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TAJIKISTAN: EVOLUTION OF THE SECURITY SECTOR AND THE WAR ON TERROR

Introduction

Tajikistan is a country whose image has been tarnished by the civil war of the 1990s, but which managed to pull itself together and overcame the consequences of violence and destruction relatively quickly.²⁷ People of Tajikistan and its leadership deserve much credit for these achievements, uncommon in post-conflict situations. The War on Terror brought new attention to the security sector in Tajikistan and proliferation of external players and influences. This facilitated the transfer of expertise and equipment, and brought much needed financial resources, but also created opportunities for competition and political manoeuvring. The challenge for a young state is to absorb all the Great Powers' attention in the best interests of the country.

This paper is concerned with the functioning of the security sector in Tajikistan. It argues that many aspects of security are outsourced to external players – most notably Russia, - while the regime can concentrate on the tasks it is most interested in. Heightened attention of other players made this tendency even more pronounced, as offers to 'share the burden' started to come in. The paper concludes with a reflection on prospects for change and what they might mean for stability in Tajikistan.

²⁷ For the background see Accord: International Review of Peace Initiatives, Conciliation Resources? London, 2001

Security Framework

Outsourcing of Security

From an outside perspective, Tajikistan is a country experiencing serious security problems, with drugs and terrorism dominating the discourse. It is strategically positioned on the border with Afghanistan, and instability of its neighbour has affected Tajikistan long before September 11 and the US-led War on Terror. The rest of the regional neighbourhood is also a cause of concern: Uighur separatist groups in China, Uzbekistan as a magnet of terrorist attacks and Pakistan with pockets of Islamic radicalism are all located in the immediate proximity. Moreover, there are challenges inside the country, as real or perceived Islamist movements are raising stakes at home.

However, although the regional challenges are numerous, they currently affect domestic security only to a limited extent. For the leadership, the crucial issue is the security of the regime, and most of its efforts are directed at fulfilling this objective. Moreover, for a small and weak state, such as Tajikistan,²⁸ it is hard to deal with external threats, while terrorism and drugs affect other countries more directly. Border security, protection from attacks of militants from abroad and fight against drugs can be outsourced to the concerned external powers, who are keen to fight drugs and terrorism. From Dushanbe's point of view, this is rather convenient, as it allows it to concentrate on the challenges it considers important.

Internal Agenda

The real challenges are related to securing power of the President and his entourage and ensuring that the system of patronage works smoothly and brings tangible benefits to those co-opted into it. Gradual elimination of power barons, who came into prominence during the civil war period, constitutes an integral part of the regime's security agenda. This is

²⁸ The World Bank Poverty Assessment Report Update for Tajikistan for 2003 names it the poorest of the CIS countries where 64% of population lives on \$2.15 a day, - ITAR-TASS, 28 October 2004

supplemented by a degree of fear spread over the population by means of harassment and police brutality. The purpose is two-fold: to ensure that any popular unrest is halted at its initial stage (unlike in 1991 in the run-up to the civil war when rallies and protests were allowed to go unchecked before violence unfolded) and to make it easier to extort money from civilians (it is better to pay than be beaten at the police station).

The Role of Security Agencies in the Political System

Despite the fact that the security sector looms large in the life of Tajik citizens and in the political system as a whole, individual agencies or their leaderships do not carry significant political weight. In other words, civilian control over the military and other power agencies is firmly entrenched. This in itself is an important achievement of the post-war period, since until recently field commanders-turned-legitimate figures in the power establishment enjoyed almost a free reign. Gradually, one by one, such leaders from the (former) pro-government and opposition sides have been either detained or forced out of the country. In 2004 the arrest of Gaffur Mirzoev, former chief of the Presidential Guard²⁹ and the extradition of former Interior Minister Yakib Salimov, both close Presidential allies in the past, confirmed that there are no untouchable personas. The President and his immediate entourage are keen to ensure that none of his security ministers is too powerful and capable of playing an independent role, if there are further upheavals.

Corruption

Corruption lies in the heart of the security sector; as one local observer noted, 'security sector exists to be corrupt'. Given the lack of financial resources at the disposal of the state³⁰ and subsequent poor funding for the state sector it is unsurprising that security agencies have to provide for themselves. Moreover, a culture of corruption and bribery is widespread in society. Transparency International has rated Tajikistan

²⁹ for profile of Mirzoev see 'Tajikistan: Fall of Praetorian Guardsman', IWPR, RCA, no. 306, 10 August 2004

³⁰ The foreign debt of Tajikistan is estimated at \$1 billion.

among the five most corrupt countries in the world.³¹ Corruption in the security sector can flourish more easily since very little information is in public domain. Those affected complain very seldom out of fear and there are few NGOs or media outlet to press with investigations. Those who are supposed to protect the law are sometimes involved in crime.³²

Individual Agencies

Since the regime is mostly interested in dealing with internal stability and security of its own rule, unsurprisingly the Ministry of Interior is the largest and most powerful body. It numbers up to 30,000 servicemen³³ broadly organised along the old Soviet structure. It has got two militarised units designed for combat action which can be used both internally and externally: OMON (police special task force) and the rapid reaction regiment of General Sukhrob Kasymov, one of the last remaining field commanders on the governmental side. Kasymov's unit is based in Varzob, about 40 km from the capital.

On suffice, police capacity to deal with crime is rather remarkable: crime statistics has been consistently going down and violent crime has reduced considerably.³⁴ In contrast to a recent post-war period, fresh in memory of the citizens, Tajikistan again became a safe place to live. However, the way security is provided increasingly becomes a conflict-generating factor. The police, in the same way as other ministries, are desperately underfunded having to turn any source of income available, including extortion and racketeering.

The population remains remarkably pliant and the only protests that took place were of immediate supporters of detained former commanders in Gharm. This may be explained by a combination of factors, such as war fatigue and belief in the state's monopoly of violence, the fact that the

³¹ Quoted in 'One of the World's Most Corrupt Countries Struggles to Create a Fairer Business Environment', by Nargis Zokirova, IWPR, RCA no. 293, 15 June 2004

³² For instance, a Ministry of Justice senior inspector was detained in the border area of Kyrgyzstan, trying to sell 92 kg of heroin, - Asia-Plus, 19 October 2004.

³³ Figures courtesy of UNTOP

³⁴ Minister of Interior Khumdin Sharipov reported that over 130 criminal gangs and bandit groups have been suppressed for the last five years, - Asia-Plus, 22 October 2004.

most active – and angry – representatives of the society largely leave to work abroad, and fear of police brutality and the lack of belief in a possibility of redress.

The Ministry of Security

The Ministry of Security is a successor to the KGB, but does not enjoy the same standing as its much feared predecessor. After the Ministry of the Interior, this is the most powerful body. In the post-war period it was loosing out to the former, but gradually managed to re-build its position. In this it is greatly helped by its ability to gather – and to use at the right moment – compromising information on other agencies and figures in the government. As parliamentary and presidential elections near (to be held in 2005), the Ministry of Security services may become invaluable.

The Ministry is dealing with such issues as Islamic political activities, for instance, *Hizb-ut-Tahrir*, but does not harass religious believers *per se* or attempt to spy in mosques as its counterparts in Uzbekistan do. It is nominally engaged in the fight against drug trafficking (there is a 200-strong unit belonging to the Ministry), but in reality drug issues are outsourced to the Drug Control Agency (DCA) established by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Previously, it dealt with the collection of weapons since proliferation of small arms and light weapons was widespread after the war, but as this job is largely accomplished, the routine work has been moved to the Ministry of the Interior.

It is unclear to what extent the Ministry is capable to combat Islamic. The Ministry used to rely on a network of agents of the criminal underworld with whom it traded favours and who could deliver valuable information on crime, movement of people, gun running etc. However, Islamic groups are largely organised around an ideological rather than a criminal agenda, and targeting them by the same methods may not deliver the desired results.

Armed Forces and Border Troops

The Committee on the Protection of State Border is vested with responsibility to deal with all border issues and is in charge of the Border Troops. The Army is supervised by the Ministry of Defence and numbers between 6,000 and 7,000 servicemen (as compared to 30,000 in the Ministry of the Interior) and is vested with responsibility to respond to large-scale military threats. Both are desperately underfunded state bodies, but increasingly in receipt of substantial Western aid in training and equipment.

Unlike other agencies, the Army and the Border Troops are conscript-based. Their structure carries a significant capacity gap in the middle: there are professional officers trained mostly in the Soviet days with years of career behind them, and a sea of uneducated rural youths who make up the conscripts. What is missing is an NCO level, i.e. a transmission belt between officers and conscripts who could train the soldiers and look after them.³⁵

The Tajik border troops are stationed on the borders with China (which is largely impenetrable because of high mountains), and the former Soviet republics of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. The border regime imposed by the Uzbekistan leadership has negatively affected Tajikistan and neighbouring Kyrgyzstan, albeit to a lesser extent. However, with a passage of time, law-enforcement agencies stationed at the border have developed a pattern of cooperation between themselves designed to extract money from those crossing the borders. Presently, corrupt networks of border guards/policemen/customs officials are firmly entrenched and are interested in the preservation of a *status quo* of closed borders. They also have a lobbying capacity in the capital to argue the case for 'better security' which in reality means more barriers to the movement of goods and people, and more extraction opportunities. The constituency pushing for change, such as business people and people in need to travel, is inevitably coming into conflict with these corrupt networks.

³⁵ Interview with a Western diplomat based in Dushanbe, October, 2004, Dushanbe.

Customs

Customs is thought to be a better functioning agency compared to Border Troops and the Army. Still, customs' capacities to detect crime and stop illegal substances from crossing are fairly low, despite significant transfers of equipment by the Western donors. However, they are more advanced than those of the border guards, as the latter are staffed by conscript soldiers, while customs recruit professional officers who at least in theory have career jobs in the agency.

The Fight against Drugs and Terrorism

Drugs

The fight against drugs is largely outsourced to external powers. Despite declarations of commitment to combat the evil, the implicit attitude towards the drug issue is that it presents a threat to other countries. Drugs are mainly destined to the Russian and other European markets where there is a demand. Although large quantities of drugs are carried through the territory of Tajikistan, internal drug consumption remained low so far, drugs are not grown in Tajikistan, production facilities are negligent and prophylactic measures taken by the international community have been fairly effective. Moreover, should the struggle against drugs start in earnest, this would lead to violence and casualties among law-enforcement agencies, and deprive them of much-needed earnings out of which the whole families survive. Such trends are certainly worrying, as it may be only a matter of time until drugs are widely consumed and drug mafia is too powerful for the regime to cope with.

However, the main loser was Tajikistan's reputation, as Tajik citizens are routinely suspected to be drug-traffickers in other countries. Russia pays increased attention to the drug challenge coming from Tajikistan since it affects domestic supply, and so do gradually other CIS countries which host Tajik labour migrants. This leads to harassment of Tajiks travelling abroad.

The US and the UK are playing a significant role in the fight against drugs by committing their funds, equipment and expertise to Tajikistan. A Drug Control Agency (DCA) has been set up on the initiative of Western donors, while its institution-building was facilitated by the UNODC. The DCA was established in June 1999 directly under the Office of the President and does not report to any of the power ministries. It cooperates with the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Security, both of them having their own anti-drug departments. The DCA is staffed by 350 personnel, 150 out of them are special forces bearing arms and capable of combating criminals. DCA officers are hand-picked through a thorough system of testing and background checks, and are paid between \$100 and \$400, a considerable salary by Tajik standards. It does not have a reputation for corruption. When drug seizures are reported, it is normally the DCA who is involved in the investigations and arrests.³⁶ For instance, over the first 9 months in 2004, the DCA Directorate for Kulyab seized 293 kilogram of drugs, including 37 kg of heroin.³⁷

Still, even the DCA is not immune to political pressure. When the President moved to dismiss Gaffur Mirzoev from his position of Head of Presidential Guards in January 2004, he was confronted by a rebellion of his former comrade-in-arms, who would not leave until a prestigious appointment was offered to him. To the dismay of the international donors who funded the agency, Mirzoev and the President settled on the position of head of the DCA. The way such an appointment would affect the fight against drugs was not a consideration for the regime concerned with finding a way out of a delicate political situation, especially since the DCA has more relevance for outside powers than at home. Soon after Mirzoev took the reigns of power, staff changes followed as some personnel had to go to make room for Mirzoev's appointees. During Mirzoev's period drug seizures by the DCA dropped by some 40%.

³⁶ For instance, drug traffickers were detained in Sughd province on the way to Novossibirskaya Province in Russia. In July 2004 FSB and Russian Customs intercepted 237 kilograms of heroin in the packs of juice which was transported from Khujand (Sudgh province) to Novossibirskaya province. The street value of the consignment in Russia was up to \$2,5 million, - Asia-Plus, 28 October 2004.

³⁷ Asia-Plus Blitz, 27 October 2004.

However, no lasting damage appears to have been done. The President could not afford to leave a commander in power who openly disobeyed his orders and threatened to take up arms, as he may become unruly in future. Moreover, the President suffered a public humiliation, which could not be forgiven. It was only a matter of time before Mirzoev was detained in August 2004. The previous head and members of staff dismissed by Mirzoev were re-appointed to their positions and the situation returned to what it was before.

The Regime's Perspective on Terrorism and External Threats

There are challenges coming from outside that the leadership is worried about, but it has its own perspective on them which may not always match the one of the 'partners in security'. While external players are far more interested in such threats as Al-Qaeda, the Taliban and international networks of terrorists, the Tajik government is less concerned with them. This is understandable: incidents of violence that occurred in Tajikistan after the civil war stemmed from internal political rivalries and business competition. Unlike the US, Russia or Uzbekistan, it has not experienced random acts of violence against civilians designed to cause terror. Moreover, part of the population that fled to Afghanistan had been hosted by the Taliban who took care of them in time of need. Some 'terrorists' with money had been providing for the whole villages. Groups of IMU fighters, led by Juma Namangani, were well-behaved when they set up their camps in the Tavildara area, paid for goods and services rather than harassing traders into giving them everything for free, as the government troops often did when stationed in Gharm.

Given this background, the government rather goes through the motions to assure the international community that anti-terrorist measures are being taken, but whether they produce much impact is unclear.³⁸ The same stance applies to Russia: Tajikistan participates in the Russia-led

³⁸ For instance, on 14 October 2004 the Parliament has ratified three UN anti-terrorism conventions, including Convention for Suppression of Unlawful Acts against Safety of Maritime Navigation and the Protocol for Suppression of Unlawful Acts against the Safety of Fixed Platforms Located on the Continental Shelf. Since Tajikistan is a landlocked country, relevance is not obvious, - Asia-Plus, vol. 8, no. 196, 15 October 2004.

CIS undertakings to combat terrorism, as these are hard to avoid. In its September 2004 summit meeting in Astana dedicated to countering terrorism a decision was taken to set up a unit for coordinating the fight against drug trafficking, and an operational group for Central Asia within the CIS Office for Combating Organised Crime was established. However, the understanding is that in case of a serious attack by ‘international terrorists’ it will be the Russian Armed Forces based in Tajikistan who would resist it.³⁹

In the leadership’s threat assessment, two considerations prevail: relations with Uzbekistan and with pan-Islamic movements such as Hizb-ut-Tahrir.⁴⁰

Relations with Uzbekistan

One external challenge which the regime feels that it has to confront it on its own are relations with Uzbekistan. Although the Karimov regime rendered military support to the governmental side during the civil war which contributed to its victory, fortunes have changed since then. Uzbekistan is believed to harbour supporters of Colonel Makhmud Khudaiberdiev who launched attacks from the Uzbek territory on Tajikistan in 1997 – 98 and retreated there after suffering defeat from governmental forces. It is unclear whether the rebellious colonel is alive or dead, but Tajik security officials believe that his lieutenants are still in Uzbekistan and have not abandoned their plans to invade their country once again, if an internal crisis in Tajikistan creates favourable conditions. In this light, the establishment of the Russian military base in Tajikistan has been interpreted by some on an assumption that the base would act as a deterrent against potential Uzbek aggression.⁴¹

Tashkent, in its turn, has its own scores against Dushanbe. In 1999 the militants of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) set up training

³⁹ 201st Division periodically holds military exercises together with Border Troops and Tajik security forces to resist penetration of combatants from the south. Last such exercise was conducted at Mumirak training ground in Khatlon province in September 2004.

⁴⁰ Radical Islam in Central Asia: Responding to Hizb ut-Tahrir, Asia Report N°58, 30 June 2003, International Crisis Group, www.crisisweb.org

⁴¹ Nezavisimaya Gazeta, cited in www.fergana.ru, 18 October 2004

camps and bases in the territory of Tajikistan, loosely controlled by the government, crossed over into Batken province of Kyrgyzstan and entered Uzbekistan to start hostilities against Karimov's regime. Dushanbe is blamed for providing refuge to the IMU fighters and closing its eyes on their bases in Tavildara, for allowing the militants to cross the borders unchecked and more recently - for transiting drugs through the Uzbek territory. Moreover, while Tashkent classifies IMU as an international terrorist organisation, the establishment in Tajikistan has a different perspective on it, viewing it as an opposition movement against the leadership of Uzbekistan and therefore as an internal problem of Uzbekistan. Its relevance to security in Tajikistan is consistently dismissed. It has been pointed out that the IMU remained dormant since the US-led intervention in Afghanistan and it is unclear whether it still represents a credible force.⁴²

More recently, Uzbekistan came to be regarded as a cradle for a new and more dangerous anti-system Islamist movement - Hizb-ut-Tahrir.

Hizb-ut-Tahrir

Tajikistan, as other regimes in Central Asia and unlike Western powers,⁴³ considers Hizb-ut-Tahrir a terrorist organisation and is determined to stop its spread across the country. Originally, this initiative came from Uzbekistan where the first cells of Hizb-ut-Tahrir activists appeared. For a while it was believed that ethnic Uzbeks living in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are more susceptible to the Hizb-ut-Tahrir ideology and that the movement reflects a broad dissatisfaction with the policies of the regime, dressed in a religious cloak. However, when representatives of other ethnic groups, including Tajiks, began to join in and the movement spread to such unlikely places as Kazakhstan and Russia, it became evident that explanation of Hizb-ut-Tahrir as an anti-Karimov protest movement may be too simplistic.

⁴² Author's interviews with the senior Tajik officials in Dushanbe. A former presidential adviser noted that there is no real difference between the Islamic Renaissance Party in Tajikistan (former armed opposition to the government) and the IMU, apart from the fact that IRP is legalised and shares power with the government, while IMU is forced to operate underground.

⁴³ Hizb-ut-Tahrir operates legally in the UK

The officialdom in Tajikistan considers Hizb-ut-Tahrir a far more dangerous phenomenon than the IMU, despite the fact that the IMU has a record of violence and is known to have links to terrorist groups, such as Al-Qaeda. On the contrary, Hizb-ut-Tahrir has done little so far beyond recruitment of supporters and distributing leaflets. It insists that it adheres only to peaceful means in its goal to establish a caliphate to unite Muslims. This concept of a transnational entity that would contest the national borders and undermine the new nation-states is especially threatening to the Central Asian leaderships. Even the President of Kyrgyzstan, Askar Akaev, with his usually more liberal stance on the issue has made a statement to this effect, dubbing Hizb-ut-Tahrir as ‘manifestations of ideological terrorism’ and saying that ‘fanatics are openly speaking about the idea of creating an Islamic state in the Fergana Valley and of the expansion of ‘ideological jihad’ in the territory of Central Asia.⁴⁴

Stick-and-carrot policies have been employed by security agencies to combat Hizb-ut-Tahrir including anti-Hizb-ut-Tahrir propaganda through mosques and the local authorities, interception of religious literature, keeping an eye on those who returned from receiving Islamic education abroad and detention of suspected Hizb-ut-Tahrir members. Throughout 2004, arrests have been reported, starting in the Sughd province in the north of Tajikistan in the Fergana Valley where a large minority of ethnic Uzbeks live, and later proceeding to other, more homogeneously Tajik parts of the country, such as Kulyab. As there is no independent access to Hizb-ut-Tahrir detainees, it is hard to judge their motivation and agenda, and the validity of the Tajik threat assessment.

Hizb-ut-Tahrir is not the only movement expressing discontent along Islamic lines. A new group called *Bayat* appeared in the north of Tajikistan in Isfara district and claimed responsibility for violent incidents there, such as the murder of a Baptist priest in Chorku. It is unclear whether the group exists in reality or is merely an Internet voice.

⁴⁴ *Interfax*, 25 October 2004

External Players and Influences

As provision of many aspects of security is outsourced to outsiders, external powers play a huge role in politics of the country, in a way that limits its sovereignty. The War on Terror brought proliferation of actors, allowing the regime to play them off against each other and to gain institutional resources without seriously committing themselves to or implementing necessary policy reforms. Competition between powers sometimes gained momentum of its own, while security in Tajikistan became a secondary consideration.

Russia

Russia remains the most important actor. Since independence, it has played a major role in all aspects of life in Tajikistan, including provision of security. Russia is the country more directly affected by challenges stemming from Tajikistan, such as drugs, weapons and people smuggling, hence its interest in maintaining security presence. The 201st Motor Rifle Division of the Russian Armed Forces has been stationed in Tajikistan since its independence. In September 1993 it formed the backbone of the CIS Peacekeeping Forces in Tajikistan (CIS/PKF) and stayed on, after battalions from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan withdrew. Russia also maintains a number of military facilities in the republic and up till now has been responsible for protection of the border with Afghanistan.

Border Protection

Borders of Tajikistan stretch for over 4,000 km, often across difficult mountainous terrain. The Afghan border has been a source of concern over the last decade. Russian border guards have been stationed on the border with Afghanistan since the break up of the Soviet Union. Throughout 2004 the leadership of Tajikistan has been advocating the withdrawal of the Russian border troops. Two sections, - 73 km stretch of the Tajik/Afghan border and the Murgab section of border with China, - have been transferred to the Tajik command earlier. Following this, China reinforced its border troops' presence on the Tajik border to maintain security in the area. Eventually an agreement between Russia

and Tajikistan on withdrawal was signed in October 2004. The transfer of the border to jurisdiction of Tajikistan and withdrawal of Russian troops is to begin in November 2004 from Khorogh section of the border and proceed to Ishkashim and Kalaikhumb sections in Pamir (Mountainous Badakhshan, or GBAO), handing over 700 km area. Moskovskii and Pianj detachments in the Kulyab area will be put under Tajik control in 2005 and the handover is to be completed in 2006. Russia is to transfer all military installations and equipment to the Tajik side. Russian experts are to stay behind as advisers to assist in capacity-building and information exchange, and increased numbers of Tajik servicemen are to be granted free training in border troops' colleges in Russia.

Until the Agreement, the Russian Border Troops numbered some 11,500 servicemen. In reality, only officers are from Russia, while conscript soldiers come from Tajikistan. Russian officers could select conscripts all over Tajikistan: in the time of the draft officers visit the regional draft centres and choose those most fit mentally and physically. There is no shortage of volunteers since soldiers are well-paid by Tajik standards.⁴⁵ Russia also provides supplies of food, fuel and maintenance of border installations and equipment. Moreover, it carries most of the financial burden for border defences: according to the 1993 Bilateral Treaty on the Joint Patrolling of the Tajik/Afghan border, the presence of Russian troops was to be financed 50/50 by Moscow and Dushanbe. However, Dushanbe made only 2.4% of its instalment in 2003, and not more than 5% in the previous years.⁴⁶

With the Russian withdrawal from the Afghan border provision of border security will lie with the Tajik state. As speculations over Russian border troops withdrawal were turning into reality, concerns mounted whether Tajikistan is ready to take up the burden of border defence. Implications for drug trade can be potentially serious, as Russian troops

⁴⁵ In the Russian border troops a soldier gets about \$40 a month, while the Tajik troops pay \$1. In the words of general Nazarov, 'contract soldiers in Russian forces get more than generals in the Tajik army', - Dushanbe, UNDP Border Management meeting, October 2004.

⁴⁶ Oxford Analytica Russia/CIS Daily Brief, 3 March 2004

at least intercept a share of what is going through.⁴⁷ Since 1992 Russian border guards seized over 29 tonnes of drugs on the Tajik-Afghan border.⁴⁸ Drugs are not the only dangerous commodity trafficked. Small arms and light weapons also get through: according to the Russian FSB Border Service press centre, in 2003 13 *Strela* SAMs and 3 missile launchers for them, tank shells and anti-tank missiles, mines, hand grenades and over 100 kg of explosives have been detained at the border, which is 5,3 times more than in 2002.⁴⁹ Since beginning of 2004 over 42,700 units of ammunition, including 5 missiles, over 1,400 tank shells and 600 mines were seized by the troops at the Afghan border.⁵⁰ It is also feared that hostage-taking of Tajik citizens by Afghan drug traffickers may intensify.⁵¹

The initiative of the Tajik leadership to ask Russian border troops to leave has been deeply unpopular in society, especially among the residents of the areas bordering Afghanistan. It has been pointed out that Tajik border troops are not ready to take up such a difficult task, and that salaries of servicemen in Tajik troops are so low that corruption is inevitable and it would be hard to attract high calibre personnel to work for such small remuneration.⁵² Moreover, the Russian troops play a role in the local economy, since they have a much better purchasing power than the locals and can pay for goods and services. There are no nationalist feelings on the popular level against the presence of the troops, especially since most soldiers are drawn from Tajikistan. The recent agreement has prolonged the period of transition to allow for better preparation, but the same concerns largely remain.

⁴⁷ For instance, 50 kg of heroin were taken in one seizure on a routine patrol from smugglers crossing the river, - 28 October 2004, Asia-Plus.

⁴⁸ ITAR-TASS, 15 October, 2004

⁴⁹ Cited in Vladimir Mukhin, 'Подводные Камни Российской Дипломатии', fergana.ru, 22 October 2004

⁵⁰ Russian Border Troops press service in Tajikistan, cited in Asia-Plus, 21 October 2004

⁵¹ For instance, Asia-Plus reported in November of a release of a hostage from Navochar village by the Russian border troops who was held for a year and a half in Afghanistan, - Asia-Plus, 1 November 2004.

⁵² 'Tajiks Alarmed by Russian Troops Withdrawal', by Gulnora Amirshoeva and Shamsiddin Orumbekov, IWPR, RCA no. 316, 28 September 2004, www.iwpr.net

Promotion of Central Asian Security Cooperation

Russia's efforts in military and security sphere in Central Asia have intensified in a drive to make the countries it has friendly relations with to cooperate better across the region between themselves and with Russia. In August 2004 troops of the Collective Rapid Reaction Force from Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan which belong to the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) held a large-scale military exercise in the mountains of Kyrgyzstan. The Rapid Reaction Force established in 2001 is the operational arm of counter-insurgency efforts, while the CIS Anti-Terrorist Centre based in Moscow is referred to as the 'brain' of such operations.⁵³ The next joint military exercise for CSTO members 'Border-2005' is planned to be held in Tajikistan in spring of 2005. Russia joined Central Asian Cooperation Organisation (CACO) at its summit in Dushanbe in October 2004.

Crime Prevention

Russia's growing preoccupation is crime prevention. Efforts in this sphere have been scaled up. Russian Interior Minister Rashid Nurgaliev visited Tajikistan in October 2004. Officially, priorities for cooperation include the fight against terrorism, disruption of its sources of financing, such as drug trade, trafficking of people, arms and drugs. However, the issue of illegal migration and crimes committed by the Tajik citizens in Russia that, according to Nurgaliev have risen 63% in 2004,⁵⁴ dominated the talks between police officials. From the Tajik perspective, information exchange between the sides is not very effective: 'as information is mainly exchanged about committed acts of crime, rather than criminal suspects'.⁵⁵ This may be explained by the distrust between parties involved.

For the authorities of Tajikistan the important issue for law-enforcement cooperation is extradition of those wanted for crimes at home. Many of

⁵³ 'Central Asia: Joined-Up Security', by Leila Saralaeva, IWPR, RCA no. 307, 12 August 2004

⁵⁴ RFE/RL, vol. 8 no. 202, 25 October 2004

⁵⁵ Stated by Khumdin Sharipov, Interior Minister of Tajikistan, in an interview to the 'Шитт и Меч' newspaper, 21 October 2004. He also pointed out that in the last two years over 160 Tajik citizens were killed in Russia, with 121 murders in 2004 alone.

the former regime's opponents, as well as those who fled Tajikistan after the civil war fearing revenge by relatives of their victims, found safe haven in Russia. Increasingly, Dushanbe is determined to get some of these people back. Until recently, Moscow resisted extradition requests from Dushanbe: since 2001 only 12 wanted criminals were handed over. However, Moscow arrived at a conclusion that it can win favours from Dushanbe for a minor price, and started to look more positively on extradition, including handing over the former Interior Minister Yakub Salimov in February 2004.⁵⁶

New Players

The War on Terror brought new players into security field in a country, previously viewed as a Russia's domain. Since 2001 the US and its allies in the Coalition of the Willing paid increased attention to security issues in the states bordering Afghanistan where regimes were agreeable to cooperation with the US, such as Tajikistan. Development aid to the country has gone up supplemented by provision of military aid in training and equipment.

The United States

As the intervention in Afghanistan was being planned, Central Asian countries became of interest to the US military and political establishment. New offers of support started to appear in exchange for support in the War on Terror. Rahmonov's visit to Washington in January 2002 provided impetus for development of a relationship in the security field. Throughout 2003 the envisaged withdrawal of the Russian border troops provided new hopes for the Western powers, notably the US and the EU, to get more closely involved in security sector in Tajikistan. Apprehensive that security vacuum could be created in the border area, the US and the EU sought to establish what kind of assistance would be most beneficial, since provision of ground troops or military instructors in large numbers to replace the withdrawing Russians was clearly out of question.

⁵⁶ Reportedly, the tacit agreement was made that the suspects would not be sentenced to capital punishment.

For the US security of the border with Afghanistan is relevant because of the anti-terrorist agenda and possibilities for smuggling of weapons, including that of mass destruction, as well as movement of people in and out of Afghanistan. Fight against drugs is important not that much because it affects domestic market in the US, but because of its interrelationship with other threats, such as provision of finance for terrorism and formation of global networks, capable of organising violent acts, smuggling of terrorists etc.

In the fiscal year of 2004, the US Departments of State, Defense and Commerce provided over \$50 million of assistance to Tajikistan. Military assistance in training and equipment constituted an additional \$2.3 million. One of the foci of the programme is to modernise communications' system and structure of the Ministry of Defence.⁵⁷ The beginning of a US Train-and-Equip operation is envisaged.

US military aid and political support for the Rahmonov regime may not have intended to drive Russia out of Tajikistan, but it has created this impression, and was interpreted by Russia as such. As security cooperation with the US proceeded with new offers of assistance coming in, Russian diplomacy was put into action.

The Europeans

France is the only Western country which maintains military presence in Tajikistan with an airbase in Dushanbe to provide technical support to its air operations in Afghanistan. The base is currently expanding: four more planes of French Air Force, i.e. K-135 refuelling plane and three *Mirage* fighters are to be deployed at the transit base for French military contingent.⁵⁸ UK has concentrated its aid on fight against drugs through provision of expertise in Customs, and technical and financial support to the UNODC and DCA.

BOMCA (Border Management Programme for Central Asia), initiated by Austria as a follow-up to the Austrian Minister of Interior situation

⁵⁷ Asia-Plus, 15 September 2004

⁵⁸ Asia-Plus Information Blitz, 3 November, 2004

assessment mission to Central Asia, and subsequently designed and financed by the EU with Austria in a lead role, deals with the borders with Central Asian states (Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan) and is meant to provide support to the agencies responsible for border protection. It envisages to spend 5 million euros on Tajikistan in the five years of its operation. A related EU programme is CADAP designed for customs. The EU has signed a partnership and cooperation agreement with Tajikistan in October 2004. Both programmes are implemented by UNDP in cooperation with the governments and other partners.

China and Japan

China became a more active player, as Chinese-Tajik border gradually opens and more interaction is to follow. In May 2004 the Kulma Pass border crossing sealed since the Soviet times opened to connect Xinjiang and Tajikistan. In its turn, Japan grew interested in Central Asia concerned with a spread of Chinese influence in the region, Sino-Russian rapprochement and their combined influence through the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, as well as transnational crime and terrorism.⁵⁹

Aid and Politics

Heightened interest and diversification of external players in the security sphere in Tajikistan gave the leadership a chance to solve their problems in fields other than security. The US, European powers and Japan has provided significant amounts of development aid under the conflict prevention and fighting terrorism through poverty reduction strategies.⁶⁰ However, aid started to impact on domestic political developments and cause increased concern to the leadership, such as the US support for political and civic groupings with agendas alternative to that of the ruling regime, opposition media and proliferation of US NGOs operating

⁵⁹ Oxford Analytica Russia/CIS Daily Brief, 10 September 2004

⁶⁰ \$900 million was pledged at a donor meeting in Dushanbe in 2003. US development and humanitarian aid to Tajikistan for fiscal year 2004 (1 October 2003 – 30 September 2004) totalled over \$50 million, - RFE/RL, Central Asian Report, 21 September 2004, vol. 4, no. 35. Over the past 11 years, USAID has provided over \$110 million of assistance to Tajikistan, - Asia-Plus, 15 September 2004.

in the political sphere. In the run-up to the elections such moves appeared dangerous and comparisons with Georgia were drawn where American organisations claimed to have played a significant role in overthrow of the Shevardnadze government. Tensions around US-funded organisations intensified and limitations of the US influence over domestic politics became more felt.

New Realignment

Back to Moscow

Finally, the leadership of Tajikistan arrived at the conclusion that Russia is the only country that can help the regime in case of civil disorder due to elections or a crisis of some kind. In the past it has been instrumental in pacification of anti-regime revolts, such as Khudaiberdiev mutiny in 1998. More recently, Rahmonov was able to order the arrest of Gaffur Mirzoev only after talks with President Putin in Sochi in June 2004, when assurances were given to Rahmonov that Russia would provide military support if his leadership was under threat.⁶¹ Tajik internal political dilemmas played into hands of Russian security interests and desire to counterbalance American influence in Tajikistan.

Despite significant US and other Western assistance, Russia may be a more relevant power for Tajikistan, as it holds tangible leverages over the country: Tajikistan's debt to Russia totalled \$300 million, while about 1 million Tajik citizens are in labour migration in Russia. Remittances they send home exceed the official budget and also act as a safety valve for the impoverished rural areas with no sources of income. Rapid and large-scale return of labour migrants could critically affect internal stability. Moreover, Russia is the only country which is prepared to invest long-term in large-scale infrastructure projects with uncertain market prospects, and is the main destination for Tajik exports. For Rahmonov, the choice was straightforward: either provide for Russia's security interests in Tajikistan and obtain some tangible benefits and security backing for the regime internally, or face uncertain prospects of

⁶¹ Tajikistan: Fall of Praetorian Guardsman?, IWPR, RCA, no. 306, 10 August 2004

Western support tangled with demands for reforms and level-playing field for opposition. President Putin's visit in October 2004 sealed that choice.

According to the Rahmonov – Putin agreement Russia will maintain its military presence by keeping its ground troops in Tajikistan and important military installations. 201st Motor Rifle Brigade has been transformed into a Russian military base to be stationed on the territory of Tajikistan indefinitely and allowed ownership of land it uses for military training. It will be manned by a 6,000-strong contingent of mainly conscripts (presently it is staffed by contract soldiers). According to Russia's Ministry of Defence, the base will be equipped with up to 20 fighter jets and helicopter gunships in 2005, making it the third Russia's foreign airbase after Armenia and Kyrgyzstan.⁶² It will also take over the Nurek air surveillance centre, located 80 km south-east of Dushanbe, equipped with ten automated multi-purpose telescopes capable of searching objects at distances of up to 40,000 km. The construction of Nurek centre has begun in 1979, but it was only fully launched into operation in 2002. In return, some major concessions were granted, such as writing-off \$242 million part of the \$300 million sovereign debt to Russia, cash injection of \$200 million into ailing construction of Sangtuda hydropower station and relaxation of immigration regime for nationals of Tajikistan in Russia. President Putin even promised to invest \$2 billion into Tajik economy.⁶³

Western Reaction

Stakes of external interest in security in Tajikistan were raised, when Putin's visit was immediately followed by NATO's Secretary –General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer who came to sign a bilateral transit agreement on support for NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in

⁶² RFE/RL Newline, vol. 8, no. 200, 21 October 2004

⁶³ Rusal (Russian Aluminium) has undertaken to invest \$560 million in Roghun hydropower plant and over \$700 million in aluminium production facilities in Tajikistan. It will spend \$600 million to build an aluminium plant with a 200,000 tonnes a year capacity, - RFE/RL Newline, vol. 8, no. 197, 18 October 2004.

Afghanistan. Tajikistan is the first Central Asian country with which NATO signed such an agreement.

De Hoop Scheffer was at pains to deny that his visit had any connection to that of Putin: ‘we are not in competition with Russia in this area. It is Tajikistan’s unquestioned right to grant a base to Russia or any other country’.⁶⁴ The US Ambassador also played down the importance of the revamped Russian – Tajik alliance.⁶⁵

Conclusion

To sum up, does the security sector in Tajikistan represent a picture of strength or weakness? The answer is perhaps illustrative of the nature of the system being formed. It is strong enough in those segments that matter for the regime, i.e. police and increasingly – the Ministry of Security, in order to ensure law and order, suppress domestic opposition and project enough fear to discourage expression of popular discontent.

Those issues which bear little impact internally, are outsourced to external actors who are willing to help, often competing against each other with offers of assistance. From the regime’s perspective, competition between regional powers and Cold War rivalry has not died yet, - despite rhetoric to the contrary, - and benefits can be had by playing various actors off against each other. Moreover, poor coordination between donors makes it easier for corruption to flourish, as it is not uncommon for assistance to duplicate each other.

Real or perceived competition between Russia and the West for influence in Tajikistan in the end undermines the very objective, i.e. maintenance of security and fight against drugs and international terrorism. Policies to create a security system alternative to one led by Russia are counterproductive and are likely to backfire. Only joint effort and genuine cooperation are likely to bring the desired goals closer. Moreover, it would be more difficult for the regime to get away with

⁶⁴ RFE/RL Newline, vol. 8, no. 200, 21 October 2004

⁶⁵ ‘it legalised what has been a reality for decades – the presence of the 201st Motor Rifle Division’, Asia-Plus, 20 October 2004

corruption, mismanagement and prosecution of political opponents, if all external actors speak from a common platform.

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