



Stabilisation Unit

**Elite Bargains and Political Deals Project:
Tajikistan Case Study**

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Author details

The authors are Associate Professor and Visiting Research Fellow respectively at the University of Exeter. The paper draws on the prior research of both authors, including hundreds of key informant interviews with representatives of all sides, dozens of focus groups in rural and urban areas, several large-scale regional surveys, months of historical research on documents and memoirs from the time, and further months of direct observations of war-time life, Track II diplomacy, peacekeeping and peacebuilding projects. Rather than attempting to rework all the data within this case study, the authors compare their findings to those of other scholars to provide a wide perspective on the dynamics of the Tajik civil war and its aftermath.

Background to Elite Bargains and Political Deals Project

This case study is one of a series commissioned to support the Stabilisation Unit's (SU) development of an evidence base relating to elite bargains and political deals. The project explores how national and international interventions have and have not been effective in fostering and sustaining political deals and elite bargains; and whether or not these political deals and elite bargains have helped reduce violence, increased local, regional and national stability, and contributed to the strengthening of the relevant political settlement. Drawing on the case studies, the SU has developed a series of summary papers that bring together the project's key findings and will underpin the revision of the existing 'UK Approach to Stabilisation' (2014) paper. The project also contributes to the SU's growing engagement and expertise in this area and provides a comprehensive analytical resource for those inside and outside government.



Executive Summary

Armed violence in Tajikistan's civil war (1992-1997) reflected an ethno-regional struggle in which elites fought over the spoils of the new post-Soviet republic. Fighting was concentrated in 1992, but continued from 1993-1997; the rebels had important transnational ties to bases in Afghanistan. Intermittent violence followed the peace accords and has returned with a small number of minor outbreaks of political violence in recent years.

Conflict and the build-up to an elite bargain

Mobilisation into fighting factions drew on horizontal inequality between regional and sub-regional groups, apparently fuelled by the grievances of the Tajik people (regarding water, food, identity and other basic needs) which were in crisis as a result of the end of the Soviet Union. However, elite positions and interests soon became predominant driving forces behind the conflict.

By 1996, the partial military victory of the regime, the pledged allegiance of many militia to the state, the stalemate in fighting, and the commitment of all foreign powers to force a peace agreement were crucial antecedents to an elite bargain. The regime of President Rahmon, which was committed to winning the war and building a state for both personal and national interests, proved effective throughout the 1990s at incorporating militias of all the fighting factions and liquidating their captains. It was, in effect, a bottom-up process in which 'warlords became the state' as they accepted the emerging regime's bargain.¹

An end to violence; but an illiberal peace

The elite bargain led to the 1997 peace agreement, which addressed the resource capture motivations and political status claims of surviving elites without fully addressing pre-war grievances or ending inter-regional disparities. The 30% quota of posts promised to the United Tajik Opposition (UTO) was never delivered, disarmament and amnesty of fighters was limited, and reconciliation was absent. The peace agreement lacked the substantive commitment from Western actors which may have provided the political pressure to actually address grievances.

Despite these limitations, the elite bargain has proved remarkably effective in ending widespread violence since the late-1990s, even despite intermittent outbreaks of political violence between 2008 and 2015. The authoritarian regime, dominated by the Rahmon family and its inner circle, is stable and its responses to these outbreaks have been effective.

The Tajik political settlement provides a model of an illiberal peace where the political elite have been reconstituted in a new regime without political reform but with authoritarian consolidation. The new elite have concentrated power locally and enriched themselves via this control and their ability to secretly divert riches to offshore accounts. This illiberal peace might not have survived were it not for the absence of enduring and popular political grievances.

External involvement before and after

External powers did not direct the process towards an elite bargain but, after 1996, pushed the new warlord state into an agreement with the UTO. External actors also overlooked the abuses of power by elites and influenced them informally and indirectly through Track 1 (UN) and Track 2 (Dartmouth Conference) negotiation processes.

Since 1997, Russian support, Western acquiescence and (more recently) Chinese economic might have together provided a persistently conducive international environment for this illiberal peace

¹ Driscoll 2015.



which has meant that the resource capture and human rights abuses of the regime continue unabated while Russia's open borders to Tajik labour has provided an exit strategy for men of fighting age.

A softer or semi-authoritarian outcome might have been possible if external backers had more interest in, devoted more resources to, and placed more pressure on the Government of Tajikistan to effectively implement power-sharing and a competitive political system after the peace agreement.

States hosting major financial services industries, particularly the UK, might also have reduced the likelihood of the emergence of a hard, authoritarian system if they had ensured better regulation of the global financial system. Such regulation would include strict adherence to anti-money laundering rules and the disclosure of the accounts and beneficial owners of offshore companies registered in British Overseas Territories and other jurisdictions.

Wider implications

It is unlikely this 'model' of illiberal peace could be easily transposed into other contexts where long-term grievances and ethnic cleavages are more pronounced and an international consensus is lacking. It is, however, similar to other post-Soviet cases where the history of strong and authoritarian local institutions during the Soviet period provides the antecedents for the emergence of a new authoritarian government.



Background

Tajikistan's civil war began less than a year after the new state gained independence on 9 September 1991. The Soviet era had established the republic in the 1920s and, over the course of decades of Soviet nationalities policy, brought a sense of political identity to a people without a modern history of statehood. Yet during the Soviet Union, as the poorest republic of the USSR, Tajikistan was structurally dependent on Moscow. In 1991, the republic received a higher proportion of its revenue from the Union budget (47 percent) and maintained a greater inter-republic trade deficit than any of the other republics (World Bank 1992). With the demise of the Soviet Union, these relationships quickly broke down and what remained of Tajikistan's national resources became the objects of conflict. Within months of independence this conflict led to a 'swift and seemingly inexorable descent into a brutal civil war'² which led to over 50,000 deaths and more than 250,000 refugees. However, these figures are estimates as the scholarly research and international aid data gathered on Tajikistan is limited, reflecting its status as one of the least-known armed conflicts of the post-Cold War era.

Part I: Structural and Proximate Causes

Four explanations can be found in the literature on the causes of war in Tajikistan.³ Some of these explanations have gained particular prominence in the international academic literature whereas others, at certain times, have been popular amongst local scholars and journalists or in official discourse. The first is the core structural cause while the remaining three were proximate to the years immediately preceding the armed conflict.

A battle of regional solidarity groups

Firstly and most importantly, the conflict was a battle of regional solidarity groups. Ethnic identities in Tajikistan are complex phenomena that have been highly politicised since the emergence of the Republic in the 1920s. There was a substantial Uzbek minority in the west and Russians in the capital and regional cities, with the Tajik majority dominating the main agricultural lands of the southern, northern and central valleys. But this basic demography obscures the diversity of ethnicities and regional solidarities which have emerged over the twentieth century. Much of the population in the west of the country, for example, has followed the bi-lingual Tajik-Uzbek tradition of their ancestors (who were at one time known as 'sarts'). For political reasons, many 'Uzbeks' reclassified themselves as 'Tajiks' during and after the civil war. Furthermore, the 'Tajik' areas of the eastern part of the country are populated by Pamiri people professing Shi'a Ismaili Islam and speaking various eastern Iranian dialects related to, but distinct from, what today is considered to be Tajiki language.

Tajikistan's conflict was, therefore, given shape not by ethno-national identity but by the modern politico-administrative dynamics of the republic. Under the Soviet system, the command economy and political structure provided the vehicles for political advancement and, to some extent, enrichment of those elites of the newly-created regions. Inchoate local identities and communities were transformed during the Soviet era into hybrid regional solidarity groups between which state posts were inequitably shared. These recomposed regional groups fought for power – a process known locally as '**regionalism**' (*mestnichestvo*, *mahalgera'y*). Inter-regional rivalry was further

² Rubin 1994: 207.

³ Throughout this paper, claims about causality are made on the basis of tracing processes and identifying them as causal mechanisms on the basis that subsequent events correlate with what one would expect if the given process was causal. Contending (rival) explanations are considered and where there is doubt or disagreement in the research literature this is highlighted.



exacerbated by a series of population movements that had the effect of crystallising the regional identities which would be the vehicles for conflict during the civil war.

Among the most important of these forced migrations were the relocations of Tajiks from the central mountain ranges of Karategin (Gharm) and Darvaz between 1925 and 1940, and from the Pamirs between 1947 and 1960, to the Khatlon region's cotton-producing valleys of Kulob and Qurghonteppa.⁴ Whilst generating animosity towards the authorities, the organisation of these groups into their own collective farms also made integration of migrants and locals more difficult. Most of these migrants, particularly so-called 'Gharmis', consequently avoided integration and held firm to regional identities and loyalties. It was from these groups that the opposition drew much support during the conflict.⁵ Collective farm units (*kolkhoz*) were 'tribalised' as 'new recompositions of solidarity groups resulting from sedentarism or population transfers'.⁶ Thus ethnic or 'clan' identity did not have a primordial value but was given social and political meaning by the migrations. It is in this sense that Roy labels the inter-Tajik conflict, 'the war of the *kolkhoz*' where, for example, Gharmi farmers fought their Kulobi neighbours.⁷

Public goods were distributed inequitably across this regionally based system. Although Dushanbe was the capital of the Tajik SSR, the northern province (Leninobod *oblast*, now Sughd *veloyat*, also known by its major city, Khujand), which had developed under Russian imperial power, provided the majority of the governing elite of the republic, including all the first secretaries of the communist party between 1946 and 1992. Moreover, it was economic and politico-administrative links with the southern cotton-producing region of Kulob which allowed northern elites to maintain their domination of the political life of the republic. The Tajikistan SSR went through numerous governmental reshuffles reflecting the ascendancy of the Leninobod-Kulob alliance over politically weaker regions such as Gharm and the Pamirs. However, Pamiris (especially in the Police [MVD]), Gharmis, and Russians continued to hold key posts and the idea of Leninobodi domination obscured a more complex set of power relations based on patronage networks both within and between regional elites and with power-brokers in Moscow. Despite such cross-cutting cleavages, regional identity emerged during the Soviet period and remained the key vehicle for the mobilisation of armed groups during the conflict. The divisions of the conflict between (to generalise) Hissori Uzbeks, Khujandis, and Kulobis on the one side and (to generalise again) Gharmis and Pamiris on the other provides only a basic starting point in any understanding of the conflict.

The battle of ideas

A second explanation of the conflict – one whose causation is more proximate than structural – is the battle of ideas and ideologies. The perestroika and glasnost reforms initiated by Gorbachev following his election as General Secretary on 11 March 1985 provoked a variety of reactions within Tajikistan, ranging from hopes for greater autonomy to disappointment at the vagueness of early announcements.⁸ By the autumn of 1989 it was clear that substantive reform was in process with a new constitution on the cards that offered the possibility of a greater decentralisation of power to the republics. Around this time, reformist groups with wide-ranging aims began to be established by journalists and intellectuals. These included *Rastokhez* ('Renaissance') formed in September 1989 by nationalists and anti-colonialists amongst the intelligentsia and educated elite. Whilst some were quickly quashed, others managed to attract reformist cadres from the party and bureaucracy.⁹ A

⁴ Usmon 2004.

⁵ Akiner 2001.

⁶ Roy 2000: 88.

⁷ Ibid: 94-96.

⁸ Hammer 1998.

⁹ See Kosachi (1995: 125-130) for an overview of the different ideological positions of the parties.



language law to promote the use of Tajik in governmental affairs was adopted in 1989 and elite criticism of Moscow, national territorial delimitation, and the early Soviet period was not uncommon. Public demonstration became a technique of public education and an indication of a burgeoning and indigenous civil society. As Atkin remarks, demonstrations ‘provided a school in the streets where the opposition could propound its views to people who gathered, sometimes by the thousands’.¹⁰ The media, particularly television, also provided fora of debate between conservatives and reformers, becoming a medium of popular dissemination of reformist discourses and conservative responses.¹¹ However, importantly the period of demonstrations in the autumn of 1991 and spring of 1992 – labelled by Jawad & Tadjbaksh as the ‘Tajik Spring’¹² – is represented quite differently in contemporary elite and popular accounts where this liberal moment is seen as a cause of the violence and disorder which followed.

A fight over resources

A third explanation of the conflict – also proximate to the events around the fall of the USSR – is the civil war as a battle for survival and a fight over resources. This is a political economy approach which explains war in terms of the interplay of greed and rent-seeking of elites and need and survival-seeking of their followers. Poverty was indeed hugely important in the making of the Tajik conflict. In the summer of 1992 there were numerous incidents of violence perpetrated to get food, other basic supplies, or better housing.¹³ For many of the actual perpetrators of violence, their acts may have been economically rather than politically motivated. But there was also a structural, economic and environmental context to this fight for resources with its roots in the ecological crisis brought about by the forced migrations. These population movements brought the proportion of Tajiks living in the mountains from 70 percent in the mid-1920s to 30 percent in the early-1990s, effectively increasing the low-land agricultural population dramatically, even though agricultural land composed just 7 percent of the republic’s territory.¹⁴ Usmon¹⁵ concurs that forced migrations provided huge pressure on resources and brought disagreements and violence over usage of pasture and water. By the time of independence, over half of Tajikistan’s agricultural land was used for cotton farming, putting a tremendous strain on water and food production. This was exacerbated by population growth (an average of 3.5 percent per annum) which exceeded the rise in revenues from cotton.¹⁶ Niyazi argues that the Tajik civil war was, ‘[a] struggle of the regions for survival brought forth by the rapid demographic growth, forced migration, overpopulation of valleys, and catastrophic insufficiency of water, land, energy and food production resources’.¹⁷

An ‘insecurity dilemma’

Finally, the war was proximately an ‘insecurity dilemma’ amongst elites: a ruling faction confronted by opportunistic individuals seeking personal advancement in a weak institutional environment.¹⁸ Akiner argues correctly that over-reliance on a regionalist explanation ‘obscures the fluidity and ambiguities of the situation’ and ‘underestimates the power of individuals to influence events’.¹⁹ Alliances were fluid. Epkenhans’²⁰ recent and ground-breaking study makes the excellent point that it

¹⁰ Atkin 1997: 288.

¹¹ Khodjibaeva 1999.

¹² Jawad & Tadjbaksh 1995.

¹³ Whitlock 2002: 167-168.

¹⁴ Niyazi 1999: 191.

¹⁵ 2004: 246-7.

¹⁶ Niyazi 1999: 188.

¹⁷ Ibid.: 191.

¹⁸ Rubin 1998: 139-42; Akhmedov 1998.

¹⁹ 2001: 21.

²⁰ Epkenhans 2016.



was rivalries and ruptures within regions and factions that drove the war as much as conflict between them. The opposition eventually incorporated a wide range of ideological positions and a coalition of different regions which was later divided between National-democratic and Islamist blocs. The former included the Democratic Party of Tajikistan (DPT), founded in August 1990, led by elites representing a number of local areas disenfranchised or marginalised in government.²¹ Added to these groups were the Pamiri organisations, foremost of which was *La'li Badakhshon* ('Ruby of Badakhshon'), also created in 1990, which strove for greater Badakhshoni autonomy but allied with groups from other regions in March 1992. Many of these groups found considerable support from governmental figures, thus blurring the government/opposition dichotomy. For example, during the war, the head of the Ministry of the Interior (MVD), Navzhuvanov, a Pamiri and *La'li Badakhshon* supporter, brought the main portion of MVD troops to the 'opposition' camp to fight against the government.

In sum, the overall context of the war suggests a 'complex crisis of decolonisation' from the Soviet Union.²² Long-term structural and short-term proximate causes interacted. The socio-economic bases and criminal gang formations also mattered, as did the geopolitical context (see below). In the patriarchal and patrimonial social context of Tajikistan, leadership was clearly important but the notion that the conflict was entirely and instrumentally manipulated by elites is not convincing. The core issue which manifested itself in the immediate context of this crisis was an imbalanced power-sharing system between political forces whose competition had been institutionalised and intensified during the Soviet era. This factor is often defined as a struggle for political power.

However, while the struggle for the spoils of the Soviet system was a typical feature of all post-Soviet republics, armed conflict took place only in a few of them. Markowitz²³ compares Tajikistan to Uzbekistan and shows that poorer and less industrialised Tajikistan had less to lose from the collapse of sustained national cooperation between elites and regions than Uzbekistan. Conversely, what paltry resources were available were 'lootable' at a local level, leading to disintegration and factionalism. The Inter-Tajik struggle for power led to the civil war mainly because the existing political system was internally unsustainable – much more than in the majority of other CIS countries.

During the Soviet Union, the domination of the Khujand (Leninobod) elite was ensured mostly due to the support from the centre (Moscow) which controlled/limited the level of inter-faction struggle. When, by the end of perestroika, the centre's involvement and control had been weakened, it was revealed that the ruling faction had a limited popular social base and was not able to consolidate power. In this situation, the ruling Khujand elite, facing with the increasing pressure from contesting regional factions, looked for allies among the Southern nomenklatura groups. The newly created alliance between Khujandis and Kulobis, which had intended to rebalance the system, in reality led to a further intensification of the political struggle for power and finally brought the country to civil war.

Part II: The antecedents of an elite bargain, 1992-1996

It is important to grasp the specific events and dynamics of the civil war in order to trace the emergence of an elite bargain. The first two sub-sections below identify four specific antecedents to the elite bargain: partial government 'victory' in 1992; the demise of key warlord backers of the new regime in 1993; military stalemate which emerged from 1993-96; and the external consensus and

²¹ *Rastokhez* was founded by Tohir Abdujabbor from Asht in Leninobod (Khujand) province and the DPT by Shodmon Yusuf from Darvaz in Gorno-Badakhshon.

²² Heathershaw 2009.

²³ Markowitz 2013.



concerted pressure for an agreement from 1996-1997. The next sub-section looks at the pact-making dynamics outlined by the best academic explanation for the political settlement in Tajikistan.²⁴ The final sub-section considers the specific dynamics of the consolidation of factions and pact-making – and the role of external actors in promoting these constructive dynamics.

1992-1993: Partial ‘Victory’ and Limited Warlordism

The first antecedent to the elite bargain which brought the war to an end was the military ‘victory’ of the pro-government forces in reclaiming the capital and driving most of the opposition out of the country.

In order to tell this story, we must first trace the course of events in 1992, the first and most decisive year of the war. From January to May 1992 there was a period of mobilisation, militarisation and criminalisation of the pro-government and pro-opposition factions that had been in conflict over the bitterly disputed presidential elections of late-1991. Opposition demonstrations, taking place in Shahidon square in Dushanbe, continued consistently for 50 days in a row and coincided with the rise of the *mujahedin* and the fall of the old Soviet-backed government of Najibullah in Afghanistan. Militant and criminal figures had begun to form militia. The Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (IRPT), for example, formed a militia, *Najot-i Vatan* (Salvation of the Motherland), in late-1991. The increasingly anxious government made numerous pleas for calm whilst organising pro-government demonstrations at Ozodi square less than two kilometres from Shahidan.

The moment of *ignition* occurred in early May 1992. The Ozodi demonstrators were largely Kulobi and led by Sangak Safarov, a convicted murderer,²⁵ who would subsequently form the pro-government *Sitodi Milli* (Popular Front of Tajikistan [PFT]) – a coalition of militias based on Kulobi and Uzbek Hissori factions that, at its height, numbered around 20,000 fighters.²⁶ With many thousands on both pro- and anti-government sides, matters escalated quickly and dramatically. Thirteen criminal gangs, connected with anti-government elites and operating under the collective name of Youth of Dushanbe City (YDC) who had been demonstrating on a third square (Aini), declared war on the government.²⁷ President Nabiev and his advisors consequently took the fateful decision on May 1 to escalate matters by distributing 2,000 Kalashnikovs in Ozodi square to Safarov’s men to form a “Presidential Guard”.²⁸ With widespread fighting in the streets, Russian troops, formerly part of the Soviet armed forces, acted to protect Nabiev and broker a compromise between the two sides. On May 11, a Government of National Reconciliation (GNR) was announced. Nabiev would remain as President and retain his key ministerial supporters while a third of posts would go to the opposition. From September 1992, with Rahmon’s resignation, the opposition – particularly the Pamiris – nominally held the capital.

State breakdown

The Dushanbe violence began a process of complete state breakdown in the summer of 1992 as the regime rapidly lost its remaining authority. It was in the period from May to November that much of the killing occurred. Very soon the GNR proved unworkable as the regions of Khujand and Kulob declared they would not take orders from the new government. By July 1992, none of the security forces remained loyal to the coalition government and fighting spread across the south of the

²⁴ Driscoll 2015.

²⁵ Safarov was convicted of offences including vehicular homicide and attempted murder and spent 23-years in jail (Atkin 2001: 102).

²⁶ Nourzhanov 2005: 119.

²⁷ Akiner 1998: 37.

²⁸ Mullojonov 2001: 241.



country between field commanders and their militias. Such groups pledged their loyalty to a particular region but ceasefires negotiated between regional leaders were often immediately broken by local commanders. Violence was most intense in those cities and districts subject to inter-regional forced migration and resettlement, especially around the town of Qurghanteppa where different solidarity groups had long been divided by kolkhoz. The PFT then began to challenge Pamiri control of Dushanbe, briefly taking the capital on the 24-25 October.²⁹

Whilst Dushanbe remained under the auspices of the GNR, the PFT brought much of the south and west under their control and sought formal acknowledgement of this shift in the balance of power. The 16th session of the Supreme Soviet of Tajikistan opened at the Arbob Kolkhoz near Khujond on 16 November 1992 but was boycotted by many opposition delegates fearful of security. Twenty-four of the principal field commanders were present, as were representatives of the governments of Russia and Uzbekistan.³⁰

At the meeting, the GNR was formally removed and Emomali Rahmon, a Kulobi from the district of Danghara and former head of a collective farm, was elected Chairman of the parliament and acting head of government. Rahmon was the candidate of Safarov and the PFT.³¹ This move reflected not just the political defeat of the 'opposition' but a shift in power within the pro-'government' coalition from Khujond to Kulob. It was, as Rubin describes, a shift from 'those who held the factories and party personnel committees' to 'those who held the guns'.³² Despite this, Rahmon soon received international recognition, including from the United States, probably due to fears of Islamic government.³³

Government recapture

The final period of sustained high-intensity conflict (November-December 1992) was one of government recapture as the new faction, only formally led by Rahmon, established a grip on power. A PFT force of some 8,000, with Uzbek land and air support, stormed Dushanbe, driving opposition forces from the city and launching a brutal 'ethnic cleansing' campaign against Pamiris and Gharmis.³⁴ The military campaign, its violence and abuses, continued along the Vakhsh valley to the south and drove the bulk of the opposition fighters and sympathisers across the border into Afghanistan or eastwards to Gorno-Badakhshon. The humanitarian situation was exacerbated as over 55,000 houses were burned and tens of thousands of non-combatants (mainly women and children) were forced to flee.³⁵

Meanwhile, Chairman Rahmon focused on re-establishing political institutions in Dushanbe; appointing a cabinet composed of Kulobis, Hissoris and Khujandis; banning opposition parties and much of the media; invalidating laws made by the Government of National Reconciliation; and replacing the Muslim Qaziyat (religious authority), whose leader had supported the opposition, with a new national Muftiat. Through its sponsorship by PFT warlords, the Rahmon government claimed 'victory' and authority but was too weak to comprehensively defeat the opposition.³⁶ Moreover,

²⁹ Nazriev & Sattorov 2005: 431.

³⁰ Nourzhanov 2005: 118.

³¹ Rahmon is from the same mahalla in Danghara as Safarov. He rose from being director of a Sovkhoz to Chairman of the Kulob Soviet and governor of the province in October 1992 after the previous incumbent in the post was killed by Safarov on 28th October (Atkin 2001: 102; Nourzhanov 2005: 117).

³² Rubin 1998: 129.

³³ Katzman 2002: 59.

³⁴ Jawad and Tadjbaksh 1995: 16; Horsman 1999: 38-39.

³⁵ Usmon 2004: 245.

³⁶ Nourzhanov 2005: 119.



despite the deaths of leading commanders Safarov and Faizali Saidov (who died fighting each other in March 1993), Rahmon was not able to bring PFT warlords – who had supported his candidature – directly under his control. Outside of the capital, intermittent violence continued.

Table 1: Actors in the Tajik Civil War

Opposition Alliance Bloc (UTO)	Pro-Government Conservative Bloc
Nomenclature Groups of the Regions (power clans)	
1. Gharm (Karategin) Faction 2. GBAO – Gorno- Badakhshan Faction Includes Qurghanteppa region – parts dominated by <i>muhajirs</i> (descendants from Gharm and GBAO)	1. Khujand (Leninobod) Clan – Northern Factions 2. Kulob (South) Faction 3. Hisor (central districts) Uzbek Faction Includes Qurghanteppa region – parts dominated by ethnic Uzbeks and Kulobis
Political Parties and Public Movements	
1. ‘Democrats’ - Democratic Party of Tajikistan - ‘Rastokhez’ Public Movement - ‘La’li Badakhshon’ Public Movement - Smaller organisations of democrats in various regions of the republic 2. ‘Islamists’ - Islamic Renaissance Party - Qaziyat Leadership	1. Popular Front (PFT) - Kulobi Dominated Kulob Guard: Paramilitary groups of Kulobi origin in Qurghanteppa region - Khujand oriented: Hisor paramilitaries; Uzbek paramilitaries; Arab minority paramilitary groups 2. Communist Party of Tajikistan (CPT) 3. Traditional Groups of clergy related to Soviet Communist Structures
Criminal Groups	
New generation of criminals (‘racketeer groups’ emerged during Perestroika interested in redistribution of assets in criminal sphere)	‘Old’ criminal groups – part of all-Union criminal system closely related to Communist nomenklatura, power structures
Social and Economic Bases	
‘Shadow economy’ groups including: - Bazar’ traders, entrepreneurs, farmers interested in getting access to economic resources, liberalisation of economy, redistribution of economic assets - ‘Muhajirs’ - victims of forcible resettlements of 1950’s mainly from Gharm, partly GBAO	Formal economic actors of Soviet system: - Business groups, major companies closely related to Soviet governing structures interested in maintaining control over existing Soviet type power/economic resources distribution system - Uzbek businessmen, farmers competing with Gharmis (muhajirs) over resources
External actors and support	
Limited support after high-intensity period of armed conflict: - Iran (mainly political support) - Afghanistan (Rabbani- Ahmad-Shah Masud led Government – since 1993)	Direct military and political intervention from: - Uzbekistan (major actor till November 1992) - Russian Federation – officially since November 1992

The second antecedent, therefore, was the contingency of Safarov and Saidov, the two major warlords on the government side, killing one another, effectively increasing Rahmon’s autonomy to act and his authority over the other faction leaders. Without their deaths, Rahmon may have remained their placeman for some time and been unable to do the deals with other factions which



eventually produced a political settlement. Rahmon and his core allies proved to be an effective arbiter of factions. However, he would have had little incentive to do deals without the military stalemate caused by the pressure from external actors (the third antecedent) and the return of the military opposition to the country's mountainous Gharm region (the fourth antecedent). Both of these factors emerged and intertwined during the period from 1993-1996.

1992-1996: The External Factor and the Military Stalemate

The 'external factor' in the immediate period of mobilisation of armed factions (1991-92) was the relative inaction of Russia, distracted by other concerns. However, by late-1992, the Russian Government and the leadership of neighbouring Uzbekistan became increasingly concerned about the development of the political situation in Tajikistan. This concern finally led them to actively interfere in the Intra-Tajik conflict using a so-called 'hybrid war' approach over the period from late-1992 onwards – a combination of political, military, security and propaganda means aimed to influence the situation in the country. From 1993-1996, both Russia and Uzbekistan worked to ensure the victory of the pro-government conservative bloc and the fighting factions of its PFT. Both Russia and Uzbekistan consistently impeded the Inter-Tajik negotiation process and prevented efforts undertaken by various internal stakeholders. However, the great fear for these governments was that Afghanistan's instability and Islamic militancy could spill over into the CIS region.

The following section outlines the two countries' positions and actions during this first phase. Initially, Russia experienced difficulties in defining its position and attitude towards the Tajik crisis – mostly because of an uncertain situation within the Russian government itself. However, Russia soon shifted to openly supporting the pro-government forces in Tajikistan through its intelligence officers and collaboration with the former-Soviet armed forces based in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. This had a decisive impact on the course of events and led to the military defeat of the opposition in November-December 1992 as the PFT took the capital and installed Emomoli Rahmon as leader following his formal appointment by the 16th Congress of the Communist Party in November 1992. In 1993, Russia led the establishment of a CIS peacekeeping mission, which included Uzbekistan. President Yeltsin declared in 1993 that Tajikistan's southern border was, 'in effect, Russia's,' as he began a policy of consistent support for the Rahmon government both politically and financially.³⁷ Moreover, Russian intervention went beyond support and assistance to the appointment of Russian military officers as ministers in the Tajik government, including Aleksandr Shishliannikov (an ethnic Russian based with former Red Army forces in Tashkent) who was Minister of Defence from 1992 to 1995.³⁸ At this time analysts and some members of the Russian government characterised Tajikistan as a 'protectorate'.³⁹ or 'Garrison state'.⁴⁰

In comparison to Russia, neighbouring Uzbekistan was more persistent and decisive in its position and attitude towards the Tajik crisis. Since the beginning, Uzbekistan supported the pro-government PFT, and it was only due to its assistance that the pro-government resistance movement survived during the summer of 1992. Air and land forces were deployed in support of the PFT and land mines were used widely in the Gharm regions. From 1993, Uzbekistan supported key allies in the new government particularly those who eventually emerged as a 'third force' under Khujandi Abdumalik Abdullojonov, partially allied to the ethnic Uzbek warlord Mahmud Khudoiberdiev.

³⁷ Rubin 1998: 155-6.

³⁸ Atkin 1997: 303.

³⁹ Whitlock 2002: 191.

⁴⁰ Rubin 1994.



A more limited role was played by Afghanistan and its northern regions in harbouring Tajik refugees who fled across the borders over the winter of 1992-93 and supporting the United Tajik Opposition (UTO) opposition factions that relocated in northern Afghanistan. Opposition leaders fled into exile in Cairo, Tehran and some other cities in the Muslim world. Secular oppositionists found exile in Moscow, despite Moscow's support for the old regime.

During 1993, the opposition, having been driven out of the country at the end of 1992, launched a fight-back against the government. It also began to organise itself politically into a coherent force for the purpose of negotiations. In Afghanistan, the Islamic opposition regrouped and belatedly consolidated itself politically, forming the UTO with Said Abdullo Nuri of the IRPT as Chair and Akbar Turajonzoda, the former Qazi (the national cleric) as First Deputy and Minister for Foreign Affairs. It proceeded to function as a government in exile and, by December 1993, had established an official alliance with the national-democratic opposition which was located in Moscow as Russian officials kept up relations with all sides. Islamic opposition forces also regrouped militarily in Afghanistan, receiving training and support from Mas'ud, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and some overseas supporters.

For over a year before negotiations began, the political conflict was frozen, with large parts of the country outside of government control. From early-1993, the UTO launched interventions from Afghanistan, fighting battles with Uzbek-supported government troops in Gorno-Badakhshon and taking temporary control of parts of the Rasht valley.⁴¹ In July 1993, UTO fighters attacked Russian troops guarding the Tajikistani border, killing twenty-five and thus signalling that the war would continue.⁴² In addition, ostensibly pro-government warlords from the Uzbek-majority region of Hissor and the northern province of Khujond both showed separatist tendencies as the future of not just the Rahmon government but the Tajik state remained in doubt.

In 1993, the International Community had become involved on the ground in Tajikistan through the presence of the UN Secretary General's special envoy to Tajikistan. Shortly after, in June 1993, an OSCE centre was set up.⁴³ The beginning of negotiations and the signing of a notional ceasefire had allowed the UN to introduce official observers with a view to supporting the holding of 'free and fair elections'. Following a ceasefire signed in Iran on 17 September 1994, the UN Mission of Observers in Tajikistan (UNMOT) was authorised by UN Security Council Resolution 968 of 16 December 1994 with renewable 6-month tours of duty.⁴⁴ Before this, from March 1993, a second-track process of facilitated negotiation, the Inter-Tajik Dialogue, began in Moscow between junior figures and associates of both sides and independent representatives of the intelligentsia under the auspices of the non-governmental Dartmouth Conference.⁴⁵ The dialogue has been widely viewed as instrumental in creating some organisational coherence among the opposition and providing the beginnings of 'consensus' between elites.⁴⁶

⁴¹ The Rasht valley, including the town of Karategin (now Gharm), became a case in itself of the complexity of the Tajik conflict. As 'Gharmi' commanders relocated their troops to the valley, they were often greeted with suspicion by local inhabitants. Local Gharmis – seen as harbouring the opposition forces – became subject to incursions and abuses by government forces including the bombing and shelling of the valley, the laying of landmines, the destruction of homes, and the mass rape of women. They organized self-defence forces which gathered in the mountains to resist these incursions. As discussed below, it was not until the early 2000s that the government began to properly retake control of the region.

⁴² Jawad and Tadjbaksh 1995: 16-17.

⁴³ Gorayev 2001.

⁴⁴ UNMOT's mandate was renewed successively until the winding up of the mission in April 2000 and its replacement by UNTOP.

⁴⁵ Saunders 1999: 9.

⁴⁶ Matveeva 2006; Saunders 1999.



The UN-sponsored negotiations in Tajikistan began precariously. At this time, there may have been greater unity between the Moscow and Afghanistan wings of the opposition – who were in regular communication and, argue Jawad and Tadjbaksh, ‘worked in uniformity’⁴⁷ – than there was within Rahmon’s government which was divided between Khujandi and Kulobi factions. In the first round of March 1994, a junior minister in the Tajik government met the National-Democratic faction of the opposition in Moscow. Both the senior echelons of the Tajik government and the Afghanistan-based Islamic wing of the UTO chose not to take part. Despite a lack of progress in negotiations, Rahmon, emboldened by the support he received from Russia, chose to push on with elections. On 6 November 1994, in a simulation of democratic consent, the Kulobi Rahmon defeated the Khujandi Abdullojonov, receiving 60 percent of the vote in an election which Helsinki Watch described as ‘marred by a climate of fear and flagrant fraud’.⁴⁸ Abdullojonov had been Rahmon’s Prime Minister from December 1992 to December 1993 in the government that came to power following the retaking of Dushanbe. On being forced from power, Abdullojonov, had sought to mobilise opposition to the Kulobis from the Khujand faction of the governing regime, establishing a number of political parties but failing to win a seat at the table for the peace negotiations.

The negotiations were relatively ineffective without concerted international pressure. From 1995, Ahmad Shah Masud and Rabbani, leaders of the Northern Alliance (NA), gradually started to limit the UTO’s supplies. Russia pressed the NA commanders to establish a ‘security zone’ along the Afghan-Tajik border. The rapid rise of Taliban movement and the defeats of the NA commanders brought increased urgency and consensus internationally that a rapid conclusion to the civil war must be achieved. As a result, Russia, Iran and the United States – in cooperation with the UN, OCSE and other international organisations – united their efforts to keep the conflicting sides at the negotiation table over this crucial year. Russia played a key role in convincing the Tajik Government and Iran used its good relations with the UTO leaders to convince them. However, for the Tajik opposition, the most convincing factor was the pressure brought about by Ahmad Shah Masud and Rabbani, leaders of the NA. According to opposition sources he later warned the UTO leadership that all opposition units must cross the border and move to the territory of Tajikistan by the end of 1996. This pressure posed a dilemma for the UTO: to continue military operations without reliable logistics and supplies from the outside (which was actually impossible from a military point of view) or to participate in the reconciliation process, mostly on the Government’s terms. The external factor and the military stalemate now combined to force the conflicting sides to reinforce the elite bargain. The two factors also worked to speed up the negotiation process which led to the conclusion of the peace agreement in 1997.

Explaining the Bargain: A Pact-making Process from the Bottom-Up

Before exploring the formal agreement, it is worth evaluating the process of the elite bargain which foreshadowed the agreement and therefore provided the grounding for the overall political settlement. The emergence of the elite bargain from 1993-1996 lacked the ‘top-down’ dynamic which was characteristic of the final negotiations from 1996-97. Driscoll has argued how pact-making was more than simply a post-civil war development of cooptation directed by a dominant regime and/or powerful external backers. Rather, it was a procedure which began much earlier with the incorporation of militia into the state based on rational calculations of interest at a time (prior to 1996) when the Rahmon regime itself remained weak.⁴⁹ Driscoll argues that whilst the state might have looked weak and dependent on Russia, militias slowly began to perceive that it was better to ally with the regime. Russia only committed to the Rahmon regime after a significant demonstration

⁴⁷ Jawad and Tadjbaksh 1995: 18.

⁴⁸ Helsinki Watch, 1994.

⁴⁹ Driscoll 2009, 2015.



of state strength: the regime's manipulation of the presidential elections of November 1994.⁵⁰ What this indicates is that the process of state-strengthening began during the civil war and was less dependent on Russia than most analysts claim.⁵¹ Moreover, the state that this created was not one that was weakened by militias which were excluded from it, but was, to a certain extent, strengthened by being composed of militias who had forged pacts to collude prior to the peace settlement.⁵²

Driscoll's path-breaking research demonstrates that pro-government militias were no more likely to survive the process of consolidation than opposition ones. Indeed, militia captains of all sides were often disappeared a few years after agreeing to cease independent action or went on to face jail, to enter transnational crime, or to the grave. The chances of each militia member, whether pro-government or pro-opposition, was a 'liquidation lottery' – 'a probabilistic game of installing a president with the full knowledge that some installers will be killed as the ruling regime is trimmed, but others will be in a position to extort the president and get away with it'.⁵³ Those that survived for the longest did so by subordinating themselves, not to an individual but to the new regime in power. 'A local puppet president', Driscoll argues,

served as a placeholder for opaque coalition politics. Many warlords became violence subcontractors for the regime. Some did not. Complicated bargaining followed. Back-room deals were struck. A great deal of property changed hands. Peace emerged as local criminals developed techniques to hold civilians hostage and re-write local history to their advantage. In other words, *the warlords became the state*.⁵⁴

As such, a bottom-up process culminated in the creation of a 'top' – a regime which could dictate terms and manage conflict in a broadly authoritarian manner. As Driscoll concludes, 'up until the moment that they departed the streets of the capital, these militias were explicitly part of the state, and were well-positioned to contest their share of the rents of statehood'.⁵⁵

According to this analysis, the emergent institutional order of the state is the product of a series of rational choices to buy into the new political community of Tajikistan. But these rational choices were composed according to 'expectations' of growing state strength from 1993 onwards.⁵⁶ These expectations of state strength cannot be fully explained by strategic calculation or a rational choice reading of emergent political order. The normative value and symbolic power of the state, despite its empirical breakdown during the war, are themselves functional here. Whilst independent statehood for Tajikistan had barely begun by the time of the civil war, statist thinking has much deeper roots amongst the people of the post-Soviet region whose political culture and identities had been transformed over 70 years of remarkably effective Soviet state-making.

Part III: Key Features of the Elite Bargain, 1996-2000

The package of agreements and protocols constituting the *General Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and National Accord in Tajikistan* was finalised from 1996-1997 and signed on 27 June 1997 in Moscow. A protocol on refugees was to facilitate the return of refugees after five years of exile in

⁵⁰ Driscoll 2009: 30.

⁵¹ Rubin 1998.

⁵² See also Heathershaw 2009: 118-126.

⁵³ Driscoll 2015: 37.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 2.

⁵⁵ Driscoll 2009: 37-8.

⁵⁶ Driscoll 2009: 3.



Afghanistan. The military protocol of the agreement provided for a process of Demobilisation, Disarmament and Reintegration (DDR) of ex-UTO fighters into the armed forces. The political protocol established a basis for power-sharing in national and local government on a 70:30 split between the government and UTO, created a joint Central Election Commission (CEC), and agreed to the lifting of all restrictions on opposition parties following the completion of DDR. The implementation process was to be coordinated by a Commission on National Reconciliation (CNR), composed equally of government and UTO members and chaired by a UTO representative. Below we summarise the negotiating positions and dynamics of 1996-7 before exploring the dynamics of implementation from 1997-2000.

Elite Positions and Negotiations

During the intensified negotiation process of 1996-7, the positions of the two sides were as follows. On the Government side, the Tajik authorities insisted on:

- 1) Preservation of the secular character of the state – the Tajik Government refused to adopt the law which would allow the existence of political parties based on religious values in the country;
- 2) The unconditional disarmament of the UTO forces;
- 3) The amnesty to the UTO fighters/activists would exclude persons engaged in criminal activities during the civil war;
- 4) An initial refusal to share the power with the opposition;
- 5) This eventually gave way to the position that in any power sharing agreement, the quota given to the opposition should have only a temporary character – until the next parliamentary elections.

These negotiating positions indicated the perceived and actual strength of the government vis-à-vis the UTO which, despite consolidation, remained fractured and controlled limited amount of territory.

Accordingly, the ambitions of the UTO were more limited. The Opposition side demanded:

- 1) The introduction of changes in to the Tajik legislation allowing the legal status of the oppositional parties – especially the IRPT – in a secular state;
- 2) The integration of the UTO forces in the power ministries' structures;
- 3) A common and unconditional amnesty to all UTO fighters and activists;
- 4) A power sharing model based on a 50-50 approach;
- 5) No clear position concerning the time framework of the power sharing agreements.

Negotiations

Over the period from 1996 to 1997, negotiations occurred around amendments to the legislation to allow for political parties with a religious identity; the specific conditions for amnesty; the details of the power sharing system and a quota given to the opposition; the number of ministries covered by the opposition quota; and the specific positions given to the opposition representatives. All these issues related to the positions of elites within the new government. Even the question of religious political identities was less that of a grievance based on fundamental disagreements over the character of the state. In reality, the majority in both government and the so-called Islamists of the IPRT agreed on the secular character of the state. The fact that these issues remained endogenous to



inter-elite struggles and did not relate *either* to core social grievances which preceded the war *or* questions arising from the war of national reconciliation, human rights abuses and post-conflict justice, indicate how and why it was relatively easy to come to an agreement compared to other protracted civil war contexts. Explaining why an agreement which did not address core grievances actually lasted is a different matter which will be addressed below.

The final agreement of 1997 reflected the preponderance of power. The government was able to mobilise far more capital and military support than the opposition due to the external support and recognition it received as the legal sovereign. In the beginning of the civil war, the pro-government People's Front was financially and organisationally supported by Uzbekistan and Russia. After the defeat of opposition forces and the establishment of the new Kulobi led Government in the fall of 1992, the Russian Federation turned into the major financial sponsor of the country. Russia had been directing considerable financial resources to support the Tajik state budget, to establish and reorganise the Tajik army and security forces. However, these financial commitments were limited by Russia's own economic weaknesses and its commitments during the disastrous first Chechen war of 1994-6. The coercive power of the government factions was determined by the inter-factional dynamics explained above.

The struggle between warlords considerably intensified after the presidential elections in 1994 when Emomali Rahmon, leader of the Kulobi faction, was elected to the position of the Tajik president. In response, the defeated Uzbek and Khujand factions, backed by a group of People's Front commanders, organised a series of coup d'état attempts and anti-government uprisings. It was Rahmon's ability to stay in power and play one faction off against another in the 1994-6 period which was the foundation of his relative politico-military strength compared to the opposition during the crucial period of formal negotiations. Eventually, this created a modicum of legitimacy for the government as the only hope to bring an end to the war. However, by the end of 1996, the Tajik Government had little popularity among the wider population, mainly due to the decreased level of living standards: the collapse of the agriculture sector had led to the pauperisation of many thousands of Tajik farmers and the failure of energy reforms had led to an increasing shortage of electricity, rising prices and social crisis.

Despite the perilous situation in the country, the opposition's relative position was not strong. Its financial and organisational resources had been considerably reduced due to the rapid turn of events towards a peace settlement. The opposition leadership invested almost entire financial and organisation resources in preparation for the 1996 military campaign. At the same time, the UTO leadership failed to restore resources due to a lack of finances after its backers (alleged to be Iran and Afghan warlords) had a renewed interest in forcing it to the table.

Inter-faction rivalry between Moscow-based and Tehran-based groups was also a typical feature for the UTO structures, and reduced its ability to develop a unified, well-thought out and effective negotiation strategy. Moreover, the UTO lacked wider public support; it failed to become a national political movement and could not expand its influence beyond the ethno-regional borders. Even the population of the Gharm valley (considered the UTO primary foothold during the Tajik civil war) was hostile to the opposition paramilitaries, having been subject to much fighting in the years from 1993 onwards. After the seizure of Gharm in January 1996, some of opposition field commanders were accused of robbery, kidnapping and racketeering, which negatively affected the level of their popularity among local ordinary people. Lack of discipline among fighters, criminality, corruption, and the looting committed by some of the opposition field commanders further weakened their standing. Many of them – especially in the Kofarnihon area – were former racketeers and criminals who had joined the opposition guerrilla only in 1995-6, when it had started to prevail over the Government army.



Internal 'stabilisation' initiatives by the government were aimed at destroying the capacity and social base of the opposition even further as well as consolidating control of their own allied field commanders whose loyalty was always in question. The Tajik Government exerted considerable effort in destroying the network of semi-independent pro-government field commanders; a number of the field commanders continuously disobeyed the Government and attempted to undermine the peace processes. For example, in January 1997 a group of commanders launched a large-scale anti-government riot with the aim of preventing the conclusion of peace agreements. They sharply criticised the Government for 'the excessive concessions' to the "Islamists" and called for enhancing the struggle against the opposition. This process of dividing and ruling militias – explained in the Driscoll model summarised above – was accompanied by bargaining with regional elites over sharing political and economic resources, including those of the northern Sughd province and the city of Khujand, the opposition areas of Central Tajikistan and GBAO.

Consistent international pressure

External assistance and mediation had the effect of increasing the likelihood of success in the Inter-Tajik official and informal negotiations. Consistent international pressure on the conflicting sides over the period from 1996-7 brought them back to the negotiating table and extracted concessions from both sides, especially the opposition. At the same time, the external stakeholders pursued different agendas and were in no way impartial. Russia actively sought an outcome where the Rahmon government would achieve domination of the political sphere. Russian mediators had been providing the official negotiations team with consulting and analytical support. The Russian Government used all existing leverages to convince Iran (as well as other stakeholders) to support the power sharing variant promoted by the Tajik Government. Uzbekistan, meanwhile, promoted the participation of a group of pro-Uzbek field commanders and politicians in the negotiation process as a separate political power, named the "Third Force". This "Third Force" was, comprised of a group of top level officials and government officers who were mainly former People's Front field commanders and who were mainly representatives of the Khujand, Hisor and Uzbek factions that had been ousted by the leading Kulob faction to secondary positions. The group was officially led by Abdumalik Abdullojonov, former Prime-Minister and former candidate to the position of the President of Tajikistan. Gradually, the leading positions in this group were occupied by Mahmud Khudoiberdiev, commander of the 1st Special Force brigade, and Ibod Boimatov, former racketeer and field commander of the People's Front branch in Tursunzoda town where the Tajik Aluminium Company (Talco), by far the country's largest industrial asset, is based. The group conducted a series of military uprisings – seizing control of the smelter on several occasions – with the aim of forcing the Tajik Government and other stakeholders to allow the "Third Force" into the negotiation process.

Implementation Dynamics

International involvement in the war in Tajikistan continued in the post-war period.⁵⁷ The Russian Federation began to act more under the guise of the Commonwealth of Independent States. It also supported the UN and Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). In addition to the border guards of the Federal Border Service of the Russian Federation (RBF) which were maintained along Tajikistan's southern border with Afghanistan until 2004, the total CIS/Russian presence at one stage numbered 20,000 troops.⁵⁸ Whilst one of the parties to the conflict (the Government of Tajikistan) was a CIS member and a signatory to the agreement, the other (the UTO) became the object of 'peacekeeping'. Implementation of the accords, therefore, was inconsistent.

⁵⁷ For a comprehensive review see the edited volume of Barnes & Abdullaev (2001).

⁵⁸ The agreement to create a CIS peacekeeping force was made on 24 September 1993 with the governments of Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan.



In keeping with the general agreement, UTO leader Said Abdullo Nuri took charge of the CNR. Strong progress was made on the repatriation of refugees from Afghanistan with the deteriorating condition there and the new optimism in Tajikistan producing both 'carrot and stick' incentives to return. Tens of thousands were repatriated with the assistance of the United Nations (UN Mission of Observers to Tajikistan [UNMOT] and UNHCR) and Russian forces (both border guards and the 201st MRD which worked alongside CIS peacekeepers). However, progress was much slower and weaker with respect to the protocol on military issues. The disarmament stage of this process was due to take just two months, with ex-opposition fighters assembling at specified points to deliver their arms to be held in secure depots. In reality, this proved unrealistic. From the early stages of the process the UNMOT officers noticed a 'discrepancy between registered fighters and the weapons returned'.⁵⁹ By the end of 1998, the CNR announced the registration of 6,238 opposition fighters but just 2,119 weapons had been handed in.

Despite these unpromising results, in August 1999 the official disarmament process was declared complete thus allowing for the legalisation of opposition parties, although only a minority of the weapons thought to be held by opposition forces had been handed in. President Rahmon stated that, 'no one knows the number of weapons. You [unspecified, probably referring to the Opposition] have hidden them'.⁶⁰ As the security environment remained uncertain, commanders remained armed and independent on both sides. Areas of Dushanbe were divided between them until the early-2000s. Nevertheless, the process continued and, by March 2000, 4,498 UTO fighters had been integrated into the armed forces, largely within their own separable units.⁶¹

A Political Protocol

Implementing the Political Protocol was an equally troubled process. At a national level, the 70:30 split was partially achieved with, for example, Turajonzoda taking the position of first vice-premier and the UTO military commander, Mirzo Ziyoev, appointed to head the Ministry of Emergency Situations (MChS), a 'power' ministry with its own troops. At the local level, the redistribution of posts was less extensive, heavily complicated by localised loyalties and intra-regional rivalries.⁶² The process was further complicated by periodic localised outbreaks of violence between warlords and by the re-emergence of the 'third force', which had been explicitly excluded from the official negotiations. Former Prime Minister Abdullojonov, operating from outside the country, established the National Reconciliation Movement with allies from the northern area of Khujond and predicted the failure of the peace accords due to their lack of support from Khujondis. When Khudoberdiev rebelled against the government and then, in November 1998, made an attack on Khujand, collusion with Abdullojonov was alleged by the government. Over 1,000 troops briefly occupied the centre of Khujond, the country's second city, before being driven out by a major government offensive involving the troops of Suhrob Kosimov (the Kulobi Minister of Internal Affairs) and Mirzo Ziyoev (the Gharmi MChS head) who had been on opposing sides before the peace agreement. These immediate post-agreement attempts at spoiling the peace agreement – including the November 1998 attack and intermittent violence right up to, and including, the February 2000 parliamentary elections – were ultimately unsuccessful in breaking the new bargain.

The role of civil society

During the civil war, the role of civil society was limited. Tajik NGOs tried to be as far away as possible from the politics, avoiding any connection to political issues. They specialised mainly in so-called "safe" areas, i.e. 'non-political' fields of activities such as education, ecology, statistics, research,

⁵⁹ Cited in Conrad 1999: 3.

⁶⁰ Cited in *ibid*: 3.

⁶¹ Abdullo 2001.

⁶² Smith, RG. 1999: 247.



economy (for instance promotion of small enterprises), etc. They were especially careful with conflict resolution issues due to their higher level of political sensitivity. Until July 1997, when the Peace Treaty was signed, only a few Tajik NGOs dealt with conflict resolution programmes conducted mostly at a community level in the form of training seminars, civic forums or research programs. In 1996, the Tajik Government initiated the establishment of Public Accord Council, signed by the majority of Tajik NGOs and public association. It was a semi-official organisation intended to demonstrate the unity and pro-government stand of the Tajik civil society in the eve of the forthcoming round of official negotiations. Women and women's organisations played very little part in the peace process.

Part IV: The Sustainability of the Elite Bargain After 2000

Despite numerous crises, momentum in the implementation process was maintained towards presidential and parliamentary elections in November 1999 and February 2000 respectively. Rahmon's re-election as president with 97 percent of the vote on a 99 percent turnout was implausible but was not popularly challenged. Although the IRP had great difficulty in registering its candidate, Davlat Usmon, it seems likely that Rahmon would probably have won anyway by a comfortable margin.⁶³ In parliamentary elections, the President's People's Democratic Party (PDP) won a clear majority of 36 out of 51 seats, with the IRP – the only opposition party to gain seats – gaining just two. The elections signified the end of the implementation phase, underscored the dominance of the governing elite, and indicated a factionalised opposition which was simultaneously 'included' within the political system and yet marginalised from real power. A new hegemony was gradually being established under Rahmon, yet 'national unity' remained contingent. As Khodjibaeva comments, with respect to national television, 'the smallest mistake in editorial policy could cause a new explosion'.⁶⁴

The Elite Bargain and Authoritarian Consolidation

In the course of 20 post-conflict years, the elite bargain has led to a combination of elite capture and renewed but limited violence. However, no elite faction has risen to challenge the regime of President Rahmon and the settlement's appointments, quota and amnesty provisions were gradually superseded by semi-authoritarian (2000-2010) and fully authoritarian (since 2010) political systems. This reflects the political reality of 1997 of an imbalance of power in favour of the Kulobi where the internal coherence and bargaining power of rival factions was reduced. Still, this consolidation of an authoritarian regime had a number of proximate causes and effects. It was never entirely local but had international and global aspects. The government strategy of this period may be characterised as that of 'authoritarian conflict management' which seeks control of the discourse, capture of the economy, and domination of political space.⁶⁵ Four observations may be made about the context in which this has taken place.

First, the peace settlement retained Tajikistan's Soviet era ethno-regional political system.⁶⁶ Its unjust and unbalanced character – where representatives of one region dominate while the others have no access to power or resources – has remained unchanged. The primary difference with the pre-war period is that the domination of the Khujand elite was replaced with the prevalence of another – the Kulobi faction. The peace accords officially confirmed the new status quo and, by doing

⁶³ Akiner 2001: 59.

⁶⁴ Khodjibaeva 1999: 15.

⁶⁵ Heathershaw and Mullojonov, forthcoming.

⁶⁶ Akiner 2001, Collins 2006, Markowitz 2013.



this, legitimised the domination of the new elite for a longer period. Constitutional changes in 2003 extended term lengths and limits for the president and, in 2016, made him eligible to stand for re-election for perpetuity; greater powers of appointment were approved and the way was laid clear for the possible accession to power of his elder son Rustamali.

Presidential elections in 2006 and 2013 re-elected Rahmon with over-whelming majorities over candidates who barely had a public profile. Other members of the family, including his elder daughters Ozoda and Tahmina, their husbands, and brother-in-law Hasan Assadullozoda, have become key figures in a regime which constitutes a family-run state. Parliamentary elections have been facades of democracy that have returned thumping majorities for the PDPT in 2005, 2010 and 2015. 'Loyal' opposition parties who lack any profile and platform have been awarded seats in parliament. Those former commanders incorporated into the regime from the UTO have gradually been excluded, most prominently Mahmadrusi Iskandarov in 2005 (who was rendered from Russia and jailed) and Mirzo Ziyoev in 2006 (who was sacked before being killed in 2009). But pro-government commanders and former regime insiders have also suffered similar fates. The Kulobi Ghaffor Mirzoev was removed from his position as head of the presidential guard and jailed in 2004 amid rumours that he was planning a coup d'état (see below). More recently, the President's main Kulobi ally and one-time rival Mahmadsaid Ubaidulloev stood down in 2017 as Mayor of Dushanbe, a position he had held for almost 20 years, to be succeeded by Rustamali Rahmon. Ubaidulloev's former lieutenants now face corruption charges. These incidences fit the pattern observed by Driscoll⁶⁷ and others⁶⁸ of civil war era commanders gradually being pushed from power, regardless of their region of origin and putative allegiance during the civil war. The government has been successful at installing loyal regional governors across the country and has demanded and attained the loyalty of the vast majority of its appointees.

Second, the sustainability of such post-conflict authoritarian consolidation could be ensured only by the use of force and through exerting permanent pressure on the opposition and the suppression of any potential new opponents. The IRPT – whose leader Nuri had signed the peace accord on behalf of the UTO in 1997 before dying of cancer in 2006 – struggled to cope with the increasingly authoritarian environment and finally lost its two parliamentary seats in 2015, declared a terrorist organisation, and accused of sponsoring a coup d'état in September 2015 (see below). New secular opposition movements such as former minister Zayd Saidov's New Tajikistan and former business insider Umarali Quvatov's Group 24 were squashed as soon as they were born with Saidov jailed under spurious charges in 2013 and Quvatov shot dead on the streets of Istanbul (where he was a refugee) in 2015. All of the above has largely been achieved with limited physical force or the threat thereof. In the ten years after the signing of the peace accords from 1997-2007, violence reduced quite rapidly to levels rarely seen in countries that have recently experienced a civil war. Some of these years recorded no battle-related deaths at all, according to the Uppsala Conflict Database Project.⁶⁹ However, from 2008 there have been several incidences of armed conflict.

Minor armed conflicts since 2008, include violence in 2009 between government forces and the faction of former civil war commander 'Mullo Abdullo' (which led to 19 deaths including the former commander and ex-Minister of Emergency Situations Mirzo Ziyoev). In addition, in 2010, there were battles in the Rasht valley between government forces and regional faction-leaders 'Ali Bedaki' (whose faction was destroyed) and Mirzokhuja Ahmadov (a police colonel of doubtful loyalty who made a deal with government forces to help them track down Bedaki) which led to 98 deaths. There was also a regional uprising in Khorog in 2012 after a senior security official had been murdered in an

⁶⁷ Driscoll, 2015.

⁶⁸ Torjesen and MacFarlane 2004.

⁶⁹ UCDP, 'Government of Tajikistan', accessed 1 March 2017, <http://ucdp.uu.se/?id=1#actor/131>



argument over control of the drug trade – the government responded by ‘invading’ the autonomous region and assassinating a popular local strong man; a total 28 died in 2012 and three more in 2014 during a riot in the same city. Finally, the apparent rebellion in 2015 by Deputy Defence Minister Abdulhalim Nazarov, a former opposition civil war commander who had been incorporated into the regime after 1997, served as the pre-text for declaring the IRPT a terrorist organisation. Over 20 died in incidents in the town of Vahdat, the capital Dushanbe and the Romit gorge to where Nazarov’s group retreated before being annihilated.

In each case, government forces eventually secured unambiguous victories, although often following a certain amount of incompetence and unnecessary losses.⁷⁰ Rather than these incidents being considered ‘rebellions’, as they are presented by the Tajik state, they may be purges of former insiders by the regime as it further consolidates its power in favour of insiders over those who retain a certain independence of the ruling clique.

Third, the government has benefited from a consistently conducive international environment which has offered aid and loans while providing few external threats to the regime. Tajik foreign policy has been focused on regime security and the suppression of domestic opposition from its outset,⁷¹ with this being the focus of the emergence of its relationship with Russia and the rise and decline of its relationship with Uzbekistan – after Tashkent began to sponsor the ‘Third Force’ in the 1990s. However, since then no foreign governments have sponsored transnational terrorist movements or Tajik exile forces which have affected the country. Countless opponents have been illegally rendered back to Tajikistan from Russia, while other CIS countries, UAE, Iran and Turkey have failed to provide a long-term safe haven for those with legitimate claims to asylum.

More importantly, Russia, China and Western states have continued to sponsor the regime despite its authoritarian consolidation and the intermittent political violence of recent years. For Russia, Tajikistan is a security client at the Afghan border which hosts one of its largest foreign bases of its armed forces. For China, it is a bordering state to its restive Xinjiang Autonomous Region and therefore a trade partner and an ally in its successful campaign to suppress its Uighur nationalist opponents; China has become Tajikistan’s chief trading partner and provider of cheap credit. For Western states, despite its security services record of torture, Tajikistan has been an ally in counter-terrorism both in the war in Afghanistan and, supposedly, in the fight against ISIS recruitment. India refurbished an airbase in 2006 while Iran maintains friendly relations. These external partners are not in conflict with one another but compete and sometimes cooperate to provide inducements to the Tajik government. At the same time, the much-vaunted fear of spill-over from Afghanistan has never materialised, largely due to the fact that conflict is much more closely connected to the southern border regions (Pakistan) than the north (Central Asia). Therefore, Tajikistan is fortunate to face an unusually positive external environment despite its constant scare-mongering about ISIS attacks, other terrorist groups, and the threat of the expansion of the Afghan conflict.

Finally, the government has been able to further consolidate power and exclude rivals via corruption and its connections to organised crime. This includes its use of its sovereignty within the loosely regulated global financial system and its evasion of anti-money laundering laws. Given the political risks associated with investment in a post-conflict state, investors have sought protection through political risk insurance and the offshore financial system. These provide guarantees of payment, insulation from taxation and other ‘fees’, enable the jurisdiction of foreign courts, and are shrouded in secrecy. But such mechanisms are supposed to be subject to anti-money laundering rules such as

⁷⁰ For example, in Khorog, conscripts were reported to have been sent out to draw the fire of rebels. In Rasht, a large part of the elite special forces unit died after its helicopter was shot down by small arms fire.

⁷¹ Jonson 2006.



those of the UK anti-bribery law and the US Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA). The latter, in particular, has extra-territorial reach meaning that deals which involve banks listed on the US stock exchange must be FCPA-compliant even if the deal concerns Chinese investment into Tajik cement or Italian construction of a Tajik hydropower facility – both real examples from the last five years. Equally, the international financial institutions are supposed to provide oversight of the Tajik banking system and corporate governance in order to reduce such corruption. However, as numerous incidents have shown in recent years – from the National Bank cotton financing scandal of 2008 to the Dushanbe-Chanak highway scandal of 2010 – these mechanisms are not working.

The case of the Tajik Aluminium Company (Talco) stands out as symptomatic of how the authoritarian post-war consolidation of the settlement has occurred via globalisation.⁷² The company oversees the world's fourth largest aluminium smelter which generated an enormous 48 percent of its export earnings in 2008 and consumed a vast quantity of its electricity. During the civil war, it was fought over by militia commanders, particularly the Hissori Uzbek commander Khudoiberdiev and the Kulobi Ghaffor Mirzoev – a struggle eventually won by Mirzoev. From 1996, the Talco manager Abdukadir Ermatov allied with his comrade from the region of Zarafshon, Avaz Nazarov, to revive the smelter via bartering agreements with foreign companies set up via offshore companies registered in the British Channel Islands and British Virgin Islands (BVI). From 1996-2004, these Zarafshoni nomenklatura elites ran the aluminium industry in collusion with the Rahmon regime and made secret payments to fund both state projects and the business interests and shopping trips of Rahmon's family members.⁷³ Mirzoev's militia continued to provide security.

However, from 2004, the President and his regime decided that they wanted direct control of the smelter and made moves to push out Mirzoev, Ermatov and Nazarov. Mirzoev was eventually jailed and Ermatov offered a position as an MP before going into exile. The President's brother-in-law Assadullozoda's Oriebank was charged with management and financial control. However, for the regime to take full control of Talco it needed its asset grab to be legalised in an international court and recognised by its foreign trading partners including Rusal, Glencore and Hydro Aluminium. From 2004-8, Nazarov fought the Tajik government in London's International Court of Arbitration in a case which cost between \$150 Million and \$200 Million – the most expensive in British legal history at the time. The case ended with settlements and the return of Norway's Hydro Aluminium to the deal via a new offshore company TML, also based in the BVI. These arrangements were originally established via a World Bank and EBRD sponsored process. This offshore company was fully state-controlled but somehow passed due diligence assessments of the Norwegian company. Subsequent investigations have shown how TML is an offshore slush fund housing \$100 millions which are used for various state economic and political projects. The Talco case demonstrates authoritarian consolidation based on loyalty, the violent exclusion of rivals (Mirzoev), the conducive international environment (with geopolitical rivalry provided no obstacle to business), and the enabling power of unregulated financial globalisation. All four of these factors have been intrinsic to how and why the settlement has seen authoritarian consolidation in Tajikistan.

Peacebuilding and the Addressing of Grievances

As research on peace settlements increasingly shows – and the Talco case above vividly demonstrates – inter-elite bargains enable the rent seeking of faction leaders without addressing the grievances of the people they claim to represent. This raises the question of how the Tajik settlement held despite the failure to address root economic and political causes to the conflict. The current regime has successfully managed to maintain the stability in the country and a certain level of

⁷² See Cooley & Heathershaw 2017, ch.4.

⁷³ Cooley & Heathershaw 2017: 102.



popularity among the people by cultivating a perception of being the instigator and guarantor of the peace process. However, the post-conflict period is now over and people do expect from the Government a set of concrete steps and measures in order to ensure the further improvement of the socio-economic situation in the country, growth and prosperity, and the creation of job opportunities. We have already discussed how regionalism has been continued in the new system – but other factors were also cited as grievances. What have been the post-conflict patterns with respect to religion, socio-economic development and gender?

The one apparent grievance that the peace settlement addressed was the exclusion of religion from politics with the decriminalisation of parties based on religious affiliation. This had been a major theme of Track II diplomacy but it was never clear how great the popular demand for religious parties was. While some outside observers simply assumed that such demand flowed from the post-Soviet Islamic revival most researchers question whether there is such a demand anywhere in Central Asia.⁷⁴ Therefore, when the regime changed the constitution in 2016 to ban religious parties – effectively reversing the peace settlement’s provision – it is of little surprise that there was little or no public outcry, although such actions are rare in an increasingly hard authoritarian system.

The authorities ardently defend the secular nature of the state, persecuting all religious activities beyond state-run institutions. The government has increased the capacity of official institutions regulating religion, such as the High Council of Religious Scholars (*ulema*) and the Department for Religious Affairs. Both institutions certify religious personnel, monitor registered mosques and religious schools, and distribute mandatory topics for the important Friday sermons.

The intervention by the government has influenced religious practice and the composition of religious authorities in the country. In July 2012, three new articles were added to the Code of Administrative Offences in order to punish those violating the Religion Law’s tight restrictions on religious education or holding unsanctioned ties with foreign institutions. The militant secularism of the government and its designation that only a very narrow interpretation of Hannafi Islam is properly Tajik is a form of dogma that has had significantly negative effects on freedom of religion in Tajikistan. The issue that the peace settlement raises is whether the long-term state process of excluding all unofficial expressions of Islam from the public sphere is storing up grievances and may lead to patterns of clandestine mobilisation.

A second issue of grievance is that of poverty and socio-economic exclusion, which appeared to be a secondary factor in the mobilisation which led to the civil war. It is important to recognise that GDP growth has been sustained since the late-1990s (with average growth of 6-7%), although Tajikistan remains below the human development achievements of the Soviet era. Moreover, economic growth was partly ignited by aid and has been fuelled since by extraordinary high levels of labour migration. According to the World Bank, Tajikistan is the most remittance-dependent economy in the world and has been for many years. Remittances from labour migrants have been the key factor behind Tajikistan’s economic growth and poverty alleviation progress during the last decade. The money sent home by between 1 million and 1.5 million Tajik migrant workers, mostly in Russia, has over recent years provided for the most basic needs of more than half of the population. Remittances rose to an estimated \$3.8 billion in 2014 (almost 50% of GDP) but dropped by almost 70% a year later due to the dramatic decline in the Russian economy.

Despite such downturns – this being the second in recent years following the recession caused by the 2007-8 financial crisis – the reduction in remittances does not lead to unrest and the flows of returnees tend to be lower than expected. This fact points to the ‘transnationalisation’ and

⁷⁴ See Khalid 2007, Montgomery & Heathershaw 2017.



dislocation of Tajik economy and society which began during, and has continued since, the civil war. For example, seasonal migrants to Russia will typically join residents of the same village or extended families, following them to the same suburb or provincial city. With the majority of labour migrants being young men of fighting age, this factor may be the most important in explaining why largescale violence has not returned.

Poverty and social exclusion is quantitatively and qualitatively extensive as well as socially ingrained. Poverty (around 30% nationally) is highest in rural areas, where about two-thirds of the population are poor and subsistence economies prevail, particularly among female-headed households and households with children. Geographically, areas with the highest incidence of poverty include GBAO, Rasht Valley, and some isolated and non-cotton growing districts in Khujand (all of which lost power and influence during the war) and in Kulobi districts (which supposedly 'won'). The World Food Programme estimates that roughly one-fourth of Tajikistan's population is at risk of food insecurity, particularly during the winter period. The Gini (0.357 in 2014) and gender (30.8 in 2014) indices show little movement in recent years.

Due to unreliable national statistics, it is hard to analyse the level of inequality based on religion and ethnicity. But the evidence is clear that socio-economic realities of transnational migration and intense rural poverty are inherently entwined with gender dynamics. According to the Global Gender Gap Report (GGGR) published by the World Economic Forum, the female-to-male ratio among individuals enrolled in higher education in 2015 was 0.61, compared to a ratio of 0.9 in secondary education and 0.99 in primary education.

The gap between women and men in higher education attainment is particularly pronounced in rural areas. A "presidential quota" mechanism enabling girls from remote regions to attain higher education had a limited effect. Female participation in the labour force has remained reasonably stable in recent years -with women constituting around 43% - but this fails to account for the disproportionate number of Tajik male labour migrants who have left the country's labour market. Women are considerably underrepresented in public offices and business. Women held only 24% of seats in the parliament and 13% of ministerial positions (at deputy level only) following the 2015 elections.

Conclusion

In lieu of a conclusion, we may assess the impact of the elite bargain and attendant peace accords on the process of peacebuilding over the period since 2000. Iji argued that, while the peace agreement was not comprehensive, it did 'put an end to the major armed conflict.'⁷⁵ This remains true. However, little more can be said in its favour and four qualifications need to be made. Firstly, major military activities continued after the accords as further significant battles and systematic political violence took place at least until 2001 and further violence has recurred on several occasions since 2015. Secondly, the accords were limited agreements reached only after heavy international pressure. Hay⁷⁶ noted that the UN mediating team always drafted the initial texts of a protocol, 95 percent of which was accepted by the parties. According to Abdullaev and Barnes, 'the agreements represented the minimum point of consensus between the negotiators at the time they were drafted and did not attempt to provide a normative blueprint for the future'.⁷⁷ Thirdly, their content represented an inter-elite 'compromise' which reflected the dominance of the civil war's victors, the

⁷⁵ Iji 2005: 189.

⁷⁶ Hay 2001.

⁷⁷ Abdullaev and Barnes 2001: no pagination.



Kulobi factions around Rahmon, and the support rendered to them by the dominant regional power, Russia. In other words, the winners further institutionalised their victory by severely restricting the political position of UTO groups, and succeeding in excluding both pro-government (Khujandi, Hissori) and opposition (Garmi, Pamiri) factions as well as rivals within Kulob region.

Finally, the peace agreement contained an informal political and economic subtext which divided the (legal and illegal) resources of the country in favour of the Kulobi factions. 'Divvying up the drug smuggling market,' Matveeva remarks, 'was perhaps an unwritten part of the peace agreement, in which both sides had a share'.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, while the 1997 General Agreement did not itself resolve the conflict, it became an important symbol of compromise between elites and a crucial foundation for legitimate government. It continues to be affirmed by elites on all sides as the basis for the peace which must continue to be preserved.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Matveeva 2006: 20.

⁷⁹ Almost all participants in post-conflict dialogues consistently refer to the peace accords as the benchmark for compromise (Seifert & Kraikemayer 2003).



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