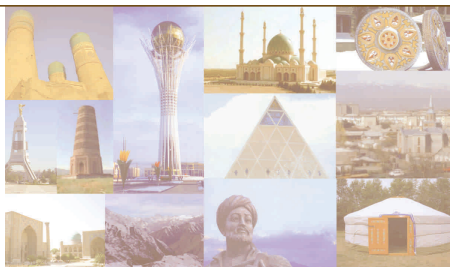


CENTRAL ASIA OBSERVATORY

<http://www.asiacentral.es>



The Central Asia Observatory (CAO) was established in 2007 by three institutions that are interested in the area: Casa Asia, CIDOB Foundation and Royal Institute Elcano



November 2010



TAJIKISTAN



SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2010

Bimonthly article

Prof. Saodat Olimova*

Highlights

The main events in this period were the chain of terrorist acts and antiterrorist operations deployed by government troops in eastern Tajikistan. Since 22 September, a large military operation has been under way in the Rasht valley, involving all the armed forces of the country. The Rasht region is completely isolated from the rest of the country. Government officials suspended telephone, internet and postal services in the region in addition to maintaining blockades of all roads connecting Rasht with other parts of the country.

Armed tensions started in the summer of 2009 when a group in eastern Tajikistan launched military operations against local authorities. During the government operation some combatants including Mr. Zieev (a former minister of emergency situations) were killed and others were captured and sentenced to lengthy terms in jail. On 23 August 2010, a group of 25 former combatants escaped from prison in Dushanbe and allegedly found refuge in the Rasht valley.

Special operations units were stationed in the Rasht region to capture the escapees, causing the discontent of influential local military commanders Mirzohuja Ahmadov and Shoh Iskandarov. Negotiations with these commanders proved unsuccessful. Mirzohuja Ahmadov is one of the military commanders of United Tajik Opposition (UTO), who after signing peace agreements in 1997 became the head of the interior ministry's anti-organized crime department in the Rasht region.

Government troops were sent to the Rasht region. On 19 September 2010 in the Kamarob gorge, unknown people ambushed a group of government

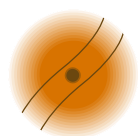
troops resulting in 26 soldiers being killed and 14 wounded. President Emomali Rahmon subsequently gave opposition commanders in Rasht an ultimatum to disarm. Mizohuja Ahmadov's house was bombed and destroyed. There are presently over 2,000 troops and security forces in the region, where a curfew has been imposed.

On 6 October 2010, an MI-8 helicopter of the National Guard of Tajikistan crashed in the Kamarob gorge. All 21 soldiers of an elite Alpha unit of the State Committee of National Security and 7 soldiers of the National Guards on board died. On the same day, a military truck with national guards was blown up in Rasht after hitting a mine. As a result 14 special operations soldiers on board the truck died and 5 soldiers were wounded. On the same day, several high-ranking officers were shot down by a sniper. Unexpectedly, however, Mirzohuja Ahmadov and his followers unconditionally surrendered their arms and joined government forces. After that, another former opposition commander Mullo Sairiddin and his group turned in their weapons. Mirzohuja Ahmadov subsequently began to help government troops in their search for military groups participating in fights in the Rasht region.

During this military conflict, over 100 citizens of Tajikistan from both sides were killed (this number does not include foreigners).

Because of the lack of information, the events in the Rasht region caused a great deal of speculation. According to the official version, Ahmadov harboured a famous terrorist Mullo Abdullo at his house and also organized a terrorist training camp for teenagers. However, no one actually saw Mullo Abdullo during the conflict. Many experts believe that the real reason for the military operation was to secure government

*Deputy Director, Research Center Sharq, Dushanbe.



control of deposits of natural resources, particularly coal anthracite reserves of Nazar-ailok in the Rasht valley. TALCO aluminium company needs supplies of high quality anthracite, which are controlled by Sho Iskandarov and Mirzohuja Ahmadov in *Nazar-Ailok*. An agreement was reached with Iskandarov, but Ahmadov refused to cooperate, thus triggering the military conflict.

Internal affairs

Tajikistan was also rocked by other terrorist acts, the biggest taking place on 3 September in the city of Khujand in northern Tajikistan, where a suicide bomber detonated a bomb in the local anti-organized crime department. Responsibility for this explosion was shouldered by a previously unknown extremist group *Jama'at Ansar Allah* (society of the followers of Allah). Another explosion took place at a nightclub in Dushanbe. A fight between Afghan militants and Tajik border guards also broke out along the border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan on 11 September. The official version was that Afghan Taliban combatants had tried to hide from NATO military forces on Tajik territory.

In response to all these events, the Tajik authorities tightened measures against radical Islamic movements in the country. Multiple arrests took place. The wearing of beards and Arab clothing was banned along with the sale and distribution of religious literature and DVDs with sermons by famous theologians. Government media launched a campaign to discredit former leaders of the United Tajik Opposition. Tajik students studying in religious universities abroad were forced to return to Tajikistan, leading to the return of about 500 students in recent months.

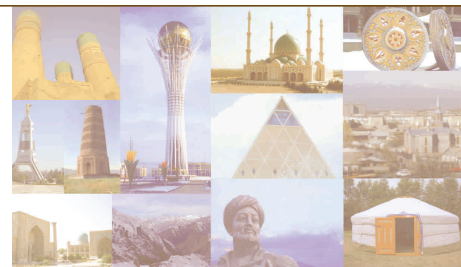
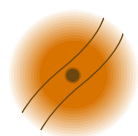
In particular, the government of Tajikistan demanded that the Egyptian authorities deport about 150 Tajik students at the famous Al-Azhar university. The Tajik authorities have made lists of all students

studying abroad. On 21 September, two active participants of the Islamic movement of Uzbekistan (one of them was a widow of the militant) were killed in a special law enforcement operation in the region of Isfara.

Multiple terrorist acts in eastern Tajikistan sparked questions from the public. Journalists, however, are unable to gain access to any information about these events and local media are targeted by government-implemented campaigns. First, defence minister Sherali Hairulloev accused journalists of supporting the terrorists after reporters criticized the defence ministry. President Rahmon also criticized the mass media. On 10 October, access to local and international internet sites such as *centrasia.ru*, *tjknews.com*, *ferghana.ru*, and *avesta.tj* was prohibited. Popular newspapers were not published in October because many printing houses refused to print them.

The OSCE wrote a letter to Tajikistan's foreign affairs ministry defending local mass media. The American, British, German and French ambassadors and the head of the EU delegation expressed their concern about the freedom of mass media in Tajikistan. On 21 September, several non-government mass media and human rights organizations established a committee for the professional rights of journalists ("Committee of September 29"). The goal of this committee is to restore freedom of speech and guarantee the work of internet sites and other mass media of Tajikistan, to provide the unrestricted publication of newspapers in printing houses and to remove administrative and judicial pressure on mass media.

In September, three political parties joined the newly established Movement of Democratic Forces, whose goal is to restore civil society and its role in resolving problems of the state. The initiators of the movement believe that only civil society can promote reforms in political, economic and social spheres.



The national census took place from 21 to 30 September. The preliminary results of the census will be published in April-May 2011.

Foreign and international policy

The strengthening of mutual relations with Afghanistan was the major foreign policy event in Tajikistan in this period. President Rahmon visited Afghanistan on 25-26 October, five years after his first official visit.

This visit marked a new phase in the strengthening of relations between Tajikistan and Afghanistan, whose presidents focused on broadening economic relations between the two countries. President Rahmon and President Hamid Karzai expressed their satisfaction with the fast growth of goods turnover and the expansion of frontier trade. The heads of the two states also discussed the development of energy, transport and communication, in particular, the planned unification of Tajik transport lines with those of Iran, Pakistan and Turkmenistan via Afghan territory by unifying highways, railways and high voltage lines. The parties supported the prompt execution of the projects involving the transport of energy resources, particularly the high voltage line that will connect Tajikistan with Pakistan and Iran via Afghan territory. Rahmon and Karzai also expressed their support for the construction of the gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to Tajikistan via Afghanistan. The broadening of relations between Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Russia was singled out as the main thrust of cooperation.

The presidents signed a joint declaration on further developing and strengthening relations between the two states. On 25 October, during President Rahmon's visit to Kabul, five more documents were signed, namely intergovernmental cooperation agreements in the fields of trade, economy, transit and culture.

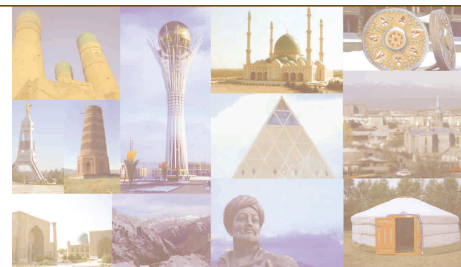
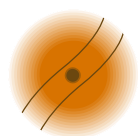
The two presidents also discussed problems related

to security and joint cooperation against drug trafficking, in which respect they singled out the achievements that have been made to date. During the press conference, President Rahmon denounced rumours in the mass media that 150 terrorists had entered Tajikistan from Afghanistan, saying that such rumours were not to be trusted. *Newsweek*, referring to its own sources in the Taliban movement, had previously reported that at the end of last year, about 150 armed members of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan entered Tajikistan from Afghanistan. Speaking about the events in the Rasht valley, President Rahmon said that governmental forces engaged armed groups with citizens of Tajikistan and of the other former Soviet republics, but no citizens of Afghanistan. President Rahmon nonetheless noted that both countries should strengthen their coordinated activity against terrorism, adding that during the first half of 2010 over 100 police officers, special operations officers, border guards and customs officers, and also 300 medical workers from Afghanistan had been trained in Tajikistan.

A few days later, President Rahmon and the minister of public works of Afghanistan Abdulquddus Hamidi discussed prospects of connecting the railway between Iran, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan with the railways of Kyrgyzstan and China. It should be noted that the total length of the railway that will connect Iran and Afghanistan with Kyrgyzstan and China through Tajikistan is 2,260 kilometres and that it is estimated to cost approximately \$3.2 billion.

Relations with the EU

German and Tajik partners organized Weeks of Germany in Tajikistan from 20 September to 10 December in the context of European week, dedicated to all aspects of German-Tajik relations and featuring numerous cultural events, educational activities and a medical conference. Days of cinema for children and youth took place at the end of September and the German band *Die Toten Hosen* gave a concert



on 27 September in Dushanbe, qualified as a resounding success. A conference of plastic surgeons—graduates of the DAAD programme took place in Dushanbe on 13-17 October.

Relations with Uzbekistan

Relations with Uzbekistan remain strained. In October Uzbekistan completely closed its border with Tajikistan and has been blocking all movements of people, goods and transport along the northern part of the Tajik-Uzbek border. Along the southern side of the border, Uzbek authorities still continue to detain railroad cargo travelling through Uzbek territory to Tajikistan. Some 900 railway cars with cargoes for Tajikistan are detained on Uzbek territory. The cargo contains combustive-lubricating materials, building materials, food products and medical and other equipment. Numerous customers of the railway service filed complaints relating to cargo losses and damages in the detained railway cars, leading to the creation of a joint commission by the Tajik and Uzbek members of national railway companies to investigate claims by Tajik customers concerning cargo on Uzbek territory.

According to Tajikistan's national statistical agency, humanitarian aid totalling \$67.3 billion arrived in the country in January-September of this year. The agency also reports that among donor countries, the greatest share came from America representing 53.4%, Kazakhstan – 10.8%, Denmark – 7.7%, Germany – 5.6%, Russia – 4.6%, Republic of Korea – 3.4%, Netherlands – 2.5%, Latvia – 1.6%, Switzerland – 1.3%, Malaysia – 1.2%, Kyrgyzstan – 1%, India – 0.8%, Ukraine and Austria – 0.6%, and Turkey, China and France – 0.5%.

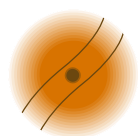
Economy and business enterprises

Tajikistan successfully overcame the consequences of the global recession. During the first months of autumn the industrial output index reached 110.6%, 10.6% higher than in the same period last year. In

the year to September, 475 enterprises exceeded their level of production in comparison with 2009. During this same period, 288 enterprises -ie, 33.9% of the total number- did not operate. There was a considerable increase in production of electric power, coal, oil, gas, non-metallic materials, salts, manufactures of black oil, gasoline, diesel fuel, metal-plastics products, rubber footwear and soft drinks. However, alcohol production has fallen. In general, according to official sources, GNP growth in the first nine months of the year was 6.2%, with inflation reaching 6.7%. Industrial and agricultural output grew by 10.6% and 7.1% respectively.

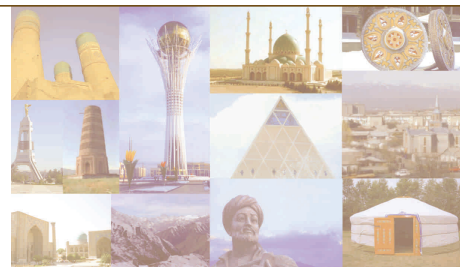
The rise in world prices for agricultural raw materials led to a ban on exports of cattle, meats, potatoes, wool and scrap metal from Tajikistan in September. Since 1 September, wages for workers in education rose 40%, minimum wages now standing at \$13.5. Several discussions of reforms to support home agricultural produce and create more favourable conditions for foreign partners took place this autumn. Earlier the programme of economic development until 2015 was approved, including the programme of food safety, the strategy to lower poverty levels and specify concrete sector development programmes.

There are also plans to develop a programme of reforms in the agricultural sector to promote the transition to market economy, strengthen the mobility of rural producers and accelerate agricultural developments in the country. Government officials created a group of economists to develop the programme of reforms in the agriculture sector. Details of a scandal involving the auditing of state company Talco Management Limited, registered in a tax-free zone of British Virgin Islands, are still coming to light. According to the audit conducted this year by the British company Moore Stephens, Talco Management Ltd. is under government control. The analysis of the results of the audit shows that in the last four years, the company's management transferred about \$1 billion in profits to offshore



CENTRAL ASIA OBSERVATORY

<http://www.asiacentral.es>



areas. Proceeds from aluminium only contributed $\approx 100-120$ million to the state budget. Talco's administrative expenses represent about 40-50% of all profits, an unprecedentedly high level in comparison with that of similar enterprises in the world aluminium industry.

The opinions expressed here are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the positions of the Central Asia Observatory (CAO). The institutions that constitute the CAO are not responsible for the use of these contents.
