



# Tajikistan: Recent Developments and U.S. Interests

**Jim Nichol**

Specialist in Russian and Eurasian Affairs

September 25, 2013

**Congressional Research Service**

7-5700

[www.crs.gov](http://www.crs.gov)

98-594

**CRS Report for Congress**

*Prepared for Members and Committees of Congress*

## Summary

Tajikistan is a significant country in Central Asia by virtue of its geographic location bordering China and Afghanistan and its ample water and other resources, but it faces ethnic and clan schisms, deep poverty, poor governance, and other severe challenges. Tajikistan was one of the poorest of the new states that gained independence at the end of 1991 after the break-up of the former Soviet Union. The new country was soon plunged into a devastating civil conflict between competing regional and other interests that lasted until a peace settlement in 1997. Former state farm chairman Imomaliy Rahmon rose to power during this period and was reelected president after the peace settlement as part of a power-sharing arrangement. He was reelected in 2006. His rule has been increasingly authoritarian and has been marked by ongoing human rights abuses, according to many observers.

The civil war had further set back economic development in the country. The economy recovered to its Soviet-era level by the early 2000s, and GDP had expanded several times by the late 2000s, despite setbacks associated with the global economic downturn. Poverty remains widespread, however, and the infrastructure for healthcare, education, transportation, and energy faces steep developmental needs, according to many observers. The country continues to face problems of political integration, perhaps evidenced in part by recent violence in eastern Tajikistan. The country also faces substantial threats from terrorism and narcotics trafficking from Afghanistan.

The United States has been Tajikistan's largest bilateral donor, budgeting \$988.57 million of aid for Tajikistan (FREEDOM Support Act and agency budgets) over the period from fiscal year 1992 through fiscal year 2010, mainly for food and other humanitarian needs. Budgeted foreign assistance for FY2012 was \$45.1 million, and the Administration requested \$36.4 million for FY2014 (these FY2012 and FY2014 figures exclude most Defense and Energy Department programs; data for FY2013 is not yet available).

After the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States, Tajikistan seemed to be willing to cooperate with the United States, but hesitated to do so without permission from Moscow. However, Tajikistan had long supported the Afghan Northern Alliance's combat against the Taliban. Perhaps after gauging Russia's views, Tajikistan soon offered use of Tajik airspace to U.S. forces, and some coalition forces began to transit through Tajik airspace and airfields. During a January 2009 visit, the then-Commander of the U.S. Central Command reached agreement with President Rahmon on the land transit of goods such as construction materials to support military operations of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. While most land transport along this Northern Distribution Network traverses Uzbekistan to final destinations in Afghanistan, Tajikistan serves as an alternative route for a small percentage of supplies. In March 2012, the land transit of some ISAF material out of Afghanistan through Tajikistan began.

## Contents

Background.....	1
Political Developments.....	2
The 2010 Attacks.....	4
The 2012 Instability in Mountainous Badakhshan.....	5
Recent Terrorism Developments.....	6
Human Rights.....	7
Economic Issues.....	9
Foreign Policy and Defense.....	12
U.S.-Tajik Relations.....	16
Overview of U.S. Support for Tajikistan.....	16
Cooperation on Counter-Terrorism and Counter-Narcotics.....	17

## Tables

Table 1. U.S. Budgeted Assistance to Tajikistan by Objective and Year, FY1992-FY2001.....	20
Table 2. US Budgeted Assistance to Tajikistan by Objective and Year, FY2002-FY2010 (and Totals, FY1992-FY2010).....	21

## Contacts

Author Contact Information.....	22
---------------------------------	----

## Background

Tajikistan is a significant country in Central Asia by virtue of its geographic location bordering China and Afghanistan and its ample water resources, but it faces ethnic and clan schisms, deep poverty, poor governance, and other severe challenges. Tajikistan was one of the poorest of the new states that gained independence at the end of 1991 after the break-up of the former Soviet Union.

The new country was soon plunged into a devastating civil conflict between competing regional and other interests. In September 1992, a loose coalition of nationalist, Islamic, and democratic parties and groups tried to take over. Kulyabi and Khojenti regional elites, assisted by Uzbekistan and Russia, launched a successful counteroffensive that by the end of 1992 had resulted in 20,000-40,000 casualties and up to 800,000 refugees or displaced persons. In 1993, the Commonwealth of Independent States (a Russian-led grouping of Soviet successor states) authorized “peacekeeping” in Tajikistan, consisting of Russian and token Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Uzbek troops. After the two sides agreed to a cease-fire, the U.N. Security Council established a small U.N. Mission of Observers in Tajikistan (UNMOT) in December 1994. In June 1997, Tajik President Emomali Rahmon and then-rebel leader Sayed Abdullo Nuri signed a *comprehensive peace agreement*. Benchmarks of the peace process were largely met, and UNMOT pulled out in May 2000, but Russian troops have remained.<sup>1</sup>

The civil war further set back economic development in the country. The economy recovered to its Soviet-era level by the early 2000s, and GDP expanded several times by the late 2000s, despite setbacks associated with the global economic downturn. Poverty remains widespread, however, and the infrastructure for healthcare, education, transportation, and energy faces steep developmental needs, according to some observers (see also below, “Economic Issues”).<sup>2</sup> The country continues to face problems of political integration, perhaps evidenced in part by violence

### Basic Facts

**Area and Population:** Land area is 55,800 sq. mi., slightly smaller than Wisconsin. Population is 7.91 million (*The World Factbook*, mid-2013 est.). The Mountainous Badakhshan (also termed Gorno-Badakhshan) Autonomous Region in eastern Tajikistan has a population of about 250,000.

**Ethnicity:** 79.9% of the population is Tajik, 15.3% Uzbek, 1.1% Russian, 1.1% Kyrgyz (2000 Census). Clan and regional identities include the Khojenti, Kulyabi, Garmi, and Pamiri groups.

**Gross Domestic Product:** \$18.0 billion; per capita GDP is about \$2,300 (*The World Factbook*, 2012 est., purchasing power parity).

**Political Leaders:** President: Emomali Rahmon; Prime Minister: Oqil Oqilov; Speaker of the National Assembly (upper chamber): Mahmadsaid Ubaydulloyev; Speaker of the Assembly of Representatives (lower chamber): Shukurjon Zuhurov; Foreign Minister: Hamrokhon Zarifi; Defense Minister: Col. Gen. Sherali Khayrulloev.

**Biography:** Rahmon was born in 1952 and trained as an economist. In 1988, he became a state farm director in Kulyab region. His rise to power was boosted by his links to the paramilitary leader and ex-convict Sangak Safarov. He became chair of the Kulyab regional government in late 1992, and weeks later was elected chair of the Supreme Soviet and proclaimed head of state. He was popularly elected president in 1994 and reelected in 1999 and 2006.

<sup>1</sup> For Russia’s role in the civil war, see Arkady Dubnov, “Tajikistan,” in Jeremy Azrael and Emil Payin, eds., *U.S. and Russian Policymaking With Respect to the Use of Force*, RAND Corporation, 1996; Iver Neumann and Sergei Solodovnik, “The Case of Tajikistan,” in Lena Jonson and Clive Archer, *Peacekeeping and the Role of Russia in Eurasia* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996). See also CRS Report 97-82 F, *Tajik Civil War: Recent Developments and U.S. Policy Concerns*, by Jim Nichol, January 8, 1997 (archived, available from author).

<sup>2</sup> “Central Asia: Decay and Decline,” International Crisis Group, February 2, 2011.

in central and eastern Tajikistan (see below, “The 2010 Attacks” and “The 2012 Instability in Mountainous Badakhshan”). Tajikistan also faces substantial threats from terrorism and narcotics trafficking from Afghanistan.

## **Political Developments**

Since the end of the civil war in 1997, President Emomali Rahmon has steadily increased his authoritarian rule and marginalized the opposition. He has slowly moved to increase his territorial control by arresting and eliminating local warlords. A legislative electoral law was approved in late 1999 calling for a lower chamber, the Assembly of Representatives (Majlisi Oli), to consist of 63 members (22 elected by party list and 41 in single-member districts), and an upper legislative chamber, the National Assembly (Majlisi Milli), to consist of 34 members representing regional interests (25 selected by indirect voting by local council assemblies, eight appointed by Rahmon, and one reserved for the former president). Another referendum on changes to the constitution was held in June 2003. Opposition critics correctly predicted that one of the changes—limiting a president to two seven-year terms—would permit Rahmon to claim two more terms in office under the “new” amendment.

There are eight registered parties. The People’s Democratic Party is the ruling party, led by President Rahmon. Pro-government parties include the Agrarian Party, Democratic Party, Economic Reform Party, and Socialist Party. The three registered opposition parties are the Islamic Renaissance Party, the Social Democratic Party, and the Communist Party. The latter sometimes allies itself with the People’s Democratic Party. In May 2012, the Justice Ministry turned down the registration of the reformist National Movement of Tajikistan as a new political party. The group had called for more balance between the legislative and executive branches and for reducing the presidential term from seven to five years. In April 2013, businessman and former Industry Minister Zaid Saidov and several other businessmen and academics announced that they planned to form a new opposition party, the New Tajikistan Party. In May 2013, Saidov was arrested on a shifting series of corruption and other charges and a closed trial began in September 2013. After his arrest, opposition groups and supporters established the Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society to advocate for political reforms, including more balance between the legislative and executive branches, and formed a committee to advocate for Saidov’s release. Many human rights observers have considered the charges to be politically motivated.

After a problematic 2005 legislative election, which the OSCE judged as not free and fair, the OSCE and opposition parties proposed changes to the law on legislative elections. A few were implemented through administrative means, such as a ban on a member of a family voting for other family members. Other proposed changes included placing opposition representatives on electoral commissions, banning officials from servicing on electoral commissions, permitting non-partisan monitors to observe elections, lowering the threshold of party list votes necessary for a party to gain legislative seats, eliminating a requirement that candidates possess higher education, and reducing or eliminating a sizeable election deposit, which some parties claimed deterred prospective candidates from running. Many of these reforms were introduced in the legislature but were blocked by the ruling People’s Democratic Party. Some opposition parties also have complained that it is difficult to campaign during the winter when legislative elections are held.

Five candidates ran in the presidential election in Tajikistan held on November 6, 2006, including incumbent President Rahmon. All four “challengers” praised Rahmon and campaigned little.

Rahmon officially received 79.3% of 2.88 million votes with a nearly 91% turnout. According to OSCE observers, the race was slightly improved over the 1999 presidential election but still lacked “genuine choice and meaningful pluralism,” including because of the dearth of meaningful debate by the candidates, improbable turnout figures in some precincts, use of administrative resources, and non-transparent vote-counting.<sup>3</sup>

Elections to the Assembly of Representatives were held on February 28, 2010. Only the People’s Democratic Party could afford to register 22 candidates for the 22 party list seats, so the total number of party list candidates was 73. For the constituency races, 153 candidates registered, including 83 sponsored by parties and 70 who nominated themselves. Turnout on election day was reportedly 3.29 million (90.3%), and the People’s Democratic Party won 54 seats (up from 52 in 2005), the Agrarian Party won 2 seats, the Economic Reform Party won 2 seats, the Communist Party won 2 seats, the Islamic Renaissance Party won 2 seats, and an independent candidate won one seat.

An OSCE monitoring mission viewed the campaign and voting as “fail[ing] to meet many key OSCE commitments.” The monitors raised concerns about the prevalence of officials and members of the People’s Democratic Party of Tajikistan on electoral commissions, the high electoral deposit (relative to average incomes), electoral commissions organizing and presiding over “meetings with the voters,” and the requirement that candidates possess a higher education. The monitors praised the sizeable field of parties and candidates providing voters with different political programs, but stated that this positive feature of the election was vitiated by credible and verified reports of local authorities and police violating campaign regulations to the disadvantage of opposition parties and by the lack of diverse viewpoints in broadcast media. There were “serious irregularities” in many polling stations observed “which undermined the integrity of the elections,” including a high incidence of proxy voting (voting for someone else) in about one-half of the polling stations. Other irregularities involved voting without identification documents, multiple voting, casting pre-marked ballots, and some cases of ballot-box stuffing. Vote-counting also was assessed negatively in many of the polling stations visited.<sup>4</sup> Observers from the U.S. Embassy were in agreement with the OSCE monitors, stating that “the vote was beset by procedural irregularities and fraud.”<sup>5</sup>

President Rahmon increasingly has used rhetoric associated with Hanafi Sunni Islam and Tajik nationalism to define his rule. This rhetoric has alienated ethnic and religious minorities, including ethnic Uzbeks and Kyrgyz and about 200,000 ethnic Pamiris in Mountainous Badakhshan who practice Ismaili Shiism.

Since late 2012, the Islamic Renaissance Party’s deputies in the legislature have called for amending the election law to reduce or eliminate the requirement for parties to gather signatures to register presidential candidates and to provide for equal representation of registered parties on precinct and district electoral committees. The legislature has rejected these proposals.

---

<sup>3</sup> OSCE, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, *Final Report on the 6 November 2006 Presidential Election in Tajikistan*, April 18, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> OSCE, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Election Observation Mission, Republic of Tajikistan, Parliamentary Elections, 28 February 2010, *Needs Assessment Mission Report*, December 4, 2009, *Interim Report No. 1*, February 8, 2010; *Interim Report No. 2*, February 22, 2010; *OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report*, July 6, 2010.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Embassy in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, *U.S. Embassy Election Observers Note Widespread Fraud and Irregularities in Parliamentary and Local Races*, March 2, 2010.

A presidential election is scheduled for November 6, 2013. The election law permits only registered parties, two unions, and local legislative councils to nominate candidates. No self-nominations are permitted. The OSCE plans to observe the election. The nomination of candidates will take place between September 17 and October 7, 2013. Several parties have nominated candidates so far to run in the election and are gathering the required 210,000 signatures for registration. The Central Electoral Commission has ruled that those working outside the country—over one-quarter of the electorate—are ineligible to sign candidate petitions. The Union of Reformist Forces of Tajikistan opposition group, formed in July 2013 and which includes the Social Democratic Party and the Islamic Renaissance Party) agreed to support civil rights activist Oynihol Bobonazarova in the presidential race, and the latter party formally nominated her on September 18, 2013. On September 24, 2013, the Independent Trade Unions Federation endorsed President Rahmon for reelection, following an endorsement by the Youth Union a few days earlier. The People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan is scheduled to hold a meeting in early October and is expected to nominate its head, President Rahmon, for reelection.

## **The 2010 Attacks**

In late August 2010, over two dozen individuals sentenced as terrorists escaped from prison in Dushanbe and launched attacks as they travelled to various regions of the country. Many of these individuals had been opposition fighters during the Tajik civil war and had been arrested in eastern Tajikistan during a government sweep in 2009. In early September 2010, a suicide car bombing resulted in over two dozen deaths or injuries among police in the northern city of Khujand. An obscure terrorist group, Jamaat Ansarullah, supposedly related to the IMU, claimed responsibility. Some escapees and their allies, allegedly including IMU terrorists, attacked a military convoy in the Rasht Valley (formerly known as Karotegin) in central Tajikistan on September 19, 2010, reportedly resulting in dozens of deaths and injuries to government forces. The government alleged that Abdullo Rakhimov, alias Mullo Abdullo, was among the attackers. Abdullo had been a former Tajik opposition paramilitary leader who spurned the peace settlement and spent time in Afghanistan and Pakistan, where he allegedly maintained links with al Qaeda and the Taliban, and who may have returned surreptitiously to Tajikistan in 2009.

The attack contributed to concerns among some observers that Tajikistan was becoming more unstable. However, the government claimed in early 2011 that it had stabilized the situation in the valley. In early January 2011, the Tajik Interior (police) Ministry reported that its forces had killed former Tajik opposition fighter Alovuddin Davlatov, alias Ali Bedak, the alleged leader of one major insurgent group. In April 2011, the Interior Ministry reported that it had killed Abdullo. In December 2011, several dozen alleged IMU members said to be involved in the suicide car bombing in Khujand received prison sentences ranging from 8 years to life. Several defendants had reported that they had been tortured to agree to false charges. According to some observers, underlying causes of the violence may be related to the failure of the Rahmon government to share power and economic benefits with minority groups and clans, and more immediate causes may be related to the increasing repressiveness and exclusiveness of the government and the ability of disaffected populations to obtain countervailing armed support from relatives and others abroad.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Lola Olimova and Nargis Hamrabaeva, "Tajik Authorities Struggle to Quell Militants," *Report News: Central Asia*, Institute for War and Peace Reporting, October 4, 2010; Umida Hashimova, "The Islamist Insurgency in Tajikistan," *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, October 12, 2010; Tilav Rasulzoda and Parvina Khamidova, "New Militant Force in Tajikistan?" *Report News: Central Asia*, Institute for War and Peace Reporting, October 21, 2010; *CEDR*, January 12, (continued...)

The terrorist incidents in mid-2010 appeared to heighten views of the Tajik government that the Islamic Renaissance Party harbored extremists. The party was ordered in August 2010 to cease holding Friday prayers at its large headquarters compound (a 2009 religion law banned prayers in unregistered sites), the headquarters was raided by the police in mid-October 2010, and a mysterious fire destroyed part of the compound in late October 2010 that had been used by women for Friday prayers. The government also requested that parents recall children studying at Islamic religious institutions abroad, detained or harassed many bearded men, banned the wearing of the hijab by shopkeepers, ordered imams to only use approved sermons, and reportedly closed several mosques that it claimed had not been legally registered. In early March 2012, a Russian website and magazine alleged that President Rahmon had held a secret meeting with his security services to direct them to move against former UTO fighters and others who opposed him, including the Islamic Renaissance Party. In January 2013, he again ordered security services to make sure that no Tajiks were studying abroad at Islamic religious schools. In April 2013, the government did not issue visas for many foreign guests who had been invited by the Islamic Renaissance Party to attend a party anniversary. In May 2013, a court sentenced Islamic Renaissance Party official Sherik Karamkhudoyev to 14 years in prison on charges that he assisted in organizing violence in 2012 in Mountainous Badakhshan (see below). Party officials denounced the charges and sentence as politically motivated.<sup>7</sup>

## **The 2012 Instability in Mountainous Badakhshan**

On July 21, 2012, a national security official, General Abdullo Nazarov, was killed near the city of Khorog, the capital of the Mountainous Badakhshan Autonomous Region in eastern Tajikistan. According to some reports, the region is a major transit point for drugs and other goods trafficked from Afghanistan and for weapons and money smuggled to terrorist groups in Afghanistan. The government responded by launching security operations to force the local “criminal group” to surrender. The government asserted that the “criminals” were led by Tolib Ayembekov, a former UTO fighter who was the head of an Interior Ministry border guard troops unit in the Ishkohim District (Khorog is in this district), bordering Afghanistan. The government also alleged that the “criminals” had ties with organized crime groups throughout the world, and were linked to members of the IMU, who were infiltrating from Afghanistan to support the “criminals.”<sup>8</sup> Ayembekov denied that he was responsible for Nazarov’s death.

Over 3,000 security personnel entered Khorog on July 24, 2012, and subsequent fighting resulted in 17 casualties among the security personnel and 30 among the alleged “criminals,” according to the government. Forty-one surviving “criminals” were arrested. Although the government officially acknowledged only one civilian casualty, some observers reported that dozens of civilians had been killed or injured. Among the forces deployed to the region were extra border guards who sealed the Tajik-Afghan border to prevent the Tajik “criminals” from escaping across the border or receiving assistance from groups in Afghanistan. Some information about the fighting leaked out of the region despite the “accidental” severing of Internet and cell phone connections to the region. The government declared a unilateral ceasefire the next day. On July 26, 2012, the U.S. Embassy raised concerns about reports of civilian casualties and urged the

---

(...continued)

2011, Doc. No. CEP-950136.

<sup>7</sup> “Tajikistan Ups Pressure On Islamic Party Ahead Of Poll,” *BBC Monitoring*, May 11, 2013.

<sup>8</sup> *CEDR*, August 8, 2012, Doc. No. CEP-950127.



government not to suppress media reporting in the region. In early August 2012, Ayembekov pledged fealty to the Rahmon government and readiness to prove his innocence in a court of law.

The ceasefire was broken by the government early on August 22, 2012, when security forces attacked the home of a popular former UTO fighter, the invalid Imomnazar Imomnazarov, and killed him. His death led some protesters to attack the administration building in Khorog a few hours later, and police allegedly fired at them, injuring three. A large memorial service for Imomnazarov was held the next day in Khorog. A ceasefire agreement was reached between the government and local officials and prominent citizens later that evening. In accordance with the agreement, some security personnel subsequently were withdrawn from the city.

Some observers have questioned the Tajik government's official explanations of events in Khorog. One local commentator has argued that General Nazarov was acting at the behest of a group in the Tajik security service to seize control over lucrative smuggling operations or otherwise was involved in extorting money.<sup>9</sup> A think tank in Dushanbe asserted that the Tajik government deployed security forces in the region after Ayembekov threatened to enlist up to 1,000 terrorists massed across the border in Afghanistan to help him if the government moved to arrest him.<sup>10</sup> Several accounts have suggested by many residents of Khorog had taken up arms on July 24 in opposition against the deployment of security forces. Accusations that Ayembekov was a "criminal" must be squared with the fact that Khorog is the location of the regional Border Guard Training Center, where the International Organization for Migration has used State Department funding to carry out training for Tajik and Afghan border guards, including on-site at regional border posts. Seeming to refer to this situation, Assistant Secretary Blake in August 2012 stated that the United States supports Tajik government efforts in the region "to address some of the corrupt activities of their own border guards and others who are helping to facilitate some of this [narcotics] trade."<sup>11</sup>

Other observers have speculated that at least part of the reason for the government actions in Mountainous Badakhshan may have been to secure the loyalty of regional officials in the run-up to presidential elections planned for November 2013. During the deployment of security forces to the region, the regional Islamic Renaissance Party head was detained and later found dead, a party office was sacked, and another party official (Sherik Karamkhudoyev) was arrested.

## **Recent Terrorism Developments**

Perhaps indicating an evolving terrorism environment in the country, Tajik authorities reported that criminal cases had been launched against 72 suspected IMU members in Sughd Region in 2012. Interior Minister Ramazon Rahimov reported in mid-July 2013 that police had detained 27 members of the IMU, Jamaat Ansarullah, Jundallah (Warriors of Allah; a Pakistan-based Islamic extremist group), and Hezb-i Tahrir (an Islamic group considered extremist by the Tajik government) during the first six months of 2013. Of these, 16 members of Jamaat Ansarullah and three members of Jundallah reportedly had been detained in Sughd Region. Regional officials in Sughd stated that the Jamaat Ansarullah members had previously belonged to the IMU. In July

---

<sup>9</sup> *CEDR*, August 25, 2012, Doc. No. CEP-950018; Sébastien Peyrouse, "Battle on Top of the World: Rising Tensions in Tajikistan's Pamir Region," *On Wider Europe*, German Marshall Fund, August 2012.

<sup>10</sup> *Interfax*, August 3, 2012.

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Department of State, *On-the-Record Briefing With International Media*, Robert O. Blake, Jr., Assistant Secretary, Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, Almaty, Kazakhstan, August 15, 2012.

2013, a court in Sughd Region sentenced two Tajiks to prison sentences on allegations that they were members of Jundallah, one of whom had undergone terrorist training in Pakistan. The prosecutor stated that they had once belonged to the IMU but had switched to Jundallah.<sup>12</sup>

On September 22, 2013, Tajik sources indicated that ten terrorists had been apprehended in Dushanbe. According to a Tajik state television broadcast two days later, the group was the Tajik branch of the IMU and consisted of two Tajiks, other Central Asians, and two citizens of Turkey. The leader of the group and some members had been trained in an al Qaeda camp in Pakistan. Members of the group were shown confessing to being ordered by IMU leaders to conduct a bombing campaign before the November presidential election in Tajikistan against targets that included the Interior Ministry and the State Committee for National Security.<sup>13</sup>

## Human Rights

Assessing Tajikistan's human rights record in 2012, Human Rights Watch, a non-governmental organization, stated that the human rights situation in Tajikistan remained poor. The government persisted with enforcing a repressive law on religion, and introduced new legislation further restricting religious expression. Authorities continued to restrict freedom of the media, including by harassing and arresting journalists. Domestic violence against women and children and torture remain widespread human rights concerns.<sup>14</sup>

According to the State Department's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, the most significant human rights problems in Tajikistan in 2012 included torture and abuse by security forces, restrictions on freedoms of expression and the free flow of information, and the erosion of religious freedom. Other human rights problems included arbitrary arrest, denial of the right to a fair trial, and trafficking in persons. A governmental Ombudsman's Office for Human Rights seldom responded to complaints about human rights violations and rarely intervened. A presidential Office for Constitutional Guarantees of Citizens' Rights continued to examine citizens' complaints, but its effectiveness was low. In April 2012, the government amended the Criminal Code to define torture in line with international law, but security officials reportedly continued to use beatings or other coercion to extract confessions, and were seldom held accountable. NGOs reported that arbitrary detention for indefinite periods of time was routine. Criminal gangs maintained high-level connections with government officials and security agencies, which weakened investigations and prosecutions. Authorities regularly ordered narcotics agencies, for instance, to drop investigations of possible ties between officials and drug traffickers. Nearly all defendants were found guilty. There was no system of trial by jury. Some trials were held behind closed doors, such as that in 2012 involving 15 alleged members of the illegal extremist group Jamoat Ansarruloh. Opposition parties and local observers claimed that the government selectively prosecuted political opponents, and maintained that there were some political prisoners.

The authorities continued to curb freedom of speech through detentions, prosecutions, and the threat of heavy fines. Several independent television and radio stations were available in a small

---

<sup>12</sup> CEDR, July 21, 2013, Doc. No. CEL-45864414; July 16, 2013, Doc. No. CEL-42554542; July 19, 2013, Doc. No. CEL-14541358; "Tajik Court Sentences Two For Membership In Militant Group," *RFE/RL*, July 18, 2013.

<sup>13</sup> CEDR, September 25, 2013, Doc. No. CEL-56916901; *Interfax*, September 25, 2013.

<sup>14</sup> *World Report 2013*, Human Rights Watch, January 31, 2013.

portion of the country, but the government controlled most broadcasting transmission facilities. The government also controlled all major printing presses and the supply of newsprint. Despite these problems, some independent newspapers published political commentary and investigatory material critical of the government. Authorities allowed some international media to operate freely. In July 2013, libel and defamation were downgraded from criminal to civil offenses, but provisions remained in place that insulting the president was punishable by a fine or up to five years in jail. Libel lawsuits were frequently filed against newspapers that were critical of the government. There were new and continuing government restrictions on access to the Internet. Independent news and social media Web sites, such as YouTube and Facebook, were blocked during the year.

Individuals considering staging peaceful protests reportedly chose not to do so due to fear of government reprisal. Human rights and civil society NGOs faced increasing pressure from the government for alleged registration irregularities and other reasons. In October 2012, a regional court approved a government request for the closure of the Association of Young Lawyers (“Amparo”), an NGO involved in investigating torture and military hazing allegations. Human rights organizations deemed the closure as politically motivated.<sup>15</sup>

In its 2013 report, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), an advisory body, stated that systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of freedom of religion or belief continued in Tajikistan. The government suppressed and punished all religious activity independent of state control, and imprisoned individuals on unproven criminal allegations linked to religious activity or affiliation. USCIRF again recommended that the country be designated a Country of Particular Concern (CPC), which could lead to U.S. sanctions. USCIRF had first recommended that Tajikistan be so designated in 2012, and the country had been on a watch list since 2009. USCIRF called for the U.S. government to step up engagement with Tajikistan on religious freedom issues.<sup>16</sup> The State Department did not designate Tajikistan as a CPC in 2012 or in 2013 to date.

In its latest *International Religious Freedom Report*, the State Department reported that the Tajik government’s respect for religious freedom declined during 2012. The government used restrictive laws to approve and control all religious activities. Such controls included prohibiting people under the age of 18 from participating in public religious activities and effectively barring most women from attending Muslim religious services. Under the 2009 religion law, all religious groups are required to register with the government to operate legally, and those groups that are not registered can be forced to cease operation, although the authorities permitted some unregistered minority groups to worship unimpeded. The government required that all religious literature be approved for publication, importation, and distribution, and seized unapproved texts. Amendments to the Code of Administrative Offences expanded punishments for individuals and religious groups that engaged in activities not specifically set out in their statutes, preached and taught unapproved religious doctrines, established ties with religious groups abroad, and sent Tajiks abroad for religious education. In July 2012, the Dushanbe mayor instructed police to set up video cameras at each mosque, to prevent underage people from attending mosques, and in

---

<sup>15</sup> U.S. Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2012, April 19, 2013. USAID also has reported that the sustainability of NGO activities declined during 2012, with NGOs raising concerns about bureaucratic obstacles and increasing corruption during the registration process. See USAID, *Tajikistan - 2012 CSO Sustainability Index*, at <http://www.usaid.gov/europe-eurasia-civil-society/cso-sustainability-2012/tajikistan>.

<sup>16</sup> U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, *Annual Report*, April 2013.

August 2012, local authorities in the Khatlon region set up video cameras in all mosques to monitor prayers, follow sermon topics, and check whether underage people were entering the mosques. Also in Khatlon region, authorities in mid-2012 seized more than 100 mosques, allegedly because they lacked proper construction permits, with the aim of converting them to schools, medical centers, and other public facilities.<sup>17</sup>

On human trafficking, the State Department downgraded Tajikistan from “Tier 2” to the “Tier 2 Watch List” in 2007 through 2009, a ranking that reflected growing concern that the country was faltering in its efforts to combat trafficking. In 2010, it was returned to “Tier 2,” a status it retained in 2011 and 2012, because the country reportedly was making significant efforts to comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. In 2012, the State Department reported that the Tajik government continued to make progress in implementing a 2011-2013 action plan to combat human trafficking, including by further reducing the use of forced child and adult labor in the cotton harvest. However, the government continued to lack procedures to identify trafficking victims among vulnerable populations and refer them to existing protective services. The State Department also reported that there were no reported convictions of trafficking offenders in 2012 under Article 130 of the criminal code, which prohibits forced sexual exploitation and forced labor. Fines were levied against some farms and schools involved in the use of forced child labor, but no government employees reportedly were prosecuted. The government permitted NGOs and the International Organization for Migration to continue to monitor the annual cotton harvest. The State Department called for Tajikistan to vigorously investigate and prosecute suspected traffickers, including local officials who force individuals to participate in the cotton harvest; provide victim identification and victim sensitivity training to border guard and law enforcement authorities; and provide financial aid and boost in-kind support for shelters and other protection services for trafficking victims.<sup>18</sup>

On July 20, 2010, cotton from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan was added to a U.S. Department of Labor list that requires U.S. government contractors to certify that they have made a good faith effort to determine whether forced or indentured child labor was used to produce the cotton.<sup>19</sup>

## **Economic Issues**

Tajikistan is the poorest country in Central Asia in terms of per capita income and its economic growth is challenged by obsolescent infrastructure, corruption, weak governance, power shortages, and external debt.<sup>20</sup> Tajikistan’s post-Soviet economic decline reversed in 1997 as the peace accords that ended the civil war took hold. The Tajik government’s National Development Strategy for 2006-2015 focuses on ending the country’s transport and communications isolation and enhancing energy and food security.<sup>21</sup> The global economic downturn in 2008-2009

---

<sup>17</sup> U.S. Department of State, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2012*, May 20, 2013.

<sup>18</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report 2012*, June 19, 2013. See also *Children and Student Participation in Tajikistan’s Cotton Harvest: Annual Assessment 2012*, International Organization for Migration, July 2013.

<sup>19</sup> For the latest list, see U.S. Department of Labor. Bureau of International Labor Affairs. Office of Child Labor, Forced Labor, and Human Trafficking. *The Department of Labor’s List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor*, September 26, 2012. See also Executive Order 13126, *Prohibition of Acquisition of Products Produced by Forced or Indentured Child Labor*, at <http://www.dol.gov/ILAB/regs/eo13126/main.htm>.

<sup>20</sup> CIA, *The World Factbook*, at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ti.html>.

<sup>21</sup> State Committee on Investment and State Property Management of the Republic of Tajikistan, *National Development* (continued...)

depressed prices for Tajik commodity exports (mainly aluminum and cotton) and reduced worker remittances from Russia and Kazakhstan, which host most of Tajikistan's migrant workers. The Tajik currency, the somoni, lost much of its value relative to stronger currencies, which increased the costs of imported food and other goods. The Tajik government reported that its worker remittances plunged by almost 30% in 2009. The Tajik economy began to improve in 2010 as world commodity prices increased and improving economies in Russia and Kazakhstan resulted in an uptick in worker remittances by Tajik migrant workers.

GDP grew about 8% in 2012 and consumer price inflation was 5.8%, according to estimates by the *Economist Intelligence Unit* (EIU), a private organization. Growth in 2012 was boosted by increased agricultural production, construction, and remittances. The EIU estimates that an economic slowdown among Tajikistan's major trade partners, Russia, China, and Turkey, (and in the case of Russia, also a major source of worker remittances), may contribute to a decline in GDP growth to 5.5% for 2013. Some observers assert that a sizeable part of Tajikistan's economy (to some degree reflected in official GDP) is reliant on drug trafficking.<sup>22</sup>

U.S.-Tajik trade is miniscule. In 2012, the United States exported \$54.2 million in goods to Tajikistan, including medicine and food, and imported \$26.8 million. The United States provided advice on negotiations and legal reforms that supported Tajikistan in gaining admission to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in March 2013. The United States has not yet passed legislation to terminate the application of Title IV of the Trade Act of 1974 and grant non-discriminatory treatment (normal trade relations) to imports from Tajikistan.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has raised concerns about Tajikistan's low stock of international reserves, high external debt service, weak banking system, unprofitable state-owned enterprises, and challenging business climate, "which serves to dampen investment and job creation." The IMF urged enhancing property rights over agricultural land, building agricultural infrastructure, improving electric power transmission and distribution, conducting energy audits at major enterprises, reducing the cost of doing business, strengthening the regulation and governance of banks, setting up bank deposit insurance, reforming tax administration, and developing a securities market.<sup>23</sup> Some analysts have warned that moves by the Rahmon government in recent months—including the arrest of entrepreneur Zaid Saidov (see below) and the closure of the Coordination Council of Business and Public Associations—have further impaired private business and the investment climate.<sup>24</sup>

Tajikistan has depended heavily on foreign loans and aid to cover its budget and trade deficits. Tajikistan's foreign debt was \$3.4 billion at the end of 2012, with the largest share owed to China's Exim Bank, according to the Tajik Finance Ministry. Most small enterprises had been

---

(...continued)

*Strategy of the Republic of Tajikistan for the Period to 2015*, August 2006, at <http://www.gki.tj/en/documents/33/>.

<sup>22</sup> David Trilling, "Tajikistan: On Afghanistan's Heroin Highway, Corruption Fuels Addiction and HIV," *EurasiaNet*, April 9, 2012; Jafar Olimov, *Informal Economy in Tajikistan*, U.N. Development Program, 2007.

<sup>23</sup> IMF, *IMF Mission Concludes the 2013 Article IV Mission to Tajikistan*, Press Release No. 13/110, April 9, 2013; IMF, *Statement at the Conclusion of an IMF Staff Mission to the Republic of Tajikistan*, Press Release No. 12/442, November 15, 2012; IMF, *Republic of Tajikistan: Sixth Review Under the Three-Year Arrangement Under the Extended Credit Facility*, April 24, 2012. See also *Tajikistan Partnership Program Snapshot*, The World Bank Group, April 2013.

<sup>24</sup> Oleg Salimov "Tajikistan's Private Sector Loses Its Leader and Coordinating Council," *CACI Analyst*, September 4, 2013.

privatized by 2000, but land and major enterprises remain state-owned. Tajikistan's aluminum smelter in Tursunzade, one of the world's largest, accounts for almost two-thirds of Tajikistan's exports. Cotton is the other major export. Major trade partners include Turkey, China, Iran, and Afghanistan. The agricultural sector employs about one-half of the labor force. However, only 7% of the land area is arable, and much is still devoted to cotton production, so Tajikistan relies heavily on food imports. In 2011, food prices greatly increased, fueled in part by increased tariffs imposed by Uzbekistan on rail transit for food imports.

One million or more Tajiks—about one-half of the labor force—are labor migrants, and about 40% or more of the remaining population lives in poverty.<sup>25</sup> Remittances reportedly were \$3.6 billion in 2012, accounting for nearly one-half of Tajikistan's GDP, making the country first in the world in terms of such dependency.<sup>26</sup> The U.N. Development Program (UNDP) has reported that poverty and frequent electricity and gas cutoffs have contributed to the elimination of 70-80% of the forest cover in Tajikistan since it gained independence.<sup>27</sup>

In mid-2012, Tethys Petroleum Ltd., a small Canadian oil and gas exploration firm, announced that it had found substantial oil reserves in Tajikistan's Khatlon region, and in June 2013, an agreement was signed by Tethys, Total (France) and a subsidiary of the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) for the development of the oilfield. Gazprom also has announced finding added gas reserves in Tajikistan. Meeting with President Rahmon in Dushanbe in September 2013, Gazprom CEO Aleksey Miller reportedly stated that Tajikistan would soon be able to supply its own domestic needs for gas.<sup>28</sup>

The construction of the Roghun dam on the Vakhsh River—which would nearly double Tajikistan's electricity production—is a centerpiece of the country's economic development strategy. The government envisages that the hydroelectric power generation will provide for domestic needs—ending wintertime shortages—as well as serve as a source of export earnings. Uzbekistan has opposed the building of the dam, with its planned large reservoir, on the grounds that the project may endanger its agricultural production and otherwise alter the environment. At Tajikistan's request, the World Bank in early 2010 launched an analysis of the economic and environmental impact of the dam. In September 2013, the World Bank stated that it would release the “first phase” of technical reports on the dam project.<sup>29</sup> During the World Bank analysis, Tajikistan agreed to defer constructing the dam (although Uzbek and other observers allege that construction has continued). Some observers have stated that by deferring construction, President Rahmon has condemned the country to a longer period without adequate electricity in the winter and has increased discontent with his rule. The goal of the international community is for Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to negotiate a mutually acceptable solution, possibly involving a water-for-gas trade, similar to the Soviet-era regional water-sharing arrangement.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> CIA, *The World Factbook*, at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>;

<sup>26</sup> *Tajikistan Partnership Program Snapshot*, The World Bank Group, April 2013.

<sup>27</sup> UNDP, *Tajikistan: Accelerating Progress Toward the MDGs by Improving Access to Energy*, 2010; UNDP, *Sustainable Energy for All: Tajikistan Rapid Assessment and Gap Analysis*, 2012; “Tajikistan: Energy Shortage Accelerates Deforestation,” *Eurasianet*, December 8, 2011

<sup>28</sup> Konstantin Parshin, “Tajikistan: Just How Much Energy Does Dushanbe Have?” *Eurasianet*, March 18, 2013; *CEDR*, June 18, 2013, Doc. No. CEL-48222972; *Interfax*, June 19, 2013.

<sup>29</sup> The World Bank, *Press Release: World Bank Regional Director meets with the President of Tajikistan*, September 19, 2013.

<sup>30</sup> Alexander Sodiqov, “The Rogun Dam Controversy: Is Compromise Possible?” *CACI Analyst*, May 2, 2012; Stephen (continued...)

Perhaps considering that negotiations were not possible or desirable, Uzbekistan began in February 2010 to restrict railway and road transport to and from Tajikistan, apparently to pressure Tajikistan not to build the dam. Reportedly, thousands of railcars and trucks faced delays, including those carrying construction materials bound for Afghanistan to support ISAF, materials for building the Roghun dam, materials from Iran for completing the Sangtuda-2 hydro-electric power plant on the Vakhsh River (the plant is scheduled to become fully operational in late 2013), fuel and seeds for Tajik farmers, flour, and materials for road construction in Tajikistan. Uzbekistan also boosted tariffs on railcars and trucks crossing into Tajikistan, restricted gas supplies to Tajikistan, and restricted Turkmen electricity supplies to Tajikistan. In May 2011, media reported that Iran had shipped equipment through China and Afghanistan for Sangtuda-2 to get around transit delays imposed by Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan rejected Tajik assertions that shipping delays were political and claimed that they were caused by increased ISAF rail traffic to Afghanistan, a backup of railcars headed to Turkmenistan, and track repairs.

A bridge support on a railway spur from Termez, Uzbekistan to southern Tajikistan—one of three such rail lines connecting the two countries—allegedly was damaged by a bomb in November 2011, backing up food and fuel shipments. This rail line has remained inoperable. In early 2012, Uzbekistan boosted the tariffs on remaining rail transport to Tajikistan. These transit problems and a Uzbek cutoff of gas supplies for a time in April 2012 led Tajik Foreign Ministry officials to declare a humanitarian crisis in the country. Tajikistan has repeatedly appealed to the OSCE, the U.N. Secretary-General, USCENTCOM, and others that Uzbekistan continues to delay rail transit to and from Tajikistan.<sup>31</sup> Talks between the two countries on the resumption of Uzbek gas deliveries that were suspended in December 2012 have not been successful. To compensate for this energy cut-off, Tajikistan negotiated for duty-free oil from Russia as part of a basing extension accord (see below), according to some observers. During January 2013, Uzbekistan temporarily halted the land transit of goods from Turkey and Iran across its territory to Tajikistan.

## Foreign Policy and Defense

In a major foreign policy address in March 2013, President Rahmon warned that since Tajikistan had become independent, the country and the world have experienced increased dangers from “arms races, international terrorism, political extremism, fundamentalism, separatism, drug trafficking, transnational organized crime, [and] the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.” To deal with these threats to a country at the crossroads of the world, he averred, Tajikistan would continue to follow an “open door” policy of developing “relations of friendship, disinterested and mutually beneficial cooperation with all countries of the world.” He stated that close ties with neighboring and regional states were a priority, to be based on “friendship, good-neighborliness, [and] non-interference in each other's internal affairs,” and to involve the peaceful settlement of disputes, such as over border, water, and energy issues. He particularly called for

---

(...continued)

Weil, “Tit-for-Tat: The Evolution of Non-Cooperation over the Rogun Dam,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, February 1, 2012, at <http://csis.org/blog/tit-tat-evolution-non-cooperation-over-rogun-dam>.

<sup>31</sup> Konstantin Parshin, “Tajikistan: Repercussions of Tajik-Uzbek Feud May Be Felt All the Way to Afghanistan,” *Eurasianet*, April 1, 2010; Konrad Mathesius, “Boxcar Diplomacy Puts Tajik Businesses at Tashkent’s Mercy,” *Eurasianet*, August 6, 2010; *CEDR*, November 18, 2010, Doc. No. CEP-950138; November 19, 2010, Doc. No. CEP-950234 and Doc. No. CEP950214; December 30, 2010, Doc. No. CEP-950116; March 30, 2011, Doc. No. CEP-950190; May 10, 2011, Doc. No. CEP-964198.

“equal” and “unbiased” relations with Uzbekistan. He pledged to assist Afghanistan to develop peacefully and stated that “language, literature, and cultural” ties with Iran would be continued and expanded. He highlighted Tajikistan’s over two centuries of ties with Russia, and called for strengthening such relations “on the basis of equality, mutual benefit, and strategic partnership,” in the political, military, economic, labor migration, and other spheres. He stressed that expanded trade, economic, and investment ties with China were important to Tajikistan. He stated that Tajikistan was grateful for U.S. economic assistance, and that Tajikistan would make efforts to maintain the “partnership” between the two countries. He averred that Tajikistan viewed increased investment and other economic ties with the EU as key, and reported that expanded ties with the Islamic world were being pursued, although he warned that Islam should not be abused for “selfish political ends.”<sup>32</sup>

Some analysts have argued that this open door foreign policy has been constrained in recent months by a concerted shift in Russian policy to consolidate influence over Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan (see also below).<sup>33</sup> Russia has used positive and negative means of inducement, the latter including some periodic deportations of Tajik migrant workers and threats to introduce an entry visa regime for Tajik citizens.<sup>34</sup>

Tajikistan is interested in the political and human rights of approximately seven million ethnic Tajiks residing in Afghanistan (25% of the population) and over one million in Uzbekistan (4%). Tajikistan has hosted several thousand refugees from Afghanistan, mainly ethnic Tajiks, but reportedly is somewhat concerned that a greater influx could exacerbate Islamic fundamentalism in the country. Tajikistan’s relations with Uzbekistan have been problematic, including disagreements about water-sharing, Uzbek gas supplies, and environmental pollution (see above).

President Rahmon has proclaimed that Russia is Tajikistan’s most significant “strategic partner.” Tajikistan is heavily dependent on remittances from guest workers in Russia (see above). Bilateral relations have been strained during drawn-out negotiations over the extension of a basing agreement (see below). Ties further were roiled in late 2011, after Tajikistan sentenced a Russian pilot to 8.5 years in prison for violating Tajik airspace. In response, Russia imposed “sanitary” restrictions on Tajik food imports, cancelled the work permits of several dozen Tajik guest workers and deported them, and threatened to stop granting work permits. Tajikistan quickly capitulated and freed the Russian pilot. Relations were further strained in April 2013, after Russia temporarily banned some operations by trains travelling to and from Tajikistan on the grounds of sanitary violations and suspected drug smuggling and terrorist infiltration. Most significantly, the restrictions threatened the travel of Tajik migrant workers to and from Russia. In May 2013, Tajikistan agreed to enhance inspections of the trains for drugs. Some in Tajikistan viewed the controversy as pressure on Tajikistan to move forward with the extension of the basing agreement.<sup>35</sup>

Economic ties with China and Iran have grown. Tajikistan has established some trade links with Afghanistan. Ties with China include Tajikistan’s role as a transit state for the Central Asia-China

---

<sup>32</sup> CEDR, March 16, 2013, Doc. No. CEL-54015758.

<sup>33</sup> Alexander Cooley and Marlene Laruelle, “The Changing Logic of Russian Strategy in Central Asia: From Privileged Sphere to Divide and Rule?” *PONARS Policy Memo*, No. 261, July, 2013.

<sup>34</sup> Murat Sadykov, “Central Asia: Labor Migrants Caught in Russian Politicians’ Crosshairs,” *Eurasianet*, June 18, 2013; Konstantin Parshin, “Tajikistan: Is Moscow Getting Ready to Punish Dushanbe?” *Eurasianet*, April 30, 2013.

<sup>35</sup> “Tajik-Russian Ties Sour Amid Military Base Row,” *BBC Monitoring*, May 8, 2013.



gas pipeline. China is the largest foreign investor in Tajikistan and trade turnover was \$670 million in 2012, according to the Tajik Statistics Agency. During a visit to China in May 2013, President Rahmon and Chairman Xi Jinping signed energy banking, agriculture, tourism, and other cooperation agreements, and China pledged \$300 million for development projects in Tajikistan.

The Tajik armed forces consist of about 8,800 ground, air force-air defense, and mobile (rapid reaction) troops, according to *The Military Balance*. There also are about 3,800 troops in the Interior Ministry, 1,200 in the National Guard, and 2,500 in the Emergencies Ministry, and an unreported number of border guards.<sup>36</sup> The term of military service is two years. All officers reportedly receive extensive military training in Russia. The ground forces possess 37 tanks, 46 armored vehicles, and several dozen artillery and air defense weapons. The air force possesses 15 attack or transport helicopters and a few transport aircraft (these forces are dwarfed by Russian forces based in the country; see below). The armed forces are underfunded and fractured by regional clan loyalties that compromise their effectiveness. According to Defense Minister Sherali Khayrulloev, a mobile (rapid reaction) force recently was created as a third branch of the armed forces from subunits of the other branches as “a quality enhancement of combat readiness and [to ensure] a swift reaction to a change in the situation in the country and region.”<sup>37</sup>

Tajikistan is a member of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO; other members include Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan). Tajikistan also belongs to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO; an economic and security organization led by China and Russia that also includes Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan). Tajikistan joined NATO’s Partnership for Peace in February 2002.

A 10-year Tajik-Russian basing agreement (with a renewal option) was signed in October 2004 that provides for Russia’s former 201<sup>st</sup> Motorized Rifle Division to be based at three garrisons and to have access to three training grounds. Tajikistan also transferred ownership of the Okno space tracking base (near the town of Nurek) to Russia. In exchange, Russia cancelled a \$242 million debt. Russia’s approximately 5,000 contract troops in Tajikistan (many or most of whom are ethnic Tajik noncommissioned officers and soldiers) constitute its second-largest military presence abroad, after the Black Sea Fleet in Ukraine. Besides these troops, Russia has positioned 54 tanks, 300 infantry fighting vehicles and armored personnel carriers, 100 self-propelled howitzers and missile launchers, and nine aircraft and helicopters in the country.<sup>38</sup> Tajikistan assumed control from Russia over guarding its borders in June 2005, although several hundred Russian border guard advisors remained (see below). In November 2006, Tajikistan and Russia signed an agreement to hold joint military training operations. In October 2009, visiting President Rahmon reportedly unsuccessfully urged President Medvedev to pay rent on Russia’s base facilities in Tajikistan.

At a meeting in Dushanbe in September 2011, then-President Medvedev announced that he and Rahmon had made progress in reaching agreement on extending the basing agreement for another 49 years. However, some media reported that Tajikistan was calling for up to \$300 million in annual rent payments, while Russia continued to reject making any significant rent payments. Also at the meeting, the two presidents agreed that the number of Russian border advisors

---

<sup>36</sup> *The Military Balance*, International Institute for Strategic Studies, March 14, 2013.

<sup>37</sup> *CEDR*, June 14, 2009, Doc. No. CEP-549001.

<sup>38</sup> *The Military Balance*.

reportedly would be reduced from 350 to 200 (but see below), although Russia would continue to provide officer training, air transportation, and equipment for Tajik border guards. President Rahmon met with newly inaugurated President Putin in Moscow on the sidelines of a CIS summit in mid-May 2012, and the two leaders agreed to continue the apparently contentious discussions on extending the basing agreement. In talks in Dushanbe in mid-August 2012, the Tajik side allegedly had reduced its request for rent payments to \$25 million but also had demanded that the basing agreement only be extended to 2016. At a press conference, the Russian defense emissary denied that rent issues had ever been a part of the negotiations.

During President Putin's October 2012 visit to Tajikistan, he and President Rahmon reached agreement on extending the basing lease until 2042. Russia pledged that it would provide oil to Tajikistan duty free and \$200 million in military assistance over the next few years, as well as support for hydropower development and better treatment for Tajik migrant workers. Agreements to finalize or amend some of these pledges have been the subject of further negotiations between the two sides. The basing extension accord was ratified by the Russian legislature in April 2013 and President Rahmon submitted it to the Tajik legislature for ratification on September 18, 2013.<sup>39</sup>

Besides the Russian military base, some media report that India has a small forward operations airbase at Farkhar and also provides some military training and equipment to Tajikistan.<sup>40</sup>

In May 2013, CSTO Secretary General Nikolai Bordyuzha stated that Tajikistan's border guards were capable of securing the border with Afghanistan, countering other reports that Russia was considering buttressing the borders with Russian border guards.<sup>41</sup> Supporting these reports, however, in July 2013, the Director of the Russian Federal Drug Control Service, Viktor Ivanov, stated that Russian border guards would return to the Tajik-Afghan border if they were invited by Tajikistan. In August 2013, Bordyuzha visited Tajikistan and assessed that Tajik-Afghan border security allegedly was deteriorating, and stated that he would report this situation to President Putin at the upcoming September 23, 2013, CSTO summit in Sochi, Russia.

At the CSTO summit, President Rahmon called for the CSTO to provide equipment to bolster Tajikistan's border defense capabilities. President Putin pledged to develop a special program of "preventative" assistance to enhance border security against terrorism and drug trafficking. Bordyuzha asserted that the CSTO would devote far more resources than anticipated from the United States to assist Tajikistan in building up its armed forces and border troops to deal with the drawdown of NATO forces in Afghanistan in 2014. He reiterated, however, that Russia did not plan to send its own border guards to Tajikistan.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> *CEDR*, October 6, 2012, Doc. No. CEP-950012; "Rahmon Says Tajikistan Will Extend Russian's Military Presence to 2042," *RFE/RL*, September 11, 2013; *CEDR*, January 18, 2013, Doc. No. CEP-008002; March 20, 2013, Doc. No. CEL-57598210.

<sup>40</sup> *The Military Balance*; *CEDR*, February 16, 2013, Doc. No. CEP-950045; Vinay Kumar, "India, Tajikistan Stress Stakes in Afghan Peace," *The Hindu*, April 16, 2013.

<sup>41</sup> *CEDR*, May 20, 2013, Doc. No. CEL-39107785; May 17, 2013, Doc. No. CEL-40648753.

<sup>42</sup> *Interfax*, September 23, 2013.

## U.S.-Tajik Relations

### Overview of U.S. Support for Tajikistan

State Department officials served as observers at the U.N.-sponsored intra-Tajikistan peace talks and pledged rebuilding aid, an example of U.S. diplomatic efforts to head off or ease ethnic and civil tensions in the Eurasian states. The United States also supported the presence of U.N. military observers in Tajikistan during the 1992-1997 civil war.

According to the Obama Administration, “stability and economic growth in Tajikistan are critical to achieving regional stability,” but the country faces many challenges, including its long and porous border with Afghanistan, difficult relations with Uzbekistan, “widespread corruption, and inadequate health and education systems.” U.S. aid aims to boost Tajikistan’s ability to counter regional threats such as extremism, terrorism, and drug trafficking, while boosting trade. Tajikistan also is described as a “key U.S. partner” in operations in Afghanistan.<sup>43</sup>

In February 2010, the United States and Tajikistan launched annual bilateral consultations (ABCs) to enhance cooperation on economic, security, and other issues. The third round of ABCs was held in Washington D.C. on May 17-18, 2012. According to the Tajik Foreign Ministry, the first day focused on security and strengthening of borders as well as economic cooperation and attraction of investments. The United States reportedly pledged further support for Tajikistan’s accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO). On the second day, the sides reportedly discussed cooperation in education, cultural exchange, and human rights, and water resources and environmental protection.<sup>44</sup> What was termed a mid-year review of relations occurred during a visit by Assistant Secretary Blake to Tajikistan in February 2013.

During her October 22, 2011, visit to Tajikistan, Secretary Clinton stated that she “thanked the president [Rahmon] for the critical role Tajikistan has played in the international community’s efforts to bring security and peace to Afghanistan,” terming Tajikistan a “strong partner” in such efforts. She also praised some progress by Tajikistan in responding to human trafficking. She reported that discussions with the president and foreign minister included Tajik security concerns, particularly along the Tajik-Afghan border, and cooperation in combating drug trafficking. The two sides discussed the U.S. “New Silk Road Vision” to turn Afghanistan into a regional transportation, trade, and energy hub linked to Central Asia. She warned the president that restrictions on religious freedom could contribute to rising religious discontent, and called for freedom of the press to be respected.<sup>45</sup>

In Congressional testimony in late July 2012, Assistant Secretary Blake stated that “Tajikistan remains a strong supporter of efforts to help Afghanistan.” He highlighted that U.S.-Tajik relations focus on U.S. support for the country’s accession to the WTO, assistance to improve agriculture and the climate for foreign investment, and encouragement to respect human rights and the rule of law. The United States also urges Tajikistan to cooperate with the World Bank’s

---

<sup>43</sup> The White House, *Congressional Budget Justification for Foreign Operations, Annex: Regional Perspectives, FY2014*, May 17, 2013.

<sup>44</sup> *CEDR*, May 19, 2012, Doc. No. CEP-950041.

<sup>45</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Remarks With Foreign Minister Hamrokhon Zarifi After Their Meeting*, Hillary Rodham Clinton, Secretary of State, Dushanbe, Tajikistan, October 22, 2011.

assessment of the technical, economic, environmental, and social impact of the Roghun Dam project, and not to move forward with construction until the assessment is complete.<sup>46</sup>

During his February 2013 visit to Tajikistan, Assistant Secretary Blake stated that he thanked President Rahmon for his support for U.S. operations in Afghanistan and discussed measures to strengthen cooperation in counter-terrorism, counter-narcotics, and border security. He also averred that he urged the Tajik government to ensure a free and fair 2013 presidential election and permit NGOs and journalists to operate freely.

The United States has been the major humanitarian and developmental aid donor to facilitate implementation of the Tajik peace accord and for resettlement of displaced persons. Over the period FY1992-FY2010, the United States budgeted \$988.57 million of aid for Tajikistan (FREEDOM Support Act and agency budgets), mainly for food and other humanitarian needs. The United States also facilitated the delivery of privately donated commodities. See **Table 1** and **Table 2**. Budgeted assistance for FY2011 was \$44.48 million and for FY2012 was \$45.1 million, and the Administration requested \$36.4 million in foreign assistance for Tajikistan in FY2014. FY2011-FY2014 figures cover aid now included in the Economic Support Fund, as well as through such programs as Food for Peace, Foreign Military Financing (FMF), Global Health and Child Survival, International Military Education and Training (IMET), International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE), and Nonproliferation, Antiterrorism, Demining and Related Programs (NADR). Country data for FY2013 is not yet available.

The priorities of the Administration's FY2014 request for assistance for Tajikistan include "peace and security" assistance programs (FMF, IMET, INCLE, and NADR) (\$10.53 million); bolstering food security and U.S.-Tajik business ties (\$10.2 million); combating tuberculosis and improving maternal and child health and nutrition (\$6.75 million); improving teacher-training, promoting reading, and increasing scholarships to the American University of Central Asia (\$4 million); and strengthening NGOs, independent media, and citizen participation, and supporting trafficking victims (\$3.7 million).<sup>47</sup>

## **Cooperation on Counter-Terrorism and Counter-Narcotics**

After the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States, Tajikistan seemed to be willing to cooperate with the United States, but hesitated to do so without permission from Moscow. However, Tajikistan had long supported the Afghan Northern Alliance's combat against the Taliban, so it was predisposed to welcome U.S.-led backing for the Northern Alliance. Perhaps after gauging Russia's views, the Tajik Defense Ministry on September 25, 2001, offered use of Tajik airspace to U.S. forces, and some coalition forces began to transit through Tajik airspace and airfields, including U.S. troops entering and leaving Afghanistan via the Manas Transit Center in Kyrgyzstan. U.S., French, and British personnel have used the Dushanbe airport for refueling (most of the French troops and aircraft based at the Dushanbe airport since late 2001 reportedly left by mid-2013 as part of the drawdown of ISAF).

---

<sup>46</sup> U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Europe and Eurasia, Hearing on U.S. Engagement in Central Asia, *Testimony by Robert Blake, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Central and South Asian Affairs, U.S. Department of State*, July 24, 2012.

<sup>47</sup> The White House, *Congressional Budget Justification for Foreign Operations, Annex: Regional Perspectives, FY2014*, May 17, 2013.

During a January 2009 visit, the then-Commander of the U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM), General David Petraeus, reached agreement with President Rahmon on the land transit of goods such as construction materials to support military operations of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan.<sup>48</sup> While most land transport along this Northern Distribution Network (NDN) traverses Uzbekistan to final destinations in Afghanistan, Tajikistan serves as an alternative route for a small percentage of supplies. Tajikistan has agreed to accept the transit of equipment and materials from Afghanistan, and in March 2012, the first such U.S. military cargoes were trucked across the “Friendship Bridge” to Tajikistan. The trucks reportedly traveled to Kyrgyzstan, where the cargoes were loaded on rail cars that transited Kazakhstan and Russia to the port of Riga and hence were shipped to the United States. However, transit costs via the NDN reportedly have proven higher than anticipated, so that only a few containers are existing Afghanistan via the NDN, including through the alternative route through Tajikistan.

In March 2012, the then-USCENTCOM Commander, General James Mattis, visited Dushanbe, where he reportedly thanked the president for supporting the NDN and for providing economic support for Afghanistan. He reportedly stressed that Tajikistan was a buffer state preventing the spread of terrorism and drug trafficking into the rest of Central Asia, and pledged continued technical assistance to the border guards and other security forces. In February and May 2012, the U.S. Transportation Command (USTRANSCOM) Commander, General William Fraser, traveled to Tajikistan, and on the May trip visited the Nizhniy Panj Border Crossing Point on the Tajikistan border with Afghanistan in order to assess the status of NDN transit. In late February 2013, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense David Sedney led a military delegation to Tajikistan reportedly to discuss Tajikistan’s security needs and its role in the NDN. In July 2013, USCENTCOM Commander Lloyd Austin visited Dushanbe, and reportedly he and President Rahmon discussed possible U.S. security support to assist Tajikistan after the planned drawdown of U.S. forces in Afghanistan in 2014.

The United States has provided \$179.9 million in “peace and security” assistance to Tajikistan in FY1992-FY2010, about 18% of U.S. assistance to the country. This aid has been administered by the Defense, State, and Energy Departments, and has included Comprehensive Threat Reduction aid, Foreign Military Financing (FMF), International Military Education and Training (IMET), Non-proliferation, Anti-Terrorism, De-mining, and Related Programs (NADR), Partnership for Peace aid, counter-narcotics aid, and transnational crime aid.

The State Department has warned that terrorists and others are able to exploit Tajikistan’s 749-mile border with Afghanistan to enter the country in part because Tajik border guards and police are stretched thin and lack the capabilities needed to police the border, despite receiving bilateral and multilateral assistance. Corruption also hampers counter-terrorism efforts. The State Department raises concerns that while Tajikistan improved its capabilities to combat terrorism in 2012, authorities in some cases targeted non-extremist Islamic groups and misused counter-terrorism laws to suppress legitimate political opposition. Possible banking links between Tajikistan and Iran involving violations of U.S. and U.N. sanctions have raised U.S. concerns, with U.S. authorities calling on Tajikistan to strengthen and fully implement its money laundering laws.<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> U.S. Embassy in Tajikistan, *Press Release: U.S. Centcom Commander Visits Tajikistan*, January 17, 2009; *Press Briefing by General David Petraeus, Commander, US Central Command*, January 17, 2009.

<sup>49</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2012*, May 30, 2013.

U.S. Special Forces reportedly have an agreement that they may pursue terrorists crossing the border from Afghanistan into Tajikistan. In September 2010, U.S. Special Forces also reportedly provided tactical support to Tajik security forces that were combating militants in the Rasht valley (see above, “The 2010 Attacks”).

The State Department has reported estimates that most of the heroin smuggled through Central Asia to Russia, China, and Europe transits Tajikistan, some 75-80 metric tons, and that the illicit drug trade constitutes as much as one-fifth of Tajikistan’s GDP. Drug trafficking contributed to corruption throughout all levels of the Tajik government and was a revenue source for militants and terrorists in Afghanistan, according to the State Department. In 2010, the Tajik government adopted a National Border Management Strategy (NBMS), drafted with the assistance of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and in 2011 the government established an Inter-Agency Secretariat to oversee implementation. However, this secretariat has remained moribund. Tajikistan’s Drug Control Agency (DCA) reported that law enforcement agencies seized nearly six metric tons of narcotics in 2012, 41% more than in 2011, although cannabis seizures accounted for most of the increase. Drug-related criminal cases were sometimes dismissed for connected individuals, or used by corrupt officials to go after internal opponents. Several law enforcement officials were arrested and prosecuted for drug trafficking and corruption.

The United States has provided \$11.3 million since 2003 to assist in the operation of the DCA, and continues to provide salary supplements for DCA personnel. The United States and the DCA support a Drug Liaison Office in Taloqan, Afghanistan, where DCA officers work with Afghan officials to prevent drug smuggling from Afghanistan to Tajikistan. In July 2012, the U.S. Embassy’s Office of Military Cooperation organized training for Customs officials operating U.S.-provided vehicle scanners at the Nizhny-Panj border crossing on the Tajik-Afghan border. However, the scanners remain underused and have resulted in negligible drug seizures.

The continued lack of commitment to implement the NBMS, negligible seizures at the U.S.-built Nizhny-Panj border crossing, and high-level corruption continued to hinder the success of counter-narcotics programs, according to the State Department. It suggests that since the Tajik government has proven willing to combat militants and extremists crossing into Tajikistan, the United States may use this shared goal to encourage more cooperation on border security and counter-narcotics.<sup>50</sup> Perhaps indicative of continuing challenges, U.S. media reported in early 2013 that USCENTCOM temporarily banned dealing with a private airline firm based in Afghanistan that it suspected was smuggling drugs “in bulk” to Tajikistan, an allegation denied by the Tajik Foreign Ministry.<sup>51</sup>

Tajikistan has occasionally hosted annual Regional Cooperation “tabletop” exercises, sponsored by USCENTCOM, to focus on strengthening security cooperation among Central and South Asian countries. The most recent exercise hosted by Tajikistan took place in mid-2012; in July 2013 the exercise was held in Germany.<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>50</sup> U.S. Department of State, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, Volume I: Drug and Chemical Control*, March 12, 2013; *Press Release: U.S. Embassy Sponsors Joint Training of Tajik and Afghan Border Guards*, February 21, 2012.

<sup>51</sup> Maria Abi-Habib, “Afghan Airline Ferried Opium, U.S. Alleges,” *Wall Street Journal*, January 25, 2013; Maria Abi-Habib, “U.S. Suspends Ban on Afghan Airline,” *Wall Street Journal*, February 4, 2013.

<sup>52</sup> Roger McDermott, “Regional Cooperation 2012 and US Security Assistance Efforts in Central Asia,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, June 28, 2012.

**Table I. U.S. Budgeted Assistance to Tajikistan by Objective and Year, FY1992-FY2001**

(millions of current dollars)

Objective	FY1992	FY1993	FY1994	FY1995	FY1996	FY1997	FY1998	FY1999	FY2000	FY2001
Economic Growth	0.0	0.01	0.14	0.37	0.33	0.64	3.26	1.81	0.95	4.66
Governing Justly & Democratically	0.23	1.83	3.5	3.36	1.74	2.24	4.38	5.0	4.18	4.85
Investing in People	0.0	0.5	0.35	0.53	0.4	0.55	0.45	0.8	1.15	1.5
Peace & Security	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.22	0.41	1.04	0.75
Humanitarian	11.38	31.38	41.27	29.45	42.9	11.23	28.25	30.14	31.36	59.23
Cross-Cutting & Program Support	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.49
Total	11.61	33.72	45.26	33.71	45.36	14.75	36.57	38.16	38.69	76.48

**Source:** Derived from U.S. Department of State, Office of the Coordinator for Europe and Eurasia.

**Notes:** : Includes all agencies and accounts. Some rounding has occurred.

**Table 2. US Budgeted Assistance to Tajikistan by Objective and Year, FY2002-FY2010 (and Totals, FY1992-FY2010)**

(millions of current dollars)

Objective	FY2002	FY2003	FY2004	FY2005	FY2006	FY2007	FY2008	FY2009	FY2010	Total (FY1993- FY2010)
Economic Growth	14.75	8.84	5.48	6.22	6.74	7.24	7.64	7.28	15.64	91.98
Governing Justly & Democratically	8.67	7.7	11.88	7.88	7.6	10.79	18.65	9.53	12.1	126.1
Investing in People	7.25	3.75	5.57	3.82	4.36	4.59	5.35	6.87	8.94	56.72
Peace & Security	21.6	1.62	7.88	28.99	10.0	18.99	30.48	26.3	31.48	179.85
Humanitarian	70.28	21.43	21.68	18.0	13.42	7.66	4.73	13.56	10.54	497.88
Cross-Cutting & Program Support	13.8	5.38	0.52	0.79	0.7	0.67	0.48	3.89	4.29	36.02
Total	136.34	48.71	53.01	65.69	42.81	49.94	67.33	67.44	82.99	614.26

**Source:** Derived from U.S. Department of State, Office of the Coordinator for Europe and Eurasia.

**Notes:** : Includes all agencies and accounts. Some rounding has occurred.





Source: CIA World Factbook.

## Author Contact Information

Jim Nichol  
Specialist in Russian and Eurasian Affairs  
jnichol@crs.loc.gov, 7-2289