



Tajikistan Peace Negotiations

Conor McAuliffe

The 1997 peace accord that ended Tajikistan's civil war was the culmination of a hard-fought, three-year-long negotiation process – a process characterized by extended periods of deadlock, often interrupted by spasms of violence between the warring parties. Despite these difficulties, the final agreement between the government of Tajikistan and the Islamist-democratic opposition was a watershed event for the region: it represented the first and only time in history that Central Asia's neo-Communist politicians were forced to share power with an Islamic political opposition.¹

The agreement, however, was not an inevitable or organic outgrowth of the negotiation process. There was a great reluctance on the sides of both parties to settle the conflict definitively, even after the prospects of outright military victory had all but vanished. The United Nations-sponsored talks dragged on for two and a half years before internal and external forces combined to create the necessary conditions for agreement. What were these forces? How did these forces transform a negotiation deadlock into a final settlement in the course of less than six

months? What can this case tell us about the viability of agreements reached under pressure? These questions will be addressed through the lens of ripeness, a concept that Richard Haass has defined as “the existence of the prerequisites for diplomatic progress.”²

Background

Tajikistan is a landlocked, mountainous country located in western Central Asia bordering Afghanistan, China, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. Its population of 7.2 million is primarily (85 percent) Sunni Muslim, although there is a sizable group of *Ismaili* Shi'a Muslims living in the remote eastern province of Gorno-Badakhshan. As the country's official language, Tajik, evolved from Persian, Tajikistan is unique in the predominantly Turkish-speaking Central Asia. As a result of its rugged terrain and lack of economic development, Tajikistan is a highly fragmented society. Political identity may be

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determined by a complex mixture of factors, the most prominent being region of origin.

While the conflict that erupted in 1992 was ostensibly a competition between neo-Communists with ties to the former Soviet regime and a coalition of new Islamist and nationalist parties, many scholars assert that the conflict was at its root a power struggle among regional identity groups.³ During the Soviet era, the Leninabad and Kulyab regions were heavily favored, and elites from these regions formed the core of the Communist party apparatus. With the erosion of Soviet central control in the perestroika era, other regional identity groups sought to challenge the existing power structure.⁴ The new political movements resulting from this period were dominated by representatives of the Garm and Gorno-Badakhshan regions, and, although these movements attempted to differentiate themselves ideologically from the Communists, they also served as vehicles for the advancement of regional economic and political interests.

The most powerful of the new movements was the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRP). The IRP capitalized on the resurgence of Islam as a social and ideological force and sought to establish Tajikistan as an Islamic state. The other main branch of new political movements can broadly be termed “democratic” and consisted of three secular-nationalist parties that were at least nominally in favor of political reform and economic liberalization.⁵ In Tajikistan’s first post-Communist presidential election, an “alliance of convenience” emerged between the Islamist and democratic factions to challenge the Leninabad and Kulyab-dominated Communist party, which remained the strongest political party in the

country. The Islamist-democratic coalition’s candidate was defeated by the Communist candidate, Rahmon Nabiev, in an election that many claimed was rigged.

After coming to power in 1991, however, Nabiev had little more than nominal control of the country, and by the spring of 1992 Tajikistan was beset with deepening divisions along complex ideological, ethnic, and regional lines. In May, anti-government demonstrations in Dushanbe by opposition supporters became violent. The intervention of Russian troops stationed in Tajikistan temporarily prevented the outbreak of full-scale civil war, and Nabiev agreed to create a coalition Government of National Reconciliation (GNR) that incorporated the opposition Islamist

and democratic parties. This new government, however, never gained the support of the traditional, Soviet-era political elites from the Kulyab and Leninabad regions and it was therefore unable to consolidate control of the country.

For the next six months, anarchy and brutal violence spread throughout Tajikistan in a

Hobbesian war of all against all. Fought largely between regional militias, it was most violent where national-level political competition intersected with local antagonisms.⁶ Nabiev was kidnapped and forced to resign in September. The Parliament cast a vote of no confidence in the GNR in a special session and elected Imomali Rakhmonov, a neo-Communist from the Kulyab region, as acting head of state. Rakhmonov, with the support of two militias opposed to the Islamist-democratic alliance, began to consolidate power and execute a violent campaign against the IRP and other opposition forces. The opposition,



now formally aligned as the United Tajik Opposition (UTO), was forced out of Dushanbe but maintained strongholds in the central Karategin region, in the mountainous region of Gorno-Badakhshan in the east, and a headquarters in Taloqan in northern Afghanistan. As the war continued into 1993 and 1994, the Rakhmonov regime and the UTO insurgency settled into a military stalemate. Although defeated in the battle for central authority, UTO military commanders nonetheless continued to wage a costly guerrilla war against the Rakhmonov regime well into 1996.

Inter-Tajik Peace Negotiations

Even as the military stalemate became apparent in 1993 and 1994, neither the Rakhmonov regime nor the UTO was committed to a negotiated settlement. The costs of war to the political leadership had not yet become critical, making compromise more attractive than the continuation of military operations. There were, however, external forces and internal considerations pushing the parties to at least begin negotiations.

The work of the UN, particularly that of the UN Special Envoys, was instrumental in bringing the warring parties to the negotiating table. The UN had been actively involved in Tajikistan since its September 1992 fact-finding mission. In April 1993, the UN increased its efforts to mediate a resolution by appointing Ismat Kittani of Iraq as Special Envoy to Tajikistan.⁷ Intensive preliminary discussions with both sides, lasting from May 1993 until the first official round of inter-Tajik talks in April 1994, worked through such issues as the venue for first round of talks and the role of third-party observers. Kittani's, as well as subsequent Special Envoys', engagement of other regional governments also played an important part in garnering regional support for UN peacemaking initiatives. Consultations with

Russia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan resulted in these countries becoming official observers to the inter-Tajik talks.⁸

Other strong external forces pushed the government toward negotiations. Russia, for example, was concerned with the instability on its vulnerable southern flank – its bulwark against the Muslim world. Since Rakhmonov was heavily dependent on the passive support of the 25,000 Russian troops still stationed in Tajikistan to remain in power, Russia was able to exert significant pressure on the government to enter negotiations with the opposition.⁹ Other Central

Asian governments, notably Uzbekistan, also made it clear to Rakhmonov that they preferred a negotiated settlement to ongoing instability in the region.

The interests of the warring parties themselves also contributed to their respective decisions to enter the negotiations. Although the war was not yet costly enough to compel either side to seek a permanent settlement, it had slipped into a mutually destructive stalemate where both sides were suffering a degradation of military capacities and political support caused by worsening humanitarian conditions in their respective

territories.¹⁰ The government sought to strengthen its uncertain hold on power without ceding too much to the opposition. One way it could accomplish this would be to agree to a ceasefire, consolidate its political gains, and hopefully generate enough economic growth or an aid package to further reinforce both military capacity and political stability.

Similarly, the opposition agreed to begin negotiations in the hopes of gaining concessions from the government without renouncing its ultimate goal of controlling the country. Another important factor behind the decision to negotiate was the ongoing civil strife in Afghanistan and

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the fear on the part of both sides that the instability in Afghanistan could spill over into Tajikistan and exacerbate the existing violence and instability. This was especially the case with the ethnic Pamiri wing of the opposition in Gorno-Badakhshan, where continuing flows of Afghan refugees threatened to overwhelm the already scarce resources of the region.¹¹

The inter-Tajik negotiations began in April 1994 and concluded in June 1997 with a final peace accord. The negotiations can be broken down into three distinct phases. The first phase lasted from the beginning of the talks to the August 1995 agreement signed on the fundamental principles for a comprehensive political solution. This phase of the negotiations was characterized by extended periods of political deadlock interspersed with occasional but significant advances. The ceasefire and prisoner exchange agreement of September 1994 and the general agreement on principles were the two most noteworthy accomplishments of the first phase of negotiations.

The second stage of negotiations, primarily encompassing the continuous fifth round of the negotiations, was notable for its lack of progress on substantive elements of the agreement.¹² Lasting over a year until December 1996, the second phase of negotiations was essentially a deadlock where increasing levels of national violence led to an overall deterioration of negotiations. Disagreements over the venue for the fifth round of talks occupied much of the Fall of 1995, and by the time negotiations resumed on November 30 in Ashkabad, intense fighting in the opposition-controlled center of the country (around Tavildara & Garm) overshadowed the talks. In July 1996 the government and the opposition did agree to a renewal of the ceasefire and an exchange for prisoners of war, but the ceasefire broke down shortly thereafter as a result of ongoing attacks and counter-attacks, especially in the Karategin Valley near the opposition stronghold of Garm.

In December 1996, after a year of diplomatic exertion with little to show for it, a significant breakthrough occurred, marking the beginning of the third and final phase of the inter-Tajik

negotiations. Rakhmonov flew to Khos Deh, in northern Afghanistan, to meet resistance leader Said Abdullo Nuri on December 10 and 11. The two leaders agreed to the text of a draft agreement outlining the next steps in the peace process, as well as to a renewal of the ceasefire for the duration of the inter-Tajik talks. The formal agreement was signed two weeks later in Moscow, along with another agreement delineating the main functions and powers of the Commission on National Reconciliation that would oversee the implementation of the final peace accord. Thereafter, negotiations moved rapidly; all remaining outstanding issues were resolved between January and May 1997. The issues resolved in this critical period included substantive agreements on the future status of refugees; the disarmament and reintegration of UTO forces into the national army; the legalization of the IRP; and a 30 percent quota for opposition figures in government posts. On June 27, 1997 in Moscow, Nuri and Rakhmonov signed the General Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and National Accord in Tajikistan, formally ending the UTO's military opposition and paving the way for the implementation phase of the accords.

As has been shown, the peace agreement did not appear overnight; it was the result of a tortuous negotiation process lasting over three years. The remarkable progress made in the first part of 1997 is even more striking when juxtaposed against the diplomatic stalemate of the prior period. The rapid conclusion of the negotiation process raises important questions about the dynamic of the negotiation as a whole. Two in particular merit attention. First, what factors account for the lack of progress in the second phase of negotiations? Second, what changed towards the end of 1996 to break the impasse?

Absence of Ripeness Prior to December 1996

Richard Haass has identified four conditions under which a conflict may be considered ripe for resolution. All four conditions in his model are necessary, and the absence of any one is sufficient to preclude agreement. The four conditions are:

(1) a mutually acceptable process or approach to negotiations; (2) the existence of sufficient concessions on both sides to convince constituents; (3) the capacity of leaders to agree to an accord; and (4) shared perceptions on the desirability of an accord.¹³ The lack of progress in the inter-Tajik negotiations between August 1995 and December 1996 can largely be explained by the fact that these four necessary preconditions were not all present. In other words, the conflict was not yet ripe for resolution.

1. Mutually acceptable approach to negotiations

The first requirement – that of a mutually acceptable approach to the negotiations – was in place as early as April 1994. From that point onward, no disagreement existed between the parties over the necessity of the UN in overseeing negotiations.¹⁴ The UN was seen as an impartial, objective mediator by both sides. The basic agenda for the peace negotiations was negotiated at the first session, establishing a shared vision for the basic outline of the peace plan and the broad issues under discussion.¹⁵ The consensus on these issues never disappeared, and continued to play an important role in perpetuating the parties' engagement in talks, even during periods when fighting was intense and no substantive advances were forthcoming at the negotiating table. The UN's mediation efforts had the full support of other important actors such as the UN Security Council, foreign governments, and other international organizations.¹⁶

2. Sufficient Concessions

Haass writes that reaching a settlement depends on "sufficient compromise on both sides to allow leaders to persuade their colleagues and citizens that the national interest was protected."¹⁷ Haass asserts that this condition is often not very difficult to achieve, but intrastate conflicts can be a more challenging environment for conflict resolution than traditional interstate wars. Civil war is often perceived, rightly or wrongly, as a zero-sum affair. The evidence on Tajikistan suggests, however, that the general outline of the eventual settlement was understood well before the parties converged on a mutually

acceptable solution in early 1997. In December 1995, at a negotiation session in Ashkabad, the UTO delegation presented a set of "elaborate proposals on political and military issues...The core of the opposition's proposals was the establishment of a council of national reconciliation for a transitional period of up to two years."¹⁸ While rejected by the government at the time, a Commission on National Reconciliation was eventually agreed to by both of the negotiating parties, but not until 1997—the Commission represents a major pillar of the ultimate agreement, and it resolved many of the outstanding political differences between the parties. The absence of a fair and reasonable formula was not a significant cause for the failure to reach a negotiated settlement during the second phase of negotiations.

3. Willingness to settle: Sufficient strength or weakness

By the end of 1995 there was a mutually accepted format for the negotiations and the basis of the final accord had already been proposed, but Haass's third prerequisite was not readily apparent. Leaders of the negotiating parties were neither "sufficiently strong to permit compromise (because of popularity or force) or sufficiently weak that compromise cannot be avoided."¹⁹ Neither Rakhmonov nor Nuri exercised effective control over all parts of their constituencies or territories. Rakhmonov, as the titular head of state, had nominal control over the Ministry of Interior forces (a poorly trained and poorly equipped group of fighters) and had the political allegiance of some militias.²⁰ More importantly, he still had the support of the Russian Border Guard troops and the other CIS army troops remaining in Tajikistan to stabilize the situation. However, as early as 1994, the Kulyab-Leninabad alliance had frayed and Rakhmonov's hold on power had become increasingly tenuous. Militia commanders that helped put him in power made political demands that had to be met to avoid the complete breakdown of Rakhmonov's influence over coercive state organs. Given the internal political crisis facing the government (even among Rakhmonov's own supporters),

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Rakhmonov probably did not feel sufficiently secure in his position to make significant moves towards reconciliation with the opposition. Nor had the crisis within the regime reached the point where Rakhmonov was too weak to avoid settling with the UTO.

Regardless of whether Nuri perceived his authority within the UTO as strong enough to conclude an agreement, two specific

considerations undermined his negotiating flexibility and militated against accommodation. First, Nuri had no military constituency; he was highly dependent on a disparate network of regional military commanders whose diverse interests and ideologies needed to be considered before any compromise could be made with the regime. Second, the very nature of the war and the complex mosaic of identities and loyalties driving it meant that political and military allegiances were often fluid, with the result that any concession could precipitate the defection of a critical military commander or local population. Thus, even had an acceptable formula presented itself, Nuri would have been severely constrained in his ability to agree to it.

4. Shared Perceptions on Desirability of Accord

The fourth indicator of ripeness was unequivocally absent prior to December 1996: the Rakhmonov government did not accept the immediate need or desirability of a negotiated solution to the ongoing conflict. As one scholar notes:

One of the main conditions for de-escalation, according to experts in conflict resolution, was lacking in Tajikistan, at least in the first stages after the end of the war: 'A major influence in

bringing about de-escalation is the prospect that the alternatives now and in the future will be worse if the conflict continues unabated.' As far as the present government was concerned, the conflict was, to all intents and purposes, over, and consequently there was no need to make concessions to an enemy whose activities hampered the establishment of total control but did not pose a direct threat to the survival of the regime.²¹

The majority of the large-scale fighting had ended by February 1993, and the ongoing violence *by itself* was unlikely to dislodge Rakhmonov from his seat of power in Dushanbe. Rakhmonov's perceived security is crucial to understanding the negotiations deadlock during 1995 and 1996. The main forces that drove the government to enter into the inter-Tajik talks in the first place – Russian pressure for regional stability and the tactical gains to be had from buying time through negotiations – had been at least partially exhausted. Until late 1996, the government simply was not convinced that negotiating a settlement was in its best interest.

Appearance of Ripeness After December 1996

As late as December 5, 1996 the UN Secretary General wrote of frequent ceasefire violations that "contradict the stated intentions of the Tajik parties to resolve the conflict through political means, raising serious questions regarding their sincerity and intentions."²² Less than a week later, Nuri and Rakhmonov initialed a draft agreement for a permanent ceasefire, and by the end of January, many of the outstanding issues had been resolved.

Negotiations scholar Louis Kreisberg has suggested a three-tiered framework for analyzing the conditions that impel political leaders to move toward accommodation and accord: domestic pressures, the relationship between the adversaries, and the international context.²³ Kreisberg's framework can be used to explain the development of ripeness in the inter-Tajik negotiation process.

First Tier: Domestic Political Conditions

In 1996, the domestic political situation in Tajikistan underwent several changes that weakened Rakhmonov's hold on state power and helped break the negotiating deadlock. First, a deepening economic crisis, leading to food shortages and excessively high grain prices, generated significant popular unrest and undermined Rakhmonov's plan to use the negotiations to buy time to defeat the opposition militarily. Second, a sense of war-weariness began to pervade military commanders, fighters, and populace alike. According to one scholar of the conflict, field commanders "began to lose interest in the interminable and hopeless internecine strife" and became more concerned to "legalize and consolidate [their] gains." Finally, the regional political alliance that formed the core of Rakhmonov's support base began to deteriorate. Rakhmonov's strategic decision to hand out important government posts to members of his own Kulyabi regional identity group led to resentment from the Leninabadi elites, the other principal regional identity group in the alliance. The splintering of the government coalition ultimately undermined Rakhmonov's power base and severely constrained his negotiating leverage over the opposition. As he began to face challenges from within his own coalition, the threats to Tajikistan's territorial integrity grew more tangible, and the ongoing conflict with the UTO became less of a nuisance and more of an existential threat. Thus the breakthrough in negotiations can be partially ascribed to a weakening in Rakhmonov's bargaining position as a result of domestic political developments.

Second Tier: Relations between Adversaries

Kreisberg's second tier is mainly concerned with shifts in the balance of power between the two parties. While scholars disagree over what power relationship is most conducive to de-escalation, the consensus is that changes in this balance can often serve to break a deadlocked negotiation process. Such changes occurred in the relationship between the Rakhmonov government and the UTO near the end of 1996. The domestic

political context that undermined Rakhmonov's own position also weakened his negotiating position vis-à-vis the opposition. Furthermore, the opposition made a series of military advances in 1996 indicating "a gradually encroaching parity by the weaker party,"²⁴ and ultimately helping to convince Rakhmonov of the need to settle the civil war definitively.

Third Tier: The International Context

The third tier proved to be the most important in ripening the Tajik conflict for final resolution. Events and decisions taking place outside of Tajikistan exerted a disproportionately large influence on the course of the inter-Tajik negotiations. The most significant of these factors was the surging military campaign of the Taliban in Afghanistan, culminating in their capture of Kabul in September 1996. Another key driver toward de-escalation was the converging political interests of Russia and Iran, the two major regional powers, to promote peace in Tajikistan.²⁵ Additionally, Uzbekistan, for reasons related to its own political and security interests as the most populous and powerful of the Central Asian states, withdrew its support for the Rakhmonov regime. Uzbekistan's actions further weakened the regime and contributed to Rakhmonov's decision to settle the conflict with the UTO.

The Afghan Taliban's capture of Kabul catalyzed the Tajik peace process by rendering both sides' alternatives to a negotiated settlement significantly riskier and less appealing. Haass notes that "as a rule, crisis or near-crisis can contribute to diplomacy if there is a shared recognition that steps must be taken to avoid developments that will be costly to all concerned."²⁶ At the end of 1996, this was true for both parties. The Rakhmonov regime, already beset by mounting domestic problems, now faced

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in the Taliban a radical Islamic regime with potentially regional ambitions. The UTO, for its part, faced an equally pressing threat. Its military viability depended on the sanctuary and support it received from anti-Taliban ethnic Tajik guerrillas in northern Afghanistan who, reeling from the Taliban campaign, had retreated into their stronghold in the Panjshir Valley. Furthermore, some suspect that Afghan Northern Alliance leader Ahmed Shah Massoud, under pressure to secure his own supply routes into Tajikistan, attempted to cut a deal with the Tajik government, potentially cutting off the UTO in the process.²⁷ Thus, a crucial component of the UTO's military strategy was under serious pressure, including also the possibility of a Taliban incursion or full-scale invasion in Tajikistan.

The Taliban's rise was also intimately related to the second major international pressure leading to negotiation ripeness: the convergence of Russian and Iranian interest in a settlement of the Tajik conflict. Russia's primary interest in Tajikistan was quite simple: "To establish and maintain military security at almost any cost in the hope of seeing Central Asia become a stable buffer zone between their homeland and the Islamic world to the south."²⁸ Russian and Central Asian leaders were fearful that the Taliban, once in power, would attempt to spread their religious and political beliefs to other states in the region, destabilizing the existing secular, neo-Communist regimes.²⁹ Even worse, the leaders of these states were uncertain that the Taliban's "announced plans to liberate Central Asian Muslims" would be limited to religious proselytizing.³⁰ Russia's economic interest in preserving its monopoly on Central Asia's natural resources – especially Caspian Sea oil and natural gas deposits – led Russia to seek a settlement in Tajikistan in order to keep the region free of the U.S. and other Western influences.³¹

Iran also came to prioritize stability in Tajikistan. Iran was

not enthusiastic about having a violently anti-Shi'a, Sunni fundamentalist revolutionary state on its eastern border, and thus supported Afghan Shi'a factions and later the Northern Alliance. But by 1996 the forces fighting to the Taliban were close to defeat. In order for these forces to remain a viable military opposition to the Taliban, they needed a stable and secure rear base in Tajikistan, which affirmed Iran's conviction in the need for a final resolution to the Tajik civil war. Also, like Russia, Iran had an interest in keeping American and European political and economic intervention out of its perceived sphere of influence.³² Thus, Russian and Iranian interests were aligned, and both regional powers used their influence to pressure the sides to reach an agreement.

The shifting relationship between Uzbekistan and the Rakhmonov regime also encouraged an agreement. While Tashkent's support for Rakhmonov helped him triumph in the 1992 power struggle, developments in 1994 and 1995 soured relations between the two states. Uzbekistan's President Islam Karimov, for example, was aggravated by Rakhmonov's inability to subdue the UTO insurgency, which was alleged to maintain close ties to the militant anti-government Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU).³³ Tajikistan's instability and IMU's good relations with members of the Islamist opposition in Tajikistan meant that the IMU found sanctuary in Tajikistan even without the regime's explicit support.

The steady disenfranchisement of ethnic Uzbeks within the ruling party in Tajikistan also contributed to the rift between Karimov and Rakhmonov. Ethnic Uzbeks made up a large part of the Leninabad and Hissar regional elites who were "seemingly integrated in the regime, although they were gradually ousted by the Kulyabis."³⁴ Interestingly, Karimov contributed to the peace settlement not by engaging in it, but rather by withdrawing his support for Rakhmonov in the hope of forcing Tajikistan's

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government to listen to the demands of its ethnic Uzbeks. In the end, however, this strategy proved counterproductive. Rakhmonov's weakened political position compelled him to settle with the UTO through inter-Tajik negotiations, a process that excluded ethnic Uzbek interests.³⁵

These pressures – Rakhmonov's weakening domestic political position, the UTO gains on the battlefield, and the reaction of regional powers to Taliban and IMU advances – resulted in ripeness for a negotiated solution. While the mechanisms of the negotiations changed little from one phase of the process to the next, the third and final phase succeeded because the underlying conditions for de-escalation were now in place. Rakhmonov's political position had become so weak that his stalling tactics were no longer feasible, creating a sense of urgency to solve the problem. External pressures, particularly those resulting from the rise of the Taliban, helped convince both sides that a compromise agreement was better than the realistic alternatives.

Evaluating the Tajik Peace Agreement

Having established that the agreement in Tajikistan was reached as a result of significant internal and external pressures, the question arises as to whether this was a successful outcome, one that might even provide some guidance to the resolution of future conflicts of this variety. In order to evaluate the success of the agreement itself, it is helpful to posit some objective criteria on which to base this assessment.

1. Effectively End Combat and Addresses Underlying Causes

The first requirement of a successful agreement is quite clear: it must end the civil war. This implies a settlement of both military and political issues. On the military side, the settlement must put an end to the organized use of force by a critical mass of the warring parties. This is the principal achievement of the inter-Tajik peace process and the primary reason why it has been deemed a success. Admittedly, the situation in Tajikistan today is unstable and the agreement has been imperfectly implemented.³⁶ The 1997

agreement did not end all violence in the country; many warlords from both sides of the conflict never accepted the final terms of the agreement and still operate outside the authority of the government.³⁷ Yet the civil war between the UTO and the Rakhmonov regime did end, and the country is much more secure now than it was prior to the agreement.

While an end to fighting between the parties is crucial, a successful negotiated outcome must also address the political sources of a civil war—either by resolving them or by establishing a mutually acceptable process for doing so in the future. Tajikistan's agreement did exactly that, settling some of the less difficult issues outright (such as the future status of refugees and the integration of the armed forces), and setting up a process for the resolution of more intractable issues through a bipartisan Commission on National Recognition, chaired by opposition leader Nuri.

2. Includes All Factions

Second, a successful negotiated agreement must also include all of the principal actors. Not doing so risks creating "spoilers." In Tajikistan, the talks were specifically designed to include other states in the region as well as the principal parties. This helped reduce neighboring states' incentives to interfere in other, less benign ways and instead offered them a legitimate venue for influencing events to protect their national interests.

However, some critics of the agreement point to at least one important faction excluded from the settlement.³⁸ The dominance of the Kulyabi faction within the Rakhmonov regime, and the concomitant sidelining of the traditional political elites from Leninabad (with its large ethnic Uzbek population), did pose problems in the implementation of the accords. Still, the challenges emerging from the so-called "Kulyabization" of government³⁹ have not resulted in renewed military conflict. In recent years Rakhmonov has begun distancing himself from his Kulyabi base and promoting Leninabadis within government to temper discontent from northern elites.⁴⁰

3. Implementation & Sustainability

Though often behind schedule and infused with a degree of mistrust, the Tajik agreement's major provisions have all been implemented. The Commission on National Reconciliation was established and subsequently dissolved in accordance with the agreement's terms. An amnesty for combatants was declared and UTO fighters were successfully integrated into the new Tajikistan National Army. In 1999, the IRP was legalized and permitted to participate in elections, where they gained representation and accepted the results of the political process.⁴¹ The limited economic resources of the state have, in fact, made it very difficult for the government to establish effective control over the entire country, forcing it to cede *de facto* authority over parts of the country to warlords. This, however, is more a structural challenge to the feasibility of statehood in Tajikistan than a problem with the peace agreement itself.

Most importantly, the agreement must be sustainable - neither so fragile as to fall apart at the first crisis nor so inflexible as to preclude necessary recalibrations during the implementation phase. Although it has been regularly threatened by the difficulties inherent in forging a modern nation-state in a highly fragmented society, the agreement between the Rakhmonov regime and the Islamist opposition has held firm. The final verdict has not been delivered on the ultimate permanence of the peace agreement, but nearly nine years without large-scale fighting represents a significant achievement.

Thus the 1997 peace agreement represents at the very least a qualified success. However, subsequent years have posed significant challenges, and the success of the state-building effort as a whole is far from certain. Warlords control large swaths of the country where the rule of law has barely been implemented. Drug trafficking from Afghanistan accounts for thirty to fifty percent of the country's otherwise anemic economy.⁴² The extreme scarcity of resources has reinforced the necessity of kinship-based access networks, further eroding state control and breeding a culture of endemic corruption. There

are still unresolved questions about the relationship between Islam and the state. Rakhmonov's increasingly authoritarian tendencies and recent showdowns with warlords indicate a country in constant simmering crisis.⁴³ Yet despite all these problems, the country has remained intact and independent. Furthermore, many of Tajikistan's current woes are well outside the bounds of what a negotiated settlement to a civil war could reasonably hope to solve.

Conclusion

The extraordinary pressure exerted on the parties by the Taliban's rise is unique to the context of Tajikistan. Nonetheless, some important lessons can be gleaned from the experience of the inter-Tajik negotiations and the implementation of the 1997 peace accord:

- The case of Tajikistan provides further support for Haass' ripeness theory. Despite the valiant efforts of the UN Special Envoys and at times even of the government and UTO interlocutors, for most of the negotiation process the parties were unwilling or unable to make the necessary concessions to reach a permanent accord. Only when forces exogenous to the actual negotiations acted to alter the cost-benefit dynamic of accommodation did the parties reach an agreement.
- This does not mean that mediation efforts are futile, or that one should simply let small wars "burn themselves out." On the contrary, when the necessary forces finally converged to create the conditions for a settlement, the settlement was reached relatively rapidly. The confidence-building measures and shared premises that had been established over the course of the first two and a half years of

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negotiations played an important part in the negotiated settlement.

- External pressures well short of unilateral military intervention or UN-led peace enforcement missions can be sufficiently compelling to hasten the arrival of ripeness. Pressure from external actors such as the UN, Russia, Iran, and Uzbekistan were very important in convincing the parties to enter negotiations, and later to reaching a final settlement.
- Despite the significant weaknesses of the eventual agreement, the outcome must be viewed as successful. Sub-optimal agreements, while not resolving every possible issue, have intrinsic value and are often the best available option.

- Finally, the case of Tajikistan does not provide any firm support for the hypothesis that agreements reached under pressure are inherently unsustainable. The 1997 Tajik peace accord was the result of myriad domestic and international pressures. Despite the extensive difficulties encountered during the implementation phase, the settlement has survived intact.

The views and opinions expressed in articles are strictly the author's own, and do not necessarily represent those of Al Nakhlah, its Advisory and Editorial Boards, or the Program for Southwest Asia and Islamic Civilization (SWAIC) at The Fletcher School.

¹ Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 91-92.

² Richard N. Haass, *Conflicts Unending: The United States and Regional Disputes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 6.

³ Olivier Roy, "Inter-regional dynamics of war," in *Politics of Compromise: The Tajikistan Peace Process*, Accord, Issue 10, K. Abdullaev and C. Barnes, eds. (London: Conciliation Resources, 2001).

⁴ Iver b. Neumann and Sergei V. Solodnik, "Russian and CIS peace enforcement in Tajikistan," in *Russian and CIS Peacekeeping*, Centre of Russian Studies, Publication no. 1, L. Jonson and C. Archer, eds. Available at <http://www.nupi.no/russland/pub/Notat530.htm>. Accessed August 19, 2006.

⁵ Shirin Akiner, *Tajikistan: Disintegration or Reconciliation?* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2001), 33 & 40. These parties were: *Rastokhez* (Rebirth) National Front, the Democratic Party of Tajikistan, and *La'l-i Badakhshan* (The Ruby of Badakhshan). Akiner suggests that the designation "democratic" for these parties is somewhat misleading, as the term was mostly used as a means of distinguishing the younger generation of political elites from the "old guard" communist nomenklatura they sought to replace.

⁶ Roy, "Inter-regional dynamics of war."

⁷ Ambassador Kittani was succeeded in January 1994 by Ramiro Piriz-Ballon of Uruguay. Ambassador Piriz-Ballon was later succeeded in June 1996 by Gerd Merrem, who oversaw the remainder of the Tajik peace process.

⁸ Vladimir Goryayev, "Architecture of international involvement in the Tajik peace process," in *Politics of Compromise: The Tajikistan Peace Process*.

⁹ This 25,000-man force consisted of approximately 17,000 border guards and 8,000 peacekeeping troops from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The border guards were stationed in Tajikistan from before the collapse of the Soviet Union and stayed on by agreement with the government of Tajikistan after independence. The peacekeeping force was established in 1993 by Russia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan in accordance with Article VIII of the UN Charter (see UN Doc. S/26610, dated 30 September 1993).

¹⁰ Akiner, 40.

¹¹ *Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in Tajikistan*, UN Doc. S/1994/379 (4 April 1994).

¹² The fifth round of negotiations was designated as “continuous” because unlike prior rounds, it had no specific start and end date, but was instead an ongoing process of engagement between the two sides in the negotiations.

¹³ Haass, 27-29.

¹⁴ UN Doc. S/1994/379 (4 April 1994).

¹⁵ *Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in Tajikistan*, UN Doc. S/1995/720, Annex I (23 August 1995).

¹⁶ Goryayev, “Architecture of international involvement in the Tajik peace process.”

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in Tajikistan*, UN Doc. S/1996/212 (22 March 1996).

¹⁹ Haass, 27.

²⁰ Akiner, 43.

²¹ Irina Zviagelskaya, “The Tajik Conflict: Problems of Regulation,” in *Tajikistan: The Trials of Independence*, Mohammed-Reza Djalili et al., eds. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 161. In the passage the author quotes Louis Kriesberg and Stuart J. Thorson, eds. *Timing the De-Escalation of International Conflicts* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1991), 15.

²² *Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in Tajikistan*, UN Doc. S/1996/1010 (5 December 1996).

²³ Louis Kriesberg, “Timing and the Initiation of De-Escalation Moves,” in *Negotiation Theory and Practice*, J. William Breslin and Jeffrey Z. Rubin, eds. (Cambridge, MA: Program on Negotiation Books, 1999), 223-231.

²⁴ Kreisberg, 228.

²⁵ Rigacci Hay, “Methodology of the inter-Tajik negotiation process.”

²⁶ Haass, 141-142.

²⁷ Mohammed-Reza Djalili and Frederic Grare, “Regional Interests and Ambitions in Tajikistan: the Role of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran,” in *Tajikistan: The Trials of Independence*, 122.

²⁸ Olivier A. J. Brennenkmeijer, “International Concern for Tajikistan: UN and OSCE Efforts to Promote Peace-Building and Democratisation,” in *Tajikistan: The Trials of Independence*, 181.

²⁹ Rashid, 104.

³⁰ Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 345.

³¹ Rubin, “Introduction: The Tajikistan Peace Agreement.” The discovery of the Tengiz oil field in western Kazakhstan in 1979, in addition to the oil deposits in Azerbaijan and natural gas fields in Turkmenistan, made the Caspian Sea a region of vital strategic importance for the Soviet Union, and later Russia.

³² Rashid, 219.

³³ Naumkin, 232.

³⁴ Naumkin, 230.

³⁵ It should be noted that Akiner is remarkably less confident than other scholars in speculating about Karimov’s motivations. He notes that after 1995, Karimov’s “attitude towards the Tajik leadership was characterized by frequent and abrupt reversals, alternately hostile and conciliatory. It is tempting to speculate on the reasons for this ambiguity but too little information is available on the process of Uzbek policy-making to determine for certain what motives lay behind these changes of orientation.” Akiner, 48.

³⁶ International Crisis Group, *Tajikistan: An Uncertain Peace*, (Osh/Brussels: 24 December 2001).

³⁷ Akiner, 72-74.

³⁸ Rubin, "Introduction: The Tajikistan Peace Agreement."

³⁹ Akiner, 64.

⁴⁰ International Crisis Group, *Tajikistan: An Uncertain Peace*, 6.

⁴¹ Rashid, 242.

⁴² Rashid, 243.

⁴³ International Crisis Group, *Tajikistan's Politics: Confrontation or Consolidation?* (Dushanbe/Brussels: 19 May 2004).