

Tajikistan Stability First

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Abstract

Tajikistan emerged from civil war as stable, but not democratic. It is a mimicry of democracy, where the regime maintains a firm grip on power behind an institutional façade and bases legitimacy on security provision. A power-sharing agreement ended the war, with predatory-driven opposition actors agreeing to authoritarian peace in exchange for access to state assets. After the peace deal, Russian intervention was disjointed from that of Western donors who chose not to work with Moscow. This deprived Westerners of leverage and unleashed geopolitical rivalries. Few resources, limited understanding of the context, and conflicting objectives led to reduced international influence.

Key words: Tajikistan, Russia, democratization, conflict, power sharing, aid, peacekeeping.

Stable, But Not Democratic

Tajikistan disintegrated into violence and civil war in early 1992, a few months after it had gained independence. The civil war finally came to an end in 1997, because the warring parties perceived a power-sharing agreement as the only way out of a mutually hurting stalemate. Since then, Tajikistan has remained stable, and the central authorities have regained strength. However, the state of democracy is bleak. In 2007, Tajikistan scored 5.5, which is considered “not free,” in Freedom House’s “Freedom in the World” index on civil and political freedoms. Tajikistan is a mimicry of democracy: it is an autocratic state which maintains a democratic façade. It has adopted a constitution and legislation which guarantee basic rights and freedoms, has laws on participation and competition, and has opposition parties in the parliament. It goes through the motions of adopting constitutional amendments, and conducts nationwide

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elections and consultation fora (for example, the Public Council) with civil society and dignitaries. However, these measures are devoid of political competition: decisions are made elsewhere and by other means. To use Thomas Carothers's terminology, the state has entered a political gray zone: it developed some of the attributes of democratic political life, including a limited space for opposition parties and civil society as well as a quasi-democratic constitution. Yet, it suffers from democratic deficits, such as poor representation of citizens' interests, frequent abuse of law by state officials, and elections of uncertain legitimacy.¹

After almost total disintegration of authority during the civil war, recentralization of power has been an ongoing objective since 2001. The president's authority to dismiss and appoint heads of provinces and districts was used frequently in the 2001-2006 period. Regular turnover keeps appointees loyal to their patrons and prevents power from being accumulated by any local fief. Heathershaw notes that, "given the indivisibility of political and economic power in Tajikistan, central control over the general functioning of local government serves to bolster control by elite networks over economic goods, foremost of which is cotton."² The expenditures and administrative functions of local government, including staffing levels and wages, are set by the center.³ As a result of this reconstruction of central authority, all power is concentrated in the hands of the president. The 1994 constitution and 1999 amendments give great power to the presidency, making the president head of state, head of government, guarantor of the constitution, supreme commander, and head of the Security Council. He also controls the judiciary by virtue of his right to propose the judges of the Constitutional Court, the Supreme Economic Court, and the Supreme Court, as well as the procurator-general and the military prosecutor. In June 2003, a constitutional referendum allowed the president to be elected for another two seven-year terms, meaning that the incumbent, Imomali Rakhmon,⁴ can rule legally until 2020. He won the November 2006 presidential elections without challenge.

In the shadow of such an all-dominating executive, neither the rule of law nor political competition can flourish. The rule of law in Tajikistan is weak

¹ Thomas Carothers, "The End of the Transition Paradigm," *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 1 (2002): 5-21.

² John Heathershaw, "Peace as Complex Legitimacy: Politics, Space and Discourse in Tajikistan's Peacebuilding Process, 2000-2005" (PhD diss., Department of International Relations, London School of Economics, 2007), 259.

³ Marilynnne Davis et al., "Assessment of Intergovernmental Relations and Local Governance in the Republic of Tajikistan," prepared for USAID (Dushanbe, Tajikistan: Urban Institute, March 2003).

⁴ Formerly known as "Rakhmonov," Rakhmon was elected as the chairman of the Supreme Council in 1992 (the highest executive post in the country), then, when presidency was reintroduced, he was elected as president in 1994.

and is affected by the Soviet legacy, when interpretation of legislation can be bent according to political authority. In politically charged situations, such as disputes over the 2005 parliamentary elections results, executive influence on court rulings is evident; in this case, court appeals by losing candidates invariably resulted in negative rulings. In nonpolitical cases, corruption undermines the administration of justice.

Not surprisingly, political participation has decreased continuously since the signing of the Peace Accords in 1997. This is largely due to the diminishing standing of the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP), the main opposition party during the civil war. Throughout the period, politicians associated with former opposition found themselves gradually pushed out of power with every government reshuffle; by the end of 2006, no opposition figures remained in an official position.

There is no free and fair electoral competition among political parties. Citizens retain the active right to vote, but elections tend to function as a procedural exercise for approving outcomes already determined in advance by the executive. Informal competition exists among the elites who are vertically organized, partially based on their geographical locality. Their functioning is underpinned by patronage links at the provincial and central levels. However, even this intra-elite “checks and balances” has been diminished, as one grouping came to dominate the political space. As the ruling group from the Dangara region expanded its power at the central level, the autonomy of other regional groupings became subordinated, and they had to accept the new rules of the game, by which winner takes all.

Civil society in a Western sense barely exists, and regional interests and those of the clergy are too weak to oppose the tendencies toward authoritarian presidential rule. Civil society organizations are tiny, mostly staffed by urban intelligentsia and supported by donor funds. Although there is a great deal of vibrancy in society, the numerous nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), which mushroomed once the international engagement in Tajikistan gained momentum, are clearly no substitute for a civil society which can hold the state accountable.⁵

The poor track record of democratic achievements is somewhat contrasted by the regime’s success in reestablishing security. In a departure from the postwar period, still fresh in the citizens’ memory, Tajikistan has become a safe place to live. Since the signing of the peace agreement in 1997, disarmament has taken place, although it has been usurped by the recycling of small arms by the regime. The demobilization of militias has been precluded by a process whereby commanders who sought to retain their independence as political actors were destroyed. What has been paramount has been a process of

⁵ Anna Matveeva, “Exporting Civil Society,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 55, no. 2 (2008): 3-13.

“reintegration,” in which those who were prepared to sacrifice their political and military independence have been incorporated into the elite networks.⁶ Ex-commanders have come to hold senior positions in the capital in various military formations. This has dispersed military power among different structures and deprived opposition field commanders of a single power base from which to mobilize against the president.⁷ With their formal integration into state structures, commanders have been unable to remain independent and have to accept strict limits on what they can do.

However, sources of insecurity remain. Potentially most serious is the threat from jihadist groups with ties across the wider region, including Afghanistan and Pakistan. So far, their attacks have been sporadic and none has marked the start of a sustained campaign. Soughd Province in the Ferghana Valley, where the borders of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan meet, has been the scene of most incidents. There is also a threat posed by drug trafficking and competition among drug networks, given the country’s location on the border of Afghanistan. However, as of yet, the drug business has not led to armed violence, apart from clashes between traffickers and the Russian border troops, when the latter had been stationed on the Tajik-Afghan border. Episodes of violence and shoot-outs at the border have decreased since Russian troop withdrawal in 2005. Today, the drug market is divided among major players with connections to the ruling elite, and there is little unorganized trade to cause drug mafia wars, but this could change in case of inter-elite struggles.

This type of postwar stability comes at a price. Today, the way security is provided becomes increasingly a conflict-generating factor. For example, the police, the same way as other ministries, are desperately underfunded, and they have to turn to any source of income available. Since the police work directly with the population, their ability to levy various “taxes” is considerable. By contrast, the Ministry of Defense has virtually no direct contact with the population, and is unable to extort bribes and taxes and demand free provision of goods; therefore, the army remains a relatively poor agency vis-à-vis the police, which have the ability to provide for themselves.⁸ The period since 2001 also has been marked by the increased power of security agencies, which

⁶ For a detailed discussion, see Stina Torjesen and S. Neil MacFarlane, “R before D: The Case of Post Conflict Reintegration in Tajikistan,” *Journal of Conflict, Security and Development* 7, no. 2 (2007): 311-332.

⁷ John Heathershaw, “Peace as Complex Legitimacy: Politics, Space and Discourse in Tajikistan’s Peacebuilding Process, 2000-2005” (PhD diss., Department of International Relations, London School of Economics, 2007), 223- 224.

⁸ Anna Matveeva, “Tajikistan: Evolution of the Security Sector and the War on Terror,” in *Facing the Terrorist Challenge: Central Asia’s Role in Regional and International Co-operation*, ed. Anja Ebnöther, Ernst M. Felberbauer, and Martin Malek (Vienna: Bureau of Security Policy, Austrian Ministry of Defense, DCAF, PfP Consortium, April 2005), <http://www.dcaf.ch/publications/kms/details.cmf?ord279=title&q279=Facing&lng=en&id=19650&navl=5> (accessed July 19, 2009).

the population fears. This fear varies: in the mountainous parts, such as Gharm and Gorno Badakhshan, there is greater general freedom and less apprehension of security officials, who also are aware of limitations on their power. In cotton-producing areas of the south, by contrast, the population is terrified of the security and police agents. This growing fear of the state agencies contrasts with a sharp reduction of threats emanating from the civil war legacy.

Given the ambiguous track record of the Tajik postwar regime, one might wonder about the actual level of legitimacy the regime enjoys among the population. In an environment marked by fake elections, no free media, and fear of the security apparatus, it is hard to be certain what the population thinks. One frame of reference is that the population compares the present to the Soviet state to which citizens had been accustomed. Against this standard, the current state is a poor replica of the past. On the other hand, the horrors of the civil war are still very present in the memory of the population, and the regime receives credit for ending the war and providing stability and even modest economic growth. Hence, despite widespread dissatisfaction and much despair about the actions of the president, his personnel policy, the government's corruption, and waste of money, it would be too simplistic to conclude that the regime is illegitimate.

Clearly, the provision of security remains the regime's trump card, upon which much of its legitimacy rests. War fatigue and the desire for peace make the population accept presidential rule, however unrepresentative and unjust it may be, and act as a powerful brake on the expression of protest, despite many justifiable grievances. Legitimacy is also reinforced by economic output, and by symbolic reverence of status and tradition. The standing of the regime is related to its ability to provide security, growth, and welfare. The president is still regarded as a peacemaker. Crucially, legitimacy thrives on a lack of choice, as no viable alternatives to the current regime appear available. Islamist hardliners are feared. Islamic moderates have no experience of government. Rivals from within the ruling elite are expected not to perform better than the president and perhaps to be more corrupt, while the old Soviet *nomenklatura* from the north has been out of power for too long to be seen as a viable and visible contender. Consequently, the population still is prepared to "endure peace" almost at any cost.⁹

This essay investigates the causes for the outcome of the Tajikistan transition from civil war to authoritarian stability. The next section discusses the legacies of the civil war and the subsequent power-sharing agreement on the political outcome. Next, the international engagement in Tajikistan is described and its primarily superficial impact is explained. The third and last

⁹ "I have lived through the civil war and am prepared to put up with Rakhmon and with his relatives in power until my dying day, if to change this means going back to violence." Senior IRP politician, interviewed by author, Dushanbe, Tajikistan, 2004.

section argues that one reason for the Tajik outcome is the limited demand for democracy among the elite and population, which is a result of both structural factors, and a legacy of the civil war.

The Civil War Legacies: Perils of Power Sharing

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Tajikistan experienced a disastrous civil war. A wide range of mainly domestic, but also external, factors led to the outbreak of the conflict in 1992. Especially explosive were the sharp regional rivalries within the country. Independence triggered a struggle for state power, fought among various factions which changed alliances. The war started as a clash among ideologies: communism versus radical Islamism, secularism versus Islamism, democracy/liberalism versus authoritarianism. It soon became apparent that the main fault lines between these factions turned out to be regional affiliations along lowlander/highlander cleavages.¹⁰ The November 1991 presidential elections served as a prelude to the civil war, splitting the country. When the status quo candidate, Rakhmon Nabiev, won the election with 57 percent of the vote, the opposition refused to accept the defeat as fair.¹¹ In the meantime, the winning side formed a government dominated by its own supporters. This experimentation with democracy underscored the danger of conducting elections in divided societies that are at the very beginning of statehood, with no culture of compromise and, instead, “winner take all” attitudes.

Main hostilities in the civil war took place between 1992 and the start of 1993, with an estimated fifty thousand people killed during the peak of the fighting.¹² The main parties to the war comprised the secularists—with strong regional support in Kulyab and among the Uzbek minority—on the one side, and the United Tajik Opposition (UTO)—comprised of an uneasy mix of democrats and Islamists with roots in Kurgan-Tyube, the Gharm Valley,

¹⁰ Olivier Roy, *The New Central Asia: The Creation of Nations* (New York: New York University Press, 2000); Barnett Rubin, *Russian Hegemony and State Breakdown in the Periphery: Causes and Consequences of Civil War in Tajikistan* (London: Routledge, 1998), 128-162; Muriel Atkin, “Tajikistan: A Case Study for Conflict Potential,” *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 24, no. 3 (1999): 175-203; and Shirin Akiner, *Tajikistan: Disintegration or Reconciliation?* (London: Central Asian and Caucasian Prospects, RIIA, 2001).

¹¹ Akiner, *Tajikistan: Disintegration or Reconciliation?*

¹² No official figures exist. Estimates range from conservative 50,000, accepted by the UN, to between 150,000 and 300,000, accepted by local analysts and NGOs. Randa Slim and Faredun Hodizoda, “Tajikistan: From Civil War to Peacebuilding,” in *Searching for Peace in Europe and Eurasia*, ed. Paul van Tongeren, Hans van der Veen, and Juliette Verhoeven (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2001), 516-535, and Kamiluddin Abdullaev and Catherine Barnes, “Politics of Compromise: The Tajikistan Peace Process,” *Conciliation Resources/Accord* (London), no. 10 (2001).

and Badakhshan—on the other. On December 10, 1992, troops of the Popular Front, a coalition of warlords who fought on behalf of the secularists, entered Dushanbe and destroyed the Islamist defenses. The active and bloodiest phase of the civil war was over, but the opposition withdrew to mountainous regions and to Afghanistan from where it continued to mount resistance.

By early 1993, the opposition was dominated by the Islamic forces that had relocated to bases in Afghanistan and formed a Council of Islamic Resistance in Tolouqan. They did not have a regular army, but instead employed guerrilla tactics from across the border, using small-sized units and hit-and-run tactics.¹³ By 1996, the civil war had reached a stalemate, and both parties came to realize that they could not win a military victory. After seven rounds of complex negotiations, the war was finally terminated through a peace negotiation process.

In June 1997, the General Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and National Accord in Tajikistan (Peace Accords) was signed by Imomali Rakhmon, on behalf of the government, and by Said Abdullo Nuri, on behalf of the UTO. The agreement provided for 30 percent UTO representation in governmental executive bodies, the safe return of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), disarmament and the reintegration of opposition forces into government security structures, constitutional and electoral amendments, the adoption of an Amnesty Law, the establishment of a date for parliamentary elections, and reform of the government. The immediate issues were the establishment of a joint Central Election Commission, the reform of national and local government on the basis of a 30 percent quota for UTO, the lifting of restrictions on opposition parties, and the freeing of imprisoned opposition. In July 1997, a Pact on Mutual Forgiveness was signed and endorsed by the newly formed Commission for National Reconciliation (CNR), the chief mechanism for the implementation of the Accords.

The Peace Accords, which were in effect a power-sharing scheme, proved to have a major impact on security. Large-scale hostilities ended, and heavy weapons gradually were surrendered. The Accords provided for the reintegration of the opposition units into armed forces and demobilization of rank-and-file members, who were to join civilian life. The Law on Amnesty allowed the former warlords to enter legitimate politics and to be given state appointments in the security sector, which created incentives for them to side with the government and exploit the system rather than to contest it.

The agreement proved to be very successful in co-opting members of the opposition into the elite network that runs Tajikistan. Also, the representation

¹³ For instance, commander Kori Hamidullo led a major attack on the 12th border post in July 1993. See Vladimir Bushkov and Dmitrii Mikulskii, *Анатомия гражданской войны в Таджикистане* (Anatomy of civil war in Tajikistan) (Moscow: Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and Russian Humanitarian Academic Foundation, 1997), 67.

quota given to the opposition allowed its members to sell lucrative appointments and to be in charge of positions, which opened vast opportunities for corruption, such as TajikGas, the Tajik state gas company, or appointments on the border, which allowed bribe taking.¹⁴

The “indivisibility” of the former opposition’s stakes gradually diminished, and with it, its support base.

Narrow identity-based conflict tends to all-or-nothing struggles for indivisible stakes (control of the state, and state patronage, land, and other valuable resources and the rights associated with them). Divisibility refers to the extent to which the conflict over a right is a question of “more or less” (such as in the capital-labour struggle), as opposed to “all-or-nothing”. When political coalitions are organized around regional, ethnic or other identity aspects, the distribution of assets and resources tends to be more indivisible.¹⁵

The ensuing state building process witnessed a number of former Islamists switching their loyalty to the government. However, an important flaw in the deal was that it did not provide for power sharing in a broader sense, specifically, inclusion of forces that were not formal parties in the civil war. For example, the Uzbeks, who had made a significant contribution toward military victory, and the northerners were not represented in the power sharing. When the government managed to co-opt or ostracize its former Islamist opponents, there were no other forces represented in politics to be reckoned with. Gradually, most power went to the representatives of the Kulyabi faction, which backed the government and became the *de facto* dominant party. After 2001, when peace became entrenched, the president, who was born and grew up in Dangara in the Kulyab region and had his patronage base there, came to promote his own clan at the expense of other Kulyabi influential groupings. Tajikistan rapidly developed into an authoritarian state, run by the People’s Democratic Party of Tajikistan (PDPT), the official party of power, with appointees from the president’s home region in key positions.

Clearly, the power-sharing agreement was not a guarantee of democracy. Although the provisions of the Peace Accords were largely honored,

¹⁴ Ibrahim Usmon, one of the chief negotiators on the UTO side, in response to my question on what went wrong, responded: “I thought that people in the UTO leadership were strong and wise. This proved hardly the case.” Ibrahim Usmon, interview by author, Mashad, February 2008.

¹⁵ Jonathan Di John, *Conceptualising the Causes and Consequences of Failed States: A Critical Review of the Literature*, Development as StateMaking Working Paper 25 (London: Crisis States Research Centre, London School of Economics, 2008), 36, <http://www.crisisstates.com/download/wp/wpSeries2/wp25.2.pdf> (accessed May 15, 2009).

there was no real mechanism to enforce negotiated rules of the game or to punish violations in the long run, and there were few provisions for future democratic development beyond the immediate aftermath of the civil war. As it was designed, the agreement had a limited validity of four years (from one election to the next) to enable a political transition to a stable system, but it was not meant to create the fundamentals of the system *per se*. In essence, what the power-sharing agreement did was to empower an elite cartel which had agreed to end mutually harmful hostilities. While the empowerment of elite cartels¹⁶ may be an important, at times even necessary, step in order to end civil wars, there were also serious negative implications for Tajikistan's democratic development. The agreement reduced open political competition, weakened the accountability of elites, and led to an increased informal rivalry for intergroup resource allocation, but also provided a mechanism to reach intergroup consensus behind the scenes, as long as elite groups retained bargaining power. Finally, it gave the government party the time it needed to consolidate, and then to marginalize the former opposition.

Thus, the agreement helped to end the war, but it produced a political regime which is based on the dominance of one closely knit network of patronage, which runs the country amid popular compliance.

The International and Russian Intervention

Despite the considerable attention that the UN, other international organizations, and Western donor governments devoted to Tajikistan in the wake of 9/11, it was Russia that provided the muscle of the peacekeeping and peacemaking process during the civil war; however, this was a role which Russia, the residual imperial power, performed rather by default than by design.¹⁷ Its *de facto* involvement started immediately in 1992, since Russian troops already were based in Tajikistan and did not have the chance to withdraw before the war erupted. In September 1993, the Commonwealth of Independent States Collective Peacekeeping Forces (CIS/PKF) was composed of contingents from Russia's 201st Division stationed in Tajikistan and battalions from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. The CIS/PKF in 1993 was comprised of 25,000 Russian forces, an Uzbek battalion of 350, and a Kyrgyz force numbering 286. At the end of 1996, the CIS/PKF was reduced to 5,500 men of the 201st Division, 500 each of the Kazakh and Kyrgyz mechanized infantry battalions,

¹⁶ "Elite cartel" in this context means politicians who control and derive their power base from significant regional elites. Its members control formal (e.g., gold production) and informal (e.g., drug trafficking) business opportunities in a given locality and can mobilize supporters to fight for a cause, if need be.

¹⁷ On analysis of Russia's role in peacekeeping in Tajikistan, see Dov Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS: The Cases of Moldova, Georgia and Tajikistan* (London: Macmillan Press, in association with the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2000), 150-172.

and 300 of an Uzbek battalion.¹⁸

The objective of the CIS/PKF intervention was to make peace and bring stability. The way to ensure this was to create an environment in which the warring parties were able to negotiate. Another objective was to limit the scope of conflict in intra-Tajik issues and to cut off foreign involvement from Afghanistan. The CIS/PKF had a mandate to secure the border with Afghanistan and prevent movement of troops and weapons across it. The CIS/PKF also guarded vital military and state installations, provided rear support to the border troops, delivered humanitarian aid, and secured the return of refugees. The troops were not allowed to participate in active combat operations.¹⁹ After the Peace Accords, objectives were reduced to border protection, guarding civilian assets, monitoring the movement of heavy weapons, and disarmament assistance.

While the Russian forces always had coercive capacity to enforce peace with military power, they mostly abstained from operations inside the country. Targets on the border were seen as legitimate. Russian forces bombed targets inside Afghanistan in pursuit of militants implicated in border raids. The more common practice, however, was to arm and give tactical advice to the Tajik armed forces, which would do the fighting. The military mandate did not go into the political domain, which was a prerogative of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Moscow was interested in consolidation of the country with its present borders and in discouraging attempts at secession by the north. It was mostly interested in stability rather than in democracy or justice, and calculated that Rakhmon was likely to deliver.

The CIS/PKF in Tajikistan did not operate under a UN mandate. In September 1993, Kazakhstan and Russia had asked the UN to give the CIS force in Tajikistan a mandate to operate as a United Nations peacekeeping force. Nothing came out of this initiative. Russia's attempt to establish the CIS as a regional partner of the UN in peace operations was partly prompted by the UN's conferring such status to NATO for operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). However, the Russian effort was seen by the Americans and Europeans as an attempt to establish the CIS as a European security organization on par with NATO. It was viewed as an undesirable development, and, consequently, the Russian military role and the political and economic efforts of the UN became disjointed. Since Russian military and financial aid was the only credible stick of the external engagement, this disjunction actually meant that the international community had lost one of its few means of leverage over a regime which did not seem keen on democratic reforms.

¹⁸ Lena Jonson, "The Tajik Civil War: A Challenge to Russian Policy," Chatham House Discussion Paper no. 74 (London: RIIA, 1998), 16.

¹⁹ Ibid.

The UN reaction to the civil war in Tajikistan began in late 1992. In January 1993, the UN established the United Nations Mission of Observers in Tajikistan (UNMOT), initially an operation tasked with helping to coordinate humanitarian assistance. In December 1994, the UNMOT was formally given the responsibility to monitor the implementation of the cease-fire.²⁰ It also maintained regular contact with CIS/PKF commanders. What grabbed the attention of the regional powers was the successful consolidation of the Pakistan-backed Taliban over large swathes of Afghanistan and the prospect that its influence, politics, and violence might spill over into Tajikistan. For example, Nuri, the UTO leader, feared that Taliban advances in the north would spell the end of the Northern Alliance and the Tajik opposition, which prompted him to take a chance for peace.²¹ In 1996, these regional dynamics allowed external actors, with Russia as the driving force, to increase their efforts to establish a political settlement. After considerable international pressure and further internationally sponsored negotiations, the parties started to bargain in earnest, and by June 1997 reached a deal fairly quickly.

The geopolitical setting was favorable for reaching a compromise. The absence of rivalry between Russia and the United States, which had been replaced by a sense of a historical opportunity to work together toward peace, created a sense of common purpose. Russia, although officially supporting the government side, was able to reach out to the opposition. As a result, Russia, the United States, Iran, and anti-Taliban forces in Afghanistan pulled broadly in the same direction, playing important roles at critical junctures of negotiations. Diplomatic pressure upon allies was “robust,” with an overall message that compromise was inevitable if the country were to pull itself out of the war. Still, the UN and Russia effectively supported a deal that excluded the northern region and a large Uzbek group.²²

There are impressive examples of peacemaking initiatives, which prepared the sides for the settlement. Since the height of the civil war in 1993, the Inter-

²⁰ UNMOT personnel was initially authorized at 40 military observers (the maximum authorized was 120 in 1997), while maximum deployment in June 1998 was 81 personnel. From July 1998 to May 2000, UNMOT included two civilian police officers. The mission lasted from December 4, 1994, to May 15, 2000. The UNMOT budget amounted to expenditures from December 16, 1994, to June 30, 1999, of U.S. \$49.9 million (gross) and expenditures for July 1, 1999, to June 30, 2000, of \$14 million (gross). See “Tajikistan—UNMOT Facts and Figures,” prepared for the Internet by the Information Technology Section/ Department of Public Information (DPI), maintained by the Peace and Security Section of DPI in cooperation with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, <http://www.un.org/Depts/DPKO/Missions/unmot/Unmot.f.html> (accessed July 19, 2009).

²¹ Haroun Mir, then adviser to Ahmad Shah Massoud and personally involved in the mediation among parties in Tajikistan, interview by author, Paris, May 2008.

²² Kathleen Collins discusses this argument in “Tajikistan: Bad Peace Agreements and Prolonged Civil Conflict,” in *From Promise to Practice: Strengthening UN Capacities for the Prevention of Violent Conflict*, ed. Chandra Lekha Sriram and Karin Wermester (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2003), 293.

Tajik Dialogue within the Framework of the Dartmouth Conference, led by a joint American-Russian team of facilitators (the Kettering Foundation in the United States, and the Institute of Oriental Studies in Russia), played a key role in bringing the parties of the conflict to the negotiation table, in consolidation of the opposition as a political force that was capable of launching attainable demands, and in exploring the crucial concepts and ideas that later formed the basis for the Peace Accords.²³ At a later “national reconciliation stage” (since 2000), the joint German-Swiss-facilitated dialogue in building confidence between Islamic and secular constituencies created a safe space for the former ideological rivals to establish a framework for peaceful co-existence of religion within an explicitly secular state, one of the crucial issues of the civil war.²⁴ When peace was still fragile, such peacebuilding interventions went to the heart of the political process and involved heavyweight political figures from the government and opposition sides. They have been taken seriously by Tajikistan’s president and his entourage. However, when the need to bring parties together no longer existed and consolidation of power had become entrenched, the government no longer required intermediaries, and the influence of internationals gradually waned.

In June 2000, the UN disbanded UNMOT. Its mandate had expired, as the need for external military monitoring of the cease-fire no longer existed. As a follow up, the UN created the UN Tajikistan Office of Peacebuilding (UNTOP). To further support the agreement and the post-conflict process, UNTOP had a mandate to provide the political framework and leadership for post-conflict peacebuilding activities of the UN system in the country. This would include supporting the efforts of the Resident Coordinator and the UN system, including the Bretton Woods institutions, in promoting an integrated approach in the development and implementation of post-conflict peacebuilding programs aimed at national reconstruction, economic recovery, poverty alleviation, and good governance; mobilizing international support for the implementation of targeted programs aimed at strengthening the rule of law, demobilization, voluntary arms collection, and employment creation for former irregular fighters; helping in creating an enabling environment for consolidating peace, democracy, and the rule of law; and serving as a liaison with the government, political parties, and other representatives of civic society

²³ Anna Matveeva, “Tajikistan: Peace Secured, But Is This the State of Our Dreams?” in *Catalytic Engagement: Leadership Networks for Transforming Intra-state Conflicts*, ed. Michael Lund and Howard Wolpe, project of Woodrow Wilson International Center, forthcoming, and Harold A. Saunders, “Public Peace Process,” in *The Inter-Tajik Dialogue* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 1999), 147-170.

²⁴ Jean-Nicolas Bitter, Frederique Huerin, Arne Saifert, and Dilya Rakhmonova-Schwartz, eds., *Построение доверия между исламистами и секуляристами—таджикский эксперимент* (Confidence building between Islamists and secularists—Tajik experiment) (Hamburg: CORE, Geneva: HEI-PSIO, and Dushanbe: Sharq, 2004).

in broadening national consensus and reconciliation.²⁵

Although there were no explicit statements about the need to establish a liberal democracy in Dushanbe, the UN's mission included the standard checklist of activities that suggested this very goal. In practice, its activities amounted to a Political Discussion Club, which included a wide range of civil society, opposition, and regional actors and the government in a series of open discussions. Technical assistance to the Ministry of Interior consisted of a forensics laboratory and a training program for the police in improvement of police professionalism, which also included the Phase II modules in "human rights and policing." In addition, human rights education, support for reporting to international treaty bodies, and electoral assistance were part of the mission.²⁶ In general, UNTOP focused on diplomatic and representational issues, while Russia and key Western donors were more involved in the political field.

In the wake of 9/11 and the war of the United States against the Taliban, peacebuilding in Tajikistan acquired a new strategic significance for the United States and its allies. Following 2002, five years after the Peace Accords, the country had become the centerpiece of a booming peacebuilding industry. Western diplomats, academics, and international nongovernment organizations (INGOs) flocked to Tajikistan, NGOs emerged, and an impressive flow of money streamed into the country, focusing on such issues as civil society and local government development, socio-economic development, and so on.

What quickly emerged in this later period was compromised peacebuilding. Rakhmon had a clear preference for maintaining political power and ensuring stability throughout the country. The president understood the need to maintain good relations with the international community for developmental and diplomatic reasons, and for the continuation of the flow of resources to enable the outsourcing of key government functions in the social sphere (from which the state had withdrawn almost completely) to external actors. Toward that end, Rakhmon cooperated with peacebuilders when there was a convergence of preferences, but when the president's agenda moved forward and opposition forces no longer presented a serious challenge, he favored his own ideas for managing the political process over international recipes. Thus, there was little more than symbolic peacebuilding when the preferences of state elites diverged from those of the internationals.

Rakhmon was not alone in his stated preference for stability over all other goals. The policy of stability was strongly supported by the population, because society as a whole benefited from it. Perhaps most compelling, even elites felt a certain level of uncertainty and insecurity in relation to the continuation of

²⁵ UN Tajikistan Information Platform, information on United Nations Tajikistan Office of Peace-Building, <http://www.untj.org/?c=6&id=51&a=35> (accessed July 20, 2009).

²⁶ Correspondence with Brian Vitunic, UNTOP/Department of Political Affairs, and author's personal observation while deployed in Tajikistan, 2003-2004.

stability. The outbreak of the civil war was a shock for society, and, as a result, the perception of insecurity was strongly felt five years after the hostilities had ended, with people still “waiting for something to happen.” Rakhmon played the “stability” card for political purposes, but at the same time, he moved his national campaigns away from the civil war legacy, instead portraying himself as Tajikistan’s best guarantee of stability and prosperity for the future.²⁷

Aid and Promotion of Democracy

Another potential lever was aid. Tajikistan has received considerable amounts of aid. Total international aid from 2003 to 2007 amounted to U.S. \$1.7 billion.²⁸ The United States was the largest donor of grant aid, followed by the World Bank and the European Commission. Officially, aid constitutes around 10 percent of Tajikistan’s GDP, but the actual percentage may be smaller; real GDP is probably higher since major sources of income such as labor migrants’ income and drug trade proceeds do not enter formal statistics. Table 1 illustrates Tajikistan’s reliance on aid. It shows that, although overall amounts grew from

Table 1. Tajikistan’s Reliance on Development Assistance Aid, 2000-2006

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
DA as % of GDP	12.60	15.34	13.59	9.51	11.71	10.86	8.53
DA per capita, US\$mn	20.01	27.10	26.64	23.13	37.59	38.34	36.12

Sources: OECD. The data set on total aid, democracy aid, humanitarian aid, other aid in 2006 constant U.S.dollars, is based on data provided by the author and converted and analyzed by the project on “External Democracy Promotion in Post-Conflict States,” by Freie Universität Berlin, together with the Center for Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law (CDDRL) at Stanford University and FRIDE, Madrid. For more information see <http://www.polsoz.fu-berlin.de/polwiss/forschung/international/konflikt/projekte/democracypromotion/index.html>. Also see, OECD Credit Reporting System, <http://wobnet.oecd.org/Microdata/CRS2.aspx?Amount=C&Flow=ODA&Year=2007&Recipient=615&UsingMemberCodes=on>; <http://wcbnct.oecd.org/Microdata/CRS2.aspx?Amount=C&Flow=ODA&Year=2007&Recipient=615&UsingMemberCodes=on>; <http://stats.oecd.org/WBOS/Index.aspx?DatasetCode=CRSNEW>; <http://webnet.oecd.org/Microdata/CRS2.aspx?Amount=C&Flow=ODA&Year=2006&Recipient=615&UsingMemberCodes=on>; <http://webnet.oecd.org/Microdata/CRS2.aspx?Amount=C&Flow=ODA&Year=2006&Recipient=615&UsingMemberCodes=on>.

²⁷ President of Tajikistan Imomali Rakhmon’s “Address to the Nation,” April 25, 2008, delivered to the bicameral parliament session. Text available on official presidential Web site, http://www.prezident.tj/rus/novostee_250408.html (assessed March 31, 2009).

²⁸ OECD Statistical Data on Tajikistan, <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/24/20/1882885.gif> (accessed August 10, 2009).

2000 to 2006, the proportion of Official Development Assistance to GNI in fact has declined (from 11.2 percent in 2005 to 6.2 percent in 2007).

Net official development assistance in 2000 constituted U.S. \$124 million, rising to \$148 million in 2003, and \$243 million in 2004;²⁹ then the commitments were \$243.3 million in 2005, \$249.5 million in 2006, and 267.3 in 2007.³⁰ However, the importance of remittances was greater: according to Tajikistan's National Bank, migrant workers sent home \$260 million in 2004.³¹ Furthermore, in 2008, the International Organization for Migration estimated that remittances reached \$1.2 billion annually.³² The World Bank's *Migration and Remittances Factbook 2008* estimated that remittances constituted 36 percent of Tajikistan's GDP, one of the highest shares of GDP globally.³³

Aid figures are best seen in comparison with other post-communist countries in transition, among which Tajikistan is the poorest and the least developed.³⁴ Consequently, in theory, it should have attracted more assistance. The figures show that the country benefited less from the aid money, despite the magnitude of its problems. Aid per capita was U.S. \$20 million in 2000, and grew to \$37 million in 2005. In comparison, in the same period, aid per capita in neighboring Kyrgyzstan was \$44 million in 2000 and \$52 million in 2005; in Serbia and Montenegro, it was \$139 million in 2000 and \$140 million in 2005. In terms of aid dependency ratios, aid as a percentage of GNI was 13.1 percent in 2000, then 10.1 percent in 2003, growing to 12.2 percent in 2004, but scaling down to 10.9 percent in 2005.³⁵ In Kyrgyzstan, this was 16.7 percent in 2000 and 11.4 percent in 2005; in Serbia and Montenegro, it was 13.2 percent in 2000 and 4.4 percent in 2005. Aid as percentage of central government expenditure was 13.9 percent in 2005 (figures for 2000 not available), relatively modest compared to Georgia at a staggering 47.9 percent in 2000 and 27.9 percent in 2005.³⁶ Perhaps more worrisome is external debt which, as of January 1, 2009, constituted \$1,371.4 billion in total, with the

²⁹ "Aid Dependency," 2007 World Development Indicators (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2008), table 6.11, 350, http://siteresources.worldbank.org/datastatistics/Resources/table6_11.pdf (accessed May 6, 2009).

³⁰ OECD, Stat Extracts, Creditor Reporting System_Full, <http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DatasetCode=CRSNEW> (accessed July 20, 2009).

³¹ International Conference, "Economic Dynamics of Labour Migrant Remittances in Tajikistan," IOM Tajikistan Press Release, January 2006.

³² International Organization for Migration, The Migration Agency, Activities, Asia & Oceania, Central Asia, Tajikistan, <http://www.iom.int/jahia/Jahia/pid/508> (accessed July 20, 2009).

³³ Asia Plus, March 22, 2008, <http://www.asiaplus.tj/en/news/39/29561.html> (accessed July 20, 2009).

³⁴ Average per capita income is \$460 (Atlas method, World Development Indicators, 2007).

³⁵ Compiled by the author from Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, International Development Statistics online databases on aid and other resource flows, www.oecd.org/dac/stats/idsonline (accessed October 2008).

³⁶ "Aid Dependency," 2007 World Development Indicators, table 6.11, 350.

debt to GDP ratio estimated in 2008 at 28.5 percent.³⁷ In the aftermath of the civil war, most aid was earmarked for humanitarian relief and emergency assistance.

Aid as a means to promote good governance and democracy featured among the donors' preferences, but the international community had few tangible means to persuade the government to pursue these objectives. Accordingly, external actors concentrated primarily on developmental aid to social sectors and on humanitarian assistance. They were largely reluctant to finance the priorities of the government: large-scale physical infrastructure (e.g., reconstruction of the Rogun hydropower station, and industrial policies), aimed at the rejuvenation of industrial potential inherited from Soviet times, at the expense of agriculture. The international agencies concentrated on community development in the countryside instead. Donors were influenced by an underlying sense of reluctance to trust the government with large sums at its disposal, which would be hard to control.

Factors related to the design and implementation of assistance programs also limited their effect. First, lack of knowledge of the Tajikistan context played a role. The profile of Tajikistan in donor headquarters has been fairly low. It is a part of the world that is little known in Europe and the United States, and with which historical links are limited. Donor agencies have found it difficult to attract and retain high-calibre staff in the region, since long-term funding commitments by their governments were uncertain. Poor historical understanding, lack of established relationships and networks in the region, and limited language skills have all contributed to donors' operation constraints. Eventually, the philosophy of assistance also started to cause friction with the government, whose developmental and political priorities diverged from those of the donors. Finally, the recipients felt that their perspective was seldom considered and that they were unappreciated and patronized, whereas "recipes from Africa" produced domestic cultural resentment.

Still, Tajikistan received a standard package of "transition paradigm" promotion of democracy, as allocated to all Soviet successor states. Such a package was based on the Western policy community's belief that people demanded democracy and that the only obstacle to achieving it was an unwilling leadership. However, the package was not vigorously pursued because of the remoteness of Tajikistan and the civil war, which made democracy programs less vital than conflict mitigation programs. In addition, Russia, which provided

³⁷ Total bilateral external debt in 2008 was U.S. \$105.7 million, divided among Uzbekistan, \$54.1 million; the United States, \$14.3 million; Turkey, \$5.1 million; Kazakhstan, \$8.5 million; and Iran, \$23.7 million; total multilateral debt (January 2009)—\$ 623 million, divided among the World Bank, \$340 million; ADB, \$226 million; and IDB, \$57 million. "Tajikistan: Background Note," USAID Bureau of South and Central Asia Affairs, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5775.htm> (accessed May 6, 2009).

the actual muscle for the conflict management efforts, did not see the promotion of democracy as an important objective, as long as the absence of democracy did not disrupt the peace.

The terrorist attacks on 9/11 placed Afghanistan and all of Central Asia on the map of global politics. All of a sudden, the Tajikistan government's claims—previously dismissed—that Islamists presented a threat, were taken much more seriously. Tajikistan received more aid and more attention as it became an ally in the fight against terrorism. The Bush Administration's new policy of promoting democracy and reform in the Middle East was conveyed in President Bush's second Inaugural Address in January 2005, and further outlined in his February 2005 State of the Union speech. By extension, this policy in the Middle East altered Washington's perspective on Central Asia. As democratization became directly linked by the administration to ensuring the stability and viability of states, it resulted in Washington's increased pressure on Central Asian leaders to pursue democratic reform.

The United States stepped up its commitment to democratization, despite the conflict of this stance with the security agenda of supporting an ally in the struggle against the Taliban. There was an understanding across the board in Washington that without democratization, short-term allies were likely to turn into long-term adversaries.³⁸ The United States embassy exerted verbal pressure about the need to democratize. Ambassador Hoagland's message was: "We are extremely frank with leaders about the need to establish democratic practices—for the good of their citizens and for their country's own national interests. We make recommendations, but we do not dictate."³⁹

American political foundations such as the Eurasia Foundation, the National Democratic Institute, and the Open Society Institute, funded by George Soros, were active and visible in the region and widely perceived as conduits of American foreign policy objectives, regardless of whether they were funded by the government.

Other external actors were less vocal. The EU and the European countries involved in Tajikistan also insisted on democratization, but their stance was less public. The EU preferred the Organisation of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to "rally the flag," while it held out financial sticks and carrots to reward good behavior. Some UNTOP activities, such as the sponsorship of the Political Dialogue Club, could fall under the category of promotion of democracy, but they were packaged as peacebuilding, in accordance with

³⁸ Eugene Rumer, "The United States and Central Asia: In Search of a Strategy," in *Central Asia: Views from Washington, Moscow and Beijing*, ed. Eugene Rumer, Dmitri Trenin, and Huasheng Zhao (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2007).

³⁹ Ambassador Hoagland, "Democracy and Tajikistan," lecture at the Tajik State National University, March 2, 2004, http://dushanbe.usembassy.gov/sp_03022004.html#top (accessed July 20, 2009).

UNTOP's official mandate and political sensitivities over what promotion of democracy was understood to mean. In general, UNTOP pursued a cautious stance and abstained from overt criticism of the government's democratic credentials.

The Tajik leadership initially did not regard the American democratization rhetoric and NGO activities as a threat, as it felt that they did not have enough resonance in society to generate a following. However, the "color revolutions" in Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004), and Kyrgyzstan (2005) made the government reconsider. The first two revolutions were met with concern, but thought to be too remote to produce a domino effect. After the "tulip revolution" in Kyrgyzstan, the Tajik leadership concluded that promotion of democracy could lead to regime change. The official position toward Western NGOs and experts became more critical. In the words of President Rakhmon, "What makes the danger worse is that our home-grown provocateurs now have skilled coaches who have learned how to use provocations."⁴⁰ When in 2006 visiting Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice publicly lectured the Tajik officials on democratization, this received a cool reaction.

One area in which the international community engaged without much success was election monitoring. Since 1994, the presidential and parliamentary elections have been subject to monitoring by the OSCE, which fields monitors around the country and reports on election irregularities.⁴¹ Western states were actively involved in election monitoring, voter education, and training of electoral officials and party observers. Besides UNTOP and OSCE, American NGOs were engaged, such as the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX), the National Democratic Institute, Open Society Institute, and others. This has not prevented the Tajik regime from crudely manipulating all presidential and parliamentary elections held since 1994, and the international community has grudgingly accepted this. This restraint is partly caused by the normative dilemma posed by allowing government manipulation of elections, particularly the 2000 parliamentary elections. The rationale was that, in genuine elections, mostly criminals, disreputable ex-commanders, and power barons would become members of parliament through bribes and intimidation of the electorate, and the president's choices hopefully would be more educated and responsible.

Summing up, Tajikistan clearly does not demonstrate a relationship between a certain level of democracy and a certain amount of aid. Political rights and freedoms in Tajikistan grew increasingly restricted while aid increased. There are a number of factors that could contribute to at least a

⁴⁰ Quoted in *Radio Free Europe Newswire*, January 10, 2005.

⁴¹ For example, see *Final Report, Elections to the Parliament 27 February 2000*, Republic of Tajikistan, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Warsaw, May 17, 2000.

marginal impact of aid on democracy. Perhaps the most important one is that, in the context of postwar Tajikistan, the international community had limited leverage, understanding of the country, and qualified human resources to pursue politicized programs. Fascination with the formal attributes of democracy, such as elections, overshadowed more meaningful notions, such as inclusive representation of the regional interests and minorities. In addition, there were few real rewards on offer for inducing Tajik elites to change their preferences, and their concerns were not taken seriously into account. Humanitarian assistance was unconditional, and a withdrawal of humanitarian aid is rarely likely to impress political elites anyway.

Other types of incentives were too little, too late. The flow of development aid increased only after the country already had found a coping strategy through labor migration to Russia. The emphasis on democracy arrived when domestic political arrangements already had crystallized. Furthermore, the international community did not use what little leverage it had. The UN did not attach conditionality to its programs. When it tried, it was either well behind the time when the government could have been seriously influenced, or undermined by different policies pursued by the heads of different UN agencies. However, the UNDP grew more assertive between 2004 and 2006 and criticized the government openly, in a belief that the government valued the aid it brought and would have to accept a critical stance. William Paton, the UN Resident Coordinator from 2003 to 2007, was outspoken with the government and the president on the need for more transparency, the need to combat corruption and violence against women, and the expectation for improvements in human rights. As a result, his popularity with the government declined, and his departure was clouded. By contrast, the UNTOP maintained friendlier relations, living on a mandate extended by the government.

Crucially, Western promotion of democracy also was intertwined with the desire to reduce Russian influence over Tajikistan. Since 2001, there had been almost no interaction between Russian engagement and that of the international community. The decision not to work with Russia deprived international actors of credible sticks, while providing to the Tajikistan government a comfort zone against international pressure. Finally, the first years of the new millennium proved to be very unfavorable for the promotion of democracy. The “color revolutions” had institutionalized the insecurity of post-Soviet regimes about being overthrown by externally sponsored democratization movements. The West, which promoted and personified democracy, had lost moral credibility in the eyes of the elites. The links among democracy, prosperity, and stability no longer seemed convincing.⁴² If in the late 1990s it was impossible to argue against democracy and maintain a semblance of international credibility, this had changed.

⁴² David Lewis, *The Temptations of Tyranny in Central Asia* (London: Hurst, 2008), 226-236.

The Limited Appeal of Democracy

Finally, perhaps the most influential and straightforward factor that explains the failure of external efforts at democratization is, plainly and simply, a lack of popular and elite demand for democracy. The concept of democracy has a very limited appeal among Tajik elites and society. One of the main reasons for this is that the horrors of the civil war are associated with failed attempts at experimenting with democracy in the early 1990s. The lesson that the public and the regime learned was that democratization can unleash chaos and expose divisions in the society which can rip the country apart. Consequently, after the war, democracy was an aspiration held by small segments of the urban intelligentsia. The population by and large craved stability, better governance, less cronyism and corruption, more appointment on merit, greater inclusiveness, enhanced transparency and accountability, and a better managerial and technical cadre. Only a few saw democracy as an answer to these problems. Furthermore, a substantial part of the political elite suspected that the West's attempt to promote democracy was either a disguise of selfish interests, such as control over resources and strategic facilities, or a new Cold War ideological front. There was also a belief that external sponsors of democratization were naïve, did not understand the local conditions, and had an unrealistic perspective about how long democratization would take.

The political establishment also was fearful that new attempts at democratization could trigger a new round of regional separatism. The ruling elites from the south were especially wary of the possibility that the wealthier Soughd Province in the north would seize any opportunity to push for more autonomy from the center, that it would insist on keeping a lion's share of its income in the province, and that it would seek to block the transfer of southerners to work in lucrative positions in the north. Another concern was that elections at district and municipality levels could empower regional and kinship networks and promote cronyism. There is a widespread sentiment among the population that electoral democracy on the local level should not be allowed because people would vote for a candidate with whom they were affiliated by locality or ethnicity, rather than for the one who would do a better job, even if they were in full knowledge that the other candidate had more merit. "Voters" are quite relieved that such decisions are taken out of their hands.⁴³

Neighborhood effects also contribute to the very limited appeal of democracy. Russia, and to some extent Kazakhstan, provide to the Tajik public examples of functioning alternatives to democracy and clear cases of success. Their alternative model of governance rests upon political monopoly by the ruling group, restriction of expressions of dissent and freedom of

⁴³ Author's field interviews in Tajikistan, May 2008.

media, and tightly controlled elections. However, compared to Tajikistan, the provision of public goods and services in these countries is phenomenal, the state apparatuses have proven to be resilient, and the populations, while fairly passive, seem to be prepared to get along with their regimes. Accordingly, as independence has become entrenched, the public in Tajikistan has grown more appreciative of their Soviet/Russian heritage. This has been aided by a growing fear of encroachment—or even incorporation—into the cultural milieu of Iran, Pakistan, and China. An important part of this legacy is a functioning state which used to deliver security, growth, and welfare. The popular view is that, had Tajikistan not been a part of the Russian/Soviet state, its development would have been on a par with Afghanistan.

Neighboring Afghanistan serves as an adverse demonstration model; spill-over effects of instability from there are feared. While ethnically related, Afghanistan did not have the experience of a functioning state with associated benefits. The population in Tajikistan is afraid, reinforced by narratives of the refugees who fled to Afghanistan during the civil war, that unless strong authority is maintained, the country could descend into an Afghan-type scenario. The futility of the international intervention to bring about tangible improvements in Afghanistan only exacerbates this. The perils of the civilian government in Pakistan further lead to the conclusion that a great deal of havoc can be wreaked by insistence on democratization in fragile states.

Tajikistan's other neighbors—Uzbekistan, China, and Kyrgyzstan—are also not shining examples of the benefits of democratization. The countries of Central Asia all have been affected, to varying degrees, by a democratization process. However, attempts at democratic reforms, both home-grown and externally supported, brought civil war (Tajikistan), the rise of Islamism (Uzbekistan), and social turmoil (Kyrgyzstan). The overarching theme that has emerged from these experiences is that the weakening of the state through democratization leads to a failure in providing security, growth, and welfare—all things that matter. In response to state weakness of the 1990s, all countries of Central Asia moved away from Western-style democracy in different manners, which nevertheless made their political systems look increasingly alike.

Conclusion

Tajikistan is a case of a civil war that was remote from international politics and low-profile on the geopolitical agenda. Juxtaposed between Russia and Afghanistan, seemingly high-level international priorities, Tajikistan, nevertheless, found itself a backwater to both. The low significance of the country means that the international community's commitment and resources have been lukewarm. The international community followed only a light footprint in Tajikistan, and its ability to decisively shape postwar political arrangements has been limited. Tajikistan is thus an interesting case of a full-fledged civil war with massive displacement and destruction, which received

little international attention.

As this study has demonstrated, external influences on democratic development have been fairly negligible. The international community missed a window of opportunity. The period between 1997, when the Peace Accords were signed, and 2001, when international engagement increased, was the crucial period during which domestic politics were shaped, yet there was only low-key external involvement. The resources that interveners brought to Tajikistan at that time were limited, and much was directed as emergency relief, which made the application of conditionality both unlikely and less effective. The goals of the interveners were intermixed and at times conflicted with each other. Different actors involved in Tajikistan were involved for different reasons and sought to project their own visions. Russia, the main contributor to muscle on the ground, did not intend to use its leverage in order to promote political transition toward more democracy, and the West did not engage Russia in a dialogue about Tajikistan's future. Promotion of democracy, while part of the peacebuilding agenda pursued by international actors, was seen as a goal in itself only when it became too late.

After the 2001 Afghanistan intervention, matters were further complicated by the emergence of the security agenda that was relevant for the West. The United States needed to cooperate with the Tajikistan government, at the same time lecturing it on democratization to the point that the Tajik elite became confused about what Washington wanted in the end. As a result, international engagement had even less leverage. The informal contract between interveners and local elites shifted in favor of the preferences of local elites, who prioritized authoritarian stability over democratic reforms. In the end, external actors could not substitute the lack of domestic demand for democracy with the funds or the *know how* necessary for promoting democracy. As the case of Tajikistan shows, the post-conflict situation called for stabilization, and when the regime delivered, "democrats" were easily viewed as enemies of stability.

There are other lessons to be learned from Tajikistan: First, as theory predicts, a damaging stalemate can lead to a power-sharing agreement.⁴⁴ In Tajikistan, an agreement could be reached because the war was relatively short, and warlordism had not yet created an alternative social and security order to that of a central state; the warring parties had aspirations amorphous enough not to obscure their material interests, and international engagement and pressure helped.

Second, Tajikistan shows that it is possible to rebuild a state after a devastating war, for the state to regain its strength and control of territory, and for it to provide security and modest welfare. However, when regime stability is rebuilt after a war, democracy may not really be on the agenda. Indeed, in

⁴⁴ Philip G. Roeder and Donald S. Rothchild, *Sustainable Peace: Power and Democracy after Civil Wars* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).

Tajikistan, the staying power of the inherited Soviet institutions and habits and the expectations of normality shared by the population proved to be the enabling factors for the process of state-building.

Third, the understanding of what democracy is varies widely, depending on the circumstances. Initially, democracy was regarded as an alternative to the Soviet system, which was seen as a failure. Democracy was equated with prosperity, liberty, and national expression. However, popular demand for democracy in the manner of orderly political competition was not internalized by either the elites or the population. As violence broke out, the prodemocracy agenda was quickly surmounted by Islamic slogans, which had a wider appeal and mobilization power. The society that emerged from the war had few reasons to care about democracy. A brief experiment with democracy was seen as bringing about the civil war, poverty, and the rise in intergroup tensions. In contrast, the Soviet period of “no democracy, but peace and welfare” came to be viewed as positive.

Fourth, when the efforts of external players are disjointed during a crucial postwar period and the regime is skilled in political manipulation, it can get away with significant gains in power concentration. In Tajikistan, the peace process was mediated by both the international community and Russia, with the latter exercising pressure on parties to compromise. Remarkably, after the signing of the Peace Accords, however, Russian and the international community’s involvement were absolutely disconnected. The West’s decision not to work with Russia, which had significant leverage over the Tajikistan government, deprived the West of a chance to form a common agenda; eventually, this led to the emergence of an alternative pole of attraction to which the government could turn in an hour of need. Thus, failure to engage Russia in the immediate post-conflict phase led to a situation that enabled the Tajikistan government to undermine the power-sharing deal, with little regard for international opinion.

Fifth, Tajikistan’s political elite perceive democratization as a serious threat to stability, and one should not too easily discard these sentiments. Because the civil war was prompted by the presidential elections of 1991 and the social forces it unleashed, the leadership learned a bitter lesson that uncontrolled expression of grievances could not be allowed and opposition should be kept firmly in check. This perception is largely shared across the board by the elites and the population. The argument that more democracy leads to more intergroup tensions in Central Asia still holds true, as demonstrated by the 2005 “revolution” in the more democratic Kyrgyzstan, and the continuous turmoil the country experienced thereafter. Given free choice, the population in Tajikistan is likely to vote on grounds other than merit and according to kinship and regional affiliations, setting the process in motion which can pit groups against each other.

Sixth, democracy is a hostage to the reputation of those who promote it. As the “West” was seen in positive terms during the Soviet collapse, its moral message had some resonance. Following the changed international climate and

revival of the Cold War rivalries, the promotion of democracy merged with geopolitics and was no longer regarded as a value in its own right. Although the policy of the United States in Tajikistan was less proactive than elsewhere, its democratization policy was understood as a pursuit of other interests, including the lessening of Russian influence. The notion that aid had a political agenda behind it was reinforced by the “color revolutions,” and brought home the message that the real goal of the promotion of democracy is regime change.

In the end, the international community’s (including Russia’s) actions can only partially explain Tajikistan’s lack of democratic development. Interplay between elite interests and low demand from society for democracy primarily explain the political trajectory that the country has taken. The opposition had a real chance to evolve into a credible political force, but did not use it well. On balance, the condition of human existence in the country is still better than across the border in Afghanistan. However, if the international community had insisted less on formal attributes of democracy, such as the proper conduct of elections, and had emphasized greater support for inclusiveness and power sharing among all significant forces rather than only between civil war protagonists, more could have been achieved in establishing a more representative government. Lastly, Russia was alienated by the Western policy community, which did not give it enough credit for working toward peace in Tajikistan, and did not involve Russia in its “aid and engagement” club, when Russians were keen to join. Thus, Russia was not interested to spend its political capital later on priorities which it saw as promoted by the West.