

€ 5,00



*To Canzio and Luciana*

THE  
HANDBOOK  
OF CENTRAL  
ASIA

*A Comprehensive  
Survey of the  
New Republics*

GIAMPAOLO R.  
CAPISANI

I.B. Tauris *Publishers*  
LONDON • NEW YORK

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## 4

## TAJIKISTAN

## Jumhurii Tojikiston

**Declaration of Sovereignty:** 25 August 1990

**Declaration of Independence:** 9 September 1991

**Area:** 143,100 square kilometres

**Population:** 6,103,000 (July 1999 estimate)

**Density:** 42.6 inhabitants/square kilometre

**Capital:** Dushanbe, 700,000 inhabitants (1995 estimate)

## POLITICAL EVOLUTION

Geographically most distant from the 'centre', Tajikistan occupied a strange place in the old Soviet Union. The policy of establishing national cadres (*korenizatsija*), initiated in the 1930s and subsequently continued by Khrushchev and Brezhnev, favoured the development of local élites and gave stability to the political leaders and to the structures of the Tajik Communist Party. Paradoxically, or perhaps for the very reason that Tajikistan was so distant from Moscow, *partinost* (belief in the party), was most entrenched, the local secretaries being among Moscow's most faithful and most conservative supporters.

In the post-war period, the Tajik party's Secretaries were Babajan Ghafurov (1946–56), Tursunbay Uljabaev (1956–61), Jabbar Rasulov (1961–82), Rakhman Nabiev (1982–December 1985) and Qahhar Mahkamov (from the end of 1985).

In 1985, Gorbachev, having just assumed power, attempted to clean up the local party. However, his attempts were severely hindered, and failed substantially, the Tajik leadership remaining firmly in power. Although the birth of a

reform movement took place belatedly in comparison to other de-sovietised republics, the party attempted to anticipate any demands by promoting Tajik to the status of a state language in June 1989. Public demonstrations in Dushanbe in February 1990 were regarded as the birth of the opposition. Demonstrators, demanding the dismissal of Tajik Communist Party Secretary Mahkamov (who resigned much later, on 19 July 1991), attempted on 13 February to seize the building of the Central Committee of the Party. According to the press, reaction by government forces led to 37 deaths. A state of emergency, which lasted until 1 January 1991, was declared.

During 1990, while social tensions in neighbouring republics exploded in the form of inter-racial conflicts, the Tajik political crisis worsened, and extended to the economy. The social turmoil became a topic of debate among local *intelligentsia*, who fomented the notion of national sovereignty. This was declared in August 1990, national independence on 9 September 1991.

Numerous political and cultural societies, created belatedly during 'perestroika autumn' as mere supporting bodies of *bazasi* (Tajik for *perestroika*) and *ashkara* (*glasnost*), evolved into actual political movements. Examples are Ehya-Ye (in the north) and Ru Ba Ru (in the south). The chairmen of these groups, partly inspired by the press of the Baltic People's Fronts such as the Sajudis, promised to rewrite the history of the Samanids (the eleventh-century first Iranian dynasty), to defend the national language and cultural heritage, and to defend minorities from oppression (like the Taleshis, the Persian-speaking minority of Azerbaijan).

Of all these movements, the Rastakhez (meaning 'renewal' or 'rebirth') movement was the first to stimulate political debate (mainly in the capital, Dushanbe) and lead the initial phase of democratisation. Founded in September 1989, it achieved legitimacy in September 1991 under the name Tajik Rebirth Party (TRP). In the pages of its journal (also called *Rastakhez*) the movement and subsequently the party defined itself as a 'nationalistic and secular popular front', founded and led by a 'group of patriotic intellectuals'. During the summer of 1990, the president of the movement, Tahir Abdujabbar (an economist from Pendzhikent), called for 'the suspension of all Communist Party activity in the structure of the state and the republic' (*Rastakhez* N° 2, July 1990).

The creation of Rastakhez is significant in that it expressed the nature and extent of the desire for change in Tajik civil society, expressed initially through a semi-clandestine opposition press. The most important aspect of the party is the fact that the majority of Rastakhez activists are former militants from the Communist Party who left in the second half of the 1980s. Other members are from the westernised, urban *intelligentsia*.

Political leaders who united to form the Democratic Party of Tajikistan (Partiya-yi Demokrati-yi Tajikistan) came from the same sources. This party was founded in August 1990 in the Tajik Science Academy conference hall in Dushanbe. The president of the DPT, Shadman Yusuf, is a young Tajik philosopher, and author of *The Concept of the Spiritual Search in Karl Marx*. In the book, Yusuf quotes from the *Avesta*, a holy book of Zoroastrianism, the ancient pre-Islamic Iranian religion. According to Yusuf, who denounces the disastrous

results of the war on religion during the Soviet era, the national objective should be to strive for the 'return to a "national" morality, the legacy of our ancestry'. In his vision, all religions are morally equal, which is why he prefers to speak of 'national traditions'. On the basis of Yusuf's work, the DPT adopted one of Zoroastrianism's fundamental precepts as its slogan: 'Good thoughts, good words, good deeds'.

The DPT started its own newspaper, *Adolatbo* ('justice'), initially published monthly and later weekly, and widely distributed in universities, often alongside *Rastakhez*. Due to the shared Marxist-Leninist intellectualism of militants in both Rastakhez and the DPT, some of the militants of the former joined the latter. Members often came from similar socio-professional positions, representative of the *nauchno-tvorcheskaja intelligentsija* ('literary and scientific *intelligentsia*): writers, teachers, scientists and artists, often members of the Writers' Union, Tajikfilm (a film-makers' group), and the cinematic studies departments of the Academy of Sciences and the university.

### Islamist Politics

One opposition movement had completely different roots. The political-religious representatives of the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP), unlike the majority of intellectuals in Dushanbe, consisted of recently urbanised village teachers and students, and the rural population in general. From the second half of the 1980s (according to some analysts, from the start of the Afghan War) *mullabs* who did not recognise official religious authority turned towards an Islamic idealism inspired by figures like Mawlawi Qari Hindustani (1892–1989), Ramatullah Aliama-yi Andjiani (who died in 1979) and especially Sayyd Abdullah Nuri (born in 1947), who emerged as the main ideologist, founding the Sazman-i Djaravan, a clandestine religiously-based youth organisation in Qurghonteppa (then called Kurgan-Tjube).

The Daghestani and Tatar leaders in Astrakhan officially founded the USSR IRP in June 1990. On 6 October, several young Tajik *mullabs* came out of hiding to create the Tajik section of the IRP (Hizb-i Nahzat-i Islami) in Dushanbe's Lenin quarter, and broke with the main organisation a week later, in protest at its programme, 'Democracy, Islamism, Turkism'. If the opposition to 'Turkism' seemed obvious (Persian-speaking Tajiks regard Turkic speakers with a certain suspicion), then the stand taken regarding the concept of democracy was more pragmatic. In fact, though initially rejected as a typically Western hypocrisy, it was then reinstated in the joint acceptance of the parliamentary system as the constitution of an 'Islamic-democratic' coalition to which the PDT assigned the task of defending, as part of the national heritage, holy places and freedom of religious instruction. This development allowed the IRP, initially declared illegal, to participate in the November 1991 elections. The IRP, led by Mohammad Sharif Himmatzada, Dawlat Usman Himmatov and Sayyd Abdullah Nuri, oscillated between the political-religious models of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran, and an ideology approximating that of the Muslim brotherhood

(al-Ikhwan al Muslimun) of Arab countries. Besides searching for its own model, the IRP, beginning from the lower social levels and a wide popular base began to push for re-Islamisation. This objective initially attracted hostility from official Islam represented in by the Tajikistan *qaziyat* in Dushanbe under the leadership of Qazi Kalan ('great *qazi*', or *qadi*, meaning 'judge' in Islamic law) Akbar Turajanzade (born in 1954). Thereafter, Qazi Kalan, who was moderate and prudent, but who had grown up with the clandestine *mullabs*, also joined the IRP, thus freeing himself from the influence of the Mufti of Tashkent.

In an attempt to promote the return to social, cultural and religious practices marginalised during the Soviet era, the IRP reintroduced the Arabic script for written Tajik. Given the difficulty in tracing religious texts, they also encouraged the spread of books and magazines which were imported or published in *samizdat* editions (literally 'self-editing', or more correct in this case, *islamizdat*, 'self-produced Islamic religious texts'). These are usually the writings of Mohammed, commentaries in the Koran and the like, often photocopies of Tatar editions dating back to the nineteenth century sold cheaply outside the entrance to mosques. Essays by authors such as Sayid Qutb and Mawdudi, regarded as the ideologues of radical Islamism, had a narrower and more confidential distribution.

The IRP could command its own four-page newsletter, *Hidayat* ('observance'), commonly known as *Nadajat* ('liberation'). It was printed in Tajik, but its masthead used Arabic characters. It was distributed along with religious texts outside mosques, and represented the evolution of the clandestine Haqiqat-i Islam founded during the early 1990s by Sayyid Abdullah Nuri.

The IRP's unambiguous political identity took root mainly with the rural youth, those most afflicted by unemployment and poverty, and its programme was in favour of a low-key Islamisation of customs concerning the behaviour of women, although its main aim remained the implementation of Islamic law (*sharia*). In the view of the IRP, only Islamic law guaranteed the equality of women, as 'the Soviet regime had reduced them to cheap labour force, which was severely exploited in the *kolkhoz*'. The relatively modern outlook can be seen in the fact that women have not yet been segregated, and have benefited from a different social status from women in other Islamic countries. Many agree that the women consider the Islamic veil an alienation through which they nonetheless feel emancipated.

*Nadajat* editors also agree that although Islamic law requires women to cover their head and body, and many agree that this practice is absent from early Islam, the *farandji*, the Central Asian variant of the *chador*, is nothing but an invention of women from European nobility, brought to the Muslim world from Turkey at the start of the eighteenth century. As proof, they (somewhat naively) refer to the *bautta* – a small, black cloak (made of silk or velvet) with a hood which can be used to cover the face – used in eighteenth-century Venice.

Furthermore, the IRP tried to form local alliances with the *ishan*, the important religious leaders who, as head of the Sufi brotherhood from the fourteenth century, guided the rural communities. While playing a far less important role than in Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan, the Sufi brotherhood enjoys great prestige due to the resistance it put up to 70 years of Soviet dominion, which they spent in semi-hiding.

Because of its unique religious identity, the small Ismaili community dominant in the Gorno-Badakhshan, which although far removed from radical Islamism also joined the opposition and demanded major freedoms and the setting up of an 'autonomous republic' instead of only an 'autonomous region'. The group's political representation, Lal-i Badakhshan ('ruby of Badakhshan'), founded in May 1991, is openly supported by both President Atabek Amirbekov and by its newspaper, *Bakhtar* ('Bactria'), in its demands for independence.

### Rethinking Tajik Identity

If on the one hand the sovietised *intelligentsia* attempt to resist pressure from Islamism, then on the other there is a strong attachment to the myth and reality of an independent Tajikistan, 'son of the of October Revolution', amongst Tajik intellectuals (even amongst those in the opposition), which the Soviet regime did, in spite of everything, help to foster. Despite the differences that separate them, Tajik intellectuals share a vision of national history similar to that formed during the 1950s (based on ethno-linguistic and territorial criteria) by the then First Secretary of the Tajik Communist Party, the academic Babajan Ghafurov.

The problem of the reconstruction of an identity dominated the writings and thoughts of the intellectual élite in Dushanbe during the early 1990s. It was felt essential to mobilise the community, disorientated by economic crisis and the breakdown of Soviet institutions, around a unification which did not include Islamism. Even before the civil war, the *intelligentsia* perceived links with neighbouring countries as of fundamental importance. Intellectuals, while insisting on the Tajiks' Iranian heritage and confirming the nation's historical and cultural differences from the region's Turkic-speaking populations, struggled to remain distant from 'pan-Iranianism'. In the past, as well as nowadays, Iran has played a determinant role in Tajik cultural life.

The Tajik Cultural Foundation established the journal *Payvand* ('connection' in Persian), aiming it at 'Iranians in Tehran and the diaspora'. The Mehr Association, founded by Rastakhez supporters, had as its objective the installation of even closer relations with 'Tajiks and Tajik speakers abroad' through the publication of the monthly journal *Sogdiana* (published in Moscow in Russian).

The small literary magazine, *Mujda* ('happy story'), published in Vilnius (Lithuania) by the exiled Tajik poet Islander Khadani, proposes a contact with 'the whole world's Persian public'. Finally, the leaders of the Kurush-i Kabir Society ('Cyrus the Great') intend promoting the 'reunion of dispersed Iranian populations (Tajiks, Ossetians, Kurds and Iranians) into a centralised and democratic state'. This objective is shared by the association's newspaper, *Saman*, a monthly created by the Persian-Tajik Language Foundation. In September 1991, Mehr and Kurush-i Kabir formed a new association, Aryana-yi Buzurg ('Greater Iran') to defend the Persian language from Russian and Turkic influences, and unify Persian speakers. It published the magazine *Mibtra* (or *mebr*, 'light'). However, it must be emphasised that all these initiatives had a very small following, forming and collapsing (as some have already) mainly within the closed circle of the élite.

### Towards Civil War

The vitality of Tajik political and cultural debate corresponded to the great expectations of change which had spread through the country after the declaration of independence. On 21 December 1991, Tajikistan participated in the foundation of the CIS, although the attitude of the Tajik Supreme Soviet remained strongly conservative (95 percent of the deputies in 25 February 1990 election had been drawn from the Communist Party). Tajikistan gained international recognition, joining the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) on 26 February 1992. On 2 March 1992, it was accepted into the UN. The importance of these transformations stood in stark contrast to the Tajik Supreme Soviet's conservative attitude. Elected on 25 February 1990, this was dominated by Communist Party representatives (who accounted for 95 percent). On 24 November 1991, Rakhman Nabiev was elected President, with 57 percent of the votes. He had been one of the party's Brezhnevites, and had been removed in 1985.

The opposition all gathered around a sole candidate, the so-called Islam-Democratic Coalition. This consisted of 'democrats' from the DPT, 'nationalists' from the Rastakhez, 'Islamists' from the IRP, dissident 'reformers' from Nur Tabarov's Communist Party, and the Lal-i Badakhshan 'Ismailis'. The coalition put forward a film director, Dawlat Khudanazar, as its presidential candidate. Khudanazar, a secular Ismaili who for several years had been president of the Soviet Cinematography Directors' Association, gained 30 percent of the votes. The entire opposition saw the result as a success, as an indication of political maturity and a sign of greater trust. In fact, from then on, Khudanazar attempted to influence political life, promoting numerous economic and ecological causes (often challenging the legitimacy of the Supreme Soviet elected in 1990, and also calling for fresh elections). For example, there was a mobilisation after it was revealed that Tajikistan had a centre for uranium enrichment at Tursun Zade. On this occasion, some Western media expressed a fear that the mineral would be sold in Libya, a country with whom Tajikistan enjoyed friendly relations.

The 'renewal' of the Communist Party, after the 1991 *coup d'état* in Moscow, did not achieve much. The majority of members supported the coupists, but after their failure the President of the Supreme Soviet was dismissed. He was replaced by the 'Gorbachevian' Qadriddin Aslanov, who in September 1991 decreed the suspension of the Communist Party. However, Aslanov himself was then replaced by Rakhman Nabiev who, on 24 November 1991, was elected president of the republic with 57 percent of the votes. Nabiev had previously been one of Brezhnev's 'eminentes' and had been purged back in 1985. On 9 December, the party was restored, and on 20 December it was renamed 'socialist', but a month later it reverted to its former name.

From March until spring 1992, huge demonstrations by a galvanised opposition took place in Dushanbe. These were organised and rapidly scaled up after 27 April 1992 (when Najibullah's government fell in Afghanistan), and were answered by equally impressive neo-Communist events. Civil war was only narrowly avoided on various occasions, until clashes between opposing factions

on 6 and 7 May claimed several victims. The country had become ungovernable; Nabiev and his government resolved to reach a compromise with an even stronger and more determined opposition. After difficult negotiations, an accord was signed on 11 May 1992 granting the opposition request for the formation of a new parliamentary assembly in which it would be represented. A national coalition government was thus formed in which various key positions (eight out of 24, amongst them the Ministries of Culture, Foreign Affairs and Radio and Television) were assigned to opposition members. All this occurred without intervention from the Russian troops stationed in the country, and with added pressure from Iran (fearing reaction from Russia and Uzbekistan) on the Tajik opposition until an agreement was reached.

Nevertheless, Nabiev did not participate at the fifth CIS summit a few days later (held in Tashkent on 15 May 1992), citing the difficult domestic political situation as his excuse. He nonetheless attended the Treaty of Collective Security meeting with Russia, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. On that same day, the Tajik Communist Party denounced the agreements made with the opposition.

### Civil War (June 1992–January 1993)

Nabiev failed to keep the situation under control. Between 27 and 28 June, while the Tajik President was on an official visit to Tehran, an Islamic combat squad attacked a *kolkhoz* in the Qurghonteppa region. This action claimed the lives of hundreds, and injured 1500. It was the start of the bloody civil war, which in only seven months destroyed tens of thousands of villages and killed between 30,000 to 60,000 people (less reliable sources put the figure at 100,000). By comparison, the Afghan War, between 1978 and 1989, claimed about 15,000 lives and 50,000 injured. The Tajik civil war (one of the most neglected wars of recent times) was the bloodiest conflict to occur in the entire former Soviet area after the break-up of the USSR.

According to the UN High Commission for Refugees, at least half a million people left the country and fled to the mountainous Pamir region (on the Tajik and Afghan sides of the border) to Uzbekistan, but mainly to northern Afghanistan. They were placed in refugee camps which politically were controlled by the IRP, but set up by UNHCR itself.

As a refugee in a Russian military barracks, Nabiev was deprived of power by a parliament in which the Islamic component held the majority. His dismissal was publicised on 7 September 1992, the day on which the democrat Akbarshah Iskandarov succeeded him temporarily, assuming leadership of the national coalition government as well.

New presidential elections were postponed until further notice. The government, now controlled by the Islamists, decided to adopt the Arabic alphabet for the transcription of Tajik, and to participate in the summit of the Islamic Conference Organisation (at which 52 countries met in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on 2 December 1992).

The post-Communists, as the international press defined them, immediately set about trying to regain power by force, starting from the regions still under their control. The southern city of Kulob, held by a few hundred pro-Nabiev militia, and Khujand (now Khodjent, then Leninabad) had meanwhile decreed secession from the rest of the country. The majority of the party and state bureaucracy, and every Tajik Communist Party First Secretary since 1946, were from the Khujand region. Khujand accounts for over 70 percent of Tajikistan's economic strength, but is linked to the capital by a single road through a 2000m pass, while the railway line connecting the two cities goes via Uzbekistan. The Khujand region's economic structure is integrated with the bordering Uzbek and Kyrgyz cities.

However, the civil war only seemed to set political groups against each other (post-Communists against Islamic democrats, or more colourfully *mullab* against *aparatchik*) because political affiliations corresponded to regional sub-divisions. The northern populations sided with the post-Communists. These populations traditionally held power in the republic, and had the support of the populations from the southern districts of Kulob and Hissar as well as of the strong Uzbek and Russian minorities west of the capital. The opposition was very rooted in the southern districts (with the exception of Kulob), and eastern ones of Gorno-Badakhshan.

The opposition enjoyed the support of a large part of the religious community, from the charismatic Qazi Kalan to Akbar Turajanzade, who came on the scene in support of the IRP. The Ismailis, little inclined to fanaticism and armed struggle, immediately distanced themselves from the Islamic opposition.

In October, after recapturing the southern city of Qurghonteppa, the Communist militia tried to acquire legitimacy. Over and above the Iskandarov national coalition government, situated in Dushanbe and dissolved in November 1992, a Communist government was formed in Khujand. On the 19 November, it elected former Communist Imamali Rakhmanov (from the Kuljabis clan, the inhabitants of the Kulob region) to the presidency of parliament and head of state until new presidential elections could be held. Moreover, Khushmahmad Hidiraliev was nominated Vice-President and Abdumalik Abdulajanov, from the Khujandis clan, Prime Minister.

Between 10 and 12 December 1992, the pro-Communist militia under Safarali Kenjaev, leader of the military *coup* on the capital city in October, together with the southern militia (politically organised into a Popular Front, led by Sanjak Safarov, who had spent 23 years in prison for common-law offences and subsequently killed under mysterious circumstances by his lieutenant, Faizali Saidov, leader of the Front in Qurghonteppa), after harsh fighting entered Dushanbe and found that most of its inhabitants had left.

With Dushanbe captured and a ceasefire declared, an offensive was then launched in December 1992 and January 1993 to assume complete control of the country. In the meanwhile, a harsh and indiscriminate repression, which seemed in some areas to have involved vendettas and 'ethnic cleansing', befell the Islamic democrat opposition. Many militants were arrested and incarcerated, while a few chose to go into exile. Numerous militants and *mullabs* found refuge across the borders (some swimming the Pyandzh) with the Afghan Mujahidin, while the

Ismailis, as they had on other occasions in their history, organised their own assistance for refugees in their large, hilly Gorno-Badakhshan stronghold. Some opposition supporters fled to Moscow, where they formed a Committee for Democratic Power in Tajikistan.

In the regaining of power, post-Communists were discreetly supported by Moscow, and by the Russian garrison stationed at Dushanbe (the 201st Armoured Infantry Division). They also received open and unconditional support from the Uzbek minorities in Tajikistan, and above all from Uzbekistan. The last of these on more than one occasion stated that it would have considered the establishment of an Islamic regime in Dushanbe a *casus belli*.

On 9 December 1992, the Uzbek parliament approved the dispatch of a military contingent to Tajikistan. Officially, this was part of the CIS intervention force (formed only on 24 August 1993) deployed between the two forces, but it was immediately involved in the battles against the opposition's militia.

In the course of 1993 and 1994, according to various political observers, Uzbekistan strongly determined Tajikistan's political orientation, to the extent that Tajikistan now seems an Uzbek military protectorate.

The post-Communists' violent return to power did not put a stop to the civil war. They were neither able to re-establish their own authority over the entire national territory, nor to extinguish the guerrilla war of the Garmis (inhabitants of the Garm region) and Pamiris (inhabitants of the Pamir region) in the central and eastern parts of the country. Nevertheless, with the Pamiris little inclined to armed opposition, prospects for an accord remain concrete.

The worst confrontations occurred along the southern Afghan border, which corresponded with the course of the Amu Darya, known further north as the Pyandzh. The river is easily crossed where the current is not too strong, so it became an area of creeping guerrilla advance, and highly unstable. In an attempt to remedy the situation, Russia became increasingly involved in military action, in a way similar to its involvement in Afghanistan.

Over and above the Pyandzh in northern Afghanistan, many Tajik Islamic opposition militants found refuge with, and support from, the Afghan Mujahidin. Their military force was estimated at the start of 1994 to consist of at least 2000 fighters, and 4000 in training. Furthermore, it seems that in March 1993, the leader of the Tajik IRP formed a government in exile, and coordinated guerrilla actions. Its headquarters were in Taloqan (in the Afghan Pamir), already a stronghold of Commander Massud, and was bombarded by the Russians in April 1995. The Tajik IRP tried to encourage the exodus of Garmis and Pamiris to refugee camps, opposing activity by the UN High Commission, which from December 1992 had worked for their resettlement. Midway through 1993, Tajik refugees in this part of Afghanistan numbered at least 60,000, and then joined refugees settled in the central part of the country.

According to Afghan Consul Assir in Tajikistan in 1993, 'This country's future is uncertain, because it finds itself in exactly the same situation that Afghanistan was in during Russian occupation; the Mujahidin on the mountains, the Russian and government armies on the plains and part of the population in refugee camps across the border'.

What seems to have radically changed nowadays is the role played by Western countries. They do not seem willing to support Islamists, but rather Yeltsin's government, and by extension the Dushanbe post-Communist *nomenklatura* regime. An explicit sign was the opening of a US embassy in the Tajik capital, under Ambassador Stanley T. Escudero, and later Robert Finn.

The attack on 13 July 1993 by Islamist guerrillas on the village of Samigor (about 13kms over the border) made a big impression throughout the CIS. Of the 200 killed, 26 were Russian border guards. The photographs of the corpses wearing Red Army uniforms struck not only Russian public opinion, but also that of other countries, as these scenes were reminiscent of footage from Afghanistan a few years before.

Russia did not wait to retaliate, and bombarded Afghan territory across the border. As the Russian commanding officer, Colonel Novikov, maintained, 'This is no longer a Tajikistan domestic affair, but a challenge launched at Russia'. The defence system around the original 201st Armoured Infantry Division at Dushanbe was strengthened. This was then transformed into a 'unified intervention force', under CIS control, with the task of defending the 'external border' along the Pyandzh-Amu Darya. Russian Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Adamichine seemed to have rather confused motives for this (although perhaps from his perspective all too clear), declaring that 'The Tajik-Afghan border is the border of the CIS and of Russia', when Russia's actual border lies 2000kms to the north. The combined military unit numbered about 25,000 fighting troops (mainly Russians, Tajiks and Uzbeks, with a few hundred Kyrgyz and Kazaks) at the end of 1995.

The domestic situation remained unstable, with sporadic clashes and entire zones of the country controlled by rebel militia. For example, throughout 1993 and 1994, heavy fighting continued along the southern border (around Shartuz, Moskovski and Pyandzh), during which many border guards and guerrillas were taken prisoner. The most serious fighting occurred on 21 August 1994, when an attack by approximately 250 Mujahidin led to the deaths of seven soldiers (four Russians and three Tajiks). According to the Russian press, the attackers were not Mujahidin Tajiks (or Afgankas) but 'mercenary' Afghans and Arabs organised into what was merely defined as an 'Arab Legion' led by Afghan officers. After this attack, General Bondarenko, commander of the unified intervention force released the following statement: 'In order to prevent further attacks, border troops will use all means at their disposal, with no exception, including military incursions across the Afghan border'. This violates the territorial integrity of the bordering country, even though Afghanistan has been run by various local warlords.

#### Towards a Russian-Uzbek Protectorate?

In May 1993, at the signing of one of many friendship treaties with Russia in Moscow, Tajik President Rakhmanov had to admit that 'without Russia and without Boris Yeltsin, our country would no longer exist today'. For the most part, the ongoing comparison in the Russian press is that 'these days Tajikistan

is controlled by Yeltsin, as was Afghanistan by Brezhnev'. The Tajik post-Communist government, as well as having failed to obtain legitimate recognition in certain regions of the republic, has also showed signs of an increasingly weak internal structure. This is due to the fragility of the alliance pact between the government clans, and the conflict with the Garmis and the Pamiris.

Rakhmanov's government is the product of the alliance: the Kuljabis, from the region surrounding Khujand and the Hissaris, from west of the capital, as well as the Uzbek and Russian minorities, control the security apparatus (the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Security); the Khujand clan, after conceding power to the Kuljabis, attempted to develop a series of privileged economic relations with Uzbekistan without informing central government. In December 1993, central government substituted the highest-profile personality of the Khujand clan (Prime Minister Abdulajanov, a 'businessman' who later became Tajikistan's ambassador to Moscow) for an economist, Samadov, who was also a 'federalist'. Following disputes with the Kuljabis, in May 1994 the Hissaris blocked the road leading to Uzbekistan.

According to the scarce information available from Tajikistan, it would appear that the disputes between clans progressed to the extent that some local leaders were eliminated in uncertain circumstances. It appears that the Minister of Home Affairs, Yaqub Salimov (a Kuljabi), has been detained for questioning in this regard. This is based on conjecture, but there has nonetheless been an increase in activity by the political police, and of assassinations (like that of Deputy Prime Minister Nazarchoiev of Gorno-Badakhshan, killed on 10 March 1994, at the age of 65), responsibility for which is generally attributed to the opposition army.

Olivier Roy, one of the leading scholars on former Soviet Central Asia, and official envoy to the Conference on Security and Cooperation (CSCE) in Europe to Tajikistan for the year 1993/1994, states that 'in this country the Tajiks are fighting against each other... in a typical post-Soviet battle based on the clans who have formed around the channels of the distribution of wealth'. Nevertheless, Uzbekistan's initial dominance of the situation, based on a military presence and Uzbekistan's regional objectives, is continually influenced by a Russia which has become dominant at an economic and political level. The Tajik economy is ravaged, and now almost totally reliant on Russia and on alimentary supplies provided by international entities. In any case, Russia has continually appealed to the UN to try to resolve the conflict, and to gain recognition for its role as a 'peace-keeping country' in the region. Solzhenitsyn holds a different view: in January 1994 he declared, 'Today it is Chechnya that burns and the whole world is speaking about it... And when will it be Tajikistan? Well, let me warn you now, we must leave there, and in a hurry.'

After an official appeal to the opposition by UN Secretary General Butros Butros Ghali, Uruguayan Ramon Piriz-Ballon was appointed special correspondent in December 1993. In April 1994, he organised an initial encounter, in Moscow, between government representatives and the Tajik opposition. A representative from the 'Afghanistan provisional government' also went to the meeting. Successive meetings were held in Tehran, Islamabad, Almaty and

Ashgabat. Negotiation, supported by Russia and Iran, the countries where many Tajik IRP leaders, including the Qazi Kalan, had sought refuge, reached an accord for the ceasefire and the exchange of prisoners on 17 September 1994. Meanwhile, it also proved difficult to hold elections open to the opposition.

In April 1994, a new plan for the constitution was presented. This provided for freedom of worship, even if religious organisations cannot take part in political activity, and a presidential system of direct suffrage, with a one-chamber Majlisi Oli ('supreme assembly') formed by 181 deputies popularly elected to five-year terms. This plan was approved by a referendum held at the same time as the presidential elections of 6 November 1994.

With the opposition parties declared illegal from March 1993 by the Tajikistan Supreme Court, and the refusal by the UN and European Community to act as 'observers', elections were thus disputed between the Kulob and Khujand. Imamali Rakhmanov was re-elected. It appears that he won 58 percent of the vote, running against the other contender allowed, Abdumalik Abduladjanov. Abduladjanov was discreetly supported by the Uzbek government, and apparently won about 40 percent of the votes, and in an interview on Russian radio contested the election result, denouncing it as fraudulent and rigged. Even in the legislative elections of 26 February 1995 (with a second round held on 12 March) – which were dominated by the Communist Party and which the CSCE (renamed OSCE from 1994) observers called 'a farce' – the same thing happened. It is of little importance that official data speaks of an 85 percent increase in voter participation. What matters is that tens of thousands of exiled Tajiks and their parties were excluded from consultation. The only legitimate representative of the opposition allowed to participate, the National Revival Party (from the Khujand clan), sacrificed this right. Its leader, former Prime Minister Abduladjanov, was unable to register for the electoral list, and had to leave suddenly for Dushanbe. A minority of deputies had adhered to new, if not fictitious, political groupings (the People's Party or Party of Economic and Political Renewal), which, although presenting themselves as opposition, are not actually opposed to the constituted power. The majority (100) of the deputies adhere to the Tajik Communist Party, while 64 are independent, and there are numerous local warlords, the so-called 'red barons'.

Russia and Uzbekistan strengthened their forces in order to favour a Tajik reconciliation, pressuring Dushanbe with various concessions to the opposition and furnishing a new position for the Mujahidin (Afghan and Tajik) of Ahmad Shah Massud and Burhanuddin Rabbani. The main reason for this stance was to oppose the Taliban offensive, well advanced in Afghanistan, having by now reached the borders of the CIS. President Rakhmonov, after escaping an attempt on his life in Khujand on the 30 April 1997, went to the Kremlin on the 27 June 1997 and signed a final peace accord with the representatives of the Tajik opposition. This accord provides for the re-entry of the Tajik guerrillas exiled in Afghanistan, the liberation of those detained in the country (who will all be integrated into the regular Tajik army) and the assignment of a third of governmental posts to representatives of the opposition, after open elections. The accord has held to a large extent, and in January 1998 Akbar Turajanzade was

nominated Deputy Prime Minister. Other leaders, like Mohammad Sharif Himmatzade and Sayyd Abdullah Nuri, and most of the other combatants have re-entered the country. However, the climate of anarchy has worsened, and the incidents with armed groups have increased. There have been kidnappings, like that of the Mufti Amanullah Nejmatzade (in September 1997), and assassinations, of a UNHCR employee (in November 1997) and four UN personnel (July 1998). An encounter between the Islamist opposition and security police in Dushanbe left 20 dead on 30 April 1998, fighting between clans continued, and there have been various military mutinies, in August 1997 and the summer of 1998, involving the main brigade of the young Tajik army under Makhmud Khudoyberdiyev (a Kuljabi), stationed at Qurghonteppa, and a command under Ubdullo Baymatov, stationed at Regar. In each case, the mutineers demanded a guarantee of representation for minorities in the new parliament. On the occasion of the kidnapping of the UN representatives, both Rakhmanov and Turajanzade (having returned from exile in Tehran in March 1998) denounced the climate of instability as the creation of a Chechnian situation in their country by enemies of the Tajik people.

The following is a listing of the characteristics, leaders and programmes of the most important Tajik political parties and movements, before and during the civil war.

#### **Tajik Communist Party**

Secretary: Shodi Shabdolov

History: banned in September 1991, it became legal again in December of the same year.

Press: the daily newspapers *Jumburiyat* ('the republic') in Tajik, and *Narodnaja Gazeta* ('the people's newspaper') in Russian. Renamed *Nava-yi Ranjbar* ('the workers' voice') in Tajik and *Golos Tadzhikistana* ('the voice of Tajikistan') in Russian. Publication of *Tajikistan Avazi* ('the voice of Tajikistan') continues in the Uzbek language.

Programme: creation of a civil society, safeguarding Tajikistan's independence and the establishment of principles of social justice and democracy. The TCP also requested a two-chamber parliamentary system providing for a Council of the Republic made up of representatives from the various provinces, as well as a Council of Nationality to represent the various ethnic communities.

Economy: the TCP encourages privatisation and favours a mixed economy.

Religion: to be separate from the state.

Diplomacy: good relations with nearby countries. Russia to be a privileged ally, Iran recognised for its cultural affinity. Good relations with Switzerland, The Netherlands, China, Singapore and South Korea.

#### **Democratic Party of Tajikistan (DPT)**

(Partiya-yi Demokrati-yi Tadzhikistan)

President: Shadman Yusuf (he was expelled in 1995 for having pro-government sentiments and was substituted by Jumaboy Niyozov).

History: founded in August 1990, the DPT had about 2000 members from the urban *intelligentsia*, and accepted the principle of joint militancy with other movements, except for the Communist Party. Members were from all nationalities (mainly Tajiks, but also Uzbeks, Russians and Jewish). The party lost the support of Slav militants due to threats made by its President to the Russian community. In 1992, it distributed 15,000 membership cards.

Press: publishes the weekly *Adolatbo* ('justice'), distributed in Dushanbe, and various publications in other regions: *Aryana* ('the Iranian world'), *Bamdad* ('dawn'), *Shabadat* ('the martyr').

Programme: affirmation of the civil society, protection of liberty without regard to culture, ethnicity and religion. Establishment of a parliamentary system and opposition to Russian military presence.

Economy: removal of Communists from government, priority to private property, distribution of land to peasants. Increased international trade to overcome problem of being merely a supplier of raw materials.

Religion: Islam as a focus of national feeling. Protection of freedom of thought. Religious parties welcome to sit in parliament, to defend rights of the faithful.

Diplomacy: 'Iran is the godfather of all Persian-speaking peoples, and relations with this country are privileged independently of the political regime in existence'.

#### Rastakhez Popular Movement

President: Takhir Abdudjabar

History: Rastakhez ('renewal') was created in September 1989 to support the Gorbachev government, from a social base among urban *intelligentsia*.

Press: the weekly *Rastakhez* (in Tajik) had an irregular publication due to lack of funds.

Programme: the main demand is the promotion of Tajik as a language of state, with the adoption of the Arabic alphabet. The second is economic independence. Rastakhez sees itself as a champion of democracy, and favours a parliamentary system centred on prime ministerial power: 'With a presidential system in a new democratic country, elections cannot be correctly carried out. Voters do not know the candidates, and vote for the better-known ones, an occurrence that could lead to the election of corrupt candidates'.

Economy: Rastakhez was the first to demand economic freedom and privatisation of factories (in favour of the workers) and land (in favour of the peasants).

Nevertheless, such reforms are impossible without a change in the political regime.

Religion: Secularism is professed, but Islam is considered part of the national culture.

Diplomacy: priority to relations with Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

#### Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP)

(Hizb-i Nahzat-i Islami)

President: Mohammad Sharif Himmatzada.

History: according to its leaders, the IRP began in secrecy 15 years before it was officially formed (1990). Initially part of the IRP in the old USSR, the local section broke away due to that movement's 'pan-Turkist' tendency.

In the beginning, the IRP presented itself as an adversary of official Islam, represented in Dushanbe by the Qaziyat of Tajikistan, led by Qazi Kalan Hajji Akbar Turajanzade.

Press: irregular publication of the monthly *Nadajat* ('liberation').

Programme: priority to Tajikistan's independence, and a parliamentary system allowing the wide spread of Islam. Islamism suggested as a means of overcoming regionalism and ethnic separatism.

Economy: reforms have to allow transition towards a market economy, and Tajikistan has to cease being merely an exporter of raw materials. It has to equip itself with modern industry. According to the IRP leadership, the *sharia* prohibits the monopolising of profit, of which it accuses Communist Party members.

Religion: predominance of religion over politics and the state.

Diplomacy: establishment of cordial relations with all countries, especially Islamic.

#### Ruby of Badakhshan

(Lal-i Badakhshan)

President: Atobek Amirbekov

History: the separatist Badakhshani party (seeking autonomy for Gorno-Badakhshan) was founded in May 1992. Its members include many key figures in Dushanbe's academic, cultural and political life, such as Akbarshah Iskandarov (President of the republic *ad interim* after the enforced dismissal of Rakhman Nabiev). The party has 3000 members, but also has a large following in the Pamir, and expects to open sections in Tajik regions with Pamiri communities.

Press: the weekly *Bakhtar* ('Bactria').

Programme: the creation of a democratic government in Tajikistan, with the concession of substantial administrative autonomy to Gorno-Badakhshan. Hostile to a presidential regime, and in favour of 'collective government'.

Economy: distribution of land and factories to peasants and workers. Main objective must be improvement of living conditions of Badakhshan population.

Religion: the separation of religion from politics, particularly the majority Sunni Muslims, who must be under the *qaziyat* of Dushanbe.

Diplomacy: relations with Pamiri community in Afghanistan and China, as well as with Iran.

#### Greater Iran

(Aryana-yi Buzurg)

President: M. Ardamehr

History: founded in September 1991 on the basis of its predecessor Kurush-i kabir ('Cyrus the Great'). It avoided constituting itself as a party, a form reminiscent of an ancient system, and is estimated as having 4000 members throughout the country. Sections have been opened in Khujand and various cities around Dushanbe. It would like to be represented in Iran and Afghanistan. Other nationalities in the country are invited to join.

Press: the monthly *Mehr* ('the light'), of which only a quarter is written in Cyrillic. The rest is written in Arabic script. Promised funding by the Iranian Ministry of Culture and Islamic practitioners.

Programme: unification of Persian-speaking population across Iran, Afghanistan and Tajikistan. Protection of Persian language against Turkic and Russian influence. Development of a democratic political structure to favour achievement of these aims.

Religion: Islam is an integral part of the culture, and a Greater Persia must not ignore such a reality.

Diplomacy: privileges ties with Iran and Afghanistan, followed by India and Pakistan. The USA is a sought-after trade partner 'on condition that no military interests are shown towards the region'.

### Afghanistan: From Independence to Taliban Rule

Afghanistan is bordered by Iran, Pakistan, China and three former Soviet republics, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The country has no coastline, and is often considered a borderline example of under-development. The British officer Sir Mortimer Durand established the borders of this 'buffer state', and the northeastern borders are still known as 'Durand Line'. The borders, enforced in 1893, were supposed to ensure that there would be no contact between the British and the Russian empires.

In 1921, Britain acknowledged Afghanistan's independence, although the country nevertheless remained under British influence until 1947, when India

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# The New Central Asia

## The Creation of Nations

• • •

Olivier Roy

Nakhichevan. In the elections for the Supreme Soviet in October 1990, the opposition took 10 percent of the seats. In August, Mutalibov approved the Moscow *putsch* and immediately afterwards proclaimed independence (on 31 August). In September 1991, he was elected president, but the war in Nagorno-Karabakh pushed the communists and opposition forces into an unaccustomed degree of agreement: a National Council consisting of 25 pro-government members and 25 pro-opposition members was set up in October.

The defeat at Khojali in the face of the Armenians led to the fall of the Mutalibov regime in 1992. He attempted a *coup d'état* in May, but it failed and he then took refuge in Moscow, thereby inaugurating a series of failed *putsches* which were to set the pace of political life in Azerbaijan. In May, the Popular Front took power. In June, the nationalist Abulfaz Elchibey was elected president. He ran an ultra-nationalist policy based on hostility to Moscow and established close relations with Turkey, which sent advisors to Azerbaijan. But repeated defeats at the hands of the Armenians, who were supported by Russia, plus popular disaffection and Russian manoeuvring, led to Elchibey being overthrown in a coup led by the warlord Suret Husseinov. Azerbaijan then saw the return to power of the 70-year-old Haidar Aliyev, who was elected president in November 1993. Within the former USSR such a come-back was exceptional (Shevardnadze, the only former Communist Party Politburo member to have run a republic like Aliyev, belonged to a younger generation). It was all the more remarkable since Aliyev was to take a thoroughly nationalist line in facing down Moscow (refusing Russian military bases and frontier guards). There were several *putsch* attempts against him, first by defence minister Rahim Gaziyeu in 1994 (supported by Mutalibov and Moscow), and then on 17 March 1995, by deputy minister of the interior Rushan Javadov, who died during the attempt (which, incidentally, was supported by the Turks). In 1996 the Russians effected a *rapprochement* with Aliyev, and briefly arrested Gaziyeu and Mutalibov.

Despite a chaotic political life and regular *putsches*, Azerbaijan enjoyed a degree of political diversity. The elections of 12 November 1995 saw the emergence of three major parties: Yeni Azerbaijan, the president's party; the Popular Front; and Ittibar Mahmedov's Party of National Independence (a business party).

Finally, Azerbaijan has had to deal with unrest among its minorities: the Lezghins, in the region close to Daghestan where they number several hundred thousand, are demanding a republic of their own (the Samur movement); the Party of the Tالش People (which later became the Party for Equality of the Peoples of Azerbaijan) operates within the law; in early 1993 there was an failed attempt to create a Republic of Tالش-Mughan (this was proclaimed by Colonel Alakram Gumbatov). Finally, there is also a Kurdish Equality Party, arising from the presence of several tens of thousands of Kurds in the country.

Azerbaijan depends on income from the exploitation of hydrocarbons to balance its economy.

## TAJIKISTAN AS AN EXCEPTION: CIVIL WAR AS A SYMPTOM OF IDENTITY CRISIS

In February 1990, rioting broke out in Dushanbe following a rumour that the government had requisitioned apartments to house Armenian refugees.<sup>6</sup> The demonstrators were basically protesting against shortages of housing and the fact that the Leninabad faction exercised a monopoly of political power. The first secretary of the Communist Party, Kahhar Mahkamov, remained in position in a climate that was becoming increasingly tense. Like his fellow first secretaries in the rest of Central Asia, he was elected president in November 1990 while still remaining first secretary. He supported the Moscow *putsch*, but was then obliged to resign on 7 September, under pressure from the streets. Qadruddin Aslanov (from the south) was appointed acting president by the assembly, and he dissolved the Communist Party and proclaimed independence. On 23 September, former first secretary Nabiyeu took power with the support of the conservatives, declared a state of emergency and re-established the Communist Party. But this made little sense, since the party had more or less disappeared in the face of emerging regional clan interests. On 2 October, Nabiyeu again dissolved the Communist Party, cancelled the state of emergency and organised presidential elections which turned out to be relatively open. The opposition forces supported the candidature of Dawlat Khodanazarov, president of the (Soviet) Union of Film Directors and a Pamiri intellectual, who took approximately 30 percent of the vote in the elections on 27 November.

At this point, Safarali Kenjayev entered the scene. He was a complex personality: of Yaghnobi origin and born in Hissar (an area to the west of Dushanbe and majority Uzbek), where he still maintained support. He was raised by the father of Qazi Turajanzade, following a Persian tradition of 'twinning' a child from a good family with a child from less favoured circumstances. He then pursued a career as a judge in the province of Leninabad, whose regional identity he adopted. He became president of the National Assembly in December, as a compromise candidate (since he was of the north without originating in the north, tendentially democratic, and close to the *qazi's* family). He suddenly chose the Leninabadi camp, and targeted the Pamiri minister of the interior, Naujavanov, who had been in the post since 1987. As we saw, Pamiris were promoted within the security organisations (MVD and KGB) on the occasion of the war in Afghanistan.

This attack (the reasons for which were obscure) soon led to a mobilisation among the Pamiris of Dushanbe (organised into the La'l-i Badakhshan ('ruby of Badakhshan') party, who feared that they were again going to be removed from power, 55 years after the purges of 1937. On 26 March 1992, they began a demonstration in front of the republic's presidential palace in Martyrs' (Shahidan) Square. In April, they were joined by the Gharmis, this time under the banner of the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP, led by Mohamed Sharif Himmatzade), as well as by all the opposition parties. All

were officially demanding Kenjayev's resignation, but the real issue was the rising power of the excluded regionalist groups (Gharmis and Pamiris) against the Communist establishment. The Leninabadis then received back-up from the Kulabis. We have already seen how, in the province of Kurgan-Teppe, population transfers among both Gharmis and Kulabis had consolidated antagonisms and had led to conflict over land. These localist conflicts were exported to the capital. They came up from the *kolkhoz* in buses and tractors to support their various factions. It was enough to look at the out-of-town numberplates and the names on the placards to see that this was a localist mobilisation. Shahidan Square brought together Gharmis from Karategin and Kurgan-Teppe, people from Ramit and Kafirnehan, Darwazis, Pamiris and people from Zarafshan (who came individually). To Liberty Square, on the other hand, came people from Kulab, Leninabad, Hissar, Shahrinai, Tursunzade, Lenin and Varzab. The *qazi*, a Gharmi, took a position against Kenjayev, virtually his blood brother. All the ministries and security organisations were split according to the regional origins of their functionaries. Repression as a way of resolving the situation was impossible. On 23 April, Kenjayev resigned. Nabiyev attempted to establish a National Guard, but the KGB and MVD were under Pamiri influence, while the (Russian) 201st Division was under the command of Ashurov, a Gharmi. The defeated Kulabis left Dushanbe on 5 May 1995.

A coalition government was then set up. Officially Nabiyev was still president, but he lost all power. Effective government was in the hands of a coalition of Pamiris (the deputy president and prime minister Akbarshah Iskanderov) and Gharmis. The *qazi* remained off the official stage, but played a considerable role, while the hardline wing of the IRP and the Young Pamiris of Dushanbe set up armed militias. The new head of the TV network, Mirbaba Mirrahim, cut down on Russian-language programmes and broadcast large chunks of Iranian television.

However, while the situation was becoming calmer in Dushanbe the war of the *kolkhoz* was breaking out in the south (see above). The Gharmis, initially victorious, expelled the Kulabis from Vakhsh in June-July, and blockaded Kulab in July. The Kulabis organised militarily, within a Popular Front under the leadership of Sangak Safarov. They procured weapons from Russian garrisons (either bought or given) and launched their counter-attack in September 1992, with the support of Russian troops (the Russian 191st Battalion based in Kurgan-Teppe), except in Dushanbe, where the Russians remained neutral.

This was a savage war: massacres, rape, torture, looting and summary executions. The lower Vakhsh valley was the scene of Serb-style ethnic cleansing. The houses of Gharmis and Pamiris were systematically destroyed and the civilian populations fled towards the border with Afghanistan. After a pause of a month, the Amu Darya was crossed at the end of December in very difficult conditions by tens of thousands of Gharmi refugees, taking them into Afghanistan, where they were rapidly taken into the care of the UNHCR.

Nabiyev was forced to resign by an armed group in September 1992, and took refuge in Khojent. An initial attack on Dushanbe by supporters of Kenjayev on 23 October failed. A meeting of parliament in Khojent in November 1992 tried to find a compromise. The Kulabi Imamali Rahmanov was appointed president of the parliamentary Praesidium, but as a last-minute compromise this achieved nothing. Dushanbe fell on 8 December 1992, and Kafirnehan, the last bastion of the Islamic-democratic coalition, fell on 27 December.

The Islamic opposition then withdrew to regroup in Afghanistan, from where they launched increasingly powerful armed attacks, albeit limited to the zones where they had a presence (the upper Gharm valley and Tahvildara), under their commanders Rizwan, Kalandar and Mirza. In order to widen the base of the IRP, they created the Islamic Movement of Tajikistan, led by Mullah Nuri and with the support of Qazi Turajanzade. This movement was completely Islamic and Gharmi. However, in the negotiations sponsored by the United Nations the opposition presented a single delegation, presided over by Otakhan Latifi, a former Soviet journalist and secular democrat from Zarafshan (as were most of the democratic intellectuals). The delegation, called UTO (United Tajik Opposition) brought together the IRP, the Rastakhiz movement, the Democratic Party (from which Shadman Yusuf, who had rallied to the government in 1995, was excluded) and the Pamiris, represented by Khaleq Nazarov, formerly minister for foreign affairs in the coalition government of 1992.

The Pamiris succeeded in preserving their autonomy both *de jure* and *de facto* in Gorno-Badakhshan, having reached a compromise with the government: they recognised the suzerainty of Dushanbe, and accepted the presence of government (actually Russian) frontier guards. Their territory became a prime location for the transit of drugs coming from Afghanistan to Osh in Kyrgyzstan, and the Aga Khan Foundation provided food support.

The Dushanbe government was in the hands of Kulabis, who consolidated their power by means of the armed militias emerging from the Popular Front. A constitution (November 1994) and parliamentary elections (February 1995) gave them control of the state apparatus, to the detriment not only of the opposition, but also of the Leninabadis, who had to content themselves with the (powerless) post of prime minister and the ministry of foreign affairs (Tajikistan had fewer than a dozen overseas embassies, and these were generally the province of disgraced leaders). The Kulabis methodically set about plundering official positions and sources of wealth for the benefit of their faction, and had no interest whatever in running the state. This predatory attitude destroyed the economy and led to their fellow regionalist factions going into opposition. The Leninabadis first tried opting for autonomy, with the support of Tashkent, on the basis of their economic dynamism, but the Kulabis took direct control of the province in December 1993. Various attempts to create a north-based pole were aborted in the face of the refusal of the Russians (who opened a consulate in Khojent in August 1994) to support

them. An armed revolt in January 1996, led by the province's military commander, General Mamajanov, failed, apparently after intervention by the Russian FSB (ex-KGB). In May 1996, popular rioting broke out in the north against Kulabi excesses. The ex-prime ministers of the north (Abdullajanov, Samadov and Karimov), who had been pushed from power one after the other in less than three years, eventually joined forces and created a National Renaissance Party in August 1996 to defend the interests of the province of Leninabad, and this time they had the green light from the Russians.

In January 1996, a military uprising actually within the militias of the Popular Front seriously threatened the government. Its leaders, Ibod Boimatov (formerly mayor of Tursunzade, the capital of Hissar, a region to the west of Dushanbe which was majority Uzbek) and Mahmud Khodaberdayev (commander of the 1st Brigade at Kurgan-Teppe), both ethnic Uzbek from Tajikistan, demanded the government's resignation. They were discreetly supported by Tashkent, which was annoyed at Russian intervention in an area that it saw as its own natural protectorate.

The Dushanbe government was forced to give way. In February 1996, the most hardline members of the Kulabi clan (in particular the minister of the interior, Yakub Salimov, and the deputy prime minister in charge of security, Obeydulayev) were removed. But there was no political solution in sight. Tashkent openly pressed for the Kulabi team to be replaced by people from the north, and created an opening for the Islamic opposition, which was officially received by President Karimov in May 1995. But the opposition movements (Islamists, Leninabadis and Uzbeks from the south) were not ready to unite. Moscow and Tashkent eyed each other watchfully, and played off their respective protégés. The Russian troops, who were making a good living out of the country and its various forms of trafficking, were in no hurry to end what for them had been a lucrative conflict. Tajikistan became a Russian protectorate, with the likelihood that it would fall within the Uzbek orbit once the Russians decided to depart northwards. However, in December 1996 the Russians, alarmed at the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the military escalation in Tajikistan, supported the signing of an agreement between Rahmanov and the Islamic opposition, which came into effect in June 1997. A coalition government was established between the ruling Kulabi faction and the UTO, with the latter as a junior partner.

In such a situation, regionalism had good opportunity to prosper, as it had in Afghanistan. In the same way that regionalism in the area had been crystallised by Stalin's policies, so it was now being strengthened by Russia's neo-colonial pretensions.

## 8

## Islam

Muslims in Central Asia are Hanafi Sunnis, as they are in Afghanistan and throughout the Indian subcontinent. Shiites are relatively few in number, and consist of two completely different groups. The urban 'Twelver' (in other words recognising twelve imams) Shiites are of Iranian origin but often turcophone, at least in Samarkand. They are the descendants of traders who came from Persia, and they total a few thousand, living in Samarkand and Bukhara, where they are part of the urban élite. The other group are the descendants of the Persian slaves who were very numerous at the end of the nineteenth century and were generally assimilated: in Turkmenistan they speak Turkmen and are Sunni, even though they are always defined as 'Persians' because they have no tribal genealogy. The second group consists of the Ismailis of Pamir, who recognise seven imams and have heterodox beliefs in Islamic terms. The Aga Khan is their spiritual leader. The Ismailis are not particularly observant and are very secular. They are seen as heretics by both Sunnis and Shiites. They number between 300,000 and 400,000 in Tajikistan, and belong to a broader grouping which is located in the Pamir mountains and is also to be found on the Afghan, Pakistani and Chinese slopes of those mountains. In my opinion, the Shiite Tajiks who feature in censuses in China are neither Tajik nor Shiite, but Ismailis speaking Pamiri languages.<sup>1</sup>

One can speak of two variants of Islam, corresponding to an opposition not so much between Turks and Persians, but between tribal zones (Kazakhs, Turkmens and Kyrgyz) and areas of longstanding urban civilisation that were Islamicised after the Arab conquest (Tajiks and Uzbeks from Transoxiana). The Islam of Transoxiana is a product of the *madrasas* (religious schools) of Samarkand and Bukhara. It is often a fundamentalist Islam, but is supported on the rich Persian Sunni literature developed in northern India during the Moghul era. The dominant figures are the *ulemas*, or doctors of law. In tribal zones, on the other hand, Islam was late in being imposed (sometimes as late