



Highlights

The main event of July-August was a military operation of government troops in the Gorno-Badakhshan autonomous region, an isolated impoverished region in the Pamir mountains with a population of 206,000. Unlike the rest of the Tajikistan, Badakhshan is inhabited by small ethnic groups who practice Ismailism - an offshoot of Shiite Islam. During the civil war, the autonomy supported the opposition. Since then, four local warlords Ayembekov, Imomnazarov, Muhammadbokirov and Mamadaslamov, continued to wield a certain influence, doing business and smuggling. Badakhshan's population considered them as relics of the civil war and did not particularly support the warlords. Now, the people of Badakhshan live off remittances and smuggling. The population fully respects the spiritual leader of the Ismaili, Prince Karim Aga Khan IV, and barely complies with Dushanbe.

The tragic events of 21 July began with the assassination of General Abdullah Nazarov, head of the office of the national security committee in Badakhshan. Tajik authorities accused Lieutenant Colonel Tolib Ayembekov's fighters of the murder. He was a former field commander of the United Tajik Opposition, then a commander of border troops of Tajikistan. According to media reports, General Nazarov took part in the clampdown on smuggled goods from Afghanistan, carried out by Ayembekov's guards. On 5 July members of the national security committee held up a shipment of contraband cigarettes from Afghanistan belonging to Ayembekov, sparking a quarrel

between General Nazarov and Ayembekov on 21 July. Officially, Ayembekov's subordinates killed Nazarov after the argument, after which negotiations between Ayembekov and the Tajik authorities took place. The commander agreed to give up the assassins to the authorities. However, on the morning of 22 July a group of Alpha special forces arrived in helicopters at the capital of Badakhshan, Khorog. An investigation team from the general prosecutor's office under the direction of the chief military prosecutor of Tajikistan Khairullo Saidov also arrived on the scene. The Tajik authorities simultaneously began to assemble troops in Khorog, after which Ayembekov refused to negotiate, saying he did not trust the government, and began to gather his supporters.

At 3.30 a.m. on 24 July, government forces launched a military operation against Ayembekov's group and three other local leaders. Backed by helicopters and armoured vehicles, 3,000 troops tried to suppress the resistance of several hundred fighters and militia in three city blocks of Khorog. In response, militants attacked the prosecution team and took five prosecutors hostage.

The townspeople had not been warned about the military operation, although staff of international organizations and foreign tourists were taken out of the city before the assault. Residents built barricades and tried to defend themselves. Landlines, mobile phone lines and the internet were blocked as well as roads. The scale of losses and destruction forced the government to suspend its actions. On the evening of 24



July the government announced a ceasefire. According to official figures, in the “one-day war” losses of government forces amounted to 17 killed and 40 wounded. On the other side, 30 militants were eliminated and 40 arrested, including eight Afghan fighters. In addition, 21 civilians were killed, including 4 children. During the bombing more than 700 homes were damaged.

Since 25 July, a number of NGOs, political parties and people from Badakhshan who live in other countries have been demanding an end to the fighting in Khorog and to act within the national legislation. Protests were held in Moscow, Washington, New York, Bishkek and other cities.

On 25 July, residents of Khorog formed a group of reputable citizens to represent the interests of the civilian population. The "Group of 20" became a mediator in talks between government forces and militants of Badakhshan. These negotiations resulted in the government's promise to withdraw troops from Khorog as soon as those responsible for the murder of General Nazarov surrendered and all militants handed over all their weapons. A moratorium on firing was set up until 27 July and then extended to 28 July. However, the militants refused to surrender, not trusting the promises of the government. The authorities did not withdraw any troops but rather continued to build up their strength. Mutual distrust led to another incident. On 26 July, at the entrance to the autonomy, a group of unknown men killed a special police unit (OMON) heading to Badakhshan. Three policemen were injured and the fate of the other 25 people is unknown. Some claim

they were killed and thrown into a river, others that they jumped into a river and drowned.

After contacts with the Aga Khan, President Rahmon signed a ceasefire, after which the mediators in negotiations were the head of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) in Tajikistan, Munir Mirali, and the head of the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF), Yodgor Faizov. On the same day, 28 July, a message from the spiritual leader of the Ismaili Aga Khan IV was read to residents of Khorog, in which he asked his followers to be calm and allow the authorities to resolve the situation through appropriate structures. The Aga Khan also called on his followers to support the government in achieving peace and order, after which the situation in Khorog normalized, rallies were stopped, prosecutors were freed, markets and shops started to operate, people surrendered weapons and dismantled barricades, and communication links were restored. Government troops nonetheless remained in the region.

It was during this period that President Rahmon met with Afghanistan's internal affairs minister Bismillohon Mohammadi and the head of the Afghan National Security Rahmatullo Nabil, as well as holding several telephone conversations with President Hamid Karzai about tightening border controls, information sharing, coordinating actions to protect the Tajik-Afghan border and countering terrorism. Rahmon was concerned because the military leaders of Badakhshan have extensive contacts in Afghanistan.



On 4 August, the government's request for the extradition of armed group commanders Ayembekov, Imomnazarov, Muhammadbokirov and Mamadaslamov was made public. They were accused of banditry, smuggling, drug trafficking, trafficking of women and unpaid bank loans. Puzzling was the fact that most of the crimes that the commanders were charged with took place several years ago, but criminal cases against them were closed during amnesty in 2008. Except for the 4 leaders, authorities promised amnesty for all parties of the conflict, including the assassins of General Nazarov.

The stabilization of the situation in Badakhshan was interrupted by a tragic accident. On 10 August, on the road from Khorog, a government soldier shot at a van with a machine gun. Two passengers were killed and a woman was seriously injured. The next day there was a rally in the centre of Khorog. The townspeople asked for forces to be withdrawn from the city and people only dispersed after the government promised to withdraw the soldiers from Khorog in three days. To reduce stress, on 12 August Ayembekov appeared on television and said that he and his brothers had surrendered to authorities. He also urged others to surrender.

Another aggravation of the situation occurred on 22 August when unknown persons at night threw a grenade inside the home of one of the four informal leaders of Badakhshan, Imomnazarov, who was killed and his family members injured. It should be noted that Imomnazarov was disabled, seriously ill and had recently been confined to bed.

Prior to the entrance of government forces in Badakhshan, many residents perceived leaders of local gangs and militants as an unfortunate legacy of the civil war, which hindered the development of the region. However, Imomnazarov's murder was seen as the deliberate elimination of a key witness, which caused uproar.

Khorag residents once again gathered in the centre of the city for a rally, demanding that the President, as the guarantor of stability, stop the violence. They also demanded the resignation of a head of administration of the autonomy, accusing the government of complicity in the murder of Imomnazarov and of breaching an agreement on the voluntary surrender of weapons and withdrawal of troops. They also demanded greater rights for the autonomy. Rally participants began throwing rocks at a building of the regional administration. In order to disperse the rally, government troops fired into the air and injured two people. The city again began to build barricades. A threat of a full-scale conflict forced both parties to resume negotiations. The result was the signing on 23 August of an agreement between representatives of law enforcement agencies of Tajikistan and delegates of the people of Badakhshan phasing the withdrawal of troops from the region.

Tension still remains in Badakhshan, compounded by deterioration in the economic situation following the military operation. A drop in tourism receipts, reductions in trade, closed banks and therefore difficulties to obtain remittances have dramatically worsened the situation of



inhabitants of Badakhshan, with the result that separatist sentiments are growing.

The government military operation was meant to remove Badakhshan's informal leaders and establish control over the area. Experts agree that the aims of the operation were not only to suppress opposition sentiments in the autonomy before the presidential elections in 2013, but also to try and take control of smuggling channels from Afghanistan, China and Kyrgyzstan. The plan was for President Rahmon to visit Khorog after the operation, on 20 August, and participate in a celebration of the city. However, the failure of the operation changed those plans. This failure was caused not only by poor preparation, but also by the organized resistance of civilians. Badakhshan supported neither government forces nor local informal leaders. The people of Badakhshan tried to resolve the conflict through negotiations on the basis of national and international legislation.

Internal affairs

On 13 August president Rahmon signed a decree to increase salaries, pensions and scholarships by 30-50%. Since 1 September, wages of public sector employees, including education, health, culture and science were increased. Student grants and social benefits were also increased. The minimum wage is due to be raised as of 1 January 2013 from 80 somoni (\$ 17) to 200 somoni (\$ 41), ie, 2.5 times increase.

In the health scores published by American media company Bloomberg, Tajikistan ranked highest among the countries of Central Asia, followed by Uzbekistan,

Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan, with Kazakhstan bringing up the rear.

Work on Rogun hydro plant was almost completely stopped. About 5,000 construction workers were given unpaid leave because of an ongoing examination of the project demanded by the World Bank.

Tajik authorities expanded the list of locked online news resources and since 30 July banned citizens from accessing the BBC, Russian TV channel Vesti, Ozodagon, Twitter and YouTube. The website of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan Nahzat.tj was also blocked.

The pressure on the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) continues to grow. The prosecutor general's office checked documentation and the financial condition of the party and accused its members of failing to pay membership fees. The IRP ended up going to court because of the legal intervention of the prosecutor's office in the inner affairs of the party. On 25 July, the head of a cell of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan in the Gorno-Badakhshan autonomous region, 32-year-old Sabzali Mamadrizoev, was killed. His replacement Sherik Karamhudoev was arrested as a member of the armed resistance in Badakhshan and transported to Dushanbe.

Since the beginning of 2012 the government has closed hundreds of mosques, which were not registered under applicable law.

In the last ten days of July, there was a sharp rise in food prices, particularly flour and bread. Many attribute this to the beginning of the Muslim fasting month –



Ramadan. Food prices have increased sharply for several years during Ramadan. In response, city halls set fixed prices for basic foodstuffs. In addition, the government started selling flour from government stocks. This measure was linked to a rise in grain prices due to drought and crop failure in Kazakhstan, the main exporter of grain and flour to Tajikistan.

Fuel prices continued to grow. The high cost of fuel forced many car owners to install equipment for use of natural gas in their cars. Although imports of liquefied natural gas were increased by 39%, they still fell short with the result that gas prices went up twice, almost equalling petrol.

Tajikistan took part in the London Olympics, but sports fans were disappointed with the performance of their athletes. The 16 athletes from Tajikistan performed in seven disciplines - boxing, athletics, wrestling, judo, taekwondo, shooting and swimming. Only one, female boxer Mavzuna Chorieva, managed to win a bronze medal. In the previous Olympics in Beijing, athletes from Tajikistan won two medals, silver in wrestling and bronze in judo.

Foreign and international policy

On 9 August, Russia's deputy defence minister Anatoly Antonov visited Tajikistan to discuss the terms and conditions of the 201st Russian military base' stay in the country, a situation in which the Tajik authorities find themselves caught in the middle. On the one hand, there is the unstable situation in Pamir and the growth of the armed front; on the other, there is the risk of losing the military support of the

Russian base in the event that Russia withdraws from Tajikistan. All these factors have forced President Rahmon to leave the current Russian military presence in Tajikistan unchanged in coming years. Dushanbe expressed willingness to renew the existing current document annually until 2016, after which it would be ready for a new agreement that would suit Russia's conditions.

In July, Tajikistan declared that it would unilaterally cancel visa requirements for citizens of 34 OECD countries as well as some countries in South-East Asia. This measure was intended to promote tourism, but the "one-day war" in the Pamir Mountains in Tajikistan dealt a heavy blow to tourism.

Economy and business enterprise

Economic data published in July showed that in the first half of 2012 there was a decrease in exports and an increase in imports. The contraction in exports was caused primarily by a 4% reduction in aluminium production due to the suspension of deliveries of Uzbek gas, problems with transporting finished goods through Uzbekistan and a decline in world prices for the metal. In the first half of the year Tajikistan produced about 145,000 tons of aluminium. By contrast, there was an increase in electricity exports. In the first half of the year Tajikistan transferred to Afghanistan and Kazakhstan about 400 million kW / h of electricity. Most of the export went to Afghanistan. In July and August, the daily flow of electricity through the Sangtuda-Puli Khumri power line linking Tajikistan and Afghanistan was 2.4 million kWh. According to the energy



ministry, Tajikistan was ready to supply to Afghanistan with up to 600 MW of electricity in summer time, but this would only be possible with the introduction of a system of power lines Puli Khumri - Kunduz-Kabul that was being built.

While increasing electricity exports to Afghanistan, the energy holding Barki Tojik has yet to pay for electricity generated by the Tajik-Russian hydro plant Sangtuda-1. In this regard, on 30 July officials at the hydro power plant issued a statement warning that they were no longer able to ensure reliable and safe operation of the hydroelectric power plant owing to lack of funds.

Tajikistan was the only country in Central Asia where exports have fallen since 2000 and imports increased. A study by the University of Central Asia released in July, "Trends in Foreign Trade in Central Asia", found that in 2010 exports from Tajikistan decreased by 45% compared with 2000, whereas imports increased by 17%. As a result, turnover had changed slightly and remained at 30% of GDP. Also there was a change in foreign trade orientation. The export destinations of the main export commodities -aluminium and cotton- changed from North to South. If in 2000 the major importers of the Tajik aluminium were the European Union and Russia, in 2010 they were China and Turkey. Also, there was a switch in the export of cotton from Switzerland, Latvia and the Slovak Republic to Turkey, Iran and Pakistan. Russia was still one of the largest buyers of Tajik cotton.

Strained relations with Uzbekistan and the Uzbek transport blockade forced Tajikistan

to seek trading partners in the south. Thus, Tajikistan's share of foreign trade with neighbouring Uzbekistan for the first seven months of 2012 was 2% (\$34 million), 99% of which was for the purchase of Uzbek gas. At the same time, trade between Tajikistan and its southern neighbours -Afghanistan and Pakistan- in the same period amounted to \$146 million.

Pakistan became one of the largest suppliers of food in Tajikistan. In August, Tajikistan signed an agreement with Pakistan to import 100,000 tons of wheat, 10,000 tons of rice and corn oil. Also Dushanbe and Islamabad signed a contract to supply Tajikistan with 30,000 tons of sugar.

China is nonetheless Tajikistan's most rapidly growing trade partner. Like Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan has become an informal re-export centre for Chinese goods in Central Asia. In 2010, the volume of informally re-exported Chinese goods through Tajikistan was approximately \$710 million, equal to 70% of the official exports in the country. In 2011 and in the first half of 2012, the volume of re-exported goods increased even more. A very wide range of goods was being re-exported, however products of light industry dominate them. Informal re-export not only had disadvantages in the form of uncollected taxes and an increase in corruption. It also made survival possible and improved the positions of poor and vulnerable groups, especially women.

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