



TAJIKISTAN – RUSSIA RELATIONS IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Tajikistan – Russia relations after the disintegration of the USSR certainly owe a lot to their historical attachment in various phases. The relationship between the two countries has always been a smooth one since the time of Tajikistan's creation as a republic within Soviet Union. The relations have passed through various stages of development starting from the Tsarist colonial times to the present. Russia has been historically tied with Tajikistan and is one of the most important neighbours and guarantor of peace in the region Tajikistan depends fully on Russia to preserve the unity and integrity of its territory. Russia has not intervened coercively in the Tajik conflict, but has acted in support of a government with which it has treaty obligations. Russia sought to apply a supportive strategy of engagement designed to defend the border zone, support the Tajik Government and persuade the opposition to resolve the conflict peacefully on the relation between Tajikistan and Russia at present are geared to a very intensive search for the best forms, ways and means of cooperation.

Key – Words

<i>Erstwhile</i>	<i>:- former</i>
<i>Dismantle</i>	<i>:- take to pieces</i>
<i>Multi-nationality</i>	<i>:- means a person is currently regarded as a citizen of more than one state.</i>
<i>Nomadic</i>	<i>:- living the life of a nomad wandering</i>
<i>Geo-political</i>	<i>:- relating to politics, especially international relations, as influenced by geographical factors.</i>
<i>TASSR</i>	<i>:- Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic.</i>
<i>Basmachi</i>	<i>:- the local Guerrilla fighters.</i>
<i>NEP</i>	<i>:- New Economic Policy.</i>
<i>Agro-industrial</i>	<i>:- relating to production for both industrial and agricultural purposes.</i>
<i>CPT</i>	<i>:- Communist Party of Tajikistan.</i>
<i>Tajik intelligentsia</i>	<i>:- highly educated group who demanded for the separate linguistic identity for Tajikistan.</i>
<i>Glasnost</i>	<i>:- openness</i>
<i>Spiritual independence</i>	<i>:- To become sovereign to recognize one's own power of self-determination self guidance and self-direction.</i>
<i>Radical Islam</i>	<i>:- extremism in Islam.</i>
<i>City-dweller</i>	<i>:- person who lives in a city.</i>
<i>Civil-war</i>	<i>:- a war between citizens of the same country.</i>
<i>Jehadis</i>	<i>:- persons involved in a Jihad, an Islamic Militant.</i>



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The sudden breakup of the Soviet Union led to the emergence of five independent states in Central Asia, namely, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, covering a vast area of over 4 million square kilometers, or almost one-sixth of the territory of the former Soviet Union. But the region possessed a collective population of only about 55 million people. After their independence, the five Central Asian states suddenly emerged into sovereign existence on the dismantling multi-nationality federation of the erstwhile Soviet Union. Emergence of Central Asia, as the latest region of sovereign states on the global map opened prospects of distinct shift in power politics.¹

Central Asia under the Soviets were organised in to five republics and continued in the same form as successor states after Soviet disintegration.² This could be constructed as the most important contribution of the Soviet state, which created nations out of proto-nations and even from clan, tribal and nomadic identities.³ However, according to Ajay Patanaik, the consolidation of national identities was still incomplete when the soviet state disintegrated, and as a result, many of these newly independent states are still grappling with sub national identities that threaten some of these new sovereign states.⁴

The present state of Tajikistan was created during the Soviet rule in 1929 which brought economic and social benefits to Tajikistan. Though Tajikistan got full national territorial status during the Soviet period, Tajik identity had formed in the fifth and sixth centuries, according to Soviet historians, and the process was completed within the tenth century Samanid empire.⁵ From its inception to the present century, Tajikistan experienced different rulers who ruled different periods and was influenced by the culture and administration of different rules.

The Republic of Tajikistan since independence in 1991 is living through a period of national and state reconstruction. self-determination and political and economic integration into the world community.⁶ The birth of the independent state was followed by a widespread bloody conflict, one of the longest and most difficult on the territory of the former Soviet Union. It has become a constant feature in the life of the country and the Central Asian region as a whole and has greatly influenced the process of state formation in Tajikistan, the course and direction of transformation processes in its economy. its social and culutural life, and its foreign policy. including relations with the Russian federation.⁷ The conflict has slowed down the achievement of full statehood in Tajikistan. As a result, olimov points out, till the late 1990s the national security concept has could not be fully determined, national interests

were not identified, foreign policy priorities were not set, and the mechanism for the establishment and implementation of foreign policy was not been worked out.⁸

The Russian conquest of Central Asia began in the 1860's. Since then an imperialistic relation was created by the Russian state which was prompted by the need for cotton to replace the supply cut off by the American civil war and by the desire to protect Russian settlers and trade from nomadic raids. Chimkent and Tashkent were taken in 1865 as were part of the Bukhara Khanate, including Khodzhent, in 1866, and the Russian province of Turkestan was formed in 1867. By 1868, the Russians held the Zeravshan valley and Samarkand and had forced Bukhara to accept their protectorate. Kingdom Khiva met a similar fate in 1873, while Kokand Khanate was incorporated into the Russian Turkestan in 1876 as the Fergana province. All three Khanates offered resistance, but they were no match for Russia's modern armies.

Tajikistan was one of the most underdeveloped regions within the Russian empire. On the eve of the Socialist Revolution in 1917, only 0.5% of the population were literate. The overwhelming majority of the populations were peasants who cultivate the land, received one-half or one-fifth of the produce.¹⁰ The Tajik economy before the October Revolution was an economy dominated by feudal relations of production within a colonial mode of production in which the Russian bourgeoisie was the dominant exploiter. Although some degree of economic development was brought to the essentially feudal Muslim regions which made up the General Governorship of Turkestan. Railways were built and in order to ensure supplies of cheap raw-materials for the Russian textile industries, particular attention was paid to the production of cotton. Small factories were set up by Russian industrialists in and around Khodzhent, and the mineral resources of the area, including coal, began to be exploited. At the same time, Russian settlements began to develop often with forced expropriation of land.¹¹

In 1918, the Bolsheviks established control over northern Tajikistan, which was incorporated into the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (TASSR).¹² They were quickly able to establish in all major centers of Tajikis, including Khodzhent, Ura Tyube and Kanibadam. But they did not conquer Dushanbe and other territories subject to Bukhara until 1921 because of strong opposition. At that time, a movement inspired by nationalism and Islam began in the Fergana valley to throw off the Russian yoke. Tajik clan leaders played a prominent role in this movement. They also revolted against widespread unemployment among native peasants that had deprived them of their livelihood.¹³ The

backbone of the resistance was provided by the conservative elite seeking the restoration of the status quo; the people flocked to them in their anxiety to preserve their religion and traditional customs.¹⁴ The Jaddists and Young Bukharans, who were reformists, nevertheless were leading the movement against the soviet regime for the restoration of the status quo and preservation of their religious and traditional customs. Among the Jaddists and Young Bukharans only the left fraction supported the Soviet Government, while many other joined the conservatives in overt-rebellion. The liberal-educated Muslims as reform-seeking representatives of a nascent of a nascent middle class cooperated with Russian revolutionaries.¹⁵

Opposition to Soviet Rule was also led by the Basmachis (local guerrilla fighters) and foreign interventionists. The Basmachis movement was born out of the Bolshevik's refusal to acknowledge the particularities of the Islamic tribal system of the region. The Russians took the derogative term "Basmachi" from the Turkic language, in which it means 'robber' or 'bandit'. Locally, however, it was known as the movement of the 'bek' or freeman; later the Basmachis themselves were not averse to using the term, as it came to be associated with nationalism and Islam, as was the term Mujahidin used by the Afghan rebels fifty years later.¹⁶ By April 1918, almost every village in Ferghana and Tajikistan had set up Basmachi guerrilla group to resist Soviet power and they became very stronger and bolder. The largely Russian Bolsheviks were totally alienated from the rural people, because they made no attempt to understand the complex tribal and clan basis of the social structures, which they considered backward.¹⁷ In turn, the Basmachis were helped by the British in India, who encouraged king Amanullah Khan of Afghanistan to send camel caravans with arms and ammunition to Bukhara and Fergana in 1919. Initially the red army was overwhelmed by the Basmachis, until Marshal Frunze arrived in Tashkent in February 1920 to organize a new offensive. Frunze attacked Bukhara forcing the Emir to flee to Dushanbe and then to Kabul. Basmachi attacks on Frunze's forces delayed his advance but he finally entered Dushanbe in February 1921.

Frunze declared an amnesty for all Basmachis who surrendered and the 6,000 who did so in 1920 were instantly turned around and made to join the Red Army. Alongside brutal offensives in Fergana and Tajikistan, Frunze also began to distribute food and money to local chiefs in a winning of hearts and minds campaign. In the mean time the Basmachi movement had been weakened due to lack of unity.¹⁸ The various detachments operated independently

of each other under the leadership of ambitious and jealous chieftains, who refused to coordinate their activities and at times engaged in internecine wars.¹⁹

Soviet Nationality Policy in Tajikistan

In order to reduce the influence of the Basmachis, the Soviet Government introduced the 'New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1922.²⁰ They returned the lands, formerly by religious institutions and reduced the burden of taxes on the peasantry. The Soviet policy of the right to national self-determination, which led to the creation of Tajik Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (TASSR) in 1924, further eroded the influence of the Basmachis leaders. In 1925 the south-east of Tajikistan was designated a special Pamir region within the Tajik ASSR. By 1926, the Basmachi resistance movement in Tajikistan dwindled from 57 groups of 1,370 men to 29 groups within 959 men.²¹ By 1927, the Basmachi chieftains of Tajikistan, Ibrahim beg and others, fled to Afghanistan. On 16 October 1929, the Tajik ASSR was separated from Uzbek SSR and became a full Union Republic of the USSR. Soon after the establishment, the Tajik government, at the time headed by Nasaratullah Maqsum, used every means at its disposal to encourage peasants to let down their arms and return to their land. It was estimated that 33,000 out of 200,000 returned to Tajikistan from refugee centers in Afghanistan.²²

Although the Basmachis continued their armed struggle against the Soviet led Government, their struggle ended when their leader Ibrahim Beg and his 2,000 fighters entered their home town, Lokai, in April 1931 to launch an armed insurrection. People were tired of hopeless war and were reluctant to support the Basmachi's call for an armed struggle. Many did not side with the Basmachi and welcomed the Red Army. The continuous war brought depopulation and economic destruction. Cultivated land decreased to less than one-half of the pre 1920 level, and about 26 percent of the population of eastern Bukhara, mostly from the border regions, emigrated to Afghanistan. Again the famine in the region also destroyed the people's will to resist. Ibrahim Beg was captured on 23 June 1931 and with his execution, the Basmachi movement finally came to an end.²³

After the death of Ibrahim Beg, the Basmachis went underground, but their ideas and passion never fully disappeared. Fifty years later, Azad Beg, a relative of Ibrahim Beg, received the Basmachi ethos at the height of the Afghan war when he formed the Islamic Union to subvert Communist Tajikistan. The Soviet Union alleged that he was helped by the American CIA, Pakistan and Turkey to setup a Mujahidin group of former refugee from

Tajikistan who lived in Kunduz province. However, Azad Begs efforts never matched those of the other important Tajik Mujahidin leader Ahmad Shah Masood, and he failed in his ambition.

In order to expedite and increase in its influences in Tajikistan, the early Soviet Government also initiated the building of a modern state bureaucracy in Tajikistan. Local communists were delegated the task of political organization and served as a means of communication between the Soviets and local Persian speaking Tajiks. The Soviet Government was devoted to socio-economic changes to social transformation and political indoctrination and elimination of illiteracy. The irrigation network had to be rebuilt, craft and agricultural skills had to be restored, and industries had to be initiated. State assistance was made available to poor and middle peasants, and the first agricultural co-operative were introduced. In Soviet modernization policy, education had top priority. The first schools for children and adults were established in 1926-27 and the first Tajik newspaper began publishing in Dushanbe in 1926. Since Tajikistan lacked skilled and professional employees to run the State bureaucracy, The Soviet Government professional technicians and Russian communists to help the Tajik people to modernize their country.²⁴ By 1930, all members of the Central Executive Committee and the Tajik Council of people's Commissars were local Tajiks. However, except for the Chairman, Nasaratillah Maqsum and Nisar Mohammad, the Commissar for education who was a revolutionary intellectual from Afghanistan, none of them could communicate in the Russian language. Because of Soviet influence, the Tajik Communist Party, which had an estimated 435 members in 1925, expanded its social base of support by recruiting new members to the extent that its membership reached 58,493 in 1962.²⁵ The establishment of Communist rule, thus, brought a ray of hope for the people of Tajikistan who were suffering under the political and economic exploitation of the Tsarist regime. Tajikistan also witnessed major economic development undertaken by the Soviet Government. A wide range economic measure was introduced to facilitate the transition to collectivized agricultural. The state distributed religious lands and lands belonging to the Emir to landless peasants, supplied peasant with credit assistance and initiated a massive collectivization of agricultural land.²⁶ Graduated progressive agricultural tax victimized rich basis (landlords). Mass collectivization in Tajikistan began in the early 1930's and was completed by 1934. The state also built industrial enterprises to boost the country's economy. Heavy industry was limited to coal, lead and zinc. By 1940, the country's economy was

transformed from a primitive subsistence economy to a mechanized and industrial economy.²⁷

Modernization was also introduced to the most backward regions of the Republic by the Soviet Union. In 1940, roads and rail roads were established that linked Khorog, the capital of Gorno-Badakshan, with other cities in the republic. However, intensive efforts were made to develop transport links between different regions within Tajikistan and with the neighboring Soviet Republics.

Since 1960s, Tajikistan entered a new phase in its industrial development. The emphasis shifted to more complex industrial structure. As a result, non ferrous metallurgy industries became one of the most developed industries; oil and gas output increased remarkably and so also the output engineering enterprises like looms, fittings, pump machinery, cables, spare parts for tractor and transformers, cotton, ore-processing, and rare a non-ferrous metal industries made Tajikistan important in USSR's national economic structure. Thus, from an area without roads industries before the revolution, Tajikistan under the Soviets was transformed into an agro-industrial republic. One third of the population lived in urban areas and about a quarter of population consisted of workers and employees. Until the 1970's economic growth provided virtually full employment. Growing prosperity and greater social security characterized much of the Soviet period. In the early 1980's rapid construction of hydroelectric plants and other industries were accomplished with labour recruited from other republic. However, despite all this impressive growth, Tajikistan remained the poorest republic in the former USSR and has been facing continuous economic decline since the onsets of perestroika and subsequent disintegration of the USSR.

The implementation of the nationality policy, in Tajikistan was similar to that in the other Union Republics. To judge by the stormy history of the establishment of soviet power there, and by the ethnic pattern of power distribution in the republic, the party could not succeed in making the Soviet government "near and dear" to the Tajik peasant. The party was successfully however, in establishing a viable government and in transforming and developing the region, considered vital from the view point of long-range objectives.²⁸

Rise of Tajik Nationalism

Since the late 1980's however due to high rate of population growth and economic stagnation, there was a sharp increase in unemployment and poverty among the Tajiks.²⁹ During the era of glasnost, independent and nationalistic socio-economic movement

developed with slogan such as “Tajikistan for the Tajikis,” that was used in street demonstrations. These developments contributed to an exodus of ethnic slavs, Germans and Jews, many of whom had professional skills and whose departure affected the Tajik industrial, Educational and health sectors.³⁰

The situation of Tajikistan at that time was mostly affected by corruption, nepotism and criminal activities. President Brezhnev’s 1978 contribution had given less formal autonomy and even fewer decision making powers were given to the republics than before. As a result, bureaucrats ruled in an often thoroughly mechanical manner and some were even drawn into criminal networks. They controlled large scale illegal economic activities. Before the coming of Gorbachev and his Perestroika, the whole society was affected by corruption, nepotism and mafia network. Gorbachev introduced ‘perestroika’ and ‘glasnost’ which helped people to protest against such a system. Independent socio-political movements developed, fuelled by and in turn stimulating the emerging policy of change under Gorbachev. Though Gorbachev was able to check the corruption through his glasnost and perestroika, the economic decline in Tajikistan aggravated after his accession to power. During the first year of his secretaryship, capital investment fell in absolute terms for all Central Asian States.³¹ Living standards were undermined during the tenure of Kahar Makhamov as first secretary of the Community Party of Tajikistan (CPT) from 1985. Mahkamov’s attempted marketisation of the Tajik economy aggravated the poor living conditions and unemployment.³² On the eve of the Soviet collapse, Tajikistan was suffering from a declining economy and dim prospects for recovery. The Soviet government abandoned the policies of mass mobilization and popular participatory development programmes and stressed the role of technocrats and professionals in the management of the country’s economy.³³ They substituted the popular rhetoric of ‘people first’ with ‘economic proficiency’. This new development led to a gradual decline in the living standards of the people and marginalised their role in the decision-making process. The Soviet figures indicated that 60 percent of the population lived below the poverty threshold.³⁴ In 1989, unemployment hit 25.7 percent of the working population, whereas, with a rate of 3.28 percent, Tajikistan recorded the highest population growth of the entire former Soviet Union.³⁵ The Soviet leadership denied the existence of unemployment, but calculations suggest that in 1990, 22.8% of the labour force in Tajikistan were out of work.³⁶

The Tajik intelligentsia launched cultural revival movement or even movement for greater national autonomy. Most of these movements had nationalist wings who more or less openly advocated complete independence. The Tajik intelligentsia pursued a nationalist doctrine which brought modern ideas and historical glories together. It fed on mythical and actual memories of Iranian Sogdian, Bactrian and Samanid civilizations. And just like its counterparts in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, the Tajik intelligentsia viewed its language as its soul and symbol of national unity.³⁷ Gorbachev's 'glasnost' offered disgruntled Tajiks a chance to voice their grievances. The intelligentsia took up this opportunity with determination. They charged the expanding republican bureaucracy with incompetence and lack of vision. Tajikistan's economic, social, cultural and ideological crises, however, were deemed secondary to the spiritual poverty of the nation. In this perspective, restoring the Tajik national dignity was pivotal to addressing the material ills of society.

The tide of nationalism was rising in every corner of the Union and Tajiks were no exception. The leadership in Tajikistan, however showed little understanding of the nature of events. This failure to grasp the significance of nationalism and its symbols sets the Tajik elite in stark contrast to other national elites in Central Asia. The use of nationalist demands by the opposition appears to have turned the republican leadership against it. Instead of outdoing its opposition in nationalist proclamations, the elite fell back on its Soviet phraeseology and reiterated its commitment to 'internationalism' in the framework of the Soviet Union. This was done even after the collapse of the union. The leadership's lack of political perception and its staunch defence of the status quo contributed to the deterioration of the crisis.³⁸

The opposition groups blamed much of the republic's economic woes on Moscow's policies which they depicted as essentially colonial, although they rarely use that word. According to them, Moscow exploits Tajikistan as a producer of raw materials, especially, but not exclusively, cotton, as well as hydroelectric power, and weight the system so that other republics derive most of the benefits from what Tajikistan produces. They demanded that the republic must have full control over setting economic policy within its borders.³⁹

The Tajik nationalism also affects the discussion of other issues, most notably economic and environmental concerns. Even opposition to the contribution (begun in 1976) of what was planned to be Central Asia's largest hydro-electric dam in Tajikistan's Roghun area was given a nationalist dimension. The opponents' argument included assertions that the

reservoir created by this dam will provide irrigation water for other republics, while not only flooding good land in Tajikistan itself but also driving Tajik from their village homes in the lands to be flooded, thus destroying the Tajik cultural traditions that village life had preserved. The analogy between the dam project and the Chernobyl I disaster as examples of the environmental damage resulting from flawed technology is another illustration of the way nationalists perceived their particular concerns with an eye to developments elsewhere in the Soviet Union.

Economic prosperity and decent living standards hinged on the revival of national sovereignty, though this was not yet interpreted in political terms. And key element of this national self reliance and spiritual independence was the Tajik language.⁴⁰ Hence improving the status of the Tajik language acquired top priority on the opposition agenda.

The Islamic Revival in Tajikistan

Together with the nationalist revival went a religious revival. Here the central figure was the head of the official Soviet Islam in Tajikistan, supreme Qazi Akbar Turajonozoda. Spread of Islamic education and measures, such as declaring Islamic festivals public holidays were taken.⁴¹ Gorbachev's 'perestroika' and 'glasnost' allowed Muslims to demand greater religious freedom and worship their Allah openly. Closed mosques were reopened and new ones were built. This was a general pattern throughout the Soviet empire, where people flocked to their religious meeting places to reassert their identity.⁴² Agreements with several Islamic international groups to build new 'Mosques' and 'Madras's' were signed. Other unofficial mosques were built for the first time.⁴³ These activities brought foreign Muslims into Tajikistan including Iranians, Pakistanis and Arabs who were involved with religious and cultural revivalism. Speeches by Ayotollah Khomeini, works of Maududi-the founder of Jamat-I-Islami of Pakistan, Jamal-ud-Din Afghan, the renowned Muslim theologian and other Muslim revolutionaries were circulated widely in Tajikistan.⁴⁴

The Islamic movement which started in unofficial mosques in the 1960 and 1970s was transformed into a political movement when Gorbachev lifted restrictions on religious institutions in the late 1980s.⁴⁵ New Soviet policies led to dismissal of President Rahman Nabiyev from the party and the state bureaucracy. His successor Kakhar Makhkamov was considered to be more loyal to Moscow, hence his unpopularity in Tajikistan. The policies of 'Glasnost' initiated by Gorbachev provided golden opportunity for the freedom of expression by the opposition members and clerics in Tajikistan.⁴⁶ As a result the clerics like Abdullah

Huri Saddov, from the provincial capital of Quighonteppe, vehemently assaulted clerics who had been on state pay rolls and called for reduction of taxes on Muslims and condemned the Soviet administration of Tajikistan. He even demanded for the creation of an Islamic state. When state security forces arrested him in August 1986, his supporters staged a protest demonstration at the office of the internal ministry demanding his release. These religious leaders were not only preaching religion, but had also called open Jihad (holy-war) against the Soviet System. It was also reported that sophisticated electronic gadgets like radio, tape recorders, audio and video cassettes were used to spread radical Islam in Tajikistan.⁴⁷

Thus, both the nationalist revival and religious revival created conditions for the political instability in Tajikistan. Two years before the beginning of the civil war (1992-1997), riots broke out in Dushanbe in February 1990 on the basis of reports that many thousands of Armenia refugees from Caucasus had arrived in the town and were being given priority housing for political support.⁴⁸ Before that, first party secretary Kakhkar Makhkamov had described housing as the republic's most acute problem and the state was unable to provide house to the city dwellers due to difficult socio-economic conditions.⁴⁹

The Civil War in Tajikistan

Soon after the establishment of a new independent Republic of Tajikistan, the Tajik people underwent the trauma of a fratricidal civil war which resulted in the death of 50,000 to 100,000 people and a material loss estimated at \$7 billion.¹⁵ The conflict in Tajikistan is viewed differently by different analysts and observers. On the one hand, it is termed as a conflict between remnants of the communist old guard and its supporters, and a broad coalition of Islamic fundamentalists, liberal intellectuals, fledgling businessmen and representatives of Kurgan-Tyube Kullas factions from southern Tajikistan which during the Soviet period generally remained unrepresented in the power structures. The republics of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, however, perceived it to be a conflict between modern secular forces and Islamic fundamentalists, supported by certain Afghan Mujahidin groups operating in northern Afghanistan.⁵¹

The civil war in Tajikistan pitted four major loosely-grouped factions formed primarily among Tajiks around ideological, regional and ethnic or clan based ties against each other and against non-Tajik ethnic groups. One faction was the Leninabad (or Khujand) clan in the northern part of the country, which controlled power throughout the post-World War II period, and was identified with hardline communism. The second faction, consisting

of the kulyab clan in the central region of the country, had acted as a conservative source of opposition to the communist leadership in Khojand, was an ally against the Islamic and democratic opposition. The third faction, the Kurgan-Tyube clan, was associated with the major opposition parties. The fourth faction, the Garm clan in the southern region, Gorno-Badakhshan, was one of the strong holds of the Islamic renaissance party and other opposition groups.

Although it was ostensibly between pro-Communist forces and Islamic fundamentalists, in fact the long suppressed clan, regional and ethnic rivalries in the republic had quickly come to the surface after Communism's demise. As Tajikistan faced the worst and longest-running political crisis of all the Central Asian republics, there were fears in early 1993 that the Tajik model of civil war, economic breakdown and ethnic conflict could spread to other republics.

Indeed, this civil war was caused by a skillful exploitation of the inter regional/inter-clan rivalries by forces of Islamic fundamentalism supported by the external forces of Mujahidin in Afghanistan and their patrons.⁵²

Rapid politicization of Islam and emergence of a militant Islamic fundamentalist movement in Tajikistan was directly linked to the developments in Afghanistan. The Tajik civil war was in a way a spill-over effect of the victory of the Mujahidden armed groups in Afghanistan. The jobless Afghan 'jehadis found 'employment' in both Tajikistan and the Indian State of Jammu and Kashmir, They were directed towards this course by their Pakistani mentors who looked to Central Asia as a potential region for acquiring strategic depth against India. Thus, in the sphere of external threats to their security, both Tajikistan and India have a common source in southwest Asia. The newly independent secular republic of Tajikistan faced on its southern frontiers an altogether different challenge to its statehood and political process which very few of the former Soviet Republics had to confront.⁵³

In a way, the cause of the civil war, in fact, lay deep in the history of Tajikistan, going back to the period on the eve of the October Revolution. The Turkestan province in the Tsarist colonial empire had gone through a wave of pan-Turkic chauvinism which continued unabated in Bukhara and Khiva until the time of their transformation into Soviet Republics. A section of the intelligentsia rendered to its people what present Tajik president Rakhmonov has called "Bear's service" (Medvezhiu Uslugh). Some of the early Tajik leaders like Faizulla Khojaev fell prey to the harmful ideas of pan-Turkism. Their role at the time of 1924

territorial delimitation in Central Asia has been very well brought out in the recent work of a Tajik historian R. Masov.⁵⁴

The territorial delimitation of 1924, which left centers of Tajiki culture like Bukhara and Samarkand in Uzbekistan and included the Khojent region with a sizable Uzbek population in Tajikistan, severely affected the process of future consolidation of the Tajik nation. The new national state of the Tajik people was pushed to the mountainous periphery which complicated the problem of consolidating the regions in to a well-knit national state structure on account of difficulties in transport and communication. In such a situation, the upsurge of regional feelings in the aftermath of the disintegration of the Soviet Union was exploited by the Islamists with the active support of external forces.⁵⁵

Immomali Rakhmonov, elected president in November 1994, showed little inclination to compromise and negotiate peace. The United Nations urged all parties involved in the conflict to solve the problem through negotiations. Responding the UN call positively, Russia, Uzbekistan and Iran indicated their willingness to assist any peace process initiated under the UN auspices. The US also showed its interest in resolving the crisis through mediation. The government tried to engage in peace talks with the opposition under the auspices of United Nations. By 1994, it was clear that there was no military 'solution' to the conflict. All the factions began to realize that continued fighting posed a profound threat to the existence of the Tajik state and the people's survival as a nation. The first round of inter-Tajik talks under the UN auspices was held in Moscow on 19 April 1994. It was the first time that Tajik Government and opposition met to discuss the political settlement of the crisis. The two sides agreed to seek national reconciliation through political means and agreed to the return of refugees. The two sides signed a protocol which particularly referred to the adherence of the government of Tajikistan and opposition to political dialogue "as the only way to achieve national reconciliation".

Tajikistan, with all its experiences of civil war, is the first Central Asian republic which realized the importance of building a broader national identity. The peace agreement led to a power sharing Government in which the opposition was incorporated, and this in itself was rather positive development not only as a resolution of the hostilities that existed, but it means that for the first time in Central Asia there was an Islamist opposition that was both recognized as legitimate and also allowed political role in the Government.⁵⁶

Position of Russian Community During the civil war

The Tajik Civil War resulted in the death of 50,000 to 100,000 people, displacement of approximately 850,000 with nearly 150,000 taking refuge in neighbouring countries. Between 20,000 and 60,000 people were killed in the first year of fighting when the wars was at its peak with most commentators judging that about 50,000 lives were lost between May and December 1992. According to the UN High Commissioner for refugees (UNHCR) 600,000 people, about one-length of the population were internally displaced and at least 80,000 sought refuge outside the country, mostly in Afghanistan.⁵⁷ The brutality of fighting in rural areas in the south shocked Tajikistanis and foreign observers. Many unarmed civilians were murdered, apparently in an effort to force them to flee their homes. In the conduct of the civil war, each of the major factions has perpetrated serious violations of human rights, including political and extra-judicial killing, rape, disappearance, arbitrary arrest and detention, the use of excessive force, and other human rights abuses.

Though the civil war resulted massive death and violence in Tajikistan, the Russian population was not harmed in the war. Before the civil war, the Russians constituted the most powerful minority in Tajikistan, and in terms of positions of influence occupied by its members, a more powerful than the other minority groups in the region. Russians relations with the Tajikis had become increasingly uneasy since 1989 with the adoption of Tajik the primary state language. Russian's worries increased because of the inability of most Russian inhabitants to speak Tajik. Although it is not certain that Russians were singled out for attack, some certainly were hurt during the riots and have been assaulted or threatened in subsequent individual incidents. Rumors had magnified the dangers still further. As a result, many Russians perceived themselves at least as living in a hostile environment created by Tajik nationalists and probably at physical risk.⁵⁸

Russia was directly involved in Tajikistan's civil war and its support to Rakhmonov resulted in opposition forces mounting a massive insurgency operation against the government. Russia was also sensitive towards the Islamic influence in the region that might spread to the Russian federation. The protection of Russian minorities in Tajikistan has been one of the excuses that Russia used as the legal basis for the presence of its troops on the Tajik-Afghan border.

It can be said that Russia has been historically tied with Tajikistan and is one of the most important neighbour and guarantor of peace in the region. Tajikistan depends fully on

Russia to preserve the unity and integrity of its territory. Russia has not intervened coercively in the Tajik conflict, but has acted in support of a government with which it has treaty obligations. Russia sought to apply a supportive strategy of engagement designed to defend the border zone, support the Tajik government and persuade the opposition to resolve the conflict peacefully. The relations between Russia and Tajikistan at present are geared to a very intensive search for the best forms, ways and means of co-operation.

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