



CIVIL WAR IN TAJIKISTAN : IT'S IMPACT ON TAJIK-RUSSIA RELATIONS

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Abstract

The relations between Tajikistan and Russia have passed through various stages of development starting from the Tsarist Colonial times to the present. Though the disintegration of the Soviet Union brought about drastic changes in the post-Second World War balance of power affecting the interests of both the countries, there is still a continuity in Tajik-Russia relations. The relation between the two sides has remained strong and cordial even after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Tajikistan witnessed a civil war in 1992 that resulted in large-scale out-migration of Russians who constituted the skilled and the elite groups key to the industrial development of Tajikistan. Realizing the seriousness of the situation, the Tajik Government adopted policies and confidence-building measures which cemented their relationship again. Now the inter-state relations between the two countries are on firm footing.

Keywords

- *Strategic Interests* – Relating to the identification of long-term aims and interests and the means of achieving them.
- *Strategic Alliance* - Agreement for cooperation among two or more parties to work together toward common objectives.
- *EEU* – Eurasian Economic Union
- *SCO* – Shanghai Cooperation Organization
- *Ethnic Conflict* – A conflict between two or more contending groups
- *Terrain* - A stretch of land especially with regard to its physical features.
- *Drug-smuggling*- The act of transporting drugs to other countries
- *CIS* – Commonwealth of Independent states
- *Exodus* – A mass departure of people
- *Religious Fundamentalism* – Excessive belief on a particular religion
- *Reconciliation* – To explain disagreement in order to make agree



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In the initial phase of its independence, Tajikistan looked at Russia both as a protector as well as a threat to its newly acquired independence. Russian attention was also focused on the region and began to evaluate its interest and formulate a policy that would promote its interests. Since Russian attention to this region was drawn because of developments in Central Asia and Tajikistan, its cultural that pursuit of strategic interests occupied a primary position in Russian policy.

Russian policy in Tajikistan has been determined not by ideological concerns for democracy, but its security and strategic concerns. The primary Russian concern has been to ensure the security of Tajikistan and to safeguard its territorial integrity. According to

Akbarzadeh, the strategic alliance of Russian democracy with the Communist elite of Tajikistan is rooted in the desire to retain its sphere of influence at the expense of ideology¹. Russia has made it clear that Tajikistan is an inseparable link in its defence strategy. The Tajik-Afghan border is often referred to as “our border” by the Russian Ministries of Defence and Foreign Affairs. In an interview in July 1993, the Russian Minister of Defence Pavel Grachev, took that line as far as implying that Tajikistan was a part of a larger Russian security sphere that goes beyond its natural borders.²

The most visible involvement of Russia in the Central Asian region is the presence of its troops on the Tajik-Afghan border. According to Joshi, Russian policy in Tajikistan has been largely determined by the military and former Minister of Defence Pavel Grachev, was associated with it since the inception of its policy.³ However, the development of such institutions like Eurasian Economic Union and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, point to the fact that relations with Central Asian states like Tajikistan goes beyond purely military or defence issues.

Again, Moscow perceives security threats emanating from Tajikistan are due to many reasons. The former Soviet Union was directly involved in Afghanistan which had far reaching implications for Russia and Tajikistan bordering with Afghanistan. Moscow fears that an unstable Tajikistan can destabilize and disrupt the neighbouring countries of Central Asia. Moscow sees Tajikistan as the key point of the re-emerging balance of power in Central Asia and controlling Tajikistan means outside powers such as, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia could be prevented from exerting their influence in the region.⁴

Russian interest in Tajikistan is further strengthened by the presence of large numbers of Russians and Russian-speaking people in the region. Despite assurances of help and protection to the Russians by the Tajik Government, the Russian population face harassment, social discomfiture and discriminations.⁵ As regards the Russians and Russian-speaking population, the Russian interest is to work for a peaceful settlement of ethnic issues. Serious and large-scale ethnic conflicts breaking out in Central Asia could have disastrous consequences for Russia.⁶

Increasing attacks on Russians and their continuing exodus from Tajikistan became important factors in determining Russia’s active policy in this region. The senior leaders of the Russian government and military openly voiced their concern over the security of the Russian minorities and vowed to discharge their responsibilities on this account. Whereas Khasbulatov, Chairman of the Russian Federation Supreme Soviet, wrote to the then Tajik

President, Iskandrov asking him to “guarantee the security of Russians living in the Republic.”⁷ The Russian Foreign Minister, Kozyrev warned that the “entire might of Russian state is poised to defend human rights, including the rights of Russians and Russian-speaking people.”⁸ Similarly, the Russian Dy. Defence Minister, General Toporov viewed the presence of the Russian troops in Tajikistan as necessary to protect Russians there. The Russian Foreign Ministry warned that “Russia will do everything necessary to protect the legitimate rights and interests of the Russians”.⁹

In the words of Russian journalist Ole Punfilov, the Russian community in Tajikistan is Russia’s “trump card”.¹⁰ Uzbekistan, the other determining foreign factor in the Tajik crisis has shared and at times fuelled Moscow’s anxiety about Islamic nationalism and its anti-Russian connotations in Tajikistan. Hence, the protection of Russians minorities in Tajikistan has been one of the excuses which Russia used as the legal basis for the presence of its troops in Tajik border.¹¹

Another manifestation of Russia’s security concern is the perceived fear in Russia of the spread of divisive forces, especially of Islamic Fundamentalism, gaining a foothold in Central Asia, including Tajikistan. The southward-orientation of the Central Asian states is a matter of concern to Russia. If Islamic fundamentalism or other forms of extremism spreads to the region, it is certain to have a spill over effect on Russia.¹² Russia desires the continuation of the neo-communist secular elite in power which could control the fundamentalist forces in the region.¹³ Andrei Kozyrev, former Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation, thought it necessary to write in 'Izvestiya' about his Government's objectives in Tajikistan. He rejected charges of defending a Communist regime in Tajikistan and justified Russia's commitment there by evoking the image of a threatening spectre of Islamic extremism that endangered the Russian community in Tajikistan.¹⁴ Hence, the protection of the Republic of Tajikistan and the Russian minority living in the region from the influence of the Islamic fundamentalists has been one of the main reasons of the Russian presence in Tajikistan.

Again, for Russia, Tajikistan is an area of special responsibility and an area of special interests. Russia's historic interest and association with the region make it obligatory that it should remain eminently engaged in the region. Satisfying the presence of Russian troops on the Tajik-Afghan border, Anatoly Adamishin, former First Deputy Foreign Minister of Russia, forthrightly put forward Russia's concern. According to Adamishin, "If we leave the Tajik-Afghan border, then we have no other right up to the Arctic Ocean, and everything

which is now somehow being held back at this border, will pour into Central Asia and through it into Russia, and this includes narcotics, terrorism and subversive activities"¹⁵

Another dimension of the Russian concern is that it believes that China, Afghanistan and Iran may also increase their respective influence in the region and draw its people increasingly into their own orbits or press territorial claims against the Central Asian states as different ethnic communities straddle across each other's borders. The then Russian president Boris Yeltsin aptly stated the Russian thinking on this question when he said at the CIS summit meeting in September 1993, "we welcome closer cooperation in guarding borders with other countries, above all with the Central Asian states".¹⁶

The ethnically turbulent Central Asia needs Russia for its security. Already nearly 24,000 Russian troops are working together with the few Central Asian soldiers to counter the militancy in neighbouring Afghanistan. There is a slow realization among the Central Asian leaders that they cannot do anything without Russia. Further, Tajikistan is too small, too poor and too remote to maintain its own territorial integrity. Hence, Russia is integral to the security of Tajikistan, which just came out of a debilitating civil war, but still faces cross-border terrorism, drug and arms trafficking and religious fundamentalism.

The decree of former Russian President Boris Yeltsin, of 14 September 1995 on Russia's strategic course with respect to the CIS member states also stimulated the development of relations. Meetings of presidents, parliamentary leaders, ministers and heads of departments are held from time to time with the intention of developing relations in the areas of the economy and culture, coordinating the activity of the two countries on the international arena and strengthening their defensive capability.¹⁷

Tajik Civil War and Russia-Tajikistan Relations:

Russian policy has been to support Tajik President Emomali Rakhmonov of the People's Front (PF), whose political platform was based on rejection and confrontation with Islamic fundamentalism. Russian support to Rakhmonov resulted in the failure of opposition forces which had mounted a massive insurgency against the government. A full scale civil war resulted in Tajikistan. The forces of so-called Tajik opposition in the civil war included 'regional warlords' who had combined with religious fundamentalists that sought not only to ensure control over the state by the regions they control, but also to replace the system of governance inherited from the Soviet Union with one based on national exclusivism and religious fundamentalism.¹⁸

The civil war had led to thousands of Tajik crossing the border and living in Afghanistan as refugees. Afghanistan had been trying to create political instability in Tajikistan and had been supporting the Islamic movement in the region, Afghanistan, torn apart by internal conflicts, encouraged by religious extremism, ethnic intolerance, drug-trafficking, illegal arms trade, has been a hot bed of instability.¹⁹ During the course of the Tajik civil war, the armed provocation on the Tajik-Afghan border, together with other manifestation of subversive activity from Afghanistan, seriously destabilised the situation in Tajikistan, and consequently throughout the region.²⁰ It also generated a range of problems like the problem of refugees, illegal drug-trafficking, international terrorism and arms proliferation.²¹ According to UN Report, Afghanistan has become not only one of the leading producers of raw opium, but it is the biggest transit point for drug delivery to the states of Central Asia and the West.²²

Another dimension to the civil war was that the opposition was receiving help and support from Afghanistan which was supporting the resistance movement in Tajikistan by providing arms and ammunition. It was also evident from the movements of weapons from Afghanistan to Tajikistan. Lack of monitoring and surveillance on the part of the state authorities on the borders resulted in Afghanistan becoming the main market for the purchase of weapons and ammunition for illegal activities in Tajikistan.²³ For example, in parallel with mass meetings which were taking place on the centre squares of the capital in 1992, there were heavily armed participants, armed mainly with the weapons obtained from Tajikistan. This has been one of the main reasons for political destabilization and the civil war in Tajikistan.²⁴

It is estimated that the Afghan Government provided shelter to approximately 70,000 Tajik refugees who fled the civil war in Tajikistan and an estimated 7,000 Tajik militia. It has also provided military training to an estimated 35,000 Tajik nationals residing in several northern provinces of Afghanistan.²⁵

When the civil war erupted in Tajikistan in 1992, the extent of ties between Afghan Islamists and the Tajik IRP, the republic's main opposition group, dramatically increased. Many of the IRP's known leaders, including Davlat Usman Mohammad Sharif Himmotzoda and Turazonzoda fled to Afghanistan, There they increased their ties with the Mujahidin leaders and conducted their opposition activities from exile. Himmotzoda received training in camps in Afghanistan and fought with the Afghan Mujahidin.²⁶ Turazonzoda, on the other hand, tried to coordinate the various IRP groups trained under

different Mujahidin leaders. New training camps were set up in many Afghan provinces where the IRP underwent military training course and learnt combat in the mountain terrain.²⁷ Afghan Mujahidin leaders such as Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and his Hizb-i-Islami and Ahmad Shah Massod's Jamiat-e-Islami had operated among future members of the Tajik Islamic Party since the early 1980s.²⁸ Both of them helped considerably to arm and train IRP militants and refugees from Tajikistan in their camps and bases in northern Afghanistan, during and after the civil war. Masood largely controlled the northern Afghan provinces of Kunduz (which directly borders the Kurgan-Tyube region of the Tajikistan), Takhar and Toloqan (where the IRP's exile headquarters were located). It was reported that in Kunduz, fighters from various Mujahidin groups were recruiting these Tajiks to attend guerrilla warfare training centres. There were more than eight such centres with tens of thousands of Tajik refugees and operating in areas adjacent to the border. It was pointed out that each of these centre was training on an average 500 men and it was estimated that in April 1993 there could be about 4,000 trained fighters reinforcing the ranks of the IRP.²⁹ According to another estimate by Russian and Tajik Defence officials in the middle of July 1993, a total of 7,000 Tajik rebels and Afghan soldiers in Kunduz were ready for combat.³⁰

Like Ahmad Shah Masood, another Mujahidin leader, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who supported the military activities of the IRP rebels of Tajikistan, was also reported to set up military camps in Kunduz to train the IRP rebels. According to the then chief of the Frontier Security Headquarters, Colonel Valery Kochnov, between June 1992 and September 1992, 600 Islamic radicals trained in these camps were arrested but at least 400 more rebels managed to cross the border without being caught in 1992.³¹ In January 1993, the Tajik Prime Minister reported that there were 10 training camps in Afghanistan supported and funded by Hekmatyar for the training of Tajik rebels. The Russian border troops officials in Dushanbe further pointed out that on 21 January 1993, more than 500 Tajik rebels had completed their training and were expected to launch a mass provocation against border installations. Lieutenant Colonel Romazyankauskas, then deputy chief of the Russian border guard troops in Tajikistan, reported that at least 20 members of the Hekmatyar's Hizb-e-Islami were fighting in the ranks of the opposition in the territory of the Tajik republic.³²

Besides providing military training to Tajik rebels, the armed Afghan Mujahidin units also established contacts with the politically-minded nationalist groups in Tajikistan to overthrow the existing social system and create an Islamic state in Tajikistan. According to Petkel, the Tajik KGB chief, there were eleven Mujahidin units engaged in smuggling

weapons, subversive literature and narcotics across the Afghan border.³³

During the spring 1992 demonstrations, organizing members of the IRP were reported to have stated: "If blood flow here, our brothers in Afghanistan will come and help us".³⁴ An unknown Afghan Mujahidin who had written a letter in early October 1992 to members of the Tajik IRP who were fighting Communist forces in southern Tajikistan, the following was stated: "In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the compassionate. Peace to you, brother Muslims of Tajikistan. The Mujahidin of Afghanistan whose Islamic Revolution has won in Afghanistan declare their readiness to give any support whatsoever to your Islamic revolution".³⁵ In this way, the Mujahidin leaders of Afghanistan provoked the Tajik rebels against the Communist forces in Tajikistan.

Frustrated with the cross-border terrorism and armed rebellion in Tajikistan, the Tajik authorities looked towards Russia helplessly to protect its borders from these extremist elements and to restore peace in the region. Russia signed a comprehensive military treaty with Tajikistan in 1992 whereby the latter delegated to Russia the right to defend its border with Afghanistan.³⁶ Since then Russia has been maintaining a presence of nearly 24,000 troops on the Tajik-Afghan border, plus the 201st Motorised Rifle Division (MRD) in the capital Dushanbe.³⁷ Tajikistan is the only country in Central Asia where Russia has armed forces, represented by the 201st MRD and the Federal Border guard (FBG) Service, stationed in Tajikistan together with the Tajik Army (1200 men) and the border forces of the Tajik Committee of State Border Defence.³⁸

It was in May 1992 at Tashkent, that Russia and other CIS members (except Turkmenistan, which refused any involvement in the Tajik conflict) took a major step by signing the Collective Security Treaty. Article 1 and 4 of the Treaty clearly states: "The participating states shall not enter into military alliances or participate in any groupings of states, nor in actions directed against another participating state. Furthermore, if one of the participating states is subjected to aggression by any state or group of states, this will be perceived as an aggression against all participating states to the treaty". In the event of an act of aggression being committed against any of the participating states, all the other participating states will give it the necessary assistance, including military assistance, and will also give support with the means at their disposal by way of exercising the right to collective defence in accordance with Article 51 of the United Nations' Charter.³⁹

General V. Samsanov, then chief of the CIS joint Armed Forces General Staff, pointed to the political significance of the Treaty; "the treaty on collective security on the

basis for forming and defence alliance' and '...the first and probably the most complex step towards creating an effective military and political structure capable of being a guarantee of security for the successful political and economic development of the subjects that form the CIS.⁴⁰ This collective security treaty was further expanded in July 1992 when it was agreed to set up a 'blue helmet' force for rapid deployment in area of conflict within the CIS.⁴¹ Tajikistan's further incorporation into the security arrangements was underscored by the request of then president Nabyev for deployment of CIS 'blue 'helmets' and 201st MRD of Russia in Tajikistan's 'conflict zones' and to take over the task of ensuring 'the activities of the national economy's facilities and protection of the population'.⁴²

The Tajik Government troops along with the Russian Forces Patrolling the border with Afghanistan to counter cross-border terrorism intensified in July and August of 1992 with many casualties reported on both sides. The continuing conflicts along the Tajik-Afghan border has been interpreted by some observers of Central Asia as being partly a battle for control of drugs-smuggling routes. Since gaining independence, Tajikistan had become a major conduit for illicit drugs (chiefly opium) from Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan to Russia and Western Europe.

The Tajik Authorities asked the Afghan Government to prevent Mujahidin fighters and consignments of weapons from crossing the frontier into Tajikistan. The Afghan Government denied that it was involved in arms-trafficking: it was believed that the main source of armaments was the renegade Mujahidin leader, Hekmatyar, over whom the Afghan Government had no authority.⁴³

The invocation of a collective security agreement in the case of Tajikistan during the Almaty meeting on November 4, 1992, was a clear indication that Russia and the Central Asian partners regardless of their intra-CIS differences will continue to hold the former Soviet Union's southern borders as the borders of the CIS and as Russia's sphere of influence. More significantly, it also indicated that maintenance of the domestic stability of the republic has been considered a legitimate security concern of the member states, which falls within the jurisdiction of the collective security agreements.⁴⁴ President Karimov of Uzbekistan justified the security pact on the ground that the militant Islamic fundamentalist forces were working overtime to turn Tajikistan into a 'spring board' for spreading militant fundamentalism in the Central Asian Republics and other CIS states and that, therefore, it was necessary to "prevent in their territories the activities of persons, groups and organizations", aimed at violating the security those states. It was emphasized that the borders of Tajikistan were "part of the

common borders of the CIS".⁴⁵

In April 1993, the Tajik government protested to the Afghan Authorities about alleged incursions across the border by Afghans, apparently to resist the remaining rebel troops. The opposition had taken refuge in Afghanistan. By mid-July 1996, Tajikistan had closed all its border points with Afghanistan in a bid to thwart Islamic guerrillas operating out of bases located in the northern parts of that country.⁴⁶ It was also reviewing relations with all countries which provided support to the armed opposition in Tajikistan.

In January 1993, Russia along with Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan signed an agreement whereby it was accepted that the external borders of the CIS is also the border of Russia. In the same month of 1993, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, on the request of Tajikistan, agreed to form a collective Peace-Keeping Force (CPF) to guard the Tajik-Afghan borders.⁴⁷ These states committed themselves to the defence of Tajikistan's southern frontiers, thus supporting the government in the continuing conflict on the Tajik-Afghan border. The participation of the Central Asian states was symbolic and major burden was borne by Russia. In practice, mainly Russian troops were responsible for repelling rebel fighters entering Tajikistan, with Russia defending the southern CIS border as if it were its own.

Sergei Yastrzhemskiy, earlier Head of the Foreign Ministry press and Information Department, characterized Moscow's position rather frankly: "the Russian Ministry proceeds from the premise that interference in the internal affairs of Tajikistan that is located in the area of the Russian Federation's important and Versatile interest, cannot be justified. Russia is ready to take all necessary measures to provide assistance to the fraternal Tajik people in stabilizing the situation in the country, to help it shore up its sovereignty and territorial integrity and ensure the security of the CIS's southern borders."⁴⁸

The then Russian Federation Minister of Defence was made responsible for implementing the comprehensive measures and providing general operational leadership in coordinating all the forces and hardware involved in carrying out the defences of the Tajik-Afghan border and stabilizing the situation with a view to bringing about a speedy end to hostilities and restoration of peace in the region.⁴⁹

The decree was followed by setting up in Moscow on August 8, 1993 of a Regional Security System comprising Russia and four Central Asian Republics of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (Turkmenistan did not Join). The five signed a declaration on the inviolability of their borders in accordance with Article 51 of the UN

charter and undertook the obligation to defend each other against outside aggressions. None of the signatory states, however, had a right to send its troops into the territory of the other states unilaterally.⁵⁰ In another statement, the presidents of Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan declared their all-out support to Tajikistan in building its own armed forces.⁵¹ A Ministry of Defence was established in September 1992; in December, it was announced that Tajikistan's National Armed Forces were to be formed on the basis of the Tajik's people's front and other para-military units supporting the government.⁵²

From the very beginning, the greatest difficulty for Tajikistan was an acute shortage of skilled personnel. It was not until 1996 that Russia decided to give free training to Tajiks in Russian military institutions. In 1997, the first 80 military graduates and eight graduates of military academies returned from Russia to Tajikistan.⁵³ Russia has provided essential support for the training, supervision and equipment of Tajik forces. In 1993, the 201st MRD began to transfer weapons and equipment to the first Tajik battalions.

Again, on 24 September 1993 at the ninth CIS summit at Moscow an agreement to form a Central Asian Coalition Force was signed between Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The Tajik-Afghan border was divided into zones of responsibility between the signatories of the agreement. The coalition force was commanded by Colonel General Boris Pyankov of Russia. The Peace-Keeping Force was to stay in Tajikistan for six months.⁵⁴ On November 2, 1993, the Russian Federation's Security Council approved the country's military doctrine which stipulated to create more mobile armed force by 1996 which could enable Russia to reduce conflict in the republics of former Soviet Union.⁵⁵

In August 1993, the Russian President Boris Yeltsin, summarized the Russian doctrine; "everybody must understand that Tajikistan's border is effectively Russia's border.⁵⁶ That the Tajik border lies 1,450 km. from Russian territory makes the doctrine even more significant. The Tajik border needs to be secured to protect Russia from the infiltration of guns, narcotics and Islamic fundamentalism from Afghanistan. Moscow's high profile presence there is expected to protect Russia significantly from "aggressive intolerance from the southern Tier".⁵⁷

Another important element during the civil war was the direct or indirect participation of the Russian Army. (Until mid-1992, the Russian government remained largely silent on the Tajik conflict, despite incidents of intervention by Russian forces on the ground. The July 1992 Tajik-Russian protocol of intentions, which transferred the troops on the Tajik-Afghan border to Russian jurisdiction, remained unratified until September. From late August until

November, by defining the situation as a civil war, the government sought to create a mechanism for conflict resolution. In a first important statement on the conflict, the then Deputy Foreign Minister of Russia, Shelov Kovedyaev commented on 30 July, "if we delay any more, it is possible that we might lose Tajikistan as a state close to Russia."⁵⁸

The peace-keeping forces had gone beyond their formal mandate which precludes them from participation in combat operations. This operation actively defended areas and facilities within Tajikistan, and provided support to Tajik government forces. The peace-keeping forces also served as reserve support to Russian border troops. However, peace-keeping force did not conducted a full counter insurgency campaign. In practice, the border troops did not receive full support from the 201st MRD. Indeed, the 201st MRD also had orders of non-interference in the conflict.⁵⁹ The interference of Russia has a salutary effect on 1st July 1992, the Government of Tajikistan accepted the protection of all important places in the republic. The protection of hydroelectric station at Nurek and other installations and motorways on mountain passes along the boundary of the Kulyab and Kurgan-Tyube areas was entrusted to 201st Russian Motorised Division according to an agreement with Russia. The protection provided by the Russian military prevented many catastrophes which would have had unpredictable consequences.⁶⁰

When the civil war in Tajikistan was at its height, Russia had unambiguously favoured the use of force in favour of the president of Tajikistan, Imomali Rakhmonov, and keeping him in power. It was Russia which took the lead to send a joint peace-keeping force to guard the 1,400 km border with Afghanistan. Since then the Russian troops were involved in intermittent skirmishes on the Tajik-Afghan border, with Islamic guerrilla forces based in northern Afghanistan.

The deployment of the Russian 201st MRD on the Tajik-Afghan border further intensified the transborder clashes. Beginning in Spring 1993, the Tajik armed groups supported by Afghan forces, started attacking the frontier and Russian border detachments. In a short time, the intensity and frequency of the clashes increased. In a major attack on 14 July 1993 launched into Kulyab, 25 Russian guards and more than 100 villager were killed. The massacre of Russian border guards sent shock waves in the Russian official and public circles. President Yeltsin called a special session of the Russian Security Council in Moscow on July 26, 1993 to take stock of the situation and adopt remedial measures. Taking the border incident seriously, Yeltsin described the Tajik-Afghan border as "the frontier of Russia", and removed Shlyakhtin, the commander of the Russian Border troops from his post.

The Russian Security Minister, Victor Baranikov, was also reprimanded.⁶¹ In 1994, there were 306 attempts to cross the border into Tajikistan; outposts were fired 247 times; there were 96 clashes involving combat; and 50 people were wounded and 31 killed.⁶² The border clashes and militant attacks on Russian Rifle division by the Tajik IRP's armed bands supported by Afghan Mujahidin continued till the Moscow Peace Accord in 1997.

Based on these perceptions of insecurity, Russia moved quickly to consolidate Rakhmonov's position. With the help of the 201st MRD and Uzbek air port, pro-Rakhmonov forces seized Dushanbe. In December 1993, additional troops were dispatched to the border. Colonel General Vladimir Semenov, Commander-in-Chief of the ground Forces, affirmed that "the deployment of these peace-keeping forces should allow the leadership of Tajikistan to take the situation under control and stop the excesses of the gangs. As fighting continued on the border in February and April 1993, the Russian Government sent additional troops. Grachev justified Russian assistance in terms of the collective security treaty, as a formal CIS operation had not yet been mandated. In April 1993, Russia started to transfer arms to the Tajik Government. The 201st MRD also began to involve Tajik soldiers and officers. In late May, a "Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Aid" was signed, providing for extensive military and economic aid to the Tajik Government.

The Tajik president regards continued Russian military presence and Russian military assistance vital for the security of his country.⁶³ After signing of the treaty, Tajik president Rakhmonov admitted that "if there had been no Russia and no Boris Yeltsin,... the nation of the Tajiks and the state of Tajikistan as they are now would not have existed."⁶⁴ As the then foreign minister R. Alimov stated in April 1993, Tajikistan is dependent on the Russian Army, because it "has never had its own army, own border guards or air defence".⁶⁵

Defining the situation in Tajikistan, Yeltsin affirmed that "we had to restore order and stop the bloodshed through the joint efforts of the Tajik leadership and our military units".⁶⁶ In the first half of 1993, the 201st MRD helped to maintain law and order inside Tajikistan, and border troops used "all means at its disposal to ensure the safety and security of the border".⁶⁷ Russia also allocated substantial credits and loans to the Tajik government. The Russian commitment gave the Rakhmonov government of Tajikistan free reign to suppress the opposition. Tens of thousands of refugees fled to Afghanistan as the southern regions fell victim to cleansing. In January 1993, criminal charges were brought against all the opposition leaders for anti-constitutional acts, and 21 June 1993, all the main opposition movements were banned in Tajikistan. Rakhmonov stated his views on prospects for national

reconciliation. It is not worth sitting down at a negotiation table with the opposition leader because they should be answerable to the law of the people for what they have done against the people.⁶⁸

The Role of Russia in the Inter-Tajik Conflict Settlement:

The complexity and diversity of the conflict in Tajikistan and the great number of parties involved have made the settlement process slow and difficult. Under the influence of global and regional power changes the positions of external forces trying to exert influence on the conflict have also changed considerably. From the very beginning, the UN and the OSCE were of great importance. Iran also played an important part and offered their services as mediators.

Despite Russia's involvement in the Tajik conflict and while upholding the policy of strength in Tajikistan, Russia also favoured a peaceful negotiated settlement of the conflict and sought to mediate between the government and the opposition leadership in exile.

At the July 1993 meeting of the Security Council, in one of his rare interventions in Russia's Tajik policy, Yeltsin established a division of labour in Russian strategy: the MFA was to promote conflict resolution (with the help of the foreign Intelligence Services), while the MOD and the Ministry of security (later RFBS) were to ensure the protection of the CIS border. In this, Yeltsin sought to balance political concerns and military interests in 'peace-keeping', while minimizing the costs to Russia. In order to integrate these policy lines, Yeltsin created an Interdepartmental Commission to deal with the conflict. In practice, however, no balance was found between these concerns.

However, since 1994, Russia's role as an observer and mediator has been the main feature of Russia's policy towards Tajikistan. Cooperation with Iran and Pakistan was a new element of Russia's policy for achieving settlement of conflicts in Tajikistan.⁶⁹

Since mid-1994, the Russian leadership had been urging the Tajik rulers to opt for a political solution to end the crisis in Tajikistan. There was wide agreement among the leaders of Central Asia and Russia that president Rakhmonov must strive for national reconciliation and start negotiations with the opposition.⁷⁰ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs had taken an active interest in the peaceful solution of the Tajik tangle. During this time, the Tajik Government did not agree to hold talks with the opposition because of clashes between the opposition and the Government forces. Some observers feared that these talks, instead of reducing tensions, could only push the country further into Afghan type conflict where the leaders from neither side would be able to control the regional warlords.

During 1994-95, relations between the Russian authorities and Rakhmonov regime in Tajikistan deteriorated owing to disagreements regarding the approach of the Tajik Government to the peace negotiations. Russia made all efforts to persuade the Tajik Government for peace talks which would be good for the country and for the people. Then with the assistance of Russia, the talks commenced under the aegis of the UN in 1994.⁷¹ In this talk, Russia took an active part. In late 1995, negotiations came to a deadlock and hostilities resumed. Thus earlier talks of 1994 and 1995 were failed and without leading to any political reconciliation.

In November 1995, Russian President's Assistant for International Affairs, Demitry Ryurikov, arrived in Dushanbe to hold consultations with the parties in the conflict and resumed inter-Tajik dialogue. Russia appointed Yevgeny Primakov, the Foreign Minister of Russia who visited Dushanbe in 1996 and declared that repairing relations with the opposition was a precondition, not only for political stabilization but also for the preservation of the country's integrity and for solving economic problems. After several rounds of talks in 1996 to facilitate a meeting between the UTO leader, Said Abdullah Nuri, and President Rakhmonov and later their meeting at Khozdeh (Afghanistan) in December 1996, the process moved towards the signing of a protocol on military problems in March 1997, which provided for the integration of the government and opposition armed units by July 1998. This led to General Agreement on Peace and National Accord in Tajikistan signed in Moscow on 27 June 1997.⁷²

Russia's involvement in the settlement of the Tajik conflict had drawn Moscow into extensive collaboration on military matters with Tajikistan, Whether Russia will continue the peaceful diplomatic approach or escalate military tensions on the Tajik-Afghan border is difficult to say at this juncture. But what is certain is that Russia will not tolerate any interference in its sphere of special interests. In a strong assertion of regional prerogatives, former Foreign Minister Kozyrev had declared that "no other groups of nations can replace our peace-making efforts along the border of the old Soviet Union".⁷³ Thus, the Russian side wants to maintain its position of dominance as well as an important partner of Tajikistan.

Despite exhorting the Tajik Government to hold talks with its opposition and arrive at a political settlement, Russian continue to guard the Tajik-Afghan border for their larger security and geo-political interests.) According to then Russian defence Minister Pavel Grachev, "Russia does not intend to get involved in fighting between the Tajik guerrillas and the government forces, but nevertheless will guard important government installations".

Further, military access to Tajikistan in order to defend their border is thus seen as vital for Russia, supposedly threatened by Islamic Radicalism, terrorism and the trade in drugs and arms. Russian troops, seen as the least risky way to assure defence of the border. The continuation of Russian Army in Tajikistan has been accepted as natural and the Russian troops' presence as an indication of Russia's strong ties with Central Asian Republics.

Taliban and Russia-Tajikistan Relations:

Tajikistan's relations with Afghanistan were strained by the apparent inability of the Afghan Government to prevent Mujahidin fighters and consignments of weapons from crossing the frontier into Tajikistan as hostilities.

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