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Tajikistan: Recent Developments and U.S. Interests

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Summary

This report outlines the transformational challenges faced by Tajikistan since its five-year civil war ended in 1997. It discusses U.S. policy and assistance. Basic facts and biographical information are provided. This report may be updated. Related products include CRS Issue Brief IB93108, *Central Asia*, updated regularly.

U.S. Policy¹

According to the Administration, “a stable, peaceful Tajikistan, secure within its own borders, will help prevent the spread of radical groups and terrorists, and increase the potential for development in the region.” U.S. assistance aims to enhance Tajikistan’s territorial integrity and security; prevent the flow of narcotics, illicit weapons, and persons of concern; foster democratic and economic reforms; and address dire humanitarian needs. U.S. International Military Education and Training (IMET) funds requested for FY2006 will help Tajikistan “support U.S. security interests and objectives.” Such aid will enable Tajikistan to secure its territory “against narco-traffickers and terrorist infiltrators, and will be provided in direct support of U.S. interests and force protection for U.S. forces operating in Uzbekistan and Afghanistan” (State Department, *Congressional Presentation for Foreign Operations, FY2006*).

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. 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

¹ Sources include Foreign Broadcast Information Service, *Daily Report: Central Eurasia*; *RFE/RL Newline*; *Eurasia Insight*; Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU); the State Department’s *Washington File*; and Reuters and Associated Press (AP) newswires.

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persons. Over the period FY1992-FY2004, the United States was the largest bilateral donor, budgeting \$612.6 million of aid for Tajikistan (FREEDOM Support Act and agency budgets), mainly for food and other humanitarian needs (by comparison, European Union members provided about \$470 million in grants and loans). The United States also facilitated the delivery of privately donated commodities. Estimated spending in FY2005 was \$43.6 million (FREEDOM Support Act and other foreign aid, excluding Defense and Energy Department funds), and the Administration has requested \$37.1 million for FY2006 (FREEDOM Support Act and other foreign aid). Much of the aid requested for FY2006 is planned for food (\$10.4 million), teacher training and other educational support, and healthcare needs, including to combat infectious diseases and to create a primary healthcare system. The Administration also plans to focus on strengthening law enforcement, including aid for the government's Drug Control Agency, training and equipment for border guards for counter-drug and counter-terrorism efforts, and advice on combating terrorist financing and money laundering. Associated aid increases are planned for Export Control and Related Border Security (EXBS) programs to assist Tajik border forces as they replace Russian border troops, in order to improve their ability to interdict the smuggling of weapons of mass destruction and related technologies. A new, more secure, U.S. Embassy building is being built.



Source: Map Resources. Adapted by CRS. (08/02 M.Chin)

Contributions to the Campaign Against Terrorism

The Administration has stated that Tajikistan has supported the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT), Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) “unreservedly from the beginning” by granting overflight and basing rights (*Congressional Presentation for Foreign Operations*). Tajikistan, host to the second largest Russian military presence abroad (the first is the Black Sea Fleet in Ukraine), seemed after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States to be willing to cooperate with the United States, but hesitant to do so without permission from Moscow. However, since Tajikistan had long supported the Afghan Northern Alliance’s combat against the Taliban, it was predisposed to welcome U.S.-led backing for the Northern Alliance. On September 25, 2001, Russian Defense Minister Sergey Ivanov stated that the United States could use bases in Tajikistan to attack targets in Afghanistan “if the need arises,” and that same day, the Tajik Defense Ministry offered use of Tajik airspace to U.S. forces. Some coalition forces began to transit through Tajik airspace and airfields. U.S., French, and British personnel have used the Dushanbe airport to a limited degree for refueling (the French maintain a presence of 100-200 personnel), but the poor condition of facilities has precluded wide-scale use by the coalition.

On March 13, 2003, President Rakhmanov reportedly refused Russia’s request to denounce coalition actions in Iraq. Tajik analyst Suhrob Sharipov argued that Tajikistan had taken a neutral stance because it had benefitted from U.S. aid to rebuild the country and from U.S.-led actions against terrorism in Afghanistan that improved its security. This stance may have changed somewhat during 2004, after Rakhmanov and Russian

President Vladimir Putin signed several cooperation accords. Tajik state-owned radio in late 2004 denounced an Iraqi “puppet government” installed to facilitate U.S. control over oil resources, warned that living conditions in Iraq were worsening, and argued that the “occupation” was fomenting anti-Americanism and extremism all over the Islamic world.

Foreign Policy and Defense

The top priorities of Tajik foreign policy, Rakhmanov stated in April 2004, are ensuring beneficial trade and investment to support economic growth, protecting territorial integrity, boosting security, and furthering Tajikistan’s prestige in the world. Tajikistan follows an “open door” policy of pursuing amicable relations with all countries, he stated. He hailed increased ties with European countries and the European Union, the United States, Japan, China, Iran, India, Turkey and Pakistan. He proclaimed that Russia was “one of our closest strategic partners.” Relations with other Central Asian states face challenges. In 2000, Uzbekistan responded to incursions by terrorists traversing Tajikistan from Afghanistan by tightening its borders with Tajikistan, including by introducing a visa regime and mining border areas, constraining regional travel and trade and leading to Tajik civilian casualties. Following the actions of the U.S.-led coalition in Afghanistan that disrupted the actions of the terrorist Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), Uzbekistan eased some cross-border trade and travel restrictions on Tajikistan, but tightened them again in 2003 to combat unapproved small-scale trade. In his 2004 speech, Rakhmanov stressed that Tajikistan’s security depended on the world’s success in stabilizing Afghanistan. Tajikistan presses for political and human rights for the approximately seven million Tajiks residing in Afghanistan (25% of the population).

Basic Facts

Area and Population: Land area is 55,800 sq. mi., slightly smaller than Wisconsin. Population is 7.0 million (*CIA World Factbook*, 2004 est.). The Gorno Badakhshan Autonomous Region has called for greater autonomy, which is opposed by the Tajik government.

Ethnicity: 64.9% of the population is Tajik, 25% Uzbek, and less than 3.5% Russian (*CIA World Factbook*). Clan and regional identities include the Khojenti, Kulyabi, Garmi, and Pamiri groups. More than a million Tajiks reside in Uzbekistan and 7 million in Afghanistan.

Gross Domestic Product: \$2.1 billion; per capita GDP is about \$300 (*Tajik State Statistics Committee*, 2004, current prices).

Political Leaders: *President:* Emomali Rakhmanov; *Prime Minister:* Oqil Oqilov; *Speaker of the National Assembly (upper legislative chamber):* Mohammad Sayed Ubaydulloyev; *Speaker of the Assembly of Representatives (lower legislative chamber):* Saydullo Khayrulloev; *Foreign Minister:* Talbak Nazarov; *Defense Minister:* Col. Gen. Sherali Khayrulloev.

Biography: Rakhmanov was born in 1952 and trained as an economist. In 1988, he became a state farm director in Kulyab region. He quickly rose to power, 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. In 1994 and 1999, he won presidential races deemed unfair by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and others.

According to *The Military Balance 2004-2005*, the Tajik armed forces consist of 7,600 ground and air troops. The armed forces are underfunded and riven by regional clan loyalties that compromise their effectiveness. In 1999-2000, some 2,000 UTO fighters were incorporated into the Tajik armed forces. Many Tajik officers and technicians receive training at Russian military schools, and the Tajik military is reliant on a Russian officer corps. There are about 5,300 Tajik Interior Ministry border guards. The Russian Border Troops (reportedly less than 12,000) in Tajikistan have consisted predominantly of ethnic Tajik conscripts under Russian commanders. In addition,

Russia's 201st Motorized Rifle Division has consisted of about 7,800 Russian contract and Tajik troops. Efforts to finalize a post-Soviet basing agreement with Tajikistan dragged on for years, as Tajikistan endeavored to maximize rents and assert its sovereignty. After the expiration of a Tajik-Russia border control cooperation agreement, Tajikistan in 2004 demanded full control over its borders. In a *volte face* during a June 2004 visit to Moscow, however, Rakhmanov announced that Russia would have additional time to finish handing over border control (the handover is planned for completion in 2005). Reasons for the *volte face* probably include Tajikistan's dependence on receipts from Tajik guest workers in Russia and Rakhmanov's desire for Russia's political support during upcoming elections. Finally, in October 2004 the Tajik-Russian basing agreement was signed, which provides for troops to be based at myriad facilities throughout the country. Reportedly, Russia is forgiving about \$240 million in Tajik debt in exchange for assets, and Tajikistan is charging less than \$1 in annual rent for basing.

Tajikistan is a signatory of the Collective Security Treaty (CST) of the CIS (led by Russia). CST members in 2001 approved the creation of a regional Anti-Terrorist Center (composed of intelligence agencies) and regional rapid-deployment military forces that include a Tajik battalion, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in 2001 also approved the creation of an anti-terrorist center. Tajikistan decided to join NATO's Partnership for Peace before 9/11, and signed accords on admission in February 2002. At the signing, a NATO press release hailed Tajikistan's support to the coalition as "of key importance" to combating international terrorism.

The Tajik Civil War. Tajikistan was among the Central Asian republics least prepared and inclined toward independence when the Soviet Union broke up. 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 CIS 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 Rakhmanov and 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, replaced by a small U.N. aid contingent, but Russian troops have remained. Stability in Tajikistan is fragile. Observers remain concerned about secessionist tendencies in the northern Soghd (formerly Leninabad) region and tensions between ethnic Tajiks and Uzbeks within Tajikistan. Some opposition leaders have alleged that former rebel leaders are being arrested in contravention of the peace accords.

Political and Economic Developments

Since the signing of the peace accords in 1997, Rakhmanov has steadily increased his authoritarian rule and marginalized the opposition. His ambit remains limited, however, by several local warlords. As set forth by the 1994 constitution, the Olii Majlis (legislature) enacts laws, interprets the constitution, determines basic directions of domestic and foreign policy, sets dates for referenda and elections, and approves key ministerial and other appointments. The legislature also approves the state budget, determines tax policy, ratifies treaties, and approves a state of war or emergency as

decreed by the president. The constitution calls for creation of a presidium to “organize work,” to be elected by the legislators and to be headed by the speaker. Laws are required to be passed by a two-thirds majority of the total number of deputies, and a presidential veto may be overridden by the same margin. The main Tajik opposition groups boycotted the 1994 presidential election and constitutional referendum because they had no say in drawing up the draft constitution and would not be allowed to field their own candidates.

The Tajik legislature in mid-1999 rubber-stamped constitutional changes proposed by Rakhmanov calling for a seven year presidential term, a two-house Supreme Assembly (legislature), and the legalization of religious parties. A popular referendum approved the changes, and a presidential election was set for November 1999. Tajik opposition candidates alleged that government harassment prevented them from registering, so that Rakhmanov emerged as the only approved candidate. This prompted opposition calls for an electoral boycott. Rakhmanov won with 96.9% of 2.85 million votes. The OSCE refused to monitor the election. Seeking to avert renewed war, Nuri agreed to respect the outcome of the election in return for pledges by Rakhmanov to allow fair legislative elections scheduled for 2000.

A legislative electoral law was approved with input from the UTO in late 1999 calling for an upper legislative chamber, the National Assembly (representing regional interests), to consist of 33 members, and a lower chamber, the Assembly of Representatives, to consist of 63 members (22 elected by party list and 41 in single member districts). In the National Assembly, 25 members are selected by indirect voting by local council assemblies and eight members are appointed by Rakhmanov. U.N. and OSCE observers who monitored elections to the Assembly of Representatives in February 2000 concluded that voters were presented with a range of candidates of alternative parties, but they raised questions about freedom of the media, the independence of electoral commissions, turnout figures, and the transparency of vote tabulation.

Another referendum on changes to the constitution was held in June 2003. Opposition criticism included the possibility that one of the changes — that a president is limited to two seven-year terms — would permit Rakhmanov to claim two more terms in office under the “new” amendment. Perhaps indicating that he plans to take advantage of this amendment to run for re-election in 2006, Rakhmanov stated in March 2005 that he was “still young and energetic” and did not plan to leave the political arena.

The four opposition parties are the IRP, Democratic Party (DP), Social Democratic Party (SDP), and Communist Party (CP). The CP sometimes has allied itself with the ruling People’s Democratic Party (PDP). In August 2004, government officials led a so-called split within another opposition party, the Socialists, and this group was quickly certified by the government as the “legitimate” leadership of the party. Amendments to the electoral law approved in June 2004 might have heralded free and fair elections, although concerns remained about the law’s failure to guarantee the impartiality of electoral commissions and its requirements that prospective candidates possess higher educations and pay a relatively large registration fee. OSCE monitors reported that the law was implemented in an “inadequate or arbitrary” fashion during the February 27, 2005, elections to the Assembly of Representatives. About 160 candidates (mostly PDP members) ran for the district seats. The OSCE reported “large-scale irregularities,” including the presence of government officials on many electoral commissions, close government control of campaigning, ballot box stuffing, doubtful ballot counting, and the

questionable disqualification of two prominent opposition figures from running. The arrest of Democratic Party head Mahmadrusi Iskandarov, resulting in his disqualification as a candidate, and actions against the Socialist Party “effectively neutralized” these parties in the run-up to the election, according to the OSCE. Also, several campaign officials from opposition parties were detained just before the election, forcing several independent candidates to drop out. In the party list voting, three seats were won by the CP, two seats by the IRP, and the rest by the PDP. In district voting, most seats were won by PDP members. The opposition parties termed the election fraudulent, with an IRP official terming it “the worst ... in Tajikistan’s history.” The head of the Tajik Central Electoral Commission dismissed outright many of the complaints of alleged violations.

According to the State Department’s *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2004*, the government’s human rights record remained poor during 2004, and the country made little progress in its transition from a Soviet-style system. Security forces tortured, beat, and abused detainees with impunity and were also responsible for threats, extortion, and abuse of civilians. Authorities made politically motivated arrests. Several international democracy NGOs faced registration problems and increased scrutiny, which made it difficult for them to operate. The government reversed moves to relax pressure on the media. According to some international observers, the reversal was part of the government’s effort to gain greater control over media in advance of legislative elections. Journalists on occasion were subjected to government harassment, and some opposition or independent newspapers were prevented from appearing through government pressure on or control of printing facilities. However, the number of independent and local newspapers continued to increase, several of which were affiliated with political parties. International media generally operated freely. Trafficking in women and children was a serious problem, which the government took significant steps to address.

In late 1997, Tajikistan’s economic decline reversed as the peace accord took hold. GDP grew about 10.6% and inflation was 5.7% in 2004, according to Tajikistan’s State Statistics Committee. Tajikistan has depended heavily on foreign loans and aid to cover its budget and trade deficits and external debt servicing. Repatriated funds from migrant workers in Russia and elsewhere may account for up to 20% of GDP. By 2000, most small enterprises had been privatized, but land and major enterprises remain state-owned. Tajikistan’s major industrial export is aluminum from its smelter in Tursunzade, one of the world’s largest. Cotton and hydro-electricity are other major exports, and silk production and sheep herding are significant sources of livelihood. The agricultural sector employs nearly three-quarters of the labor force. There is close state control over land use for cotton-growing, farmers and pickers are underpaid for their work, and school children are a major source of forced labor, according to the non-governmental International Crisis Group. Economic reforms face the challenges of the lowest educational level and the highest infant mortality and poverty rates of the former Soviet republics. According to the State Department, over one-half of the population lives in poverty. Tajikistan is a major transit state for heroin produced in Afghanistan and the drug trade has deeply corrupted the elite. Despite these challenges, Tajikistan has considerable development potential, according to the World Bank. Foreign direct investment (FDI) reached \$160 million in 2004 but is still inadequate to finance an increasing trade deficit, to foster private sector development, and to reduce poverty. FDI remains constrained by a poor legal climate, trade tariffs, and corruption.