

The “Islamist” Conflict? : Religion and Politics in the Tajikistan Civil War

Tetsuro IJI

Abstract

The 1997 peace agreement of the Tajik civil war gave the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) the opportunity to get legalized and obtain a small share of governmental power in the secular state. The present article aims to explain the unique ending of this war, making three interrelated points. First, the presence of much common ground, historical and social, led the conflict parties to agree to maintain the Tajik state and try to govern it jointly, without pursuing separatist alternatives. Second, the IRPT-led opposition prioritized not *religious claims* but the demand for a share of power for their regional footholds. This focus on the power-sharing agenda reduced the obstacles to negotiation and compromise. Third, the negotiated outcome, tilted in favor of the incumbent government rather than the IRPT, reflected power asymmetry between the former firmly supported by Russia, and the latter with limited external support motivated by religious sympathy.

Keywords

Civil wars, Islamist conflicts, negotiation, religion, Tajikistan, the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT).

Introduction

The Tajik civil war was formally ended with the negotiated agreement in 1997 that opened the way for the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) to become a participant as a legalized party in the secular state and obtain a small share of power in the government. This way of ending the war is rather unique among cases of internal armed conflicts involving Islamist armed groups, given the general intractability of such conflicts and the frequent difficulty with their negotiated settlement.

The purpose of the present article is to explain why the Tajik conflict evolved and eventually came to a formal end as it did, by elucidating the interconnected features of the conflict and more specifically the nature of the IRPT itself. A useful starting point is to look at the Religion

and Armed Conflict (RELAC) data from 1975 to 2015, the most comprehensive dataset on religious armed conflicts to date (Svensson & Nilsson, 2018). The article treats the coding of the Tajik civil war in the data (according to RELAC Data Codebook, v.1.1) as its basic snapshot, takes that as a point of departure for analyses, and seeks to gain a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of its course and outcome.

In RELAC, Islamist conflicts are categorized into three kinds, based on the nature of *religious claims*: territorial (separatist), revolutionary (government), and transnational (Svensson & Nilsson, 2018, pp. 1133-1134). The Tajik civil war is classified as revolutionary, that is, a conflict over government, not over territory; the IRPT was in no way secessionist, but a nationalist insurgency. Despite the sheer degree of polarization and fragmentation observed in the civil war, why did the conflict remain one over government at all? Put differently, why did Tajik parties hold on to the idea of governing the existing state jointly, rather than pursuing separatist alternatives? What served as the common ground for the conflict parties, secular and Islamist, in a polarized, disintegrated state of Tajikistan, to reach a power-sharing agreement in 1997? The majority of Tajiks adhere to the same Sunni Hanafi tradition, and for this reason, the RELAC data, in terms of *religious identities*, posits that it was not a religious identity conflict as fought by the belligerents from different religious traditions (Svensson & Nilsson, 2018, p. 1135). The article will begin by examining this and other aspects of commonality and how they contributed to the persistence of both sides in a search for an agreeable form of joint governance through negotiation, in spite of inherent differences and disputes.

Islamist conflicts also vary in terms of the extent to which incompatibility between the parties is religiously defined. One interesting feature of RELAC is its use of a device to capture the *salience of religious claims* (Svensson & Nilsson, 2018, p. 1135). The religious dimensions of the Tajik conflict are perceived to be of low salience, on the ground that the IRPT formed an alliance with secular opposition groups. Why did Islamist and secular groups get along? This is the next line of inquiry in the article. It argues that the Tajik civil war was not so much a religious conflict as a clan- or region-based conflict; the IRPT was a regionalist actor more than a religious one. The Tajik conflict was characterized by the low salience of religious dimensions, and conversely, the salience of non-religious conflict over political power and economic resources among different regions. This perspective will provide clues to questions such as: What are the factors that contributed to the relatively short duration of the negotiation process between Islamists and the secular opponent? Why was it that Islamist aspirations did not get in the way of the IRPT negotiating with the secular government on power sharing? And how did they actually make compromises and reach agreement?

Being legalized and given a small share of power in the secular political system may be a modest outcome for the Islamist insurgency. What made the IRPT accept the power-sharing agreement on unfavorable terms vis-à-vis the secular government? This modest outcome reflects power asymmetry between the government and the IRPT; the IRPT was undoubtedly the

weaker party. The Dushanbe government enjoyed the sustained and committed support from Russia, its powerful patron. The IRPT, on the other hand, obtained limited support from external actors. What were the limits of Tajik Islamists' religious appeals in terms of attracting support from Iran and other Muslim neighbors, as well as transnational Islamist networks? The last part of the article will address the interplay between religious and non-religious factors in constraining the involvement of Iran and other Muslim states in the civil war in Tajikistan. It will also consider the IRPT's limited access to transnational networks.

Commonality and Premise of Joint Governance

Analysts of conflict, particularly armed conflicts, tend to pay more attention to, or at times overemphasize, differences that divide conflict parties and drive them to violence, with the result that they may downplay or even overlook the common ground present between them. In analyzing internal conflict, it is important to take into account common elements shared by the government and rebel groups—more broadly, within the domestic society as a whole—that could serve as sources of common identity. The presence of these elements is bound to play a role in shaping each party's strategies and objectives in waging the conflict and eventually to influence the efficacy of the strategies and the fulfillment of the objectives.

The questions of whether a solution can be negotiated at all and what kind of solution can actually be agreed upon should be affected to a large extent by how much common ground exists in a civil war state. If the state in question is lacking broad enough common ground, an outcome of the conflict, whether negotiated or not, is more likely to take the form of division, such as autonomy and secession, where separate modes of governance are to be applied to different constituencies and territories. Alternatively, if there is much commonality encompassing the whole state, a negotiated outcome may be achieved more readily in the form of joint governance, in which an integral and inclusive mode of governance is to be put in place for the entire territory and population.

Tajikistan basically belongs to the latter pattern. In Tajik society, for all its cleavages and discrepancies, there are plenty of shared elements conducive to common identity among the Tajik people, which would incline the conflicting parties to seek, as an outcome of the conflict, a joint and inclusive form of governance rather than separate forms of governance. The most important elements, in the light of the present article's focus on religious dimensions, are a solid tradition of secularism in politics and the widespread adherence to Sunni Hanafism. Indeed, the former is exactly what the IRPT aspired to challenge, at least initially. As will be discussed later, however, the IRPT, in the course of the conflict and negotiation, was compelled to moderate such religious aspirations and adjust the strategies and objectives of its struggle accordingly. What should be underscored here is that the IRPT's retreat with respect to its Islamist demands

was dictated by the dominant tendency in Tajik society toward secular politics, which had largely been brought about by the previous Soviet rule.

During the Soviet period, the practice of Islam (and other religions) had been curtailed and oppressed by the Communist authorities. In this hostile environment, Islam in Tajikistan had survived as a mainstream religion among the people, but it did so in a rather restrained manner. With the oversight and control by the authorities, there emerged two channels for Muslim activity in the country: through the *Qaziyat* (official religious administration) or in the clandestine and traditional mode of “unofficial Islam.” This separation and juxtaposition of official and unofficial strands contributed to the fragmented nature of Islamic foundations in Tajikistan (Abdullaev & Akbarzadeh, 2010, pp. 178-179).

In the RELAC data, the Tajik civil war is not classified as a religious identity conflict, the kind of conflict fought by the belligerents from different religious traditions; the majority of Tajiks, except for a small Shia Ismaili population in the eastern part of the country, follow the same Sunni Hanafi tradition. Sunni Hanafi Tajiks, unlike Shiite Persians, are unfamiliar with theocratic rule, being accustomed to living in a society where political power is organized and vested in secular leaders that enjoy the support of religious figures (Abdullaev & Akbarzadeh, 2010, p. 177). As to the question of how to govern the state, there had been a broad societal consensus on secularism and separation between religion and state (again, the aspect that the IRPT began to challenge).

In examining the emergence of the IRPT and its subsequent course of action, it is essential to recognize this longstanding social and political context in Tajikistan. The IRPT emerged as a political force at a time when Islam in Tajikistan gained momentum for revival during the era of Gorbachev’s reforms, with some of the restrictions on the practice of Islam being removed. It, on the other hand, had to operate under the given conditions inherited from the Soviet era—namely, secularism in politics and the moderate nature of Islam in Tajikistan.

Relatedly, that was also the time when a sense of national unity and nationalism was reawakening in Tajikistan. As the Soviet Union disintegrated and Tajikistan became independent, Tajik people were faced with the sudden need to search for a new principle to govern their independent state—something to replace Communism. Religion was the immediate answer to this soul-searching question for Tajik Islamists, who wanted to bring Islam into the political sphere. Government leaders, on the other hand, wanted to retain the secular tendencies continuing from the Soviet era, rejecting political Islam. Despite these political differences, both sides shared the belief that when it came to social and cultural life, Sunni Islam and Persian culture constituted the foundations for the shared identity of Tajik people. The Tajik government, for its part, never denied the practice of Islam and remained tolerant of it to a large extent. Occasionally, they even went so far as to try to draw popular support by invoking Islam (Akiner, 2001, pp. 28-33; Atkin, 1997c, p. 283). Interestingly, although the Iranian political model of an Islamic state is foreign to Tajik people, Shia Iran is an object of great cultural admiration in

Tajikistan, the only Persian-speaking country in Central Asia. On the back of the shared historical, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds, not only Tajik Islamists but also the Tajik government were eager to cultivate relations with Iran (Atkin, 1994; Mesbahi, 1995). These shared backgrounds proved to be the critical source of a sense of national unity and nationalism. They served as the common ground for both parties, especially after the IRPT later moderated its religious aspirations and both parties moved to mend the divisions to achieve a settlement.

The rise of Tajik nationalism was certainly bolstered by the ethnic makeup of the country. In spite of its multiethnic character, Tajikistan was indeed "land of Tajiks" with Tajiks accounting for about 60 percent of the population as of 1989. And after the collapse of the Soviet Union, it actually began to follow the path toward a "progressively mono-ethnic" state due to the emigration of non-Tajiks (particularly Russians), to the point that the share of Tajiks reached about 80 percent in 2000 (Abdullaev & Akbarzadeh, 2010, pp. 5-7). To be sure, as will be discussed in the next section, the Tajiks were divided along regional lines and were engulfed in the fierce and brutal fighting against one another. Yet it should be equally stressed that, propelled by a growing sense of national unity, the Tajiks were eventually brought to a negotiated settlement in a relatively swift manner, as compared to some lengthy civil wars. (In passing, the role of the Uzbeks, the largest minority (about 15 percent in 2000), cannot be neglected, especially in the light of their military contribution to the government side in the early phase of the civil war.)

In sum, despite the presence of differences and polarization, as well as the intensity of violence between the conflict parties, there were some robust elements of commonality and bonds in Tajik society as a whole. The Tajiks' common identity drew on the shared historical, linguistic, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds, to the extent that a renewed sense of nationalism and national unity began to emerge rather quickly and spontaneously with the end of the Soviet era, and then continued to grow, even in the midst of the civil war. Importantly, the majority of the Tajiks endorsed secular politics and practiced Sunni Hanafism. With reference to Tajikistan (and Nepal and Somalia as well), Svensson (2012, p. 211) argued that "in conflicts where the religious identities are shared by the contestants, the religious regulations tend to be 'inclusive of the entire population,' since there is no way to separate distinguished constituencies." In fact, the IRPT never pursued a secessionist alternative, even though it had footholds in the particular regions of the country (which will be discussed in the next section). And over the course of the conflict, the IRPT toned down its radical Islamic agenda and came to accept becoming part of the extant secular political system, trying to align itself with the rising tide of nationalism and the continued dominance of secularism in politics.

Ultimately, the Tajik parties saw their struggle as a conflict over the governance of Tajikistan's state in its entirety, as opposed to a specific tract of its territory. Their initial unilateral alternatives were of course an outright victory over the opponent. Falling short, their negotiated outcome was premised on some form of joint governance; the division of the

population and territory was not seriously contemplated by either side. In the Tajik civil war, the parties were bound by the idea of maintaining a single Tajik state, and the point of contention was how to govern the entire state.

Low Salience of Religion and Negotiability

Against the backdrop of dominant secular tendencies in Tajik politics, it was challenging for the IRPT to firmly keep its religious aspirations, and maintain broad popular support. The IRPT initially attempted to portray itself as an adherent of political Islam, challenging “both the corrupt and conformist ‘official’ Islam and the passive, ignorant, and narrow-minded people’s Islam” (Abdullaev & Akbarzadeh, 2010, p. 179; emphasis in original). The IRPT made an attempt at what Toft (2007) described as “religious outbidding,” in which “embattled political elites will tender religious bids when they calculate that increasing their religious legitimacy will strengthen their chances of survival.” But eventually, the attempt was unsustainable and unsuccessful, as the religious distinction they tried to highlight did not sink in among the Tajik Muslims at large, rather becoming less blurred than they initially tried to depict. At the very early stage of the war, the IRPT leaders advocated the establishment of an Islamic regime, but quickly relented and stated clearly that although they regarded the creation of an Islamic state in the country as an ultimate goal, they would need to wait indefinitely for its realization (Atkin, 1995; Mesbahi, 1997, p. 143). Given that the process of religious outbidding is one of the factors conducive to the centrality of religious dimensions in a conflict and its radicalization (e.g., Svensson, 2018, p. 53), the IRPT’s setback on this front reflected the low salience of religion in the Tajik conflict.

The IRPT’s moderate religious agenda sat rather comfortably with the other demands raised by secular opposition parties and movements, enabling them to collaborate in pursuing the struggle against the Tajik government. An early indication of this was seen in May 1992, when the IRPT was part of the short-lived coalition government, established in the lead-up to the full-scale civil war. And in 1993-1994, the IRPT joined with other opposition parties and movements including secular ones, and eventually formed the United Tajik Opposition (UTO), which was to serve as an umbrella organization in negotiations with the government. The IRPT was a core participant and a main provider of armed fighters in the UTO, with Said Abdullo Nuri, the leader of the Tajik Islamists, acting as its head (Iji, 2020, pp. 35-37). It is because of this Islamist-secular alliance that the religious dimensions of the Tajik conflict are considered to be of low salience in the RELAC data. Importantly, the UTO kept functioning as a negotiating entity for the opposition side, despite recurrent crises and stalemates in negotiations, until the signing of a peace agreement in June 1997. (It even continued to exist for a couple of years afterwards.) How were the Islamists and secularists able to sustain their working relationship without suffering

the conceivable problem of ideological and psychological incompatibility to the degree of causing a breakup of the alliance? It was partly because of the unique combination of two features of society in Tajikistan, mentioned in the previous section: the longstanding tradition of secularism in politics, coupled with the widespread adherence to Sunni Islamism. These elements were broadly shared by the society as a whole; that is, across different political groups.

There is no denying that the UTO was a mixed bag of heterogeneous groups. Among others, the *Rastokhez* (Renaissance) Movement called for revival of traditional Tajik culture, language, and traditions. The Democratic Party of Tajikistan (DPT) wanted to see the Tajik state democratized and modernized. As a regional organization of Gorno-Badakhshon, *La'li Badakhshon* (The Ruby of Badakhshon) sought to promote the region's economic and social development and its political autonomy. These diverse groups were brought together in the pursuit of broad and elusive ideas, such as democratization and political reforms, economic liberalization, and religious freedom and closer relations with the Islamic world (Atkin, 1995, 1997c; Mesbahi, 1997, p. 143). Akiner even characterized the Islamic-democratic coalition as a whole as an "alliance of convenience" (2001, p. 35). Apart from the absence of grave psychological incompatibility as mentioned above, what specific interests kept these Islamist and secular groups united in the form of the board coalition? Clues are provided by Abdullaev and Akbarzadeh:

After peace was concluded, in 1999 the IRPT was legally recognized and included in politics. Since that time, Islamism in Tajikistan has fused with *nationalism*. The *political objectives* of various (secular) political groups have merged with Islamic (religious) concerns. This tendency had emerged in the course of the civil war. In 1993-1994, the political movement of Ismaili Pamiris, *La'li Badakhshon*, joined the Sunni IRPT to form the UTO under the banner of a unified Tajik *nationalism* (Abdullaev & Akbarzadeh, 2010, p. 180; emphases added).

There are two interrelated points that need to be emphasized. First, as has been discussed earlier, Islamism was combined with nationalism. Interestingly, a sense of nationalism worked as a factor for bringing together the Sunni IRPT and the *La'li Badakhshon*, a regional organization of Gorno-Badakhshon populated by Ismailis, Shia Muslims. This was indicative of the absence of serious religious outbidding between the two groups with different religious traditions and also of the fact that a nationalist sentiment was indeed a cohesive force bringing together these and other secular groups such as the DPT, in a polarized and disintegrating state.

The second point is that a growing sense of nationalism was not merely a romantic idea; it was amalgamated with shared political objectives. Fundamentally, given that a religious dimension was of low salience in the Tajik conflict, it is natural to ask what non-religious issue was the central point of incompatibility between the government and the opposition. It is then logical to assume that the Tajik Islamists and their secular partners, in jointly opposing the

government, shared some critical political goal over this non-religious issue. What common political objectives lay behind their calls for democratization, economic reforms, and other changes? What non-religious dimensions were at the heart of the Tajik conflict?

Conflict Among Regions

According to most expert accounts of the Tajik civil war (e.g., Roy, 1993, 1998b), the principal cause of the conflict was deep-rooted localism; it was in essence a clash between local groups rather than ideological camps. The Tajik government was basically composed of the regional elite from the Leninabad (now Sughd) region in the north and the southern region of Kulob. (The latter is a native region of President Emomali Rahmon.) In contrast, the opposition groups drew support from the southern regions of Gharm, Qurghonteppa, and Gorno-Badakhshon. In this polarization along the regional lines, individuals' political allegiances were not so much dictated by their ideological and religious beliefs as by their geographic origin. In other words, religion and ideology only assumed secondary importance in the Tajik conflict; a sense of belonging to a region of origin is a dominant identity marker. In actuality, Islamists were on the sides of both the opposition and the government, depending on their regional affiliations. Being from Gharm, Hoji Akbar Turajonzoda, the chief Muslim cleric of the Soviet-designated official religious administration (mentioned in the previous section) was on the side of the opposition and served as a chief opposition negotiator during the inter-Tajik negotiations. On the other hand, being from Kulob, Haidar Sharifzoda joined the side of the government and was often called the "Red Mullah of Kulob" (Roy, 1993, 1998b).

Conversely, this meant that leaders from the same region would never share the same ideological or religious cause. For instance, the Gharm region was not exclusively Islamist; it also produced secular leaders such as Shodmon Yusuf, who was formerly an *apparatchik* of the Soviet academic establishment and became chair of the DPT. Under these circumstances, it was inconceivable that Islam would serve as the foundation for the demand for autonomy of a particular region, let alone its secession and independence.

How did regionalism (or localism) emerge and eventually become the primary faultline of the violent conflict in Tajikistan? Regionalism in Tajikistan was related to the country's structural and topographical features. When the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic was created in 1929, its border (which has remained the same) was demarcated so that Bukhara and Samarqand, two major centers of Tajik culture and history, were incorporated into neighboring Uzbekistan. In addition, the new Tajik Republic contained many ethnic minorities and left a large portion of the world's Tajik population outside the country's borders (Akiner, 2001, pp. 13-15; Niyazi, 1994, pp. 164-168). Further, high mountains separate one region from another and render communication between them cumbersome (Akiner, 2001, pp. 5-6; Niyazi, 1998, pp. 146-154).

Besides these physical characteristics, the government policies during the Soviet period were also responsible for Tajikistan's rigid regionalism, causing disparities among regions in terms of

the access to political power and the levels of economic development. As a consequence, patron-client networks emerged on a regional basis, and regions began to vie for political power and economic resources. Leninabad was most closely linked to Moscow, and the Leninabadi elite received favorable treatment in the Tajik Communist Party's personnel policy. This allowed them to establish a monopoly on the political and administrative power of the state (see, e.g., Rubin, 1998). Leninabad was also prioritized in the realm of industrial policies and flourished because of its economic ties with the rest of the Soviet Union and beyond, while other regions lacked investment and remained underdeveloped (Gretsky, 1995b; Niyazi, 1998, pp. 146-154).

Here, the effects of the agricultural collectivization policy should also be considered. When immigrants from Gharm and Kulob were resettled in the newly irrigated areas of Qurghonteppa between the 1920s and 1950s, both communities maintained a strong sense of attachment to their respective regions of origin. They found a focal point of solidarity in *Kolkhozes* (collective farms) organized along regional lines and engaged in power struggles (Atkin, 1997c, p. 294; Heathershaw, 2009, pp. 21-22; Roy, 1998b, p. 139).

Power struggles among the different regions reached a new level of intensity in the mid-1980s when the Soviet regime underwent reforms and its control over Tajikistan's state apparatus was weakened. The IRPT and other opposition groups, with support from underprivileged regions, then began to mobilize the masses and vocally oppose the Communist government. In response, government elites from Leninabad entered into an alliance with Kulob, which was able to provide military might through a region-wide militia known as the Popular Front. Tajikistan's economy, the weakest of all the Soviet republics, was highly dependent on subsidies from Moscow and came under considerable strain from the fallout of the collapse of the Soviet's centralized, planned economy. Regions became embroiled in the struggle for scarce resources such as water, land, housing, and employment (Akiner, 2001, pp. 25-27, 35-39). All these elements put strain on the weak governance structure of the Tajik state, led to the deterioration of law and order, and ultimately threw the country into a virtually anarchical situation and full-scale civil war (Lynch, 2001, pp. 49-55).

From Religious Conflict to Struggle Over Power

Although Tajikistan was afflicted by the sheer degree of polarization and fragmentation along regional lines, there was no serious attempt at separatist alternatives. Neither the IRPT and other opposition parties nor the Tajik government seriously questioned the idea of Tajikistan's single statehood. As seen earlier, the Tajik parties were in dispute over how to govern the existing state in its entirety. More precisely, different regions competed for governmental power and accompanying economic resources within the boundary of the Tajik state, the integrity of which was rather taken for granted. The IRPT and its secular partners demanded the reallocation of more power and resources to their own regions, kept underrepresented and underdeveloped in the Soviet era. The government elites, for their part, were keen on retaining

a monopolistic role in Tajikistan's political and economic life. (There was also an internal power struggle within the government, in which the Kulobi elites increasingly gained an upper hand over the Leninabadi elites (Iji, 2020, pp. 97-99).)

Thus, the Tajik parties fought over not so much religion as non-religious resources. Generally speaking, religious disputes are hard to settle through negotiation. When the parties perceive they are engaged in conflict over religious beliefs or anything sacred, they may find there is little room for bargaining and compromise. Internal armed conflicts with religious dimensions are less amenable to a negotiated settlement (Svensson, 2012, pp. 70-71; 2018, pp. 5-6). With respect to the adverse effect of religious incompatibilities on the likelihood of negotiated settlement, as Svensson argues, parties may perceive that the conflicting issues are indivisible and lacking substitutes, and consequently that achieving outright victory or continuing fighting is the only tenable option (Svensson, 2007; 2012, pp. 68-69). Svensson writes:

When (at least) one side explicitly anchors its demands in religious convictions and beliefs, the subjective value of the contested territory or control of the government of the state is substantially increased. There is only one constitution in a state, which can either be secular or religious, but not both simultaneously (Svensson, 2007, p. 934).

To be sure, such perception of indivisibility overshadowed the interactions between the Tajik parties, particularly at the early stage of conflict (i.e., 1992-1993). They saw the conflict from a zero-sum mindset, finding that making any concessions in negotiation was not an acceptable course of action. (Or at least, both sides may well have judged that the other side was wholly bent on achieving total victory in pursuit of respective unilateral goals, without any interest in negotiation and compromise.) Government elites, out of their own fear, continued to treat the IRPT as "Islamic fundamentalists" seeking to supplant the secular regime and establish an Islamic state. The response was also aimed at arousing fear among ordinary people and mobilizing their support for the cause of maintaining the status quo.

On the other hand, the IRPT had its own perception of indivisibility as to its religious aspirations. But that perception was relativized and apparently diluted when the IRPT opted to enter the alliance with secular parties that did not share the same religious aspirations. As discussed above, the IRPT became increasingly driven by the other agendas that it had in common with the secular partners, such as the call for national unity and the redistribution of power and resources to the outlying regions. To increase its bargaining power in dealing with the government was clearly part and parcel of the IRPT's calculations in aligning itself with other opposition groups. And once the UN-mediated negotiations got started, senior IRPT leaders acted as chief negotiators for the UTO; Turajonzoda led the opposition delegation at successive rounds of negotiations held in the territories of the observer states, including Russia, Iran, and other Central Asian states. Nuri personally intervened on the occasion of summit

meetings with Rahmon at critical junctures. In their capacity as negotiators, the IRPT leaders were apparently compelled to prioritize strategic and realistic calculations and thereby to reduce the religious tone and largely set aside its perception of indivisibility over religious claims. No less important, interactions in a diplomatic setting with international mediators sent by the UN and governments of the observer states may well have reinforced the IRPT’s shift from a religious insurgent to a negotiating actor.

Still, the problem of indivisibility lingered and came to the surface, notably in the parties’ contestation over a new constitution that would determine the basic character of an independent state of Tajikistan. In November 1994, the Tajik government adopted the constitution stipulating that Tajikistan is a secular state, by a referendum without the participation of the UTO. (The presidential election that elected Rahmon was conducted at the same time, excluding the UTO.) In reaction to these governmental moves aimed at consolidating the regime, the UTO charged that the Tajik government contradicted the agreement (reached in April that year at the first round of UN-sponsored negotiations) to the effect that work on the new constitution should be conducted with all parties participating only after a political settlement had been achieved (Iji, 2020, pp. 47-52).

In the course of the negotiations with the government, the IRPT, while retaining its religious agenda, shifted the primary goal of its struggle from religion to power. Gaining a share of governmental power remained the central concern for the IRPT up to the end of the negotiation process. Power is indeed divisible, in contrast to religious beliefs. The issue of power sharing is more amenable to a negotiated settlement than religious issues. The low salience of religion—indeed, lowering over time—in the Tajik conflict is thought to indicate the likelihood of its negotiated settlement. But it took some time before the Tajik parties began to feel that their conflict may indeed not be zero-sum and an agreement could be reached with the opponent through negotiation. In the successive rounds of negotiations, the opposition delegation headed by Turajonzoda kept calling for the formation of a transnational coalition government with legislative and executive powers. (The proposed power-sharing body carried different names at different points, such as a council of national accord and a council of national reconciliation.) Until the end of 1995, the Tajik government was adamant in insisting that it was the only legitimate form of government, and the establishment of a joint power-sharing body of that kind would be unconstitutional (Iji, 2020, pp. 44-59). Never did the parties come to seriously negotiate the sticky issue of power sharing before they felt the strong need for an exit from their conflict.

In Zartman’s well-known conceptual formulation, that moment is thought to come when both parties find themselves in a “mutually hurting stalemate” and the conflict becomes “ripe for resolution” (Zartman, 1989, 2000). The Tajik conflict became ripe in 1996. By that point, the two sides had lost confidence in their respective unilateral alternatives of military victory and shifted toward a joint alternative of a negotiated and compromised solution. The Tajik government had never been able to annihilate the UTO and was now also preoccupied with internal challenges

from discontented non-Kulobi factions. The UTO, for its part, achieved some military advances and annoyed the regime, but it was devoid of the strength to replace it (Hay, 2001, p. 39; Jonson, 1998, pp. 26-27; Lynch, 2001, p. 51). The disturbing effects of the rise of the Taliban in neighboring Afghanistan also compounded both sides' dilemmas. The IRPT found it increasingly difficult to maintain a military alternative, hampered by its narrowing breathing space in northern Afghanistan and decreasing support from Rabbani and Masud, now patrons in their own crisis. No less important was the declining support for the jihadist cause among the Tajik people.

Up to that point, the Rahmon government had not seen the UTO as a partner with which to share power, but its policy apparently started to change in early 1996. Once serious negotiations over how to divide and share power were initiated, they centered around the two main institutions of power: the existing government and the new power-sharing body. There were some interrelated sticking points between the sides. The first point was the exact nature of the new body's power; whether it would be merely consultative or more substantial. This was inevitably linked to the second point: relations between the existing government and the new body. Was the new body to replace the existing government, and would it become tantamount to a transitional coalition government? Alternatively, would the incumbent government continue to exist and if so, which would become more powerful? Would the UTO leaders be allowed to join the Rahmon government, and to what extent? The last (but not least important) point was the composition of the new body itself; a percentage split between the two "warring" sides and also whether to include other parties not involved in fighting (notably the elites from Leninabad) (Iji, 2020, pp. 59-74). Again, all these issues of power were divisible and negotiable. And in dealing with all these aspects of power sharing, the parties were in effect negotiating redistribution of power and resources along regional lines, representing the interests of respective regional footholds. Therefore, in some quarters related to transnational jihadism, the IRPT was castigated as having "relinquished the Islamic identity of the Tajikistani cause and ... turned it into merely a dispute over power between the opposition and the government" (cited in Abdullaev & Akbarzadeh, 2010, p. 180).

The major breakthrough in reaching agreement on these power-sharing issues was the two summit meetings between Rahmon and Nuri in December 1996. A new body named the Commission on National Reconciliation (CNR) was to assume a variety of functions, such as proposing changes to the constitution, drafting a new electoral law, and suggesting the timing of parliamentary elections to be held under international supervision. But it was not a transitional coalition government with supreme legislative and executive powers that the opposition had looked for. Rather, it was merely intended as a mechanism to facilitate implementation of the agreements during the designated transition period and indeed to do so together with the president. This meant that the Rahmon government would continue to exist and stay in power, although it was agreed that a portion of opposition representatives would be incorporated into it. In yet another face-to-face meeting in February 1997, the two leaders further agreed that the

UTO would be granted 30 percent of executive branch posts and also that the CNR would be composed of equivalent numbers of government and UTO representatives, leaving no seats for other Tajik parties (Iji, 2020, pp. 65-69; UN, 1996, 1997a). The agreement was the result of significant mutual compromises by both sides. From the standpoint of the government which had sought to confine this joint body to purely consultative status, the power given to the CNR was substantial and appeared too large. For the Islamists and other opposition leaders, the CNR's power was clearly less than what their vision of a genuine coalition government would have acquired.

These power-sharing arrangements were predicated on the notion that the IRPT, together with other opposition parties, would become legalized and participate in Tajikistan's secular political system. The government insisted that in order to become its legitimate contender, the IRPT would need to operate within the country's constitutional and legal framework. The IRPT instead wanted to ensure that it would be a viable actor in normal politics after renouncing its military means of struggle. Rahmon and Nuri reached agreement on this critical aspect in May 1997, one month before the signing of a final peace agreement that marked the end of the negotiation process (Iji, 2020, p. 72; UN, 1997b).

Constraints of Religious Appeals and Power Asymmetry

The major, frequent feature of internal conflict is asymmetrical power relations between the government and the insurgency; the former is stronger than the latter. The insurgents often seek to compensate for their inherent weakness by soliciting support from external actors (Zartman, 1995, pp. 7-12). While this tendency is seen with regard to insurgency in general, religious organizations have unique grounds for soliciting external support. The IRPT received support from neighboring Muslim states, notably Iran. Such support was of course motivated by the sympathy for the Islamist cause pursued by the IRPT. Fundamentally, religions have constituencies and appeals that go beyond the boundaries of nation-states, and the transnational feature of religion is one of the major explanatory factors for the growth of jihadist groups in civil wars (Svensson, 2018, p. 15). To be sure, Tajik Islamists were successful to some extent in capitalizing on the religious appeals of Islam and obtaining moral and diplomatic support. But in terms of both state and transnational (nonstate) channels, they faced constraints (in part, as a result of their own preferences) in garnering more tangible support for the armed struggle. This put a curb on their capability to mobilize for militancy and to overcome its inferior position vis-à-vis the secular government. In contrast, the Tajik government enjoyed the patronage and consistent support of Russia which viewed the country as its backyard in their "near abroad" (Iji, 2020, p. 94).

This asymmetric reach for external support (in addition to intrinsic power asymmetry to

being with) was already clear from the early stage of the conflict. Interventions by Russian (and Uzbek) forces was a critical factor for tipping the military balance in favor of the pro-Communist elite and installing a Rahmon government in Dushanbe in November 1992. Russia remained firmly committed to supporting the new government, almost monopolized by Communist party members of Kulobi and Leninabadi origin. When the Tajik government held a presidential election and referendum in November 1994 and parliamentary elections in February 1995, Moscow backed these attempts despite strong objections from the Tajik opposition (and the international community), enabling Dushanbe to strengthen its power and legitimacy (Atkin, 1997c, p. 303; Gretskey, 1995c, pp. 249-250). At any rate, Moscow's patronage was indispensable to the survival of the Rahmon regime. Security and order in Tajikistan, especially along the vulnerable Tajik-Afghan border, were barely maintained with the presence of the Russian military (namely, the 201st Motorized Rifle Division and Border Troops). Further, Tajikistan's economy was entirely dependent on aid and subsidies flowing from Moscow. In effect, Tajikistan was a Russian "protectorate" (Gretskey, 1995c, p. 245; see also Rubin, 1993, p. 73). It should be noted that the opposition leaders also recognized the importance of Russia for Tajikistan (e.g., Mesbahi, 1995, p. 136).

With Tajik society and politics dominated by Russian influence, how did Iran and other Muslim neighbors react to the conflict in Tajikistan and support the IRPT? Iran was the chief external patron and sympathizer for the IRPT. As the only Persian-speaking country in Central Asia, Tajikistan shares a common cultural and historical heritage with Iran. Thus, for Iran, Tajikistan is an essential foothold in Central Asia (Mesbahi, 1997, pp. 141-142). Iran apparently had high hopes in May 1992 when the coalition government was instituted in response to the demand by the Islamist-Democrat opposition coalition. By the time the neo-Communists returned to power in Dushanbe in November, Tehran quickly reassessed its policy toward Tajikistan, and in 1993 began to advocate a political solution to the conflict. Iran's accommodating and pragmatic stance was due to its judgement that there was little prospect of Tajikistan becoming an exclusively Islamic state. Behind this were at least three main assessments on the part of the Iranians. The first point is that the firm knowledge and foundations in Islam necessary for heading in that direction were lacking in Tajik society (Akiner, 2001, p. 49; Gretskey, 1995a, p. 17; Mesbahi, 1997, pp. 142-149). The second point, sectarian in nature, is that the Iranian Shia model of the Islamic political system would not be feasible in Tajikistan where, except for the Ismailis, the majority of Muslims are Sunni (Akiner, 2001, p. 49; Mesbahi, 1995, pp. 119-120; 1997, p. 142). Indeed, this has been recognized by some Tajik leaders (Atkin, 1994, pp. 99-100). The third point is that it was not so much an ideological or religious conflict between Islamists and neo-Communists as a conflict among different regions, particularly the Gharmis and the Kulobis (Mesbahi, 1995, p. 126; Roy, 1998a).

All these points—indeed, touched upon in the previous sections—were fully and correctly recognized by Iran, and put constraints on Iran's commitment to help the IRPT achieve a

victory in the conflict in spite of its military advances. Iran denied extending military assistance to the Tajik opposition, despite some indication of the covert provision of such support (Akiner, 2001, p. 50). Furthermore, Iran was even hesitant to extend political and ideological support to the Islamic opposition (Mesbahi, 1995, p. 127). Rather, Tehran attached great importance to the cultural ties between the two countries and was keen on developing and maintaining relations with the Tajik government (Akiner, 2001, p. 49; Mesbahi, 1995, pp. 121-123).

At the same time, Iran had a lukewarm attitude toward the IRPT because it placed the utmost priority on maintaining its relations with Russia in view of the international political environment. In pursuing their "Russian-centric policy" in Central Asia and the Caucasus, the Iranians recognized the primacy of Russian influence and interests in Tajikistan. From an Iranian standpoint, the maintenance of good relations with Russia assumed more importance than the creation of an Islamic state in Tajikistan. In fact, Moscow and Tehran had been building closer ties not only through the sales of arms but also via cooperation in nuclear projects and Caspian Sea energy exploration (Herzig, 1995, p. 9; Mesbahi, 1995, pp. 114-115). Iran never wanted to risk its relations with Russia by supporting the IRPT too aggressively (Atkin, 1997a, p. 200; Gretskey, 1995a, pp. 17-18; Mesbahi, 1995, pp. 114-115). Instead, Iran chose to facilitate a negotiated settlement of the conflict, in what may be seen as a "policy of positive engagement with both sides" or a "delicate balancing act" (Akiner, 2001, p. 50). In assuming such a role, Iran aimed to highlight the significance of its part in molding the future of Tajikistan, and of Central Asia and the Caucasus as a whole, to increase its regional prestige and leverage (Mesbahi, 1995, p. 118). More broadly at the global level, Russia and Iran apparently had a common interest in keeping such outside actors as the US, Turkey, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the Taliban out of Tajikistan (Abdullaev & Barnes, 2001, p. 92; Atkin, 1997a, p. 200; Hay, 2001, p. 39).

Here, the involvement of Pakistan, another Muslim neighbor and a possible source of support for the IRPT, should also be considered. Pakistan regarded the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989 as the beginning of a decrease of Russian influence in Central Asia and was discontented with the continuation of Russia's dominant political and military presence in Tajikistan (Abdullaev & Barnes, 2001, p. 93; Djalili & Grare, 1998, p. 125; Roy, 1999, pp. 7-8). Pakistan harbored great strategic, economic, and religious ambitions in Central Asia and was successful in advancing these interests in Tajikistan to some degree (Amin, 1994, pp. 218-220; Hyman, 1994, pp. 86-87).

Nonetheless, it turned out that Pakistan had less substantial involvement in the Tajik civil war (and its negotiations) and that its support for (and its influence on) the IRPT was rather limited. To be sure, Pakistan, like Iran, was a major foreign supporter of the opposition. Its assistance to the Tajik Muslims ranged from providing religious training to refugee children to extending financial aid through Islamic organizations (Zviagelskaya, 1997, p. 14). Moreover, Pakistan allegedly provided covert military aid to the Tajik opposition through both governmental and nongovernmental channels (Abdullaev & Barnes, 2001, p. 93; Gretskey, 1995a, p. 16). Importantly,

the involvement of Pakistan in this region should be viewed against that of Iran. These two countries had been rivals not only in a religious sense (Sunni versus Shia) but also in an economic contest for the provision of Central Asia's access to the sea (Djalili & Grare, 1998, p. 126; Roy, 1998a).

However, cooperation between Pakistan and the IRPT never went far due to differences over the conflict in neighboring Afghanistan. After the withdrawal of the Soviet Union, as part of the "strategic depth" policy, Islamabad provided systematic support to the predominantly Pushtun radical Islamist Hizb-i Islami (headed by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar) and later sided with the Taliban, which was also primarily Pushtun (Djalili & Grare, 1998, pp. 122-126). Such Pakistani position was out of step with the IRPT's alliance with the predominantly Tajik Jami'at-i Islami (led by Burhanuddin Rabbani and Ahmed Shah Masud, both ethnic Tajiks). Indeed, Tajik Islamists received arms, training, and some combat support from mutually hostile mujahideen factions. While the IRPT allegedly had an initial connection with Hekmatyar, it came to develop its closest relations with the Tajik-dominated factions led by Rabbani and Masud (Atkin, 1997b, p. 620; Roy, 1999, p. 5). In sum, such alignments reflected and further added to the ethnic divide between Pakistan and Tajikistan. As a result, significant constraints were placed on Pakistan's support for the IRPT (and on the former's leverage over the latter).

The Rabbani-Masud faction was a close ally for the Tajik Islamists but its support for the IRPT's military alternative was also contingent on its own strategic calculations. Masud apparently sympathized with the Tajik Islamists in part because he wanted to strengthen his own negotiating position with the Russian and Tajik governments and thereby obtain their support to defeat Hekmatyar (Djalili & Grare, 1998, p. 122). In the face of the Taliban's advances, Rabbani and Masud established "working relations" with Moscow and Dushanbe and became increasingly dependent on these secular governments. Becoming hopeful for stability in neighboring Tajikistan, they decreased their commitment to assist the IRPT in pursuing a military alternative (Hay, 2001, p. 39; Roy, 1998a). As the Tajik Islamists stood to lose essential operational bases in northern Afghanistan, now under siege by the Taliban, Rabbani and Masud acted as important mediators at the Rahmon-Nuri summit in early December 1996, convincing the Tajik leaders into agreement (Iji, 2020, p. 64).

In sum, religious factors—sympathy and ties based on the Islamist cause—are inseparably intermingled with political, strategic, and economic factors in the complex web of international relations. Tajikistan's Muslim neighbors were part of such relationships in the evolving regional and international environment, and they responded to the civil war in Tajikistan based on their respective cost-benefit calculations. For one thing, the preponderance of Russian influence in Tajikistan and Central Asia weighed heavily on the policies of the IRPT's friends and allies for the Islamist cause. Russia had retreated from a superpower status but remained a great regional power, and perceived Tajikistan as falling squarely within its traditional sphere of influence, which it would never allow other outside powers to infiltrate. In extending support to the Tajik

Islamists, these Muslim neighbors, however sympathetic to their religious cause, were not able to ignore Russia's interests—critical in the eyes of Russian policymakers. These geopolitical conditions constrained the policies of Muslim neighbors like Iran, Pakistan, and Afghan factions toward the Tajik Islamists.

Moreover, as has been discussed earlier, the low salience of religious dimensions of the Tajik conflict may well have worked against the IRPT's ability to solicit external support drawing on religious appeals. The conflict was actually religiously defined to a lesser degree than it looked on the surface; it was fought for material resources and power along regional lines. That Iran and other neighboring states apparently discerned this fundamental nature of the conflict also constrained the hands of the IRPT in obtaining external support based on religious sympathy and affinity.

Limited Transnational Ties

In view of the transnational nature of religion in general and the rise of transnational jihadism in particular, possible sources of support for Tajik Islamists were not confined to other Muslim states. In recent decades, the potency of nonstate, transnational support for Islamist rebellion has been epitomized by Salafi-Jihadi groups. Toft and Zhukov (2015) have argued that, based on the case study of the North Caucasus, particularly Chechnya, Salafi-Jihadis pose a significant challenge to governments, mainly because they can count on considerable support from transnational networks and foreign fighters (as compared to secular nationalists, for example). This was not the case with the Tajik Islamists. As reported by Abdullaev and Akbarzadeh (2010, p. 313), Salafism itself had not taken root among Tajik Sunni Hanafi Muslims. In fact, most of them strongly opposed Salafism, regarding it as "hostile to local views" and called it "Wahhabism" to connote its foreign origin. They perceived that it would threaten the integrity of religious identity in Tajikistan. (Salafism was outlawed in Tajikistan in 2009.) Salafists, for their part, denied Hanafi traditions and Shiism, and objected to the IRPT on the ground that there should not exist a political party in Islam (Abdullaev & Akbarzadeh, 2010, p. 313).

In these circumstances, it seems fair to say that the IRPT's connection to the transnational jihadist networks was more or less confined to the one through collaboration with the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). The IMU had its own radical agenda of overthrowing the Uzbek government by force and establishing an Islamic state in Central Asia. It was also well connected with al-Qaeda and the Taliban and was an active part of the transnational network involved in illegal trafficking and terrorism. Escaping from a crackdown, IMU activists found a sanctuary in the part of the Gharm region under the UTO's control, from where they fought alongside Tajik Islamists. Yet "religious coalition of Uzbek and Tajik Islamists" came to an end, as Tajik Islamists moved to conclude a peace agreement with the government "in favor of ethnic nationalism" and began to assume the role of a legalized participant in Tajikistan's post-conflict politics. Importantly, the shared fear and antipathy toward the Pushtun-dominated

Taliban, which culminated in its takeover of Kabul in September 1996, played a critical role in bringing the Tajik government and the UTO toward agreement. Instead, the IMU was excluded from participation in Uzbek politics, and lost its sanctuary in Tajikistan; this led the IMU to tilt toward the network of al-Qaeda and the Taliban (Abdullaev & Akbarzadeh, 2010, pp. 29-30, 181).

Viewed in this light, Tajik and Uzbek Islamists followed contrasting paths. The IMU continued to attract many radical, disenchanted members of the IRPT who saw the agreement with the Tajik government as a “sellout” (Abdullaev & Akbarzadeh, 2010, p. 181; see also ICG, 2001, p. 6). The IMU, for its part, apparently held the view that the IRPT’s approach was not Islamist (ICG, 2001, p. 6). On the other hand, most Tajik Islamists view the IMU as an “illegitimate Islamic force” because of its denials of Central Asian traditions and culture as well as its dependence on foreign sources (Abdullaev & Akbarzadeh, 2010, p. 182).

The limited scope of the IRPT’s links and collaboration with transnational Islamist and jihadist actors reflected the basic character of its aspirations and the low salience of religion within them. The IRPT never harbored the kind of religious claims or demands that would be described as *transnational Islamist* in terms of the RELAC data, which transcend the boundaries of the nation-states in an attempt to create a caliphate across national borders (Svensson & Nilsson, 2018, p. 1134). (Again, the other two kinds are territorial (separatist) and revolutionary (government).) As has been seen, the IRPT’s concerns and agenda were not transnationalist but nationalist. Its version of Islamism was closely intertwined with nationalism, which was instrumental in bringing about its partnership with secular opposition parties in the struggle for the government, and ultimately in realizing the agreement with the government to end the war. For the IRPT (and its opponent), the Tajik civil war was a conflict over the government of the Tajik state; its main concern was over how to upgrade the role of Islam in domestic governance in Tajikistan (i.e., revolutionary in the dataset’s terminology). Neither had the IRPT the separatist agenda. It defined its own struggle as the one over the Tajik state as the unitary and self-contained unit of governance. Given these basic parameters, the religious dimensions were only part of the Tajik Islamists’ aspirations, and its important demand was rather reallocation of political and economic resources to its regional footholds. This fundamental outlook held by the Tajik Islamists kept them from fully exploiting the transnational jihadist networks as possible sources of support for its insurgency, as some Islamist armed groups seek to do.

Overall, there were limitations on the amount and scope of support that the Tajik Islamists secured from neighboring Muslim states and the transnationalist jihadist networks. This stood in marked contrast to the committed and sustained support of Russia enjoyed by the Tajik government. The result was a further sharpening of power asymmetry inherent between the government and the insurgency, which was reflected in the negotiated outcome based on power-sharing arrangements, not on an equal footing, but weighted in favor of the government side. What the IRPT ultimately obtained in June 1997 as part of a final peace agreement was to be allowed to act as a political actor in the secular state, granted a small share of power in the

secular government. In the light of post-conflict developments in Tajik politics, this turned out to be a hard-won but transient prize for Tajik Islamists and other opposition groups.

Conclusion

Considering the frequent difficulty in settling, through negotiation, internal armed conflicts involving Islamist armed groups, the case of the civil war in Tajikistan merits special attention. As a result of the 1997 peace agreement, the IRPT was given the chance to become legalized and participate in the secular political system, while its representatives were given some posts in the government in line with the agreed power-sharing quota. The present article has been an attempt to provide explanations for this noteworthy outcome by focusing on the involvement of the Tajik Islamists in the war and negotiations from the three interrelated angles.

First, the article began by asking why the IRPT-led UTO and the government, in spite of stark differences, were able to continue to negotiate and eventually agree on such a joint and inclusive form of future governance premised on the idea of retaining a single statehood, rather than pursuing separatist alternatives that would entail division of population and territory. The article argues that it was mainly because, regardless of polarization and fragmentation that led to vicious violence, there were many shared elements in Tajik society which worked as common ground for the parties to build on when reaching agreements in the course of negotiations. More than being torn apart by the cleavages along the regional lines that aggravated the conflict, the conflicting parties were bound together by multiple overlapping, interconnected sources of common identity. These elements of commonality, shaped by the country's past and notably its experience during the Soviet era, included the unique coexistence of the tradition of secular politics and the prevalent adherence to Sunni Hanafism, a growing sense of nationalism and national unity at the time of transition to an independent state, and a substantial degree of ethnic homogeneity. Importantly, the presence of these elements had an inevitable effect on the IRPT's strategies and aims; it led the Tajik Islamists to moderate their initial religious claims and ultimately accept the fate of working in the secular political system in order to achieve a negotiated settlement of the conflict.

Second, the article proceeded to demonstrate how the Tajik civil war was not merely a conflict over religion and ideology, but also over the intensifying competition for power and resources among the regions of the Tajik state. The latter aspect came to gain more priority over time in the IRPT's concerns, contributing to the low salience of religion in the conflict. The IRPT and its opposition partners were brought together, partly by the shared concern over national unity in the disintegrating state. But at the same time, both Islamists and secularists in the anti-government coalition were united in their non-religious, political goal of bringing more resources and power to the underdeveloped and underrepresented regions from which they

drew support. To this end, once the negotiations got underway under the UN sponsorship in 1994, they became bent on the struggle over power with the incumbent government. The article has emphasized that the issue of power sharing, unhindered by the perception of indivisibility, is likely to be more amenable to a negotiated settlement than religious issues, often encumbered by the same perception. It thus suggests that the Tajik government and the UTO succeeded in reaching agreement on the power-sharing agreements, as the Islamists placed an increasing emphasis on divisible, negotiable issues of power, instead of indivisible, non-negotiable issues of religion and its relation with the state. Yet it was only in 1996 when both parties had lost confidence in the military alternative (jihadist for the Islamists) that they began to seriously negotiate the thorny issue of power sharing. The agreed-upon formula—a product of mutual compromises—centered around providing the IRPT and other opposition groups with a chance to participate in secular politics as well as a small share of power in the existing government.

Finally, in seeking to explain why the Tajik Islamists had to accept such an outcome of their struggle—the continuation of a secular regime as well as power sharing on unequal terms—the article has paid attention to power asymmetry between the Tajik Islamists and the government. In contrast to the Tajik government, which was firmly supported by Russian patronage, the Tajik Islamists had only limited sources of external support based on religious appeals. This was partly due to the low salience of Islamist claims in the Tajik conflict, but more significantly was because the preponderance of Russian interest and influence in Tajikistan (and Central Asia) kept Iran and other neighboring Muslim states from extending intrusive support to the Tajik Islamists. In addition, the access to the transnational jihadist networks was also limited for the IRPT as possible sources of support. For the Tajik Islamists, the main focus of their struggle was nationalist in nature (involving much of the non-religious dimensions) rather than transnationalist, in the sense that their priority was bringing change to the domestic governance of the Tajik state, rather than on the transnational Islamist agenda defying the boundaries of nation-states. In the Tajik case, the religious appeals of Islam did not significantly help the Islamists in their attempt to overcome power asymmetry with the sovereign government.

References

- Abdullaev, K., & Akbarzadeh, S. (2010). *Historical dictionary of Tajikistan* (2nd ed.). Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press.
- Abdullaev, K., & Barnes, C. (Eds.). (2001). *Politics of compromise: The Tajikistan peace process*. London: Conciliation Resources.
- Akiner, S. (2001). *Tajikistan: Disintegration or reconciliation?* London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs.
- Amin, T. (1994). Pakistan, Afghanistan and the Central Asian states. In A. Banuazizi & M. Weiner (Eds.), *The new geopolitics of Central Asia and its borderlands* (pp. 216-231). London: I.B. Tauris.
- Atkin, M. (1994). Tajikistan's relations with Iran and Afghanistan. In A. Banuazizi & M. Weiner (Eds.), *The new*

- geopolitics of Central Asia and its borderlands* (pp. 91-117). London: I.B. Tauris.
- Atkin, M. (1995). Islam as faith, politics, and bogeyman in Tajikistan. In M. Bourdeaux (Ed.), *The politics of religion in Russia and the new states of Eurasia* (pp. 247-272). New York: M.E. Sharpe.
- Atkin, M. (1997a). Tajikistan: A case study for conflict potential. *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review*, 24(3), 175-203. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/187633297X00086
- Atkin, M. (1997b). Tajikistan: Reform, reaction, and civil war. In I. A. Bremmer & R. Taras (Eds.), *New states, new politics: Building the post-Soviet nations* (pp. 602-633). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Atkin, M. (1997c). Thwarted democratization in Tajikistan. In K. Dawisha & B. Parrott (Eds.), *Conflict, cleavage, and change in Central Asia and the Caucasus* (pp. 277-311). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Djalili, M.-R., & Grare, F. (1998). Regional ambitions and interests in Tajikistan: The role of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran. In M. R. Djalili, F. Grare, & S. Akiner (Eds.), *Tajikistan: The trials of independence* (pp. 119-131). London: Curzon.
- Gretsky, S. (1995a). Civil war in Tajikistan and its international repercussions. *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies*, 4(6), 3-24. doi:10.1080/10669929508720063
- Gretsky, S. (1995b). Civil war in Tajikistan: Causes, developments, and prospects for peace. In R. Z. Sagdeev & S. Eisenhower (Eds.), *Central Asia: Conflict, resolution, and change* (pp. 217-247). Chevy Chase, MD: The Center for Political and Strategic Studies.
- Gretsky, S. (1995c). Russia and Tajikistan. In A. Z. Rubinstein & O. M. Smolansky (Eds.), *Regional power rivalries in the New Eurasia: Russia, Turkey, and Iran* (pp. 231-251). New York: M.E. Sharpe.
- Hay, E. R. (2001). Methodology of the inter-Tajik negotiation process. In K. Abdullaev & C. Barnes (Eds.), *Politics of compromise: The Tajikistan peace process* (pp. 38-43). London: Conciliation Resources.
- Heathershaw, J. (2009). *Post-conflict Tajikistan: The politics of peacebuilding and the emergence of legitimate order*. London: Routledge.
- Herzig, E. (1995). *Iran and the former Soviet south*. London: Royal Institute of International Affairs.
- Hyman, A. (1994). Central Asia's relations with Afghanistan and South Asia. In P. Ferdinand (Ed.), *The new Central Asia and its neighbours* (pp. 75-94). London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs and Pinter Publishers.
- ICG. (2001). *Tajikistan: An uncertain peace*. Osh/Brussels: International Crisis Group.
- Iji, T. (2020). *Multiparty mediation in violent conflict: Peacemaking diplomacy in the Tajikistan civil war*. Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge.
- Jonson, L. (1998). *The Tajik war: A challenge to Russian policy*. London: Royal Institute of International Affairs.
- Lynch, D. (2001). The Tajik civil war and peace process. *Civil Wars*, 4(4), 49-72. doi:10.1080/13698240108402487
- Mesbahi, M. (1995). Iran and Tajikistan. In A. Z. Rubinstein & O. M. Smolansky (Eds.), *Regional power rivalries in the New Eurasia: Russia, Turkey, and Iran* (pp. 112-143). New York: M.E. Sharpe.
- Mesbahi, M. (1997). Tajikistan, Iran, and the international politics of the 'Islamic factor.' *Central Asian Survey*, 16(2), 141-158. doi:10.1080/02634939708400980
- Niyazi, A. (1994). Tajikistan. In M. Mesbahi (Ed.), *Central Asia and the Caucasus after the Soviet Union: Domestic and international dynamics* (pp. 164-190). Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida.
- Niyazi, A. (1998). Tajikistan I: The regional dimension of conflict. In M. Waller, B. Coppieters, & A. V. Malashenko (Eds.), *Conflicting loyalties and the state in post-Soviet Russia and Eurasia* (pp. 145-170). London: Frank Cass.

- Roy, O. (1993). *The civil war in Tajikistan: Causes and implications (occasional paper)*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press.
- Roy, O. (1998a). The Iranian foreign policy toward Central Asia. Retrieved from www.eurasianet.org/resource/regional/royoniran.html
- Roy, O. (1998b). Is the conflict in Tajikistan a model for conflicts throughout Central Asia? In M. R. Djalili, F. Grare, & S. Akiner (Eds.), *Tajikistan: The trials of independence* (pp. 132-147). London: Curzon.
- Roy, O. (1999). *The foreign policy of the Central Asian Islamic Renaissance Party*. New York: Council on Foreign Relations.
- Rubin, B. R. (1993). The fragmentation of Tajikistan. *Survival*, 35(4), 71-91. doi:10.1080/00396339308442712
- Rubin, B. R. (1998). Russian hegemony and state breakdown in the periphery: Causes and consequences of the civil war in Tajikistan. In B. R. Rubin & J. L. Snyder (Eds.), *Post-Soviet political order: Conflict and state building* (pp. 128-161). London: Routledge.
- Svensson, I. (2007). Fighting with faith. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 51(6), 930-949. doi:10.1177/0022002707306812
- Svensson, I. (2012). *Ending holy wars: Religion and conflict resolution in civil wars (16pt large print edition)*. St Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press.
- Svensson, I. (2018). Religion and civil war: An overview. In P. A. Djupe, M. J. Rozell, & T. G. Jelen (Eds.), *The Oxford encyclopedia of politics and religion* (forthcoming). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Svensson, I., & Nilsson, D. (2018). Disputes over the divine: Introducing the religion and armed conflict (RELAC) data, 1975 to 2015. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 62(5), 1127-1148. doi:10.1177/0022002717737057
- Toft, M. D. (2007). Getting religion? The puzzling case of Islam and civil war. *International Security*, 31(4), 97-131.
- Toft, M. D., & Zhukov, Y. M. (2015). Islamists and Nationalists: Rebel motivation and counterinsurgency in Russia's North Caucasus. *American Political Science Review*, 109(2), 222-238.
- UN. (1996). S/1996/1070. Letter dated 24 December 1996 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General. 27 December 1996.
- UN. (1997a). S/1997/198. *Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Tajikistan*. 5 March 1997.
- UN. (1997b). S/1997/415. *Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Tajikistan*. 30 May 1997.
- Zartman, I. W. (1989). *Ripe for resolution: Conflict and intervention in Africa* (updated ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Zartman, I. W. (1995). Dynamics and constraints in negotiations in internal conflicts. In I. W. Zartman (Ed.), *Elusive peace: Negotiating an end to civil wars* (pp. 3-29). Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.
- Zartman, I. W. (2000). Ripeness: The hurting stalemate and beyond. In P. C. Stern & D. Druckman (Eds.), *International conflict resolution after the Cold War* (pp. 225-250). Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Zviagelskaya, I. (1997). *The Tajik conflict*. Reading, UK: Ithaca Press.