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TAJKISTAN: POL/MIL INFORMED QUESTIONS

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Tajikistan was one of the few former Soviet republics that endured a violent civil war after the Soviet collapse. Tajikistan's political, economic and social structure was devastated by the war. Deaths were estimated at 50, 000 and refugees estimated at 500, 000. Tajikistan's economy, in 2001, was determined to be half the size it was a decade ago.¹ Yet, in 2003, Tajikistan has the only parliamentary government in Central Asia that functions with inclusion of the minority representation from both an Islamic party and a secular democratic party. The events of 11 September 1991 put Tajikistan center stage in the United States' Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) because of its geostrategic location to Afghanistan. However, this fact did not alleviate the challenges that face the people and government of Tajikistan in their struggle to build the economy and solidify the peace. Historical Tajikistan is at the geographic and cultural crossroads of Central Asia. *Will Tajikistan progress under its pluralistic government? Or will present Great Power interest from the United States and Russia wane letting Tajikistan regress into political and economic turmoil?*

Historical Context

Tajikistan is a presidential republic with a bicameral legislature. The President, Imonali Rahmonov, from the People's Democratic Party (roots in former Communist party), won the 2000 elections with 65% of the vote. Opposition parties include the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP), formerly part of the United Tajik Organization (UTO), and the Democratic Party. The 1997 peace agreement requires that the opposition parties maintain 30% of the seats in government.²

Tajikistan has a population of 6.2 million and rising. The capital is Dushanbe. The key ethnic groups of the country are: Tajik 62%, Uzbek 23%, and Russian 7%. The terrain in Tajikistan is compartmentalized with half of its territory over 10,000 feet. This feature of the

terrain has led to distinct Tajik subgroups and regionalism. Tajikistan borders the Ferghana Valley in the north and Afghanistan to the south illustrating its vital position in the struggle against Islamic terrorists. Tajikistan is 80% Sunni Islam. Of note, 1 million Tajiks live in Uzbekistan and 4 million in Afghanistan.³

Tajiks trace their origins to the Persians from 6th century Iran. Their language is related to Farsi not the Turkic roots of their Central Asian neighbors. Also, Tajiks are less nomadic than other Central Asian peoples. What is now Tajikistan has been conquered by the Arabs in the 7th century to the Russians in the 19th century. The Bolsheviks established control in northern Tajikistan in 1918. With fall of the Khanate in Bukhara in 1921, the Soviets were in full control of the region. Under Stalin in the 1920s, Central Asia was divided into ethnic-based republics to facilitate Soviet control. In 1924, the Tajik soviet republic was established within the Uzbek soviet republic. In 1929, the Tajik republic was separated from the Uzbek republic. This demarcation was significant because the historic cultural and economic centers of the Tajiks, Bukhara and Samarkand, were included in Uzbekistan vice Tajikistan.⁴

Soviet control in this remote region was not easily achieved. In 1922, the Basmachi Movement, a guerrilla group formed by Muslim Tajiks and Uzbeks challenged the authority of the Soviets. The Basmachis were ardent anti-Bolshevik, anti-modernist and against Soviet ethnic nationalism. Basmachis advocated pan-Islamism. Basmachis were active until 1929 and are considered antecedents of militant Islamic activity in Central Asia.⁵

Domestic Political Context

Soviet rule remained dominant until Gorbachev's policies of perestroika (restructuring) and glasnost (openness) started a resurgence of anti-communist and nationalist movements in Central Asia. In August 1990, Tajikistan declared its sovereignty. The Tajik Communist Party

(TCP) Chief, Makhkamov, supported the August 1991 coup in Moscow. Makhkamov resigned when the coup failed. Democratic and Islamic opposition pressured the Tajik Legislature, which declared the republic's independence on 9 September 1991 and suspended TCP activities. The communist backlash was strong. The communists, who declared a state of emergency, reconstituted the TCP in parliament and elected Rahkmon Nabiyev as President deposed Acting President Aslonove. Nabiyev had been the head of the TCP in Tajikistan before being removed by Gorbachev in 1985.⁶

The upswing of civic nationalism and ethno-regional nationalism in Tajikistan came to a violent head. In 1992, civil war broke out between opposing regional and ideological groups. The communist party was backed by support from the northern Leninabad and Kulob regions. A coalition of Islamists and democrats were supported in the eastern and southern regions. Mass demonstrations and violence in early 1992 forced Nabiyev to agree to a government coalition that included representation from the Islamists and democrats. Armed communist supporters forced this government from office and established a neo-communist rule in 1994. President Rahmonov emerged from the chaos through a controversial election.⁷ Both Russia and Uzbekistan supported the Rahmonov government.

Tajik Islamists operated through the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) and, in 1992, established a military arm called the Islamic Movement of Tajikistan. In 1995, the IRP combined with United Tajik Opposition (UTO), which had been operating out of northern Afghanistan. By 1995, the conflict settled into a protracted stalemate. In 1996, the Taliban captured Kabul, Afghanistan and ousted the Afghan-Tajik government. With Uzbek pressure from the north and Afghan-Tajiks fighting the spread of the Taliban in the south, both President Rahmonov and IRP leader, Sayed Abdullah Nuri, began negotiations for peace. Brokered by the

United Nations special representative, Ivo Petrov, the peace settlement called for a coalition government that included the IRP. Despite the problems of the February 2000 parliamentary elections in which Rahmonov's party dominated, Nuri declared the peace process was "irreversible."⁸

Domestic Political Context: Post-Tajik Civil War 1992-1997

Tajikistan has maintained a limited pluralistic government since the 1997 peace deal was implemented. Regional and ethnic opposition groups remain. Russia maintains a motorized rifle division and border guards (20 thousand men) which provide a significant degree of support for Rahmonov's government. In 1999-2000, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) was operating freely from bases in Tajikistan creating tensions between Tajikistan's neighbors, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. It indicated Rahmonov's inability to establish control in all regions.⁹

Since mid-2002, President Rahmonov and the opposition party, IRP, have seen an increase in the tensions between the two parties. Rahmonov openly accused members of the IRP of promoting extremist views. Rahmonov believes that the IRP leaders are conducting activities similar to or with the outlawed group, Hizb ut-Tahir(Party of Freedom). IRP, the only Islamic party with government participation in Central Asia, contends that Rahmonov's government is taking hard-line, anti-Islamic posture that led to civil war in 1992. With economic stagnation, a rising population and ethno-regional strife, the potential for further violence in Tajikistan remains.¹⁰

International Political Context:

United States and Tajik relations were minimal prior to 11 September 1991. The United States supported the UN-brokered efforts to bring an end to the Tajik Civil War but considered the region within the Russian sphere. The U. S. Embassy was closed in 1998 following the

bombings of the African embassies. The Ambassador resided in Almaty, Kazakhstan and traveled to Dushanbe on occasion.

Post-9/11, Tajikistan's geostrategic position came to the forefront. Tajikistan expressed its willingness to support the U. S. in the fight against international terrorism. However, Tajikistan was apprehensive both because of domestic political issues and foreign policy issues with Russia. On 25 September, Russian Defense Minister Ivanov announced that the Dushanbe airport would be available for potential American use. In October, Tajikistan opened its airspace to the U. S. and following a visit by the U. S. Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld in November, Rahmonov allowed U. S. troops to based in Tajikistan. Since the agreement, Tajikistan has received increased U. S. and European Union (EU) aid. In February 2002, Tajikistan joined the NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP) program.¹¹

I. Domestic Political Issues

Coalition Government: The 1997 peace agreement brought relative stability to Tajikistan and established a government that provides for inclusion of opposition parties. The coalition includes at least 30% of the government seats for members of the IRP, the Islamic minority party in Tajikistan. Despite this political accommodation, Tajikistan has continued to struggle with regional and political rivalries. President Rahmonov and opposition groups have exchanged accusations of political oppression on one side and radical extremism on the other. In addition, Tajikistan faces considerable socioeconomic problems.

What is the prospect for Tajikistan to continue functioning under a coalition government? Will President Rahmonov's roots in the communist party lead to an increasing autocratic rule as in Uzbekistan or Turkmenistan? What are the internal political challenges facing the Tajikistan government?

Ethnicity and Regionalism: For nearly 50 years, Tajikistan government was dominated by northerners from Leninabad (now Soghd). This region was economically sound and populated by ethnic Uzbeks. Although from the communist apparatchik, Rahmonov broke the string of Leninabad political leaders. As an ethnic Tajik, he garnered his support from the Tajiks from the Kulob region as well as the Leninbad region. Ethnic Uzbeks from Leninabad also supported Rahmonov. Islamist opposition groups (ethnic Tajiks) were from the Gharma and Qarateguine Valleys east of Dushanbe and were called Gharmis. The Pamiris formed the major democratic party and lived in Dushanbe. In the Tajik Civil War, the majority of the ethnic Tajiks killed were Gharmi or Pamiri.¹²

What is the importance of ethnic/regional divides in the politics of Tajikistan? Do ethnic/regional groupings have a greater impact than religion or ideology? Five million ethnic Tajiks live outside the borders of Tajikistan, to include the Tajik cultural centers of Bukhara and Samarkand. How does this impact the internal and regional politics of Tajikistan? What is the impact of the large contingent of ethnic Uzbeks in Tajikistan?

Islamic Movements: Tajikistan has been a country of development, transit and support and combat experience for most organized radical Islamic movements in Central Asia. Islamic terrorist organizations such as the IMU originated in the Ferghana Valley and fought alongside the United Tajik Opposition (UTO) in the Tajik Civil War. The IMU, under its legendary commander Namangani, fought with the Taliban against ethnic-Tajiks in Afghanistan. The IMU continued terrorist attacks against the Uzbek government from bases in Afghanistan and Tajikistan until severely beaten by U. S. actions in Afghanistan. With this background, President Rahmonov has identified Tajikistan's two priorities as fighting against terrorism and religious extremism.¹³ He has banned the covert Hizb ut-Tahrir, a movement that promotes a non-violent

establishment of a pan-Islamic caliphate. Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan share concerns over this movement that has a center of support in the border regions of the Ferghana Valley.

Will President Rahmonov's policies against the Hizb ut-Tahrir spill over to non-tolerance for the IRP opposition party? Will this action be viewed by the people of Tajikistan as a reactionary Soviet position on religious tolerance and inclusion? Tajikistan has served as delicate model for inclusion of an Islamic party in government. In broader context, can Islam co-exist in a state striving toward a more secular, modern and democratic society?

Defense Issues: This paper does not focus on the socioeconomic conditions in Tajikistan. However, an understanding of the internal competition of resources between security and economic and social programs requires a brief explanation. The Central Asia states were the poorest and least developed in the Soviet system. The loss of subsidies, regional industry, markets and road/communication networks left the Central Asian republics starting nearly from scratch. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, both resource-poor and landlocked, were at the bottom of the list. The World Bank estimates that Central Asia economies declined by 20-60% of their GDP between 1990-1996. International debt burdens are extreme and infrastructure in decline. In Tajikistan, over 80% of the population lived below the poverty line.¹⁴

Military Technology 2002 reports that Tajik defense forces and border forces number approximately 15,000 men. The Russian Border Troops (10,000) are mostly ethnic Tajiks with Russian officers. Russia remains Tajikistan's security guarantor. In 1999, Russia and Tajikistan signed a security agreement that allowed for 20,000 Russian troops to remain stationed in Tajikistan. With the Tajiks, the Russian military's primary mission is to stop the movements of Islamic guerrillas and drugs.¹⁵

President Rahmonov's priorities address security issues. Can Tajikistan balance the competing socioeconomic issues and security issues without collapsing from within? What are the ethnic/regional implications of Tajiks guarding borders against ethnic Tajiks ie. Running drugs from Afghanistan? What are the challenges facing Rahmonov as he attempts to reorganize/restructure a security force that was rampant with regional divides, no funds and poor training?

What is the impact of the substantial Russian forces on the functioning of the coalition government? How does the IRP and other minority parties view the presence of the Russian force?

II. Regional Issues

Russia and Tajikistan: Within 5 years of Tajik independence, 65% of ethnic Russians departed Tajikistan for Russia. Russian economic, social, political and military challenges at home resulted in Russian contraction from the Near Abroad. The logistical, monetary and military commitment by Russia to Tajikistan, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, has appeared outside the national interests of Russia. However, Russia's commitment has continued in earnest. When the Russian forces assumed peacekeeping duties under the UN auspices during the Tajik Civil War, Tajikistan essentially became a protectorate of Russia. Owen Lattimore called Tajikistan the "pivot of Asia". President Rahmonov emphasized that Russia is Tajikistan's most important "strategic partner."¹⁶

What are Russian interests in Tajikistan? Is Russia's dedication to Tajikistan based only on the realist's determinants of national interests? Is Russian presence in Central Asia, specifically, Tajikistan necessary for the stability of the region? Can Russia sustain this commitment to

Tajikistan? Can Russia afford to lose this sphere of influence? In the longer term, is the Russian commitment beneficial to the development of Tajikistan?

Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan: In Central Asia, Uzbekistan is strategically positioned, possesses the largest population, resources and the most capable military. Uzbek and Tajik relations have been strained for generations from the Soviet demarcations across ethnic lines to the accusations of Tajik support of or lack of action against Islamic guerrillas.

Afghanistan and Tajikistan have strong cultural ties. Ethnic Tajiks from Tajikistan and northern Afghanistan fought the Taliban incursions into Afghanistan. During in U. S.-led assault on the Taliban in 2001, the Northern Alliance forces were predominantly ethnic Tajiks.

Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan share the borders along the rugged and remote region of the Ferghana Valley, a cauldron for Islamic extremists. These three countries continue to have border disagreements and armed clashes stemming from insurgent activity and drug trafficking.

Are there regional institutions or means for addressing grievances and pooling resources to combat common threats to stability? Is Uzbekistan a regional hegemonic threat? Does Russia and now, the U.S. provide a balance to this potential? If successful, what will be the impact of a rebuilt Afghanistan? Is the reconstruction of Afghanistan a long-term key to stability and prosperity in Tajikistan? Can regional cooperation be achieved to address the socioeconomic unrest and Islamic activism in the Ferghana Valley?

III. International Issues

U.S. Involvement and Strategic Implications: The Shanghai Forum, originally the Shanghai 5, is comprised of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The Forum was organized to effect discussion on political and security matters. Prior to 9/11, the Forum provided a considerable opportunity for China and Russia to exercise influence in Central Asia.

In 2002, India stepped up diplomatic efforts with Tajikistan and is interested in membership in the Forum. Post 9/11, U. S. actions and continued presence have altered the security landscape.¹⁷

With Tajikistan as a frame of reference, how has U. S. presence affected the influence of the “Great Powers”, Russia and China? As stability, resource development and markets improve in Central Asia, will Great Power rivalry in Central Asia rise and if so, will the rivalry remain regional? Will the inclusion of India in the Forum or cooperative diplomacy with Tajikistan create additional tension between India and Pakistan?

Iran and Tajikistan are linked by heritage and culture. Iran was an ardent anti-Taliban supporter of both Tajikistan and Russia. *What was the impact of Tajikistan’s acceptance of U.S. security agreements in the post-9/11 period on Tajikistan’s relations with Iran? What changed in the strategic equation between Iran and the U. S. ?*

According the STRATFOR, on 25 July 2002, the American Ambassador to Tajikistan confirmed that the U. S., in addition to economic aid, would increase its military to military contact. The U. S. military train and equip mission in the Republic of Georgia is expected to serve as a template. *What is the impact on Tajikistan and on the Russian presence in Tajikistan of the U.S. mil-to-mil agreement? Will this enhance U.S. and Russian cooperation on the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT)? How will Russian nationalists in Moscow view this agreement? What will be the Islamists view of longer term U. S. military involvement in Tajikistan?*

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