPDP implemented only in a limited part of the country shows that due to the government's weak commitment, vague policy and institutional framework, pasture management reform in Tajikistan is progressing extremely slowly and is under the risk of halting due to the lack of a clear policy and inexistent regulatory and normative foundations. The reforms are mainly driven by the international donor organization's projects and programs. However, donor-initiated reforms usually slow down when reaching the offices government officials. Furthermore, the proposed establishment of the National Pasture Development Fund, if approved by the government and parliament, may require a long time to develop the legal and implementation arrangements, since it needs budget allocations either from the state budget or from donor organizations. Both potential funders' procedures require substantial time. For instance, allocating funds from the state budget requires at least one year after establishment of the entity. Support from the international donor organization also requires undergoing a long process of design and approval. In this regard, dedicated capable and operational institutions for pasture management would play a great role in expediting the reforms.

To highlight the slow progress of pasture reform in Tajikistan, according to the Article 9 of the pasture law, the government of Tajikistan listed an "authorized state body" as responsible for pasture management and use, which is critical for further reforms.

However, it took more than two years to adopt relevant legislative acts and to assign authorized state bodies responsible for pasture management and use. Thus, only in August 2015, as part of ongoing pasture management reform, the government of Tajikistan adopted Decree #509, which assigned the State Committee for Land Management and Geodesy of Tajikistan as an authorized state body responsible for pasture management, and the Ministry of Agriculture as an authorized state body responsible for the pasture use.<sup>13</sup> However, until now no further instruction has been adopted, nor has coordination been established between these agencies in order to define the roles and responsibilities of each in detail.

Investment policies and practices are bottlenecks for sustainable pasture management in Tajikistan. In 2015, the government of Tajikistan adopted the state Pasture Development Program for 2016-2020. The Program envisages allocation of 300,000 Tajik Somoni (US\$ 38,000)<sup>14</sup> annually, which is a negligible amount to have a real effect on pasture improvement. Thus, the Program aims to improve only 1,420 ha of pastureland out of 3.85 million ha in the course of this five year program.<sup>15</sup> The Program also takes a piecemeal approach to addressing the improvement of pasture infrastructure largely in the summer pastures, which are mainly used by the state breeding farms and large, better-off individual farmers.

On the other hand, the collection mechanism for pasture use fees by the users and PUUs at the local level has not yet been elaborated or reflected in legislation, though there are enormous efforts by the IFAD project to establish a pasture use fee collection system in the limited districts of the Khatlon region of the country. By contrast, in Kyrgyzstan collection of pasture use fees has increased and, according to the community pasture management plans, pasture use fees are used for construction, rehabilitation and maintenance of the pasture infrastructure as well as for the improvement of pasture conditions and prevention of degradation.

Another outstanding issue to be addressed is pasture demarcation at the local level. With growing attention to the legal status on pasture land tenure, conflicts around pasture demarcation will increase in the local level. There are many cases when land use certificate holders occupy more pasture areas

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<sup>13</sup> The Decree of the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan No. 509, dated August 1, 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Pasture Development Program for 2016-2020, The Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2015.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*



than they have been entitled to, according to their certificates. Therefore, the process of establishing pasture management commissions at the district level<sup>16</sup> should be accelerated. Though more than three years has passed since the adaptation of pasture law, there has been no commission established and operational at the district level.

The process of the formation of PUU is extremely slow due to a lack of state support for their development, as well as institutional capacity at the national level to facilitate their formation. So far formation of the community based pasture management in Tajikistan has been supported by the international donor community, including three international financial institutions, such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB), which initiated the formation of the first pilot PUUs through its Rural Development Project even before the pasture law was adopted. ADB has established 10 PUUs in the districts under the Republican Subordination in 2013. Following ADB's experience, within the framework of the LPDP, IFAD supported the formation of 203 PUUs in five districts in Khatlon in 2014 and 2015. IFAD announced the expansion of LPDP to another 5 districts in Khatlon in 2016. However, these activities have not yet been initiated.<sup>17</sup> The World Bank's Environmental Land Management and Rural Livelihoods Project has supported the formation of 8 PUUs in four districts of the Rasht area in 2015. Other bilateral donors, such as the Swiss and German governments, have been also active in formation of the several PUUs at the district levels.

PUUs established by donors' projects regularly report on improvements in livestock and pasture productivity. Particularly, PUUs supported by IFAD's and the World Bank's projects regularly report on the improvement of pasture conditions, due to the implementation of pasture rotation, and on increases in livestock productivity.<sup>18 19</sup>

Thus, as of today, around 220 PUUs have been established through the support of donor agencies. However, though more than three years have passed from the date when the pasture law was adopted, there is no data on established PUUs by local com-

munities themselves. Moreover, the analyses show that the majority of communities, where international donor's projects do not work, are not aware of the Pasture law or about their rights to establish and run PUUs.

The state Pasture Development Program for 2016-2020 does not include any community development activities to support smallholder farmers for formation of PUUs at the local level per se. It also does not envisage any pasture improvement works or construction/rehabilitation of pasture infrastructure that is located in the near-village pastures and used by smallholders. Instead, the Program is focused on Soviet-style activities, such as improving access to summer pastures through reconstructing access roads, including bridges. Because the summer pastures are mainly used by state breeding farms and big individual farmers, the smallholders do not benefit from the implementation of the Program.

## **Conclusions**

Support to livestock husbandry and fair and efficient access to pasture resources for smallholder farmers plays a crucial role in poverty reduction and food security in both countries.<sup>20</sup> However, pasture management reforms in Tajikistan have not yet established a coherent or effective management and use system. The law adopted in 2013 was a piecemeal approach, which created more confusion than a clear, effective, fair and sustainable pasture management system. The Ministry of Agriculture initiated a revision of the pasture law in 2015, establishing a working group where representatives of responsible government ministries and agencies such as the Land Committee, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Justice, and the Tax Committee were included, but improvements have not yet been made.

In addition, weak institutional framework remains one of the biggest bottlenecks to successful pasture reform in Tajikistan. The outdated institutions only hamper the change that could bring economic growth.

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16 According to the Pasture Law establishment of pasture management commissions at the district level should be carried out.

17 "Mezhdunarodnye donory vydelyat dlya uluchsheniya sostoyaniya pastbishch Kulyabskogo regiona 24 milliona dollarov," *Asia-Plus*, June 22, 2016, <http://news.tj/ru/news/mezhdunarodnye-donory-vydelyat-dlya-uluchsheniya-sostoyaniya-pastbishch-kulyabskogo-regiona-24m>.

18 "Efficient Pasture Management and Sustainable Development of Livestock Sector: Achievements, Problems and Prospects," Materials of National Conference, Dushanbe, Tajikistan, November 20, 2015.

19 Materials of Annual Conference of Pasture Management Networking Platform, March 15, 2016. Dushanbe, Tajikistan.

20 Peyrouse, "The multiple paradoxes of the agriculture issue in Central Asia."

Public discussions and awareness-raising campaigns initiated in Tajikistan by international donor organizations and their projects during the last three to four years have started effecting both high level politicians and the general public. More people are concerned about fair and equitable pasture land allocation in country. Thus, in the process of ratification of a new financial agreement between the government of Tajikistan and IFAD on LPDP II, Shukurjon Zuhurov, the Head of the lower Chamber of the Tajik Parliament, stated that "Currently some of the pasture land is on the hand of strangers who have nothing to do with livestock but unilaterally define unfair pasture use fees by themselves, and we should put an end to such practices."<sup>21</sup>

The process of non-merit based pasture privatization by individuals is an emerging urgent issue for contemporary mountain agro-pastoralism.<sup>22</sup> Due to unfair pasture land allocation and quickly increasing numbers of livestock, many smallholders face shortages of pasture land in nearby pastures. In this regard the government of Tajikistan should consider pasture land reallocation based on the number of livestock as stipulated in the pasture law. Pastureland reallocation should be considered as an urgent and important issue, otherwise the policy

orientation to support livelihoods of poor people will continue to increase the wealth of the influential and wealthier group who has better access to the financial resources. Mobilized and empowered PUUs at the community level can also actively defend and promote their own pasture use rights at different levels.

The Kyrgyz experience demonstrates that users' institutions established on the ground can foster pasture improvements if empowered with the collection of revenues and knowledge on how to spend these funds. Such improvements made by local communities benefit the productivity of pastures, as well as prevent further pasture degradation, through organization and implementation of rotational grazing, as well as seeding pastures and fodder cultivation. The government of Tajikistan should take urgent steps to adopt relevant changes in the legislation to support and encourage an official collection and use of pasture fees by PUUs.

There is a lack of data on the effectiveness of PUUs as an efficient tool for the promotion of sustainable pasture management in Tajikistan. Therefore, sustainability of PUUs as community-based organizations and their role on sustainable pasture management should be investigated further.

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21 "Mezhdunarodnye donory vydelyat dlya uluchsheniya sostoyaniya pastbishch Kulyabskogo regiona 24 milliona dollarov."

22 Kerven, et al., "Pastoralism and Farming in Central Asia's Mountains."

# Somoni Devaluation: An Assessment of Measures Taken by the National Bank of Tajikistan

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**Nozim Ishankulov<sup>1</sup> (2015)**

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The sharp decline in world oil prices from about \$100 dollars in September 2014 to \$50 in January 2015<sup>2</sup> has seen the status of the Russian economy worsen. This factor has significantly affected the stability of the ruble, as well as the execution of the revenue part of the Russian budget, half of which comprises oil and gas revenues. The West's exertion of political and economic pressures on Russia has further caused a decline in the country's economic growth. It grew a mere 0.6 percent in 2014, down from 1.3 percent the previous year.<sup>3</sup> The IMF and the World Bank predict a further decline in the country's economy in 2015 to negative 3.4 percent<sup>4</sup> and negative 3.8 percent respectively.<sup>5</sup>

The economic crisis and new labor migration legislation in Russia, which came into force in January 2015, have complicated procedures for migrants to get work permits, the result being a negative impact on Tajikistan's economic growth. A reduction in the remittances sent by Tajik migrants, most of whom work in Russia, will have a direct influence on Tajikistan's economy, as the annual amount of remittances equals almost 50 percent of its GDP. According to the World Bank, this made Tajikistan the most dependent country on remittances in the world in 2014.<sup>6</sup> Due to these factors, in the first quarter of 2015, economic growth in Tajikistan stood at 5.3 percent as compared with 7 percent the previous

year.<sup>7</sup> By the end of 2014, exports had decreased by 7.3 percent and remittances by 8 percent.<sup>8</sup> The sharp depreciation of Russian ruble and reduction of foreign currency earnings of Tajikistan caused growing deficit of the US dollar in the country. The National Bank of Tajikistan's (NBT) attempts to stabilize the situation have so far proved futile.

On May 5, 2015, President Emomali Rahmon dismissed all the heads of the National Bank of Tajikistan, essentially due to the administration's ineffective monetary policy, which led to a sharp devaluation in the national currency, the somoni.

## Verbal Interventions

Verbal interventions by Central Bank executives constitute the easiest and cheapest way to influence the currency market. This method is used all over the world and is usually issued in the form of a statement by central bank and senior government officials designed to reassure the population and companies of the stability of a currency market and its controllability by regulators.

Tajikistan followed this practice as alarming news emerged of the ruble depreciation. The NBT's first verbal intervention took place in November 2014, as the depreciation began to affect the value of the somoni. The population panicked and started to exchange their rubles for US dollars in order to avoid losses due to the plummeting exchange rates—the first sign of the somoni devaluation. The second

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1 Nozim Ishankulov is a board member, and former Executive Director, of the Tajikistan Free Market Centre. He has worked for the last four years on Tajikistan's democratic governance and economic development. He has worked both in government bodies and private companies. Recently completing an internship at the Cato Institute, Washington D.C., Ishankulov's articles and commentaries have been published and quoted by most major Tajik media outlets, including *Asia Plus*, *Radio Liberty*, *Ozodagon*, *TojNews*, *CA-News*. He holds a Graduate Diploma in Finance with honors from the Russian-Tajik Slavic University, Tajikistan.

2 Price dynamics for Brent crude oil, Yandex, May 10, 2015, <https://news.yandex.ru/quotes/1006.html>.

3 "Above expectations: Rosstat published the first data on GDP in 2014," *NTV*, January 30, 2015, <http://www.ntv.ru/novosti/1296997>.

4 Andrey Ostroukh, "Russia's Economic Outlook Worse Than Thought, World Bank Says," *Wall Street Journal*, April 1, 2015, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/russias-economic-outlook-worse-than-thought-world-bank-says-1427883522>.

5 "IMF sees less gloom for Russian economy," *Deutsche Welle*, May 21, 2015, <http://www.dw.de/imf-sees-less-gloom-for-russian-economy/a-18466181>.

6 "World Bank: Tajikistan is the world's most remittance dependent country," *Asia-Plus*, April 15, 2015, <http://news.tj/en/news/world-bank-tajikistan-world-s-most-remittance-dependent-country>.

7 Payrav Chorshanbiev, "Tajikistan's GDP growth in the first quarter slowed to 5.3 percent," *Asia-Plus*, April 14, 2015, <http://news.tj/ru/news/rosvvp-tadzhikistana-v-pervom-kvartale-zamedlilsya-do-53>.

way to influence the currency market has to do with Tajikistan's banking system. Local banks receive remittances in rubles, which the NBT uses to purchase US dollars through the Moscow Currency Exchange. As a result, if the value of the Russian ruble falls, the value of the US dollar grows not only in Russia but in Tajikistan as well.

The Central Bank of Tajikistan released an official statement, according to which "The NBT is constantly present in the foreign exchange market and ensures its liquidity and stability,"<sup>9</sup> implying that the NBT kept the market under control and sold US dollars from their reserves to avoid a shortage and a sharp exchange rate fluctuation. In a less volatile economic situation, such an intervention by the regulator would usually have been sufficient to stabilize the national currency, but the conditions in Tajikistan have only continued to deteriorate.

The next pointed verbal intervention took place earlier this year, in January 2015, at a press conference held to announce the results of 2014. The statements issued were more cautious, as if to warn the public that "exchange rate fluctuations in the Tajik market will continue for as long as it takes the world oil prices to stabilize,"<sup>10</sup> thus indicating that the NBT would permit the somoni to fall further. Another public announcement from Tajik officials came at a press conference held unexpectedly on March 12, 2015. The First Deputy Chairman of NBT, Jamshed Yusufiyon stated that, the "NBT will not allow abrupt fluctuations in the dollar."<sup>11</sup> However, the statement created confusion among the population, since the somoni had already depreciated by 15percent since the beginning of the year.

Verbal interventions work effectively in countries with developed securities markets and currency exchanges because such countries are endowed with a central bank that, by opening so-called short positions, are able to strike fear into speculators' betting on a further decline of the national currency. Speculators out to make a profit by pushing the rate

of national currency down can suffer losses if a bank suddenly enters the market and begins selling US dollars. Such an intervention can disrupt speculators' plans to sell US dollars at a higher price because a sharp increase in supply reduces the price of US dollar, and hence strengthens the national currency exchange rate for a short period. In Tajikistan, a country with an underdeveloped banking system and an absent currency exchange market, verbal interventions bring little success, especially during unstable economic times. The authorities thus were obliged to engage less in words and more in deeds.

### Currency Interventions

Along with verbal interventions, the NBT decided upon a currency intervention, which was the only effective way to maintain the stability of the somoni. While foreign exchange interventions are preventive in nature and are used to a greater extent to protect against speculative attacks, in financially underdeveloped countries like Tajikistan, the use of currency intervention mechanisms can be justified on other grounds—the shortage of currency in circulation. Incidentally, in Tajikistan this measure has been used very successfully to date.

However, these kinds of currency infusions are temporary and covered by the limited foreign exchange reserves of a central bank. The purpose of foreign exchange interventions is not to maintain the exchange rate at an artificial level, as has been done in Tajikistan; rather, the intervention presumes that a national currency will soon collapse, making the reduction of the exchange rate more smooth and stable. In total, the NBT spent \$998 million in 2014 on currency intervention measures.<sup>12</sup>

At the end of February 2015, the amount of Tajikistan's international reserves (gold and currency reserves) amounted to \$531 million, of which 70percent was monetary gold weighing about 11 tons.<sup>13</sup>

8 Roman Kojevnikov, "Decline in remittances restrained growth of Tajikistan's GDP in 2014," *Reuters*, January 21, 2015, <http://ru.reuters.com/article/companyNews/idRUL6N0V004020150121>.

9 "NBT revealed reasons of Somoni fall," *Asia Plus*, November 20, 2014, <http://news.tj/ru/news/natsbank-tadzhikistana-raskryl-prichiny-padeniya-somoni>.

10 "Somoni awaits stabilization of world oil prices," *Asia Plus*, January 20, 2015, <http://news.tj/ru/news/somoni-zhdet-stabilizatsii-mirovykh-tsen-na-neft>.

11 Lidiya Isamova, "NBT: Sharp fluctuations of the dollar exchange rate will not happen in Tajikistan," *RIA*, March 13, 2015, <http://ria.ru/economy/20150313/1052357024.html>.

12 "Deficit of payment balance is covered not only by remittances," National Bank of Tajikistan, December 23, 2014, <http://nbt.tj/en/chastozadav/>.

13 "NBT undertakes all dependent measures for stabilization of situation in the currency market," National Bank of Tajikistan, March 18, 2015, <http://nbt.tj/en/chastozadav/>.



This level of NBT reserves is very low, and satisfies only two of the five criteria that indicate adequate levels of international reserves, as described below.

### Central Bank Reserve Adequacy

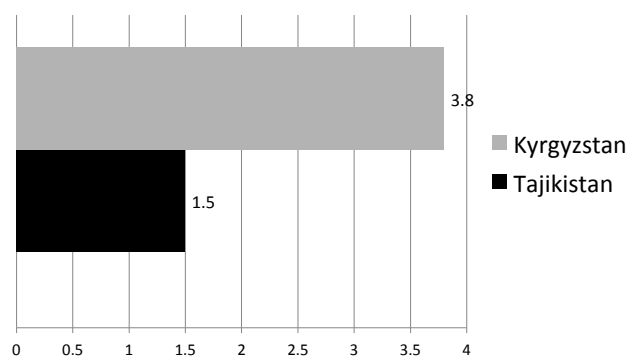
Experts use many different indicators to assess the adequacy of international reserves. However, in international practice, there are five main indicators used, all of which are recognized by economists of the International Monetary Fund.<sup>14</sup> Those indicators are 1) Import coverage; 2) the Greenspan-Guidotti threshold; 3) the ratio of international reserves to deposits in foreign currency; 4) provisions for money supply; and 5) the composite indicator of Lipschitz, Messmacher, and Mourmouras. Despite the fact that each of the indicators has clear guidelines for complying with the values of comparative analysis, for the current report the same calculations have been carried out of the indicators for the Kyrgyz Republic, which has similar economic conditions to Tajikistan's. The international reserves of the National Bank of the Kyrgyz Republic stood at \$1.82 billion at the end of February 2015.<sup>15</sup> This amount is several times greater than the NBT's, despite experiencing the same difficulties with the national currency and repeatedly conducting foreign exchange interventions.

Let's look now at these five indicators.

1) Central banks need to have international reserves in order to cover balance of payments deficits and, in particular, balance of trade deficits. Due to this, the easiest and most common method for assessing the adequacy of international reserves is the requirement that central banks possess reserves amounting to a value of at least three-months' worth of imports. Tajikistan's imports totaled \$4.34 billion<sup>16</sup> in 2014, resulting in an average of \$1.08 billion per quarter. The reserves of the NBT are thus far below the minimum required threshold, as they are able to cover the cost of less than 1.5-months' worth of imports.<sup>17</sup> The situation in the Kyrgyz Republic is a little better. Performing these same calculations shows that the country has reserves of 3.8 months, which safely

exceeds the threshold.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, at more than \$1 billion the Kyrgyz Republic's volume of imports is higher than Tajikistan's in absolute terms.<sup>19</sup>

Figure 1: Import Cover, Months



2) Another crucial function of international reserves is to ensure the performance of international settlements and payments. The Greenspan-Guidotti threshold used for this purpose assesses the adequacy of reserves for covering short-term external debt (for up to a year). According to economists, the safe value indicator is a ratio of reserves/debt of no less than 100 percent. According to the World Bank, the amount of such debt in Tajikistan is \$124.54 million for 2013. Assuming that the debt has not changed much in 2014, the ratio of reserves/debt for Tajikistan is 426 percent.<sup>20</sup> This means that Tajikistan has more than enough reserves to cover short-term external debt. Even so, the Kyrgyz Republic shows a much higher ratio of reserves/debt, which stands at 591 percent for the same period.<sup>21</sup>

3) The next indicator, the ratio of international reserves to deposits in foreign currency, characterizes the ability of a central bank to be ready for unexpected situations, such as excessive closing of deposit accounts or demanding to return of foreign currency deposits in case of a panic among the population. The NBT, as regulator of all Tajikistan's commercial banks, has to be able to insure and cover their lack of funds in foreign currency when caused by a sudden increase of requests of depositors to return their savings. According to the NBT, the volume of deposits

14 Holger Floerkemeier and Mariusz Sumlinski, "International Reserve Trends in the South Caucasus and Central Asia Region," *IMF Working Paper*, February 2008.

15 Gross International Reserves, National Bank of the Kyrgyz Republic, May 10, 2015, <http://www.nbkr.kg/index1.jsp?item=130&lang=ENG>.

16 Macroeconomic Indicators, National Bank of Tajikistan, May 10, 2015, [nbt.tj/en/statistics/real\\_sector/](http://nbt.tj/en/statistics/real_sector/).

17 Source: Author's calculations.

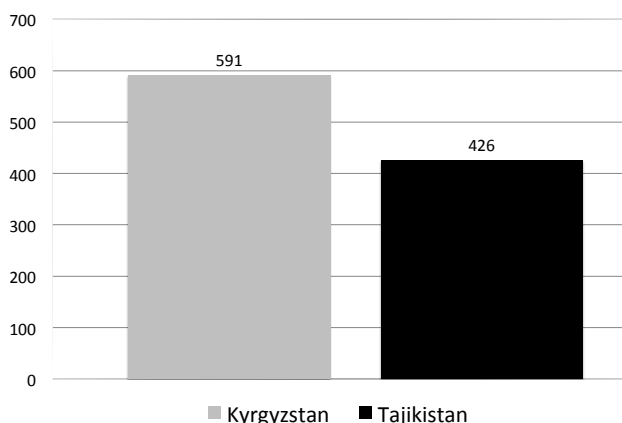
18 Ibid.

19 International Trade, National Bank of the Kyrgyz Republic, May 10, 2015, <http://www.nbkr.kg/index1.jsp?item=2007&lang=ENG>.

20 Source: Author's calculations.

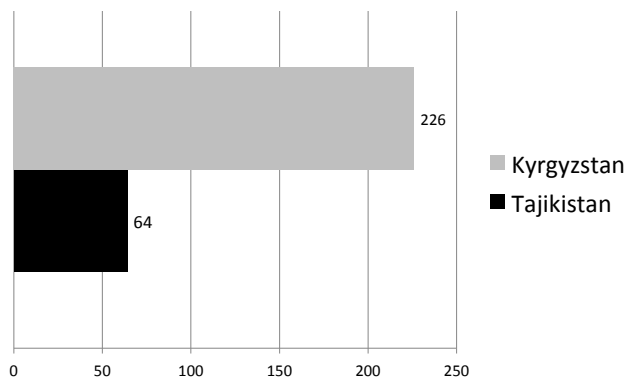
21 Ibid.

Figure 2: Greenspan-Guidotti Threshold, Percentage



in foreign currency in Tajikistan was \$829.1 million as of the end of February 2015.<sup>22</sup> Calculations reveal that the ratio of international reserves to foreign currency deposits for Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan stands at 64 percent and 226 percent, respectively.<sup>23</sup> Given that the safe level of the ratio of international reserves is no less than 100 percent, the NBT risks failing in case the unexpected situations described above should occur.

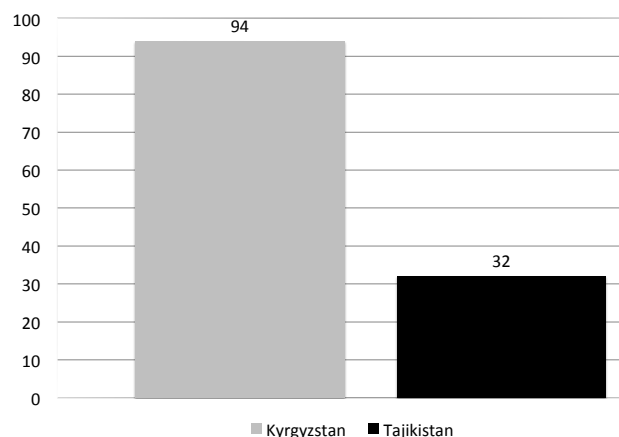
Figure 3: Ratio of Reserves to Deposits in Foreign Currency, Percentage



4) The provision of money supply or so-called currency board principle is another tool that is used to assess the adequacy of reserves. The tool represents the ratio of reserves to broad money, which assesses

the ability of a central bank to convert all outstanding cash and securities from national currency into foreign currency. In Tajikistan such “broad” money was, according to the NBT, estimated at about \$1.64 billion as of end of February 2015.<sup>24</sup> This amount reveals that the ratio of reserves to broad money is 32 percent, well above the safe level of 20 percent. On the other hand, the ratio of the Kyrgyz Republic stands at 94 percent.<sup>25</sup>

Figure 4: Provision of Money Supply, Percentage



5) In 2006, IMF economists Lipschitz, Messmacher, and Mourmouras decided to modify the all above indicators to create a more thorough assessment of reserve adequacy. “The new threshold takes into account the need to finance import consumption in the event of a drop in revenues. It looks at reserve coverage relative to the sum of 100 percent of the prospective external debt service—10 percent of broad money and 20 percent of imports.”<sup>26</sup> Under the new measure, the safe level is identified at no less than 100 percent, up from 20 percent. Applying this methodology for Tajikistan reveals alarming figures for the country—46 percent, while Kyrgyzstan stands at 110 percent.<sup>27</sup>

The above analysis clearly gives points to an unfavorable conclusion concerning the NBT’s international reserves. The comparison between the situation of the central bank in Tajikistan and that of the Kyrgyz Republic reveals stark differences. The Tajik

22 Deposits, National Bank of Tajikistan, May 10, 2015, [http://nbt.tj/en/statistics/monetary\\_sector/](http://nbt.tj/en/statistics/monetary_sector/).

23 Source: author’s calculations.

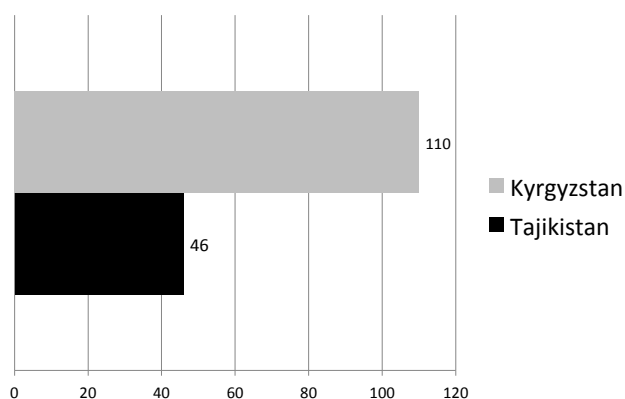
24 “Banking Statistics Bulletin,” Issue 2 (235), National Bank of Tajikistan, 2015, [http://nbt.tj/en/statistics/stat\\_bulletin.php](http://nbt.tj/en/statistics/stat_bulletin.php).

25 Source: author’s calculations.

26 “Kyrgyz Republic: Selected Issues,” *IMF Country Report* No. 13/176, June 2013.

27 Source: author’s calculations.

Figure 5: Lipschitz, Messmacher and Mourmouras Threshold, Percentage



regulator has recognized the complexity of the situation, by stating that, “In the long-term, if the given level of reserves and external pressure upon the rate of exchange remains, it can entail negative consequences for the exchange rate.”<sup>28</sup> Clearly, considering the deplorable conditions of NBT reserves, there is not much hope they will increase in the long term. This is why it is necessary to look for other possible solutions.

### Possible Mitigating Measures

#### Refinancing Rate

One of the powerful instruments a central bank can have at its disposal is the so-called refinancing, or discount, rate. This rate represents the cost of credit, which is expressed as the percentage a regulator can issue for commercial banks. The rate increase entails a rise in the price of credit that, according to the market rules, would lead to a reduction in demand of funds from commercial banks. In turn, banks are forced to take loans elsewhere, but at a higher rate. This increases the rates of loans for their customers. As a result, when the flow of money in the economy is shrinking, a competition for holding money ensues between banks, companies, and people. More and more people start to demand access to their money

held in banks in order to pay taxes or repair homes, thereby increasing the exchange rate.

Unfortunately, the refinancing rate tool has had almost no effect due to Tajikistan’s weak financial system and economic problems of a structural nature, epitomized by the country’s unfavorable business climate and high level of dollarization. It is worth noting that as of December 2014 the refinancing rate in Tajikistan stood at 8 percent per annum. During 2014 the rate changed four times, gradually increasing from 4.8 percent.<sup>29</sup> This confirms the measure’s inefficacy in the Tajik context, because such fast growth of the refinancing rate in other developed countries would have led to economic crisis as a result of a sharp increase in loan rates. Most likely, if the NBT allowed this to occur, it was in order to restrict price growth in the country.

#### Reserve Requirements on Deposits in Banks

Reserve requirements for banks have a much greater impact on the circulation of money in a country as compared to the refinancing rate tool described above. Commercial banks are obligated to save part of their attracted deposits in central banks in order to create a “safety cushion.” In Tajikistan, these requirements were slightly modified last year. For deposits in the national currency, the requirement was reduced by 3 percent and currently stands at 2 percent. Foreign currency deposits, by contrast, increased from 7 percent to 8 percent.<sup>30</sup>

As mentioned earlier, this requirement has a direct impact on the amount of money in circulation, of both national and foreign currencies. By slightly reducing the requirement for foreign currency deposits, the regulator leaves this part of foreign currency at the disposal of the banks. As of February 2015, the amount of deposits in foreign currency in all the banks of Tajikistan was about \$829.1 million.<sup>31</sup> Were this requirement to be reduced by 5 percent for example, it would be possible to free up the required reserves of \$24.8 million,<sup>32</sup> which could then be used by banks for lending and selling on the cash market. The “immobilized” reserves

28 “NBT undertakes all dependent measures for stabilization of situation in the currency market,” National Bank of Tajikistan, March 18, 2015, <http://nbt.tj/en/chastozadav/>.

29 Refinancing Rate, National Bank of Tajikistan, May 10, 2015, [http://nbt.tj/ru/statistics/monetary\\_sector/](http://nbt.tj/ru/statistics/monetary_sector/).

30 “Banking Statistics Bulletin.”

31 Deposits, National Bank of Tajikistan, May 10, 2015, [http://nbt.tj/en/statistics/monetary\\_sector/](http://nbt.tj/en/statistics/monetary_sector/).

32 Source: author’s calculations.

would then be released to cover the current currency shortage.

This solution has a downside, however. These reserves are created precisely in order to hedge the bank against risks, while meeting their obligations to depositors. By reducing their volume, the bank threatens its financial stability. The NBT is thus unlikely to make such a risky move. Reducing the mandatory reserve at the current low level of capital in banks is dangerous. Otherwise, the regulator would have nothing to cover the already critical level of liquidity. At the end of last year, the World Bank issued an economic development report that included a statement on the overestimated figures of Tajikistan banks, according to which “the deteriorating situation in the banking system continues to cause concern, due to the problem of governance and compliance with prudential norms.”<sup>33</sup>

### *Exchange Restrictions*

If the situation in the currency market spins out of control and the exchange rate of the national currency goes down abruptly, and if the central bank's economic mechanisms do not work, the regulator then has the right to impose emergency administrative measures. The purpose of such measures is to prevent the population from worrying about the devaluation of the national currency, which would mean it starts buying currency en masse and heads to the banks to reclaim its deposits. Depending on the situation and the seriousness of the regulator, various options for currency restrictions can be imposed either one by one, or all at once.

In light of the difficult political and economic situation in Ukraine, for example, the monetary authorities initiated a number of emergency measures to stop the collapse of the Hryvnia exchange rate. The government initially required exporters to sell 100percent of their foreign currency earnings,

but then lowered the stake to 75percent. Also, the government sharply limited remittances abroad, including payments for imports. Ordinary citizens also faced restrictions, including withdrawal limits for foreign currency were introduced at ATMs and limits on purchasing foreign currency in exchange offices.<sup>34</sup>

Another element of the currency restrictions is the introduction of a fee for currency purchases. This measure, introduced by the National Bank of Belarus immediately following the collapse of the Russian ruble, was made in order to prevent panic among the population. Now every person who wants to buy a currency is obliged to pay 30 percent tax. As expected, those previously wishing to do so were discouraged.<sup>35</sup>

### *The “Efficiency” of Administrative Measures*

Given the lack of effective monetary mechanisms, the NBT has started to apply currency restriction measures. The first signal of stronger foreign exchange control appeared when the Interior Ministry of Tajikistan announced in March the detention of about ten citizens in connection with the unlawful conduct of payments in foreign currency during a car sale deal.<sup>36</sup> According to the legislation, all payments and transactions in Tajikistan must be done in the national currency somoni. Although this rule has been in place for many years, strict control over its implementation has only just begun.

The next step was to ban the operation of private currency exchange offices. This unexpected decision was taken by the NBT without any discussion or appropriate warning on April 16.<sup>37</sup> Tajik officials and people often blame private exchange offices for allegedly causing the artificial deficit of the US dollar in order to increase its exchange rate. The NBT has as much as admitted that the exchange offices acted as unscrupulous speculators, in decreeing that all private exchange offices close the next day. The regulator explained that the aim of the decision was to ensure

33 “Tajikistan: Moderated Growth, Heightened Risks,” *Economic Report* No. 6, World Bank, Fall 2014, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/tajikistan/publication/tajikistan-moderated-growth-heightened-risks>.

34 “NBU introduced new and extended old restrictions on currency transactions,” *BBC*, March 4, 2015, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/ukrainian/ukraine\\_in\\_russian/2015/03/150304\\_ru\\_s\\_nbu\\_new\\_currency\\_restrictions](http://www.bbc.co.uk/ukrainian/ukraine_in_russian/2015/03/150304_ru_s_nbu_new_currency_restrictions).

35 Jack Farchy, “Belarus slaps 30 percent tax on foreign currency purchases,” *Financial Times*, December 19, 2014, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/254f-cdb4-8782-11e4-8c91-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3b0970Czd>.

36 “Citizens detained on suspicion of illegal currency transactions,” Interior Ministry of Tajikistan, March 17, 2015, <http://mvd.tj/index.php/ru/glavnaya/6769-zaderzhany-po-podozreniyu-v-nezakonnoj-valyutnoj-sdelki>.

37 “The activities of currency exchange offices of physical entities are suspended,” National Bank of Tajikistan, April 17, 2015, [http://nbt.tj/en/news\\_right/?ELEMENT\\_ID=16799](http://nbt.tj/en/news_right/?ELEMENT_ID=16799).

38 Ibid.



the sustainability of the domestic foreign exchange market, the stability of the somoni, and to protect the interests of clients of credit institutions.<sup>38</sup>

According to NBT management, the owners of private exchange offices can continue to operate by joining commercial banks. Although half of them have done so, the situation has changed little in the currency market. Instead, closing more than 800 private exchange offices across the country has led to a sharp jump in the value of the dollar—from 620 to 640 somoni per \$100.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, due to its absence, it is extremely difficult to get US dollars even with such a high rate. This situation complicates the work of importers, who are forced to postpone goods' imports owing to a lack of US dollars. Borrowers of foreign currency have similar issues. In addition to the lack of dollars, high rates make it more expensive to repay loans.

## **Conclusion**

Frequent inspections of currency exchange offices by law enforcement agencies out to prosecute any unjustifiably high exchange rates for US dollars, as well as the recent participation of the General Prosecutor's

Office in the campaign, has only served to provoke anxiety among the population of Tajikistan. The foreign exchange restrictions in place have a big drawback, which is that they lead to the emergence of a black market on which any amount of money can be bought and sold, thus circumventing official restrictions and violating law. While the NBT is trying to stabilize the situation and satisfy claims, the government should also share the responsibility for what is happening.

The falling exchange rate of Tajikistan's national currency is a reflection of the general state of the country's economy, which is burdened by bureaucracy and corruption. To solve this gridlock, difficult and painful reforms must be carried out. These include deregulation, privatization, and liberalization aimed at improving the investment climate. Tajikistan should change the course of the economy toward gaining foreign currencies through foreign investment and export income, rather than by relying on migrant remittances.

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<sup>39</sup> "Dollar rose sharply in Dushanbe after closing exchange offices," *Ozodagon*, April 20, 2015, <http://catoday.org/centrasia/19361-v-dushanbe-rezko-vyros-kurs-dollar-a-posle-zakryti-obmennyh-punktov-valyuty.html>.

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# Causes and Consequences of the Dysfunctionalities of the Housing Market in Dushanbe

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Xeniya Mironova<sup>1</sup> (2016)

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In the beginning of 2015, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) examined the implementation of the corresponding treaty in Tajikistan. The committee assessed the progress made by the country in regards to the protection of economic, social and cultural rights in Tajikistan: it put on record the progress Tajikistan made and expressed concern and recommendations with respect to different disadvantaged and vulnerable groups.<sup>2</sup> The next country review will be in 2020; again, it will be a critical moment for the Tajik authorities to show some commitment toward the most pressing economic, social and cultural issues the country faces. The housing market, as a part of the right to adequate housing, will be one of them.

According to international human rights law, everyone has the right to an adequate standard of living, including the right to adequate housing, which the United Nations describes as “the right to live somewhere in security, peace and dignity.”<sup>3</sup> This right covers a number of defined freedoms and entitlements, such as: protection against forced evictions and the arbitrary destruction and demolition of one’s home; the right to be free from arbitrary interference with one’s home, privacy and family; the right to choose one’s residence, to determine where to live and to freedom of movement; security of tenure; housing, land and property restitution; equal and non-discriminatory access to adequate housing; participation in housing-related decision-making at the national and community levels.<sup>4</sup>

Offering an adequate standard of living to its citizens is among the most important challenges for Tajikistan and its capital city, Dushanbe, in particular. The city’s housing market is severely ineffective: it lacks general housing-related infrastructure, has an inadequate supply of social housing, excessive real estate prices compared to significantly low wages, dependence of real estate prices on remittances sent by labor migrants, and gives preference to the construction of luxury estate, and to patronal relations.

How is it possible to account for these dysfunctions? Are they structural or conjectural, political, economic, social, or purely technical and logistical? The dysfunction of Tajikistan’s housing market has not been studied before. The statistical data provided by the Agency of Statistics of the Republic of Tajikistan is incomplete and therefore unreliable, and thus information has to be collected from other sources. To offer a first take on this issue, I collected and analyzed real estate and rental prices in the capital city, interviewed local experts on micro-credit, another expert on legislation in Tajikistan, and a Social Service Centre worker, and looked at social media discussions around this issue and at cases of expropriation.

After a short history of the capital city and its population, I explore several causes and consequences of the housing market’s dysfunction, such as population growth, civil war, internal migration, privatization, homelessness, the mortgage system, social housing, infrastructure, luxury housing, rental and real estate prices and remittances. Eventually, I conclude with some policy recommendations, which governments, civil society and international organizations may consider for the improvement of the housing market in Dushanbe.

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1 Xeniya Mironova holds an MA in European Studies from the Yerevan State University and an MA in Linguistics and Intercultural Communication from the Russian–Tajik (Slavic) University. She worked as a Program Associate at the Eurasia Foundation of Central Asia – Tajikistan. She supported the program “Equal before the Law: Access to Justice in Central Asia,” which was designed to increase access to justice for vulnerable populations in Central Asia. After being a scholar and intern with the Initiatives of Change, Xeniya worked as a Project Consultant for the British communication agency “United World” and helped to prepare a country report on Tajikistan that was published by *USA Today* in March, 2015. She then worked as a Project Coordinator at the UN OHCHR where she managed and coordinated the UK Conflict Pool project “Building Capacities for Human Rights Monitoring, Protection and Advocacy in Tajikistan.” She then worked with the FAO UN.

2 “Concluding observations on the combined second and third periodic reports of Tajikistan,” UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, March, 2015, <http://www.refworld.org/publisher,CESCR,TJK,555205734,0.html>.

3 “The Right to Adequate Housing,” Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, May, 2014, [http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/FS21\\_rev\\_1\\_Housing\\_en.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/FS21_rev_1_Housing_en.pdf).

4 Ibid.

## A Short History of the Capital City and Its Population

Tajikistan is a landlocked country with a territory of 143,100 km<sup>2</sup>, 93% of which is covered by high mountains.<sup>5</sup> Because of this challenging geography, the country is complex for urban design; most of its cities, towns and villages are located in valleys, canyons and plateaus. Dushanbe is located in the Hissar Valley in the south of Tajikistan. Some archeological evidence confirms the first human settlement as early as the 5th century BC. However, Dushanbe is a young city. It was only in 1924 that the Soviet regime decided to transform the small village of Dushanbe into the capital of the new Tajik Republic, then called Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. The village was known for its Monday market that gives its name to the city, and marked by “one-storied, clay, red and raw-brick houses with crooked back streets.”<sup>6</sup>

Dushanbe is the embodiment of a Soviet city. Its main urban features—governmental buildings, initial housing, factories, and municipal infrastructure—were built during the Stalin era. This fact is symbolized by the change of name of the city, which was named Stalinabad from 1929 to 1961. The railway reached the city in 1929, and a first hydroelectric power station, located at Varzob, provided it with electric power. The style of Dushanbe in the late 1930s and early 1940s “was characterized by European neoclassicism in accordance with the directives of the then-current Soviet architectural theory,”<sup>7</sup> built by architects and designers coming from Leningrad, Moscow, Kiev and Odessa. The main city street, Rudaki Prospekt, reflected this neoclassic style with its Presidential Palace, Parliament Building, Avicenna Tajik State Medical University, Sadriiddin Ayni State Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre,

Chaihona Rahat (Tea House), “Vatan” Cinema and other Stalinist style buildings.

Without any major historical cities located on its territory,<sup>8</sup> Dushanbe embodies and highlights Tajikistan’s urbanization. At the Soviet census of 1926, only 10 percent of Tajikistan’s inhabitants lived in cities, and Dushanbe was hosting only 5,600 people. In 1959, the urban population rose to 33%, and in Dushanbe it constituted 224,242 people.<sup>9</sup> As Glenn E. Curtis noted, “Between the 1959 and 1979 censuses, Tajikistan’s urban population more than doubled, while the rural population increased almost as rapidly. However, by the 1970s the rate of rural population growth had begun to outstrip that of urban areas. After reaching a peak of 35% in the 1979 census, the proportion of the urban population declined.”<sup>10</sup>

Table 1: Dushanbe Population Growth, from 1926 to the Present

Year	Population
1926	5,600 <sup>11</sup>
1939	82,597
1959	224,242
1970	375,744
1979	493,528
1989	595,820 <sup>12</sup>
1993	528,600
2010	728,844 <sup>13</sup>
2014	788,700 <sup>14</sup>

Dushanbe’s population evolved dramatically during Soviet decades, both in terms of numbers but also in terms of its ethnic composition. The city was truly cosmopolitan. According to the Soviet census of 1970, the number of urban ethnic Tajiks was only 99,184, compared with 157,527 ethnic Russians, out of a total of 375,744 people.<sup>15</sup>

5 “FAO Corporate Document Repository,” Food and Agriculture Organization, <http://www.fao.org/docrep/w6240e/w6240e17.htm>.

6 Todzhiddin Pirov and Nazarsho Nazarshoev, *Dushanbe* (Moscow: International Relations, 2003).

7 Yuka Kadoi and Iván Szántó, eds. *The Shaping of Persian Art: Collections and Interpretations of the Art of Islamic Iran and Central Asia* (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014).

8 Bukhara and Samarkand, the two main historical cities of the region, with a bilingual Uzbek and Tajik speaking population, have been attributed to the neighboring republic of Uzbekistan.

9 “Vsesoyuznaya perepis’ naseleniya 1959 goda,” *Demoscop Weekly*, [http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng\\_nac\\_59.php?reg=14](http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng_nac_59.php?reg=14).

10 Glenn E. Curtis, *Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan: Country Studies* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1996).

11 “Dushanbe, Capital and Most Populous City of Tajikistan,” *Encyclopedia Iranica*, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/dushanbe>.

12 “Vsesoyuznaya perepis’ naseleniya 1939 goda,” “Vsesoyuznaya perepis’ naseleniya 1959 goda,” “Vsesoyuznaya perepis’ naseleniya 1970 goda,” “Vsesoyuznaya perepis’ naseleniya 1979 goda,” *Demoscop Weekly*, <http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/census.php?cy=6>.

13 Numbers provided by the United Nations Data Retrieval System, <http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?d=POP&f=tableCode%3A240>.

14 Number provided by the Agency of Statistics under the president of the Republic of Tajikistan, <http://www.stat.tj/en/database/socio-demographic-sector/>.

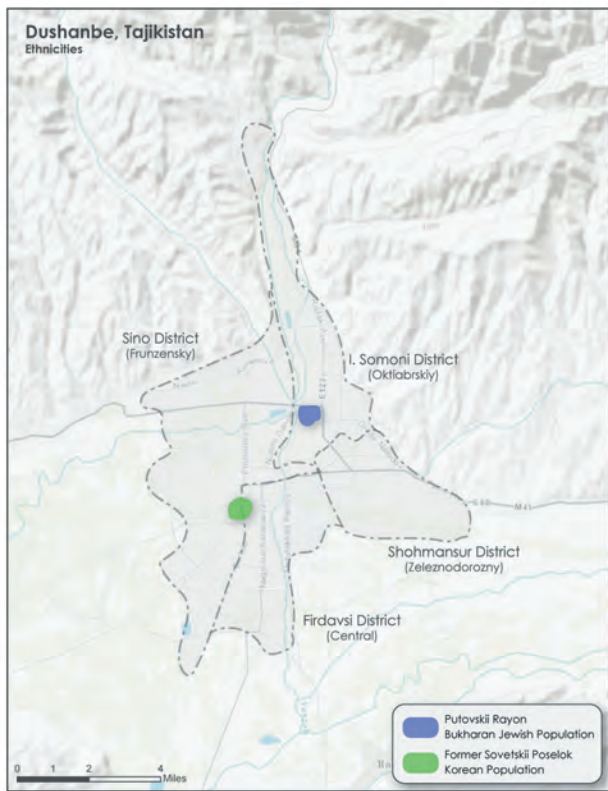
15 “Vsesoyuznaya perepis’ naseleniya 1970 goda,” *Demoscop Weekly*, [http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/resp\\_nac\\_70.php?reg=80](http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/resp_nac_70.php?reg=80).

Picture 1. Soviet Architecture Icons:  
Sadriiddin Ayni State Academic Opera and Ballet  
Theatre



Source: Asia-Plus News Agency

Map 1. Dushanbe's 'Ethnic' Districts at the Soviet  
Period



Sources: Information compiled by the author. ©Rhys Young and Xeniya Mironova

Ethnic Germans alone numbered 50,000.<sup>16</sup> Tajiks, Russians and Ukrainians resided all across Dushanbe, but some groups tended to live within their own communities; for instance, Koreans lived in the *Sovetskii poselok* (former central district and now, the Firdavsi district) and Bukharan Jews lived in the Putovskii rayon (now the central district).

Like all Soviet cities, Dushanbe experienced a new trend of housing construction in the 1960s and 1970s, when the Khrushchev and Brezhnev regimes decided to solve the lack of individual housing with massive construction programs. Communal apartments (*kommunalki*) began to be replaced by small-scale, five-story buildings with high ceilings (*khrushchevki*), panel buildings (*panel'nye doma*), brick houses (*kirpichnye doma*) and cast-in-place concrete buildings (*monolitnye doma*). This new housing emerged in the neighborhoods around the main street Lenina (now Rudaki) and Aini Street, which were the first streets in Dushanbe connected to the railroad.

Picture 2. Cast-In-Place Concrete Buildings  
(*Monolitnye Doma*) in Dushanbe, 1974



Source: Asia-Plus News Agency

Housing has always been a critical social issue for the population. One of the factors leading to the civil war was a rumor about providing new housing to Armenians who arrived in Dushanbe in 1989, after the 1988 earthquake in Armenia. "Moscow was trying to accommodate thousands of homeless Armenians throughout the Soviet Union. Thus, the Armenian refugees were intruding on the rights of the native inhabitants [Tajik residents – X.M.] who had been waiting for their turn."<sup>17</sup> The disintegration

16 Sophie Ibbotson and Max Lovell-Hoare, *Tajikistan* (UK: Bradt Travel Guides Ltd, 2013).

17 Mansi Mehrotra-Khanna, "Causes for the Civil War in Tajikistan," *Mansi Mehrotra Blog*, July 5, 2011, <http://mansimehrotra.blogspot.com/2011/07/causes-for-civil-war-in-tajikistan.html>.



of the Soviet Union and Tajikistan's independence at the end of 1991 dramatically impacted the future of the country and its capital. The entry into a bloody civil war, which began in Dushanbe in 1992 before moving to the rural regions, effected population flows. People fled the regions at the outset of the war and emigrated to neighboring countries, especially Uzbekistan. The civil war thus accelerated what would become a critical feature of Central Asia's population mobility—labor migrations in the direction of Russia. The number of migrants has been steadily growing after the civil war, and in 2014 it reached the official number of 834,000 people.<sup>18</sup>

In a quarter century of independence, Dushanbe's population has evolved dramatically. It stagnated in the 1990s at around 500,000 people, but hosted 300,000 more people in the 2010s, reaching almost 800,000 people. This dynamic demography is an element of concern for housing. "The 1989 census recorded that the average family size was 6.1 persons, which was the largest in the Soviet Union. The average Tajik woman gave birth to between seven and nine children, with higher birth rates in rural areas. The 2000 census recorded a slight decrease in family size, down to an average of 5.8 persons. The MICS 2005 data indicate that 59.4 per cent of households have between four and seven members. One-member households remain extremely rare at 3 percent. At the other extreme, 10.9 percent of households have more than 10 members."<sup>19</sup>

The rapid growth of Dushanbe's population in the last decade was due not only to demographic factors. It can be also explained because the capital city works like a magnet. When labor migrants come back to their home country, some of them do not want to return to difficult rural conditions but hope for building a new life for their family in the capital city. There they can find new temporary jobs during the months when they are not in migration, in the markets and bazaars, cafes and small restaurants, shops and car washes of the capital, or work as taxi drivers.

Moreover, there is still a significant flow of rural migrants coming to Dushanbe in search of a better

life. If they have enough money, they rent apartments for themselves and/or their families, mostly in the suburbs of the city. If not, they share apartment with relatives or extended family. "The newcomers should obtain *propiska*—a record of their official place of residence—at their local police station. The *propiska* is stamped in passports and is essential to accessing legal employment, schooling children, and accessing social services. The lucky ones can re-register if they have relatives in town prepared to offer them a permanent home, or if they can afford to buy a property. But many others live and work in town while their *propiska* shows them as residents of some faraway village. Failure to have the right *propiska* counts as an offence, and police are authorized to conduct ID checks to identify people with the wrong residence papers, or none at all."<sup>20</sup>

Last but not least, some key elements to understand the current dysfunction of the housing market are not social or economic, but political. The privatization process, which was launched at the end of the civil war, did not create a so-awaited free market that would have resulted in "property rights ... [to be – X.M.] respected and ... [to – X.M.] be freely transferred through sales."<sup>21</sup> In Tajikistan, the whole process of privatization was not transparent, as "when donor engagement began in 1996, no semblance of accountability and transparency existed over the distribution and redistribution of resources in Tajikistan. Yet the IMF and World Bank loans—US\$22 million and US\$50 million respectively—set out to de-regulate and privatize state-owned enterprises, many of which were already controlled by wartime elites, and therefore legalized their ownership of these assets. Commanders of armed groups and district authorities took agricultural farms by force and used profits from cotton production to buy properties made available through privatization, such as apartments, shopping centers and restaurants."<sup>22</sup> Moreover, a deeply embedded patronage culture contributed to accentuate the distortion of the housing market, as demonstrated below.

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18 James Kimer, "Spurned by Russia, Tajik Labour Migrants Return Home to Build Rogun," *Silk Road Reporters*, January 13, 2015, <http://www.silkroadreporters.com/2015/01/13/spurned-russia-tajik-labour-migrants-return-home-build-rogun/>.

19 "Tajikistan Country Study," United Nations Children's Fund, December, 2013, <http://allinschool.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Tajikistan-OOSCI-Country-Report-En.pdf>.

20 "Abolish Residence Controls, Say Tajik Rights Groups: Critics believe Soviet-style system should be scrapped," IWPR, January 9, 2010, <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/abolish-residence-controls-say-tajik-rights>.

21 Anders Åslund, *How Capitalism Was Built. Transformation of Central and Eastern Europe, Russia, the Caucasus, and Central Asia, 2nd edition* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

22 Sumie Nakaya, "Aid and Transition from a War Economy to an Oligarchy in Post-War Tajikistan," *Central Asian Survey* 28, no. 3 (2009): 259–73.

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All the above-mentioned issues resulted in a deep transformation of the city's social landscape and the relationship between its inhabitants and the evolution of its urban design. I will now discuss several consequences of the dysfunction of the real estate market in Dushanbe.

### Unrecognized Homelessness

There is no single, legal definition of homelessness in Tajikistan, no official data or statistics on the number of homeless people, and no special shelters for homeless people.

Homelessness became obvious after the beginning of the privatization process in the 1990s and early 2000s. Some vulnerable populations—mostly old, single people—lost their houses because they were cheated by acquaintances who made them sign documents to register someone else in their apartment. Others were kicked out by their relatives. Some homeless people do not have internal passports or IDs; the lack of these official documents prevents them from solving their housing problems.<sup>23</sup> According to the head of one of the agencies of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, there are more than 500 beggars in the capital city and the half of them are not residents of Dushanbe.<sup>24</sup>

Another side of homelessness in Dushanbe, which can be associated with “hidden homelessness,” is when people come from rural areas and stay in Dushanbe in the houses of their relatives or friends. They live packed in small spaces, which are often devoid of infrastructure such as access to clean water or heating systems. The Rom people—known in Central Asia as *lyuli* or *djugi*—is perceived by general population as homeless, but they often live in the Hissar Valley, not far from Dushanbe, and have houses in their community of origin while continuing their traditional mobility.<sup>25</sup>

In 2010, the City Territorial Social Service Center for Older People and Adults with Disabilities started functioning in Dushanbe within the framework of the European Union program of Technical Assistance to Sector Policy Support Program in the

Social Protection Sector. Now the center is managed by the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection and financed by the local administration, the *khukumat*. Homeless people are among the beneficiaries, but according to one of the center's workers, in 2015 only a small number of them (not exceeding 20 people) received support services there. Many do not know about the center or are afraid of going there, as they do not want to be sent to the homes for elderly people located outside Dushanbe, or they do not have passports or pensioner IDs, which are obligatory to benefit from the center. According to the same worker, the center can help homeless people with passports by preparing a covering letter and providing required forms for an official request. However, he indicated that often homeless people fail to answer correctly their last place of residence registration (*propiska*). Those who do not benefit from the center can be sent by force to a detention center (*spetspriemnik*), where the living conditions are very difficult.

### Insufficient Social Housing

Insufficient social housing is another consequence of the dysfunction of the housing market. During Soviet times, the state provided social housing to the most vulnerable groups of the population. The public administration remained the owner of the housing, and the tenant cannot sell it or transfer it by succession. The state was also responsible for providing cheaper municipal services and free repair works for such types of housing. The government of Tajikistan stopped providing social housing at the collapse of the Soviet Union and the country's entry into civil war, and re-addressed the issue only in 2008.

Now social housing differs from the Soviet era. The state provides it not for renting, but for purchasing at below-market prices. Dushanbe's *khukumat* only recently has restarted the construction of social housing. In 2012, the mayor's office created a state enterprise for the construction of affordable housing (*Stroitel'stvo dostupnogo zhi'l'ia*), to which the state granted some land in order to decrease the cost per square meter. Because of the suspicion of misman-

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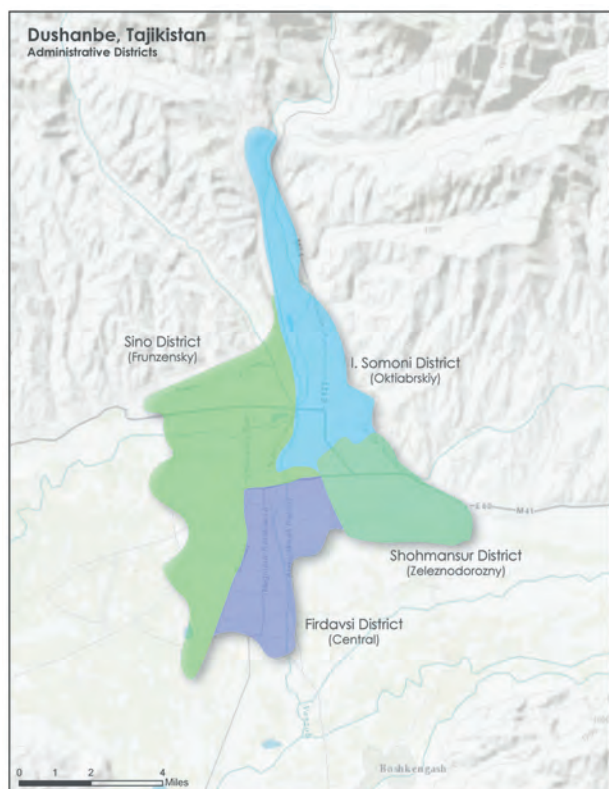
23 Anora Sarkorova, “Mnogonatsional'noe soobshchestvo bezdomnykh na ulitsakh Dushanbe,” *BBC*, November 28, 2014, [http://www.bbc.com/russian/international/2014/11/141127\\_tajikistan\\_homeless](http://www.bbc.com/russian/international/2014/11/141127_tajikistan_homeless).

24 “Nishchie Dushanbe, po poryadku rasschitaytes'!,” *Asia-Plus*, September 27, 2014, <http://news.tj/ru/news/nishchie-dushanbe-po-poryadku-rasschitais>.

25 “Tadzhikskie tsygane “Djugi”,” *Vsemirnyy islamskiy sayt musul'man*, September 22, 2015, <http://www.muslim-info.com/tadzhikskie-tygane-dz-hugi.html>.

agement and tax evasion,<sup>26</sup> the construction of social housing was frozen for some time and began again in 2015, offering square meters ranging from \$330 to \$600<sup>27</sup> in all four districts of the capital: Ismoili Somoni, Shohmansur, Firdavsi and Sino.

*Map 2. Dushanbe's Four Main Districts*



Sources: Information compiled by the author. ©Rhys Young and Xeniya Mironova

Yet, this price is still high for a large part of the population. In September 2015, the average official salary for a Dushanbe resident was TJS878 (\$137)<sup>28</sup> and the price of a one-room apartment of 35 square meters in a distant micro-district of Dushanbe was

about \$12,000, meaning that one would need seven years of full salary to afford social housing. In comparison, the affordability of housing in other countries differs tremendously. According to the Deloitte overview of European residential markets, the most affordable housing is in Belgium, “where a person needs to on average to save only 3.2 years to buy a new dwelling. Belgium is closely followed by its neighbors Germany and Denmark. Relatively affordable housing can be found in the Netherlands, Spain, Ireland, Sweden, and Austria. Housing in Italy, the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, and France falls into a less affordable category. Citizens of these countries need to on average to save for 6-8 years to buy a new dwelling. The least affordable housing is in Russia, the United Kingdom, and Israel.”<sup>29</sup> It might take citizens of Russia, the UK and Israel from 8 to 14 years to save their salaries in order to buy housing in their respective countries.

Social housing in Tajikistan is therefore more expensive, compared to average salaries, that in many more developed countries. Moreover, Dushanbe’s social housing’s “cheapness” is synonymous with a very low quality of infrastructure (cheap cement and lime) and complete lack of internal plumbing. Apartments are limited to the walls and the ceiling, without bathtubs and sinks.<sup>30</sup> This means that inhabitants of social housing need to come up with a significant additional sum to make the apartment inhabitable. Few people are therefore interested in investing in an unfinished product. The activity of several project sites in Dushanbe was recently stopped because of the lack of financing and absence of demand of social housing. The head of the enterprise for the construction of affordable housing reported to the Tajik media about the lack of financing and that monthly payments from investors are not received on time.<sup>31</sup>

26 The government helped the enterprise with providing the land to build, which allowed the enterprise to decrease the prime costs for a square meter. However, in 2014 the Tax Committee of the Republic of Tajikistan made its decision to recover back taxes from the enterprise representing TJS 7.6 billion. That decision was based on the audit of the enterprise’s accounting reports made by the Tax Committee, which revealed that the enterprise had demonstrated low income, but in fact it had gained more (see: Zarina Ergasheva, “Stroitel’stvo dostupnogo zhi’ya” ne mozhet vyplatit’ nalogovuyu zadolzhennost’,” *GUP*, July 21, 2014, <http://news.tj/ru/news/gup-stroitelstvo-dostupnogo-zhilya-ne-mozhet-vyplatit-nalogovuyu-zadolzhennost>).

27 Ekaterina Pastorova, “Pochemu zhi’le v stolitse stalo dostupnym?,” *TojNews*, April 17, 2015, <http://tojnews.org/ru/news/pochemu-zhile-v-stolice-stalo-dostupnym>.

28 Tajikistan’s average monthly wage in Tajik Somoni is presented by Trading Economics, <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/tajikistan/wages>. The calculation was made in accordance with the USD rate presented by the National Bank of Tajikistan in September 2015, <http://nbt.tj/ru/kurs/kurs.php?date=18.09.2015>.

29 “Property Index Overview of European Residential Markets,” *Deloitte*, June 2015, [http://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/it/Documents/mergers-acquisitions/be\\_fa\\_Deloitte-Property-index-2015.pdf](http://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/it/Documents/mergers-acquisitions/be_fa_Deloitte-Property-index-2015.pdf).

30 V. Kasymbekova, “Pochemu v Dushanbe takoe dorogoe zhi’le?,” *Centrasia*, August 8, 2013, <http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1375984500>.

31 Temur Amirov, “Podvizhnaya nedvizhimost’,” *Asia Plus*, November 1, 2015, <http://news.tj/ru/news/podvizhnaya-nedvizhimost-stoit-li-pokupat-seichas-kvartiru>.

Social housing also faces a severe lack of transparency. Several cases of fraud have been revealed in the Tajik press, with private subcontractors from the state agency for the construction of affordable housing stealing the funds given by future owners.<sup>32</sup> Patronage networks dominate this state-funded market: influential figures place their spouses as heads of the subcontracting firms<sup>33</sup> and several engineers and builders have been able to buy apartments in buildings constructed by their own enterprises.<sup>34</sup>

Taking into consideration the number of years required to purchase social housing, one could assume that the mortgage system could help, but Tajikistan's banking system is structurally dysfunctional. The law on mortgages, adopted in 2008, is hardly sufficient. The main banks such as Amonatbank, Orienbank and Agroinvestbank do not provide mortgages for housing to the population, and deal only with more profitable banking products. Two banks provide mortgages, Eskhata and Tojiksodirobank, but their high interest rates make their mortgages unaffordable. Bank Eskhata provides mortgage for 10 years (for payment in US dollars) and three years (for payment in Tajik somoni). In this case the mortgage is issued under the pledge of the acquired or existing property at 20% per year in US dollars or under 28% per annum in Tajik somoni. Tojiksodirobank issues mortgage at 25% per year for up to five years, but it does not provide mortgages for newly built houses, only for those which are being built with the help of bank financing.<sup>35</sup>

### Urban Infrastructure Issues

The housing market cannot be assessed without taking into consideration the broader city infrastructure, especially the water supply, electrical grid, heating and transportation.

Dushanbe lacks functional electric power infrastructure despite the fact that the country received several loans from different international financial institutions for developing its electric power infrastructure.<sup>36</sup> In 2008, the whole country suffered tremendously from lack of electricity.<sup>37</sup> The World Bank noted that “in the cities of Dushanbe and Khujand, for example, it is estimated that as much as 20-30% of residential and public heating demands are not met during winter months due to insufficient heat and electricity supplies.”<sup>38</sup>

Energy blackouts periodically occur in Dushanbe, most of them in the winter period. Only the central districts do not experience many shortages, while suburbs, like rural regions, face regular power outages. Natural gas is not provided in every house in Dushanbe, but mostly downtown. In winter Dushanbe residents have to heat their houses using electricity, natural gas, gas-cylinders purchased at the market, and sometimes during total blackouts they have no other choice but to stay without any heat at all. In 2015, after having no central heating at their houses in the suburbs for a long period of time, and after getting central heating unexpectedly, people faced a problem of broken water pipes due to the unpreparedness of the utilities for the winter season.

Compared to the difficulties of accessing water in rural regions, Dushanbe is relatively well endowed in terms of water supply and sanitation, but the situation is deteriorating. Across Tajikistan access to water services has 90% coverage in urban areas,<sup>39</sup> even if “16% of water is in a system of urban water supply from the river [Dushanbinka – X.M.] without cleaning.”<sup>40</sup> However, the construction of new buildings in the city is not complemented by new infrastructure construction. The authorities, lacking public budgets, do not take into consideration that “the water and sewage systems were built in the 1970s and

32 “Nebesa obetovannye: opyat’ ob obmanutykh vkladchikakh,” *Asia-Plus*, November 20, 2015, <http://web.news.tj/ru/news/nebesa-obetovannye-opyat-ob-obmanutykh-vkladchikakh>.

33 Ibid.

34 F. Umarzoda, “Stolichnoe zhile po \$280 za kvadrat: v chem podvokh?,” *ASIA-Plus*, October 24, 2013, <http://news.tj/ru/newspaper/article/stolichnoe-zhile-po-280-za-kvadrat-v-chem-podvokh>.

35 Temur Amirov, “V poiskakh ipotechnogo kredita,” *Asia-Plus*, October 29, 2015, 7.

36 “Republic of Tajikistan: 2006 Article IV Consultation,” *Staff Report*, International Monetary Fund; Public Information Notice on the Executive Board Discussion; and Statement by the Executive Director for the Republic of Tajikistan, International Monetary Fund, Washington D.C., 2007.

37 “Zhiteley Dushanbe ostavyat noch’yu bez sveta,” *Lenta.Ru*, February 7, 2008, <http://lenta.ru/news/2008/02/07/blackout/>.

38 “Reliable and Affordable Heating Is Essential to Everyday Life in Tajikistan,” World Bank, 2015.

39 “Improving Water and Sanitation in Tajikistan,” Global Partnership for Social Accountability, 2013, <https://www.thegpsa.org/sa/project/improving-water-and-sanitation-tajikistan>.

40 I. S. Normatov, N. Karomatulloeva, and I. M. Rakhimov, “Current Situation of Water Supply and Improvement of Sanitary Conditions in Republic of Tajikistan,” *International Archives of the Photogrammetry, Remote Sensing and Spatial Information Science*, vol. xxxviii, part 8, 2010, [http://www.isprs.org/proceedings/XXXVIII/part8/pdf/W02O02\\_20091223172216.pdf](http://www.isprs.org/proceedings/XXXVIII/part8/pdf/W02O02_20091223172216.pdf).



1980s and are worn-out. They are unlikely to cope with dozens of new buildings (...) residents report decreased water pressure in older buildings near the new high-rises.<sup>41</sup>

As for the transportation system in Dushanbe, it is covered mostly by private motor vehicles (taxis), state and private minivans, and some buses and trolleybuses. Public transportation functions more or less efficiently downtown, but it is difficult for micro-districts' inhabitants to reach the center. Minivans can be overcrowded and run not according to their schedule. The number of buses and trolleybuses in the city is limited, and the renovated ones function, mostly, only downtown. At night, only private taxis are available. This situation has an impact on the prices of the real estate market, as more prestigious districts are considered to be the ones where public transportation runs more efficiently.

### **Destroying Historical Dushanbe and Building Luxury Real Estate**

Since 2011, a new trend has emerged in Dushanbe, wherein historically unique buildings are being demolished and replaced by new ones. The Tajik authorities seem determined to remodel the face of the capital city and to get rid of the Soviet look of the city center, thus following the path blazed by the Turkmen and Uzbek authorities in their remodeling of Ashgabat, Tashkent and Samarkand.

At stake here is not only an image issue, but also a financial one. Real estate developers prefer to demolish Soviet-era houses downtown. After buying the land, they do not have to invest into new infrastructure, especially new sewer systems, which therefore make these real estate operations very profitable. They continue to use ageing Soviet-era infrastructure in order to construct high-rises they will sell at high prices. Owners of Soviet-era houses are evicted, offered mediocre financial compensation, or are relocated to the suburbs. This city reconstruction is decided by the municipal authorities, with no public discussion. However, decisions on demolitions

created tensions in Dushanbe in 2015, with vivid discussions on social media about the planned destruction of the Presidential Administration Office, Maiakovskii Theatre, Lohuti Theatre, Rokhat Teahouse and others.<sup>42</sup>

*Picture 3. High Fences of Gated Communities in the Vodonassosnaia Street*



*Source: Asia-Plus News Agency*

This planned destruction of Soviet-era Dushanbe goes hand in hand with the development of luxury real estate in the city center. New gated communities, with expensive private villas over two floors protected by high fences, emerged in the main streets of Dushanbe, for instance in Rudaky, Vodonassosnaia, Ainy, Saryi Aeroport, etc.

Another pattern that shapes housing dysfunction in Dushanbe is the construction of luxury real estate. In 2011, Tajikistan and Qatar jointly launched the Diar Dushanbe project, planned to offer a mix of residential and commercial properties in five luxury buildings located at N. Ganjavi St. (Sino district), not far from downtown and near the Hyatt Regency Dushanbe, a luxury five star hotel.<sup>43</sup> The construction project was still ongoing in 2015 and officially stopped, depending on the source, by lack of funding and/or lack of customers.<sup>44</sup>

That real estate is tailored to the needs of wealthy people. The price for one square meter at Diar Dushanbe ranges from \$2,640 till \$2,900, meaning that an average citizen will need his or her full monthly salary of \$137 invested for fifteen years to buy the smallest three-bedroom apartment of 115 square meters at a price of \$303,000. Sandzhar Karimov,

41 Konstantin Parshin, "Tajikistan: Dushanbe Building Boom Blocks out Economic Concerns," *Eurasianet.org*, May 1, 2012, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/65340>.

42 Xeniya Mironova, "My uydem bez sleda..." *Central Asian Analytical Network*, October 20, 2015, <http://caa-network.org/archives/5737>.

43 "Project Overview," *Diar Dushanbe*, 2014, <http://www.diardushanbe.com/en/project/project-overview/>.

44 "KRIZIS: katarskaya stroyka v Dushanbe priostanovlena," *TojNews*, August 3, 2015, <http://tojnews.org/ru/news/krizis-katarskaya-stroyka-v-dushanbe-priostanovlena>.

the head of the sales department of Diar Dushanbe, recognized that ordinary citizens cannot access this kind of housing and that future owners are well-known businessmen, entrepreneurs and government officials.<sup>45</sup> Still, this luxury estate project could not get enough clients. The Tajik authorities therefore granted the owners of Diar Dushanbe an exclusive right to sell apartments to foreigners, even though officially, foreigners can only buy property after five years of residence in Tajikistan.<sup>46</sup>

### The Housing Market's Remittances Bubble

Another key challenge of Dushanbe's housing market is that real estate prices are intrinsically dependent on remittances sent from almost one million labor migrants. Therefore, the market functions as a bubble. Prices rise excessively when remittances sent from Russia are high, and collapse rapidly when remittances slow down, as they currently are with the Russian economic crisis.

"In January-June of this year, prices for one square meter of dwelling space in Dushanbe have declined on average by \$300," Nourali Saidzoda, the deputy head of the Committee for Construction and Development under the Government of Tajikistan, told reporters on July 15. According to him, prices [by square meter in the suburbs of Dushanbe – X.M.] have declined from \$500-\$1,200 in 2014 to \$450-\$800 this year... Meanwhile, prices for one square meter for dwelling space in downtown Dushanbe have not changed. Thus, prices for one square meter in residential buildings in the TsUM (Central Universal Department Store) fluctuate from \$1,400 to \$1,800, Saidzoda noted. Current prices for one square meter for dwelling space in the airport area reportedly fluctuate from \$600 to \$800."<sup>47</sup>

With the exception of a few downtown districts of Dushanbe, where the prices still fluctuate, the rest of the housing market underwent a decline in prices due to the reduction of remittances sent from Russia. The prices declined not only for the new buildings, but also for the secondary housing market. Compared to 2014, the prices for one square meter declined from \$800-1,000 to \$350-650; and now the average price for the one-room apartment is \$20,000, and not \$30,000, as it was a year ago.<sup>48</sup>

Table 2: Examples of Real Estate Prices in Dushanbe in 2014 and 2015

Year and Name of the District	Number of Rooms		
	2	3	4
2014 Ispechak-2 district (suburbs)	\$40,000 <sup>49</sup>		
2015 Ispechak-2 district (suburbs)	\$35,000 <sup>50</sup>		
2014 Zarafshon (suburbs)			\$55,000 <sup>51</sup>
2015 Zarafshon (suburbs)			\$45,000 <sup>52</sup>
2014 33 micro-district (suburbs)		\$52,000 <sup>53</sup>	
2015 Mayakovskiy, not far from the 33 micro-district (suburbs)		\$38,000 <sup>54</sup>	
2014 Downtown	No data		
2015 Downtown	\$95,000 <sup>55</sup>		

Sources: Information compiled by the author

However, even successful migrants experience difficulties in buying in Dushanbe. A migrant earning \$1,000-\$1,200 per month in Russia—a relatively good salary, possible only in the construction sector—who needs a house for a medium-sized family,

45 Nupmukhammad Kholzoda, "Dieri Dushanbe" prodadut inostrantsam," *Radio Ozodi*, November 20, 2014, <http://rus.ozodi.org/content/article/26701326.html>.

46 Faromarz Olamafuz, "Tajikistan Tightens Marriage Rules," *IWPR*, March 3, 2011, <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/tajikistan-tightens-marriage-rules>.

47 Mavzouna Abdulloyeva, "Prices for one sq m of dwelling space in Dushanbe decline by \$300," *Asia-Plus*, July 15, 2015, <http://www.asiaplus.tj/en/news/prices-one-sq-m-dwelling-space-dushanbe-decline-300>.

48 "Zhil'e v Tadzhiqistane desheveet," *Avesta.tj*, September 9, 2015, <http://www.avesta.tj/business/35665-zhile-v-tadzhiqistane-desheveet.html>.

49 Reklama, no. 33(693), August 14, 2014, 13/B.

50 Reklama, no. 43 (755), October 29, 2015, B/10.

51 Asia Plus, no. 47(930), June 19, 2014, 15.

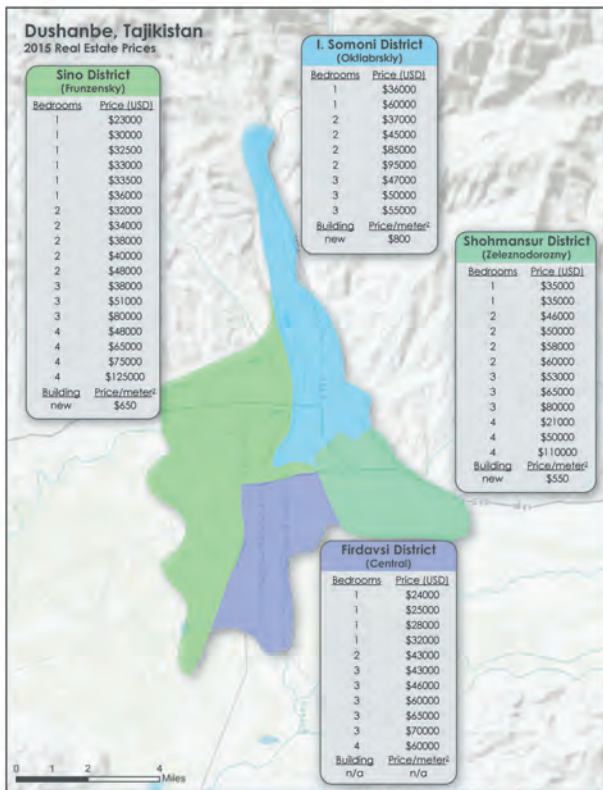
52 Reklama, no. 33(693), August 14, 2014, 13/B.

53 Reklama, no. 33(693), August 14, 2014, 13/B.

54 Reklama, no. 43 (755), October 29, 2015, B/13.

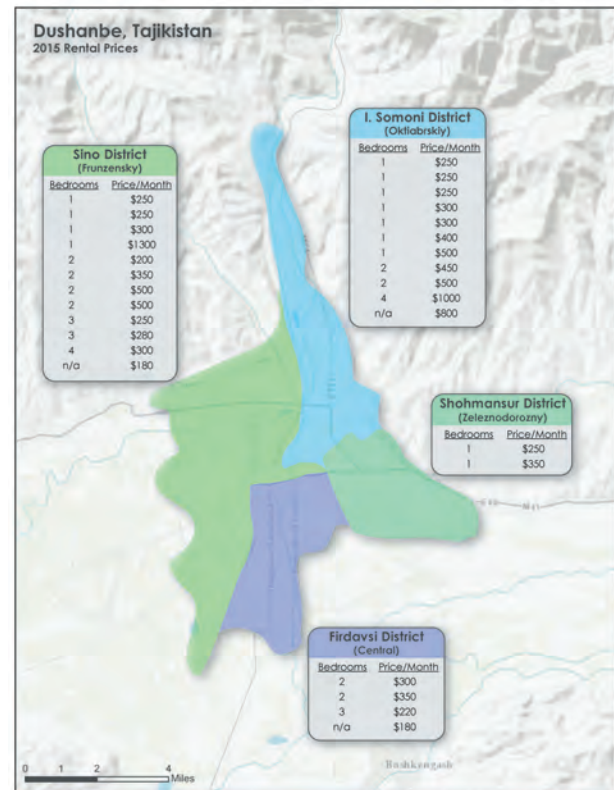
55 Reklama, no. 33(745), August 20, 2015, B/5.

Map 3. 2015 Average Prices for Buying Apartments in Dushanbe's Main Districts



Sources: Information compiled by the author. ©Rhys Young and Xeniya Mironova

Map 4. 2015 Average Prices for Renting Apartments in Dushanbe's Main Districts



Sources: Information compiled by the author. ©Rhys Young and Xeniya Mironova

has to buy land outside Dushanbe, for instance in Hissar, approximately 30 km away, to build a house large enough for the whole family.<sup>56</sup>

Many inhabitants of Dushanbe coming from rural regions cannot afford to buy, and therefore have to rent. This is often seen as a temporary solution to find a way to stay in Dushanbe for a longer period. Renting is a widespread option, in particular in the suburbs, which offer lower prices that can vary from \$180 (1-room) per month to \$200 (2-rooms) and \$250 (3-rooms) per month. Renting prices in the center are more expensive: \$250 for a one-room apartment in an old building, \$500 for a one-room apartment in a new building, up to \$1,000 for a four-room apartment.<sup>57</sup> Renting downtown is a niche occupied mostly by expatriates or international organizations' employees.

## Conclusion

Over the last 25 years, Dushanbe has been constantly under the influence of internal and external factors that explain the housing market's multiple dysfunctions. The housing market in Dushanbe is thus a reflection of Tajik society: it was shaped by rapid population growth, internal migration from rural areas to the city, labor migration to Russia and growing social inequity between the rich and poor.

Contemporary Dushanbe is not able to absorb and integrate all rural migrants, and cannot provide all of them with jobs and affordable housing. The risk of growing urban poverty, which exists in many developing countries, is a steady tendency in modern Dushanbe, causing larger gaps between social classes. Dushanbe experiences "inequality, continuously de-

56 Anusher Oripov, "Krizis ostanovil stroitel'stvo v Dushanbe," *Radio Azattyk*, November 2, 2015, <http://rus.azattyk.org/media/video/27342596.html?z=0&zp=1>.

57 Source for the renting prices: *Reklama*, no. 43 (755), October 29, 2015.

clining living standards, and a sharp increase in the number of households living in slum conditions,”<sup>58</sup> and this situation will continue to deteriorate. Moreover, housing market is affected by the same problems that exist in other post-Soviet states, such as corruption and patronage relationships. My findings confirm that these trends of urban development are similar to those in other transitional countries, for instance, Armenia or Kyrgyzstan.

The creation of additional employment opportunities in the rural areas might decrease the flow of internal migrants to the capital city. Migrants based in Russia could also potentially go back to their villages and not to Dushanbe if they were offered employment opportunities or invited to invest into their own small enterprises. Offering more public funds to provincial cities, not only to Dushanbe, would help rural populations look toward their regions’ administrative centers, not the capital city, and advance a more balanced development for the country.

## Recommendations

### *For the Tajik Government*

*Invest in infrastructure.* Investing in public transportation and utilities will improve the quality of housing on offer in Dushanbe.

- *Involve civil society in urban planning.* Involving civil society in policy discussions on urban planning will sensitize urban planners and construction companies to the concerns and proposals of residents.

- *Launch long-term micro-credits.* Improving the mortgage system by offering longer-term micro-credits for housing to prospective buyers with lower interest rates would allow citizens to become sustainable owners.

### *For International Organizations and Civil Society*

- *Improve social housing system in the capital.* International financial institutions could assist the Tajik government in constructing affordable housing in Dushanbe by providing grants for building social housing. The grantees might be local NGOs that are already working in the sphere of social justice. Social housing monitoring groups could include representatives from civil society and local NGOs. Additionally, international and local NGOs could assist in the registration and vetting of those who are eligible for social housing; awareness raising campaigns could be conducted in order to provide the greater population with information about affordable housing.
- *Monitor homelessness.* Local and international NGOs could assist in building a census of homeless people in Dushanbe, and helping them to obtain official documents (passports or IDs). Large educational billboards on the streets of Dushanbe could contain contact information for local NGOs that appeal to homeless people to approach them for further assistance. International NGOs could provide grants for building special shelters for homeless people.

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58 Sonia Hirt and Kiril Stanilov, “Revisiting Urban Planning in the Transitional Countries,” UNHabitat, 2009, <http://unhabitat.org/wpcontent/uploads/2010/07/GRHS2009RegionalTransitionalCountries.pdf>.



## About the Central Asia Program (CAP)

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The George Washington University  
1957 E St. NW  
Suite 412  
Washington, D.C. 20052  
Email: [infocap@gwu.edu](mailto:infocap@gwu.edu)



**TAJIKISTAN: Islam, Migration, and Economic Challenges** is part of a series dedicated to the 5th anniversary of the Central Asia Program.

In the past few years, Tajikistan's domestic situation has been shaped by the shrinking place given to the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRPT). The Tajik authorities used the Islamic State threat to liquidate the IRPT, the last structured opposition force, and eventually banned it in late 2015. State-sponsored narratives have been making massive—excessive—use of “Islam” as a tool to better control society (through women's dress code, for example); to denounce regional warlords and opponents; and to instrumentalize regional powers such as Iran. However, societal evolutions are much more complex than the black and white state narrative would have us believe, with migrations and youth bulge at the core of social transformations, not to mention difficulties in making the Tajik economy—from energy use to agriculture—and public finance viable.

Marlene  
**Laruelle**  
**Director**

Central Asia Program, Associate Director  
and Research Professor, IERES,  
The George Washington University

**Contributors**

Altynai Achilova, Sheila Aminmadani, Zamira Djabarova, Eric Hamrin, Nozim Ishankulov, Safovudin Jaborov, Muhiddin Kabini, Parvina Khamidova, Kavikas Kuhiston, Edward Lemon, Xeniya Mironova, Rut Perez-Studer, Igor Rotar, Abdulfattoh Shafiev, H el ene Thibault, Noah Tucker, Asyl Undeland, and Said Yakhoyev

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