

6. Experimentation, Turmoil and Fragmentation under Gorbachev, 1985–1991

On 24 May 1979, the US Embassy in Moscow sent a cable (in reply to an assessment by the US diplomatic mission in Kabul arguing that the Soviets were worried about stability in Central Asia) that said:

All information that we have been able to gather on this region [Soviet Central Asia] testifies that Moscow controls the situation completely. During frequent visits of Embassy officers to Soviet Central Asia few signs of discontent were discovered. Central Asian republics under Soviet leadership have achieved considerable social and economic progress and have a higher standard of living than neighbouring districts of Iran and Afghanistan.¹

The same year, 81 per cent of Uzbeks living in cities and 85 per cent of those living in rural areas said that they were satisfied with the fulfilment of the prime values of their lives.² Yet, just more than a decade later, much of the region witnessed ethnic conflict, fratricide and civil violence, or, at a minimum, tremendous deprivation. What allowed this to occur?

The answer is linked with the name of Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachev, the last general secretary of the CPSU CC and the president of the USSR, and the policies implemented by him and a coterie of his associates known under the aggregate name of *perestroika*. This chapter attempts to analyse the impact of *perestroika* on patterns of modernisation, nation gestation and political authority in Tajikistan, and to explain why Tajiks in the immediate post-Soviet era, when asked whom they regarded as the biggest villain in world history, named Gorbachev, who took an impressive 13.5 per cent lead over the next contender—Adolf Hitler.³

1 Quoted in: V. Spolnikov and L. Mironov, 'Islamskie fundamentalisty v borbe za vlast', *Aziia i Afrika segodnia*, No. 4 (1992), p. 26. The cable is available through the Cold War International History Project. The exact cable is titled: 'Afghanistan: Prospects for Soviet Intervention', AMEMBASSY Moscow to SECSTATE, Moscow 13083 (24 May 1979).

2 Iu. V. Arutiunian and Iu. V. Bromlei, 'A Sociological Profile of Soviet Nationalities: Ethnosociology Research Results', *Soviet Anthropology and Archeology*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (Summer 1988), p. 58.

3 *Vechernii Dushanbe*, 10 June 1994. Attitudes to Gorbachev remain very negative in Tajikistan. He is still the Soviet figure perceived most negatively. See: Evraziiskii monitor, 'Vospriyatие naseleniem novykh nezavisimykh gosudarstv istorii sovetskogo postsovetskogo periodov 11-ya volna, Aprel'–Mai 2009 g.', *Osnovnye rezul'taty Al'bom diagram* (30 June 2009), online: <<http://www.eurasiamonitor.org/rus/research/event-158.html>>

The Controversy of Centrally Planned Development

Stalin's strategy of forced industrialisation, which had transformed the USSR into the world's second-largest economy and allowed it to compete with a varying degree of success with the United States for global domination, was based primarily on the extensive means of growth: expansion of production was achieved through channelling natural and human resources to certain sectors of the economy, heavy industry in particular, at the expense of others. By 1960, however, 'it was clear to the Soviet leadership that the scope for further extensive growth was exhausted. Capital accumulation was at maximum levels and the labour resources of the country were fully mobilised.'⁴ In-depth analyses of the state of the Soviet economy under Brezhnev and of his successors' attempts at reforming it can be found elsewhere;⁵ however, the authors share Myron Rush's view that in 1985, when Gorbachev came to power, the USSR

was not poised for a collapse, nor was it even in acute crisis ... The economy was stagnant and falling farther behind the West, but inflation was not a serious problem; agriculture ... fed the Soviet people adequately, perhaps better than in the past; and industry provided them with their basic needs. The economy had been in worse shape, arguably, in Khrushchev's last years, 1963 and 1964. There was no compelling need for the Soviet Union to enter on the dangerous path of systemic reform.⁶

The system had enough internal resources to stay afloat for decades, tackling the symptoms, if not the causes, of its numerous maladies.

In the case of Tajikistan, the most acute problems of the time were

- the continuing demographic explosion
- the inability of the centralised planned economy to sustain steady growth
- the declining living standards of the population
- the decaying environment.

As mentioned earlier, following incorporation into the Russian empire, Tajikistan experienced a demographic explosion: its annual growth between 1870 and 1917 was estimated at 1.2 to 1.5 per cent, compared with a meagre 0.2

4 Rutland, 'Economic Crisis and Reform', p. 202.

5 See, for instance: Alec Nove, *An Economic History of the USSR* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), pp. 362–79; Robert F. Miller, 'The Soviet Economy: Problems and Solutions in the Gorbachev View', in *Gorbachev at the Helm: A New Era in Soviet Politics?* eds R. F. Miller and T. H. Rigby (New York: Croom Helm, 1987), pp. 109–35.

6 Myron Rush, 'Fortune and Fate', *The National Interest*, No. 31 (Spring 1993), pp. 19, 21.

per cent in the first half of the nineteenth century.⁷ This tendency gained further momentum under Soviet rule. By the mid 1970s, Tajikistan had overtaken all other republics of the USSR in terms of birth rate, which, coupled with its low mortality rate, gave it the highest natural growth in the Soviet Union (Table 6.1).

Table 6.1 Birth and Mortality Rates and Natural Population Growth in the USSR and Soviet Republics (per 1000 of population)

	Number of births			Number of deaths			Natural growth of population		
	1940	1960	1986	1940	1960	1986	1940	1960	1986
USSR	31.2	24.9	20.0	18.0	7.1	9.8	13.2	17.8	10.2
Russia	33.0	23.2	17.2	20.6	7.4	10.4	12.4	15.8	6.8
Uzbekistan	33.8	39.8	37.8	13.2	6.0	7.0	20.6	33.8	30.8
Tajikistan	30.6	33.5	42.0	14.1	5.1	6.8	16.5	28.4	35.2

Source: *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR za 70 let* (Moscow: Finansy i statistika, 1987), pp. 406–9.

With its population doubling every 20 years, and reserves of cultivable land all but exhausted,⁸ the demographic pressure⁹ came to be felt in Tajikistan in no uncertain way. It has been estimated that in the predominantly peasant Central Asian society, an allotment of 0.28 ha of arable land per person is required to guarantee reproduction on a simple scale.¹⁰ The corresponding figure for Tajikistan was considerably lower,¹¹ and, generally, it was incapable of producing enough food to meet domestic demand.¹² The south-western Qurghonteppa region was particularly inauspicious demographically: by 1989 its population density had reached 91.7 people per square kilometre—2.5 times the average for Tajikistan and far ahead of the second-most densely populated area, Leninobod (59.5).¹³

Even at the height of Soviet rule, regulation of land allotments at the local level (village or *kolkhoz*) tended to generate tension. An account of the 1983 gathering

7 Vladimir Bushkov, 'Tadzhikistan na ostriie demograficheskogo supervzryva', *Rossiiia i musulmanskii mir*, Vol. 37, No. 7 (1995), p. 46.

8 In 1951–60, 341 000 ha of new agricultural lands were put into circulation; in 1961–70, 231 000 ha; in 1971–80, 144 000 ha; and in 1980–90 only 89 000 ha. See: *Narodnoe khoziaistvo Tadzhikskoi SSR v 1965g.* (Dushanbe: Statistika, 1966), p. 83; *Narodnoe khoziaistvo Tadzhikskoi SSR v 1988 godu* (Dushanbe: Irfon, 1990), p. 212; *Narodnoe khoziaistvo Tadzhikskoi SSR v 1990g.* (Dushanbe: Goskomstat TSSR, 1991), p. 163.

9 See: R. Turner, 'Tajiks Have the Highest Fertility Rates in Newly Independent Central Asia', *Family Planning Perspectives*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (May–June 1993), pp. 141–2.

10 V. Medvedev, 'Prazdnik obshchei bedy', *Druzhiba narodov*, No. 8 (1990), p. 208.

11 For land and food provision figures for 1940–80, see: *Narodnoe khoziaistvo Tadzhikskoi SSR v 1979g.*, pp. 94, 104, 108; *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1979g.* (Moscow: Finansy i statistika, 1979), pp. 242, 253, 275; *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1989g.* (Moscow: Finansy i statistika, 1990), pp. 442, 467; *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR za 70 let*, pp. 226–7, 259, 274–5.

12 In the 1980s, Tajikistan harvested 5–7 per cent of the quantity of grain it needed. See: *Komsomolets Tadzhikistana*, 11 October 1991.

13 Calculations are based on: *Itogi Vsesoiuznoi perepisi naseleniia 1989 goda po Tadzhikskoi SSR*, Vol. II, pp. 10–18.

of some 6000 inhabitants of the village of Surkh in northern Tajikistan, who had assembled to decide upon redistribution of parcels of privately held land, stated that, despite the presence of district party and soviet officials, 'there were moments when the discussion seemed to have become unmanageable. The strain began to tell, and nerves gave way.'¹⁴ Six years later the same village and three other settlements of the Isfara *raion* found themselves in the epicentre of land disputes with adjacent districts of Kyrgyzstan. In July 1989 thousands of Tajiks and Kyrgyzs clashed, one person was killed and 27 were injured or wounded;¹⁵ it took the leaders of the two republics and their superiors in Moscow more than one month to quell the 'Isfara–Batken incident'.¹⁶

The policy of economic development based primarily on rapid agricultural growth that had been imposed on Tajikistan by planning authorities in Moscow was not conducive to the migration of people from the countryside. In fact, in the postwar period the movement to urban centres was constantly declining: in 1960, 1 per cent of Tajikistan's rural population chose to settle in cities; in 1970, 0.8 per cent; and in 1976, 0.7 per cent.¹⁷ In later years a process of real de-urbanisation became evident in the republic—an unprecedented phenomenon in the USSR. The share of city-dwellers dropped from 35 per cent in 1979 to 32 in 1990; in 1991 for the first time there was an absolute decline in the urban population.¹⁸ Tajik experts have offered the following explanations for the weak migratory mobility of the agricultural population¹⁹

- skill levels are too low for industrial employment
- large family size and high birth rates create problems in finding adequate housing and childcare facilities in cities
- inadequate knowledge of Russian complicates the acquisition of 'city professions'
- strong urban–rural ties are a disincentive to move.

14 Anastasia Gelischanow, 'The Employment Situation in Tajikistan', *Radio Liberty Research Bulletin*, No. 26 (3231) (28 December 1983), RL 482/83.

15 *Ezhegodnik Bolshoi sovetskoi entsiklopedii* (Moscow: Sovetskaia entsiklopediia, 1990), p. 167.

16 The history of the conflict is as follows. In 1958, the Tajik *kolkhoz* named after Kalinin ceded 144 ha of its fallow lands to the namesake *kolkhoz* in the Batken *raion* of Kyrgyzstan. Thirty years later, the Kyrgyzs decided to build a huge irrigation canal in that area, thus allegedly depriving their Tajik neighbours of water. Additionally, due to imprecise mapping, the issue of ownership of a land parcel of 95 ha remained moot. By the late 1980s, the population on both sides of the administrative borders had grown to an extent where even this exiguous patch appeared a coveted prize. The inquiry instituted by the USSR Supreme Soviet commission concluded that 'outwardly the conflict looks like one between nationalities. In fact, however, it is based on socio-economic problems which have built up over years ... The tension in the region is created by "land" issues: the shortage of farmland, the scarcity of water, the surplus manpower.' See: *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, Part I USSR (18 July 1989), SU/0511 B/2. See also the brief commentary in: Tishkov, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in and after the Soviet Union*, p. 74.

17 R. K. Rahimov, *Sotsialno-ekonomicheskie problemy razvitiia Tadjikskoi SSR* (Dushanbe: Donish, 1984), p. 43.

18 *Narodnoe khoziaistvo Tadjikskoi SSR v 1990g.*, p. 7.

19 Khonaliev, *Trudovye resursy Tadjikistana*, p. 15.

While accepting the validity of these arguments, it appears that at least two other fundamental factors are responsible for the laggard country-to-town migration. First, the Soviet system did not provide sufficient remuneration to industrial workers or skilled managers. Indeed, it would be very hard for a Tajik family with half a dozen children to survive on a bare salary. The story of a qualified builder who left Dushanbe, where he earned a decent wage of 350 roubles a month, for a remote village where he would get 70 roubles and still ‘feel happy’,²⁰ was a typical one. In the countryside a private plot generated the bulk of family income. A certain agronomist in 1981 received 2280 roubles in wages; his 50 apple trees fetched him another 15 000, and his two cows and some sheep saved him the trouble of buying meat and dairy in state shops.²¹ The second factor is rooted in the traditionalism of Tajik society. As Aziz Niyazi has observed, ‘young people are not at all enthusiastic about moving to towns, notwithstanding the fact that incomes in the rural areas are low. Many of the young people are bound by family ties, as it is not easy to get parental consent for moving away.’²² In a patriarchal family every pair of working hands means additional output from its privately owned strip of land, even more so in a situation where tractors and other means of mechanisation are not readily available. Additionally, industrial employment is not a prestigious occupation for the eponymous population, who prefer to work in agriculture, trade and services.

Not surprisingly, a survey conducted in the early 1980s in Tajikistan revealed that 65 per cent of rural young people wanted to stay in the countryside, only 15 per cent wanted to move to the capital city, and 8 per cent to other towns.²³ In 1986, as many as 25.7 per cent of the working-age population may have been unemployed;²⁴ the figure for rural areas was higher—probably in the region of 35 per cent.²⁵ An estimate made in 1985 suggested that 7.1 million people would have to leave Central Asia before 2000 simply to maintain its existing level of national income per able-bodied inhabitant.²⁶ Admittedly, Tajikistan fared badly even compared with its neighbours: ‘an absolute majority of the republic’s

20 *Kommunist Tadzhikistana*, 31 May 1975.

21 ‘Why Do Central Asians Stay on Farms?’ *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*, Vol. XXXV, No. 8 (March 1983), p. 2.

22 Niyazi, ‘Tajikistan’, p. 169.

23 ‘Why Do Central Asians Stay on Farms’, p. 1.

24 McAuley, ‘The Central Asian Economy in Comparative Perspective’, p. 141.

25 The number of able-bodied people of working age not studying or working at state/cooperative enterprises. See: V. V. Vybornova and E. A. Dunaeva, ‘Nereshennye protivorechiia kak istochnik mezhnatsionalnykh konfliktov’, *Izvestiia AN TSSR. Seriya: Filosofiia i pravovedenie*, No. 3 (1992), p. 37.

26 William Fierman, ‘Central Asian Youth and Migration’, in *Soviet Central Asia: The Failed Transformation*, ed. William Fierman (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1991), p. 258.

population does not accept even modest attempts aimed at the reduction of population growth ... The demographic situation in Tajikistan has passed the critical level and is no longer under control.²⁷

The leadership of Tajikistan was reluctant to acknowledge even the existence of such a problem. Not until 1985 did Rahmon Nabiev, first secretary of the CPT CC, publicly express concern at the fact that the growth of agricultural production in the republic lagged hopelessly behind population growth.²⁸ The first comprehensive set of legislation dealing with family planning was passed only in June 1988.²⁹ The centre remained equally incapable of dealing with the growing demographic pressure in the republic. A low-key program to move 15 000 Tajiks to sparsely populated areas of the USSR, the Khabarovsk *krai* in particular, was aborted soon after its inception in 1983 due to the unwillingness of the would-be settlers to leave their birthplaces.³⁰

From the 1960s to the 1980s Tajikistan, like any other republic of the USSR, succumbed to two tendencies in the autarkic Soviet economy. On the one hand, the planning centre gradually lost its ability to control all the links in the economic mechanism due to its sheer expansion and complexity. On the other hand, branch ministries, most importantly 'base supermonopolies',³¹ became ever more powerful in strategic decision-making. The ideals of the comprehensive, integrated development of Central Asia, if they ever existed at all, were eventually sacrificed to the interests of ministerial lobbyists in Moscow who craved unlimited government allocations for grandiose but hardly feasible projects in the region.

In order to cope with the burgeoning population growth it would have been natural to build low-cost and labour-intensive production enterprises in Tajikistan to utilise local resources. In the 1970s, investment of 1 million roubles could create more than 600 seamstress posts, 380–450 in the leather, textile or footwear industries, or 165 in food or cotton-processing, versus only 35–40 in

27 S. Poliakov, 'Politicheskii krizis v Tadjikistane', *Rossia i musulmanskii mir*, No. 5 (1992), p. 46.

28 *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 20 (1985), p. 21.

29 'Qarori Soveti Oliy RSS Tojikiston dar borai tadbirhoi ta'mini muhofizati manfiathoi modar va kudak, behtar namudani sharoiti mehnatu maishati zanon va vus'at dodani fa'oliyyati onho dar hayyoti istehsoli va jam'iiyyati', in *Sessiyvai hashtumi Soveti Oliy RSS Tojikiston: Da'vati yozdahum; Hisoboti stenografi* (Dushanbe: Soveti Oliy RSST, 1988), pp. 167–72. Still, contraception and other means of family planning have not been embraced by traditional society, and even 'urban Tajik women, students, factory workers and activists, have to plan the number of children in secret from their husbands'. See: Monogorova, 'Struktura sovremennoi gorodskoi sem'i tadjikov', p. 24.

30 'Recruitment and Resettlement of Workers from Tajikistan', *Radio Liberty Research Bulletin*, No. 26 (3231) (29 June 1983), RL 247/83.

31 Ministries of energy, oil and gas, irrigation, ferrous and non-ferrous metallurgy, and fertilisers—a powerful agglomeration whose capital assets in 1987 exceeded those of the entire light industry fifty-six-fold. See: Iu. G. Alexandrov, 'Sredniaia Aziia: spetsificheskii sluchai ekonomicheskoi laborazvitosti', *Vostok*, No. 5 (1991), p. 143.

the aluminium or chemical industries.³² Yet it was precisely the last two that received rising capital allocations from Moscow. Tajik economists cautiously expressed their astonishment:

In recent years in the republic, as compared to the rest of the USSR, more capital-intensive and less labour-intensive industrial development has been in evidence. Generally speaking, this contradicts the strategy of industrial development of the republic which is based on the necessity to put emphasis on labour-intensive and capital-saving manufacturing.³³

Central planners and ministerial heavyweights in Moscow continued to pursue the fetish of physical economic growth at all costs, primarily through inflating the capital stock. The creation of the South Tajik Territorial Production Complex (STTPC) is probably the best illustration of the inefficient planning and investment and total disregard of local agendas that were inherent in the Soviet command-administrative system of economic management. The STTPC, conceived in the early 1960s, was to become the new industrial centre of Tajikistan. It embraced 37 per cent of Tajikistan's territory with 64 per cent of its population. Utilisation of the area's enormous hydro-power potential³⁴ formed the centrepiece of the design. In the initial stage, covering the period until 1985, the gigantic Norak hydro-electric power station was the major element of the STTPC, with an aluminium smelter in the city of Tursunzoda, an electrochemical plant in Yovon and a fertiliser combine in Vakhsh, as well as 46 other enterprises reliant on its electricity. Poor interdepartmental communication and lack of a clear-cut construction program plagued the project from the start.³⁵

It took the Ministry of Energy of the USSR 22 years instead of 10, and 2.5 times the originally allocated money, to build the Norak station, with a capacity of 2.7 million kW.³⁶ In 1981, however, the ministry started work on an even more powerful (3.2 million kW) hydro power station at Roghun. Three years later the construction manager exclaimed in frustration that it might take up to a hundred years, rather than the planned 12, to complete the project,³⁷ but it did

32 H. M. Usmanov, *Tekhnicheskaiia rekonstruktsiia industrii Tadzhikistana v usloviakh perestroiki* (Dushanbe: Irfon, 1989), p. 20.

33 R. K. Mirzoev, *Tempy, proporsii i effektivnost obschestvennogo proizvodstva v Tadzhikskoi SSR* (Dushanbe: Donish, 1983), p. 39.

34 Tajikistan's rivers have the potential of generating 283 billion kWh of energy annually, with the Vakhsh and Panj in southern Tajikistan accounting for more than 100 billion kWh. See: M. S. Osimov, ed. *Tadzhikskaiia SSR* (Dushanbe: AN TSSR, 1974), pp. 175–6.

35 'Lack of coordination amongst various ministries and institutions was evident, in that they strove to decide, and consequently to finance the measures that stemmed primarily from their own, albeit important, but still narrowly selfish interests.' See: G. B. Poliak and B. I. Annenkov, 'Sovershenstvovanie finansirovaniia', in *Territorialno-proizvodstvennye komplekсы: planirovanie i upravlenie*, ed. A. G. Aganbegian (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1984), p. 120.

36 Pavel Gorbachev, 'Uroki Nureka', *Druzhba narodov*, No. 3 (1983), p. 209.

37 N. Savchenkov, 'Vremia ne zhdet', *Druzhba narodov*, No. 3 (1984), p. 166.

not really matter; it would be impossible anyway to use surplus electricity, as projects implemented by other ministries were in even worse shape. The smelter in Tursunzoda, with a capacity of 517 000 t of primary aluminium a year, was built between 1965 and 1984, and proved to be, at the time, a disaster: 'People at the plant say that their aluminium costs more than the gold extracted from the bottom of the Zeravshan river ... just two years after start-up, the plant is already in urgent need of major overhaul and reconstruction.'³⁸ The factory in Yovon, commissioned in 1981 instead of 1974, was operating at 37 per cent of its nominal capacity, and in 1983 its production costs were twice its revenues.³⁹ Despite all this waste and inefficiency, money continued to flow freely from Moscow: from 1965 through to 1980, annual investment in all industries in Tajikistan rose from 155 to 320 million roubles, 'with two-thirds of fixed assets, output, and labour force represented by the South Tajik Complex'.⁴⁰

The Spiral of Economic Decay

Even in better years, returns on capital in Tajikistan were 10 per cent below the USSR's average.⁴¹ Since 1968, the volume of incomplete construction constantly exceeded that of absorbed capital investment. Insufficient attention to infrastructure development and reliance on an expensive imported workforce⁴² also impeded Tajikistan's economic performance. In 1985, 15 per cent of all industrial enterprises and 31 per cent of all collective and state-owned farms were loss-making.⁴³ Gorbachev's ill-conceived reforms exacerbated the situation even further. In line with the Kremlin's new *idée fixe* of accelerated development of high-technology sectors, Tajikistan was issued with a program that envisaged⁴⁴

- increases in the volume of capital investment and its share of national income
- emphasis on re-equipping and reconstructing operating factories
- expansion of the share of new equipment in the overall sum of investments

38 Rumer, *Soviet Central Asia*, p. 52.

39 Sh. Dustbaev, *Problemy khimizatsii otraslei narodnogo khoziaistva Tadjikistana* (Dushanbe: Donish, 1989), p. 34.

40 Leslie Dienes, *Soviet Asia: Economic Development and National Policy Choices* (Boulder, Colo., and London: Westview Press, 1987), p. 126.

41 I. A. Lenshin, 'Proizvodstvennyi apparat Tadjikistana: sostoianie i vozmozhnosti sovershenstvovaniia', *Izvestiia AN TSSR. Serii: filosofii, ekonomika, pravovedenie*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (July–September 1991), p. 38.

42 In the 1960s, 80 per cent of all those employed in the STTPC were recent immigrants from other republics of the Soviet Union. See: *Vestnik statistiki*, No. 8 (1991), p. 80. One of the many absurdities in the recent history of Tajikistan was a steady influx of European settlers, mainly skilled workers, to already overpopulated areas. They accounted for 17.5 per cent of the population growth in the republic over the period 1960–70, which was much higher than the corresponding figure for the rest of Central Asia. See: I. K. Narzikulov and A. G. Khajibaev, 'Tadjikskaiia Sovetskaiia Sotsialisticheskaiia respublika', in *Naselenie soiuzykh respublik* (Moscow: Statistika, 1977), p. 252.

43 Kh. Umarov, *Khoziaistvenno-upravlencheskie aspekty perestroiki* (Dushanbe: Irfon, 1988), p. 102.

44 Usmanov, *Tekhnicheskaiia rekonstruktsiia industrii Tadjikistana v usloviakh perestroiki*, p. 23.

- more allocations to the machine-building and construction industries.

Once again, planners in Moscow ignored light industry and agriculture. Millions of dollars were spent on purchasing hardware and technology abroad, but state-of-the-art machinery rusted quietly in factory backyards because there were no personnel to install and operate it. The stockpile of imported equipment standing idle rose almost elevenfold from 1988 to 1991 in Tajikistan.⁴⁵ Growth in industrial labour productivity was the slowest amongst Soviet republics, and in 1990 actually declined by 1.2 per cent,⁴⁶ while in agriculture labour productivity sank by 1991 to 75.6 per cent of its 1980 level.⁴⁷ On average, construction workers in Tajikistan took three times as long to build a house as their counterparts in Russia.⁴⁸ Tajikistan's agriculture was especially badly hit by Gorbachev's reforms, particularly by his obsession with gigantic and amazingly inefficient agro-industrial complexes. Over the period 1988–91, the republic's agricultural output decreased by 17 per cent.⁴⁹ The disruption of old All-Union food-supply mechanisms in 1990 brought about the spectre of hunger in Tajikistan.

It appears that Tajikistan's economy, especially its industry, could exist and produce so long as it remained an integral part of the Soviet economic mechanism.⁵⁰ In 1988, Tajikistan exported 21 per cent of its produce to other republics, and imported 29 per cent of what it consumed from them—more than any other entity in the USSR.⁵¹ Throughout the Soviet period, Tajikistan had a negative trade balance with other republics.⁵² Additionally, Tajikistan received substantial cash infusions from Moscow. Critics of the command economy cited Tajikistan as evidence that 'administrative redistribution and non-equivalent exchange, "brotherly help", have created conditions in which it is economically more feasible to be backward and ask for assistance, than to work better'.⁵³

45 *Narodnoe khoziaistvo Tadjikskoi SSR v 1990g.*, p. 123.

46 *Khojagii khalqi jumhurii Tojikiston omori soli 1992* (Dushanbe: Kumitai davlatii omori jumhurii Tojikiston, 1993), p. 127.

47 *Selskoe khoziaistvo Respubliki Tadjikistan* (Dushanbe: GSA pri pravitelstve RT, 1994), p. 49.

48 *Vestnik statistiki*, No. 6 (1991), p. 51.

49 Production of cotton dropped by 14 per cent, cereals by 12 per cent, fruit by 15 per cent, grapes by 36 per cent, meat by 19 per cent and eggs by 21 per cent. See: *Dehkanskoe khoziaistvo: Voprosy organizatsii i zakonodatelnye osnovy ego sozdaniia* (Dushanbe: AN RT, 1993), p. 72.

50 It has been argued that 'the level of integration amongst regions and branches in the USSR is much higher than in the European Economic Community'. See: M. N. Rutkevich, 'Obostrenie natsionalnykh otnoshenii v SSSR', *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia*, No. 1 (1991), p. 29.

51 *Vestnik statistiki*, No. 3 (1990), pp. 36–7.

52 And, as Lucjan Orlowski has convincingly demonstrated, 'inter-republican trade flows in which prices for goods were set by the authorities independently from the market became ... [a] powerful channel of income transfers'. See: Lucjan T. Orlowski, 'Indirect Transfers in Trade among Former Soviet Union Republics: Sources, Patterns and Policy Responses in the Post-Soviet Period', *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 6 (1993), p. 1001.

53 V. Terliatskas and V. Baldishis, 'Tak nuzhny li respublikanskii dengi?' *EKO*, No. 3 (1990), p. 136.

A Western author, analysing budgetary practices in the centre–periphery relationship in both Soviet and post-Soviet times, has judged that the fiscal system in the former Soviet Union was ‘not truly a “system”, but rather a series of ad hoc bargained agreements, non-transparent at best, whose effects and incentives are not well understood’.⁵⁴ It is safe to assume, however, that tax-sharing schemes and direct, centralised subsidies constituted two major elements in Soviet fiscal federalism. In the second half of the 1980s, Tajikistan was one of the few republics allowed to retain 100 per cent of turnover tax collected,⁵⁵ and 14–21 per cent of its budget revenues comprised direct subventions from Moscow.⁵⁶

Not surprisingly, when in September 1987 the Baltic republics, Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, and a number of Russia’s *oblasts* floated the idea of regional self-financing (*regionalnyi khozraschet*), the most vehement opposition arose from the Central Asian republics, Tajikistan in particular.⁵⁷ Similarly, Gorbachev’s legislation introduced in June 1987, which granted individual enterprises managerial freedom, did not work well in Tajikistan: local factories simply could not survive without the patronage of a branch ministry.⁵⁸ A sociological survey conducted that year revealed that people in Tajikistan were resolutely against Gorbachev’s economic reforms.⁵⁹

It would be incorrect to say that Tajikistan lived off the more developed regions of the Soviet Union. After all, indicators such as the volume and structure of net material production and national income, labour productivity, and resource and investment efficiency simply reflected the sectoral composition of republican economic complexes that had been moulded according to directives from Moscow. As long as the All-Union economic mechanism was intact, it made little sense to speculate who was the donor and who was the recipient inside USSR, Inc. A senior Russian diplomat based in Dushanbe, who had previously served with the Soviet State Planning Authority (GOSPLAN), recollected that ‘while Tajikistan produced one million tonnes of cotton a year, we could provide it

54 Daniel Treisman, ‘The Politics of Intergovernmental Transfers in Post-Soviet Russia’, *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 26, Part 3 (July 1996), p. 307.

55 Usmanov, *Tekhnicheskaia rekonstruktsiia industrii Tadjikistana v usloviakh perestroiki*, p. 56; *Gosudarstvennyi biudzhnet SSSR* (Moscow: Finansy i statistika, 1989), p. 131; *Kommunist Tadjikistana*, 6 December 1985.

56 A. G. Granberg, ‘Ekonomicheskii mekhanizm mezhrespublikanskikh i mezhregionalnykh otnoshenii’, *EKO*, No. 9 (1989), p. 43.

57 V. Koroteeva, L. Perepelkin and O. Shkaratan, ‘Ot biurokraticheskogo tsentralizma k ekonomicheskoi integratsii suverennykh respublik’, *Kommunist*, No. 15 (October 1988), p. 29.

58 *Osnovnye pokazateli ekonomicheskogo i sotsialnogo razvitiia oblastei*, p. 34.

59 In another poll, the responses in Tajikistan were far more negative when the survey was in regards to ‘Public Attitude towards Transition to a Market Economy’, in June 1990: 4.9 per cent positive; 19.3 per cent ambivalent; 56.9 per cent negative; 2.7 per cent indifferent; 15.8 per cent ‘hard to answer’. Meanwhile, the Soviet average for ‘positive’ in this poll was 9.9 per cent and in Estonia it was 34.4 per cent. See: *Vestnik statistiki*, No. 2 (1991), p. 61.

with all the goods it needed and even some extras, without incurring losses'.⁶⁰ The leaders of Tajikistan were happy with such an arrangement and could not, or did not want to, respond to the crisis resulting from Gorbachev's economic endeavours.⁶¹ At a time when the political cohesion of the USSR was in tatters, when the breakdown of central planning and severe monetary and fiscal crises signalled the end of the Soviet socialist economy, such inaction betrayed either extreme naivety or, at the very least, an astonishing level of complacency.

The Mounting Social Problems

The downward spiralling economy inevitably led to a deteriorating quality of life in the USSR. It has been suggested that in 1987 'simply to maintain the current standard of living in Tajikistan, which was already the poorest republic, would demand a 250 per cent increase in investment or another 6 to 7 billion roubles more. Considering that the entire budget in 1988 was only 2.1 billion roubles, no such investment was possible'.⁶² According to official figures and considering revenues from the formal sector only, in 1988, 12.6 per cent of the Soviet population lived below the poverty line; the corresponding figure for Central Asia was 45 per cent, and for Tajikistan a staggering 58.6 per cent.⁶³ By 1991 this figure had increased to 87.3 per cent.⁶⁴ It can be argued that the actual state of affairs may have been better in Central Asia due to undeclared incomes and produce-in-kind from private plots, but statistical evidence shows that Tajikistan was the worst off amongst all Soviet republics on a variety of socioeconomic parameters.⁶⁵ Even the food pyramid of an average Tajik family did not meet nutritional norms—as in centuries before, bread remained its major element.⁶⁶

60 Recorded interview at the Russian Embassy, Dushanbe, 3 March 1995.

61 For example, as late as May 1991, Dr Rustam Mirzoev, then director of Tajikistan's Productive Forces Research Council, wrote that 'in the next 50 years there will be no alternatives to the existing production-technological integrity of this country's economy ... It is impossible to act against the laws of the established production-technological system and violate its manageability ... The coordinating and regulating role of the Centre in strategic spheres of public production constitutes the inalienable element of management of the republics' economies.' See: R. K. Mirzoev, 'Tanzimi inkishofi mintaqavi dar sharoiti iqtisodi bozargoni', *Akhboroti Akademiyayi fanhoi RSS Tojikiston. Seriyayi falsafa, iqtisodiyot, huquqshinosi*, No. 3 (1991), pp. 21–2.

62 Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia*, p. 171.

63 McAuley, 'The Central Asian Economy in Comparative Perspective', p. 146.

64 *Vestnik statistiki*, No. 12 (1991), p. 10.

65 *Sotsialnoe razvitie SSSR*, pp. 40, 126, 197. These include consumption of goods and services, housing, availability of communal services, infant mortality, and preschool facilities. See also: Leonid A. Fridman, 'Economic Crisis as a Factor of Building Up Socio-Political and Ethnonational Tensions in the Countries of Central Asia and Transcaucasia', in *Central Asia and Transcaucasia: Ethnicity and Conflict*, ed. Vitaly V. Naumkin (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1994).

66 *Vestnik statistiki*, No. 9 (1991), pp. 54–6.

In another serious development that was detrimental to the social order, towards the end of the 1980s crime increased dramatically in Leninobod, Kulob and Qurghonteppa.⁶⁷ In Qurghonteppa, local mafias operated in the black market with some official protection during the 1980s.⁶⁸ Fraud, theft of state property, falsification of cotton production and other forms of organised crime and embezzlement all contributed to weakening state capacity. In response, first secretary, Qahhor Mahkamov—forced by a second secretary appointed by Moscow⁶⁹—implemented a campaign against corruption between 1986 and 1991, resulting in a large turnover of political and economic elites.⁷⁰ At a lower level in society, youth problems were becoming increasingly violent in nature by the mid 1980s. Instances of mass violence, ‘hooliganism’, binge drinking and violent assaults were all cited as serious problems in Dushanbe. In two of the more notorious events, foreign students at the Agricultural Institute were attacked in 1987, and two years later, just down the street, a mass riot involving students from the Pedagogical Institute, the riot police and a third unidentified group spilled over into attacks on uninvolved pedestrians and theatre patrons, who were assaulted with sticks and iron bars.⁷¹

Environmental problems also seriously affected the quality of life in Tajikistan. Until the mid 1980s, the Soviet government’s efforts to solve them ‘were still at least partially effective ... This situation changed in 1985 and 1986 ... One contributing factor was certainly the erosion of technological discipline in industry that took place under *perestroika*’.⁷² Soil degradation, deforestation, air and water pollution and loss of biodiversity emerged as major ecological hazards. Overuse of agricultural lands resulted in appalling soil degradation.⁷³ According to agronomic norms, plantations in Tajikistan should have produced 700 000 t of raw cotton a year in the 1980s.⁷⁴ In reality, annual yields approximated 1 million tonnes. This was achieved primarily through massive use of chemicals. Every hectare of arable land in Tajikistan received 31.6 kg of pesticides in

67 Markowitz, *Collapsed and Prebendal States in Post-Soviet Eurasia*, pp. 83–4.

68 Akiner, *Tajikistan*, p. 26.

69 The role of second secretary Petr Luchinsky will be discussed later in this chapter.

70 Markowitz, *Collapsed and Prebendal States in Post-Soviet Eurasia*, pp. 83–6. Markowitz argues that Roy (*The New Central Asia*) and Kathleen Collins (*Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia*) have ‘erroneously suggested that perestroika-era purges were not implemented fully in the republic’.

71 ‘Student Teachers in Dushanbe Violence’, *Komsomolskaya Pravda* (22 February 1990), *Summary of World Broadcasts—Soviet Union* (BBC) [hereinafter *SWB SU*], 0393 (24 February 1989), i; ‘Speech by First Secretary K. M. Makhkamov to the 24th Congress of the Tajikistan Lenin Communist Youth League’, *Kommunist Tadjikistana* (22 February 1987), pp. 2, 5, in *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*, Vol. XXXIX, No. 9 (1 April 1987), p. 9.

72 Georgii S. Golitsyn, ‘Ecological Problems in the CIS During the Transitional Period’, *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (8 January 1993), p. 34.

73 In 1989, the humus content in land under cultivation was barely 30 per cent of the 1940 level. See: Kh. Umarov, ‘Sovremennyye sotsialno-ekonomicheskie protsessy i problemy razvitiia sovetskoi Srednei Azii’, in *Sovetologi o problemakh sotsialno-ekonomicheskogo razvitiia SSSR i soiuzykhk respublik* (Moscow: Institut ekonomiki AN SSSR, 1990), p. 13.

74 *Kommunist Tadjikistana*, 25 May 1991.

1986—10 times the average for the USSR.⁷⁵ It was normal for farmers to use mineral fertilisers at twice and even six times the recommended rate ‘in the false belief that the more fertilisers you put in, the more cotton you harvest’.⁷⁶ Given the omnipresence of cotton plantations in Tajikistan, which pervaded even suburban areas and traditional zones of fruit and vegetable growing, there was little exaggeration in the assessment that ‘the employment of the so-called high technologies of cotton production had led to such catastrophic chemicalisation of agriculture, that local ancient fertile oases became poisoned for long years to come’.⁷⁷

In 1989, 82.3 per cent of all pregnant women residing in cotton-sowing areas suffered from anaemia, due to exposure to harmful substances, poor diet and backbreaking labour in plantations.⁷⁸ Great quantities of chemical residues returned to surface streams and aquifers with drainage water. The result was not unexpected: ‘The analysis of the high rate of infant mortality has shown that its main cause consists of acute digestive diseases, and especially of the fact that 45 percent of the rural population procured drinking water from open reservoirs.’⁷⁹ To make the situation even worse, industrial sewage escapes in Tajikistan more than doubled over the period 1985–89.⁸⁰ In 1990, 15 per cent of drinking water samples showed chemical pollution and 21 per cent of samples had bacteria infestation.⁸¹

Newly built factories were often put into operation without any recycling or rectification facilities. Several types of vegetation died within a 10-km zone around the smelter in Tursunzoda because the fluorine content of the soil rose tenfold between 1979 and 1986, and an environmental disaster eventually turned into a problem of human ecology: it became dangerous to live in the region where ‘the air basin is saturated with compounds of aluminium, fluorine, lead, zinc, cadmium, copper, mercury, arsenic, sulphur and nitrogen oxides, and mineral acids’.⁸² Emissions of toxic chemicals by the Yovon electrochemical plant increased from 451 t in 1985 to 853 t in 1987; the concomitant rise in fines—from 300 to 1110 roubles⁸³—indicated not punishment but criminal indifference of the authorities to environmental protection. A study conducted

75 *Tojikistoni Soveti*, 28 August 1988.

76 Ahmedov, *KPSS v borbe za intensifikatsiiu khlopkovodstva*, p. 278.

77 Shamil Sultanov, ‘Dukh evraziitsa’, *Nash sovremennik*, No. 7 (1992), p. 146.

78 *Zdravookhranenie Tadjikistana*, No. 2 (1990), p. 21.

79 S. E. Karimova, ‘Meditsinskoe obsluzhivanie trudiashikhsia Tadjikistana (60–80-e gody)’, *Izvestiia AN RT. Seriya: vostokovedenie, istorii, filologiya*, No. 2 (26) (1992), p. 43.

80 *Narodnoe khoziaistvo Tadjikskoi SSR v 1990g.*, p. 100.

81 *Vestnik statistiki*, No. 12 (1991), p. 61.

82 Dustbaev, *Problemy khimizatsii otraslei narodnogo khoziaistva Tadjikistana*, p. 75.

83 M. N. Nurnazarov, *Agropromyshlennye komplekсы Tadjikistana* (Dushanbe: Donish, 1990), p. 72.

in 1991 revealed that residents of Dushanbe, once regarded as the greenest and cleanest capital city in the USSR, were seriously concerned about looming ecological problems.⁸⁴

In the post–World War II period, the acreage of forests in Tajikistan decreased almost fourfold.⁸⁵ Still, the Soviet-era powers had enough commonsense to set up a number of nature reserves. The most famous reserve, ‘Tiger Gorge’, was established in 1938 in the southern segment of the Vakhsh Valley.⁸⁶ A special permit from the republican State Committee for Forestry was required simply to visit it. In the 1960s, however, following the construction of dams on the Vakhsh River, the marshes and bogs in Tiger Gorge began to dry up. In the early 1990s, with the weakening of the political centre, unauthorised agricultural development and logging commenced in the reserve.

Scarce financing of conservation and protection measures, irresponsible behaviour by industrial and agricultural managers, and demographic pressures had undermined the unique ecological potential of Tajikistan. Environmental degradation was beginning to affect the health of the population in a gruesome way, similar to that in Turkmenistan.⁸⁷ In one cotton-growing *kolkhoz*, only three of 368 children who underwent medical examination were pronounced healthy.⁸⁸ In 1990, Dr Sofia Hakimova, director of the Institute for Reproductive Health in Dushanbe, assessed the situation as follows: ‘The health of the nation has been sacrificed for cotton. Our genetic fund has been completely destroyed. It must be [considered] a case of genocide.’⁸⁹ In the early 1990s Tajikistan had the worst ratings amongst all republics of the Soviet Union on a number of indicators pertaining to quality of life, sanitation and medical provision, and the situation was likely to deteriorate.⁹⁰ Furthermore, the ability of local authorities to deal with the fallout of the health crisis was unsatisfactory. In one appalling example, an inspection of Clinical Hospital No. 1 of Dushanbe in 1990 revealed that *all* the diagnoses made by its specialists were wrong.⁹¹

84 Some 82.5 per cent complained about dust and gas pollution, 77.8 per cent noted the increasing presence of vermin and 99.9 per cent deplored high noise levels. See: *Zdravookhranenie Tadjikistana*, No. 2 (1993), pp. 37–8.

85 Umarov, ‘Sovremennye sotsialno-ekonomicheskie protsessy i problemy razvitiia sovetskoj Srednej Azii’, p. 13.

86 It offered sanctuary to 30 species of mammals, 140 species of birds and 150 species of plants; many of them were extremely rare and endemic to Tajikistan. See: F. G. Patrunov, *Po Tadjikistanu* (Moscow: Profizdat, 1987), pp. 187–9.

87 For example, in 1991 only 12.2 per cent of children in the age cohort three to twelve months born in the countryside were without developmental abnormalities. See: V. A. Purdenko, M. D. Amanekov and O. N. Kulberdyeva, ‘Problemy ekologii narodonaseleniia Turkmenistana’, *Vostok*, No. 6 (1992), p. 93.

88 *Sogdiana*, No. 1 (February 1990), p. 2.

89 Interview in: *Mesiats ushcherbnoi luny*, [Documentary film] (Dushanbe: Tadjikfilm, 1990).

90 Christopher M. Davis, ‘Health Care Crisis: The Former USSR’, *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 2, No. 40 (8 October 1993), pp. 36–41.

91 A. A. Ahmedov, ‘Sovremennoe sostoianie zdravookhraneniia v respublike i zadachi kollektiva TGMU im. Abuali Ibn Sino v dele podgotovki vrachebnykh kadrov i razvitiia meditsinskoj nauki’, *Zdravookhranenie Tadjikistana*, No. 3 (246) (1993), p. 11.

By the late 1980s, it had become obvious that Tajikistan was in the middle of a ‘systemic structural crisis that economically hinged on absolute land and water starvation, and socially—on the exceptionally high birthrate and the loss by the grassroots social structures of their self-sustainability functions’.⁹² Its symptoms used to be ameliorated by the centre’s redistributive policies—the share of aggregate external transfers in the national income used in Tajikistan rose from 6.7 per cent in 1970 to 12 per cent in 1988.⁹³ Obviously, this situation could not last forever in the conditions of economic collapse during the late Gorbachev period. Tajikistan was living on borrowed time, trying desperately to maintain production and welfare provision at the levels of the more fortunate years of ‘developed socialism’. The crunch in the economic sphere came in 1991. The republic’s budget for that year envisaged a deficit of 23.8 per cent, even though Moscow had promised to contribute 35.8 per cent of all budgetary revenues in subsidies.⁹⁴ When the centre failed to deliver, it was only a matter of time before economic catastrophe would become a major factor in the coming political turmoil.

The Politics of Centralisation and Increased Regionalism

As discussed earlier, the Brezhnev era was characterised by a high degree of stability in the ruling establishment in the union republics. In the 1970s in particular, the tacit compromise between the Kremlin and regional elites ‘allowed strong, extensive political machines to develop *sub rosa* in the Central Asian union republics’.⁹⁵ Territorial bureaucracies had acquired virtual autonomy in handling domestic affairs. The long-serving communist leaders of Central Asia were regarded by the indigenous population as the fathers of their respective nations, who governed not according to some obscure laws imposed by Moscow but in line with traditional sets of values and practices. Donald Carlisle has coined the following metaphoric description while writing about Uzbekistan’s first secretary from 1959 to 1983, Sharaf Rashidov:

There surfaced a variant of communist feudalism, or, to put it another way, an Uzbek version of Oriental Despotism, with Rashidov ruling as khan or emir and the CPSU bureau serving as a council of viziers.

92 Bushkov and Mikulskii, ‘*Tadzhikskaiia revoliutsiia’ i grazhdanskaia voina*, p. 14.

93 Misha V. Belkindas and M. J. Sagers, ‘A Preliminary Analysis of Economic Relations among Union Republics of the USSR: 1970–1988’, *Soviet Geography*, Vol. XXXI, No. 8 (October 1990), p. 640.

94 Boboev, *Ekonomicheskoe razvitie respubliki v usloviakh rynka*, p. 33.

95 Edward Allworth, ‘The New Central Asians’, in *Central Asia: 130 Years of Russian Dominance, A Historical Overview*, ed. Edward Allworth (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), p. 556.

A great deal of power was also delegated to the party secretaries of the various provinces, who administered them much in the way begs (or beks) had ruled their dominions before the Russian conquest.⁹⁶

The situation changed dramatically in 1985 with Gorbachev's appointment as general secretary of the CPSU Central Committee. Curtailing the independence of regional apparatuses was crucial for consolidating his position at the apex of the Soviet power pyramid. Gorbachev had far greater powers than did Brezhnev and Khrushchev at the beginning of their tenures; still, he worked feverishly to expand his power base, and by the time of the CPSU's twenty-seventh congress, held in February–March 1987, 'Gorbachev supporters occupied the key positions in the strategically important fields of foreign affairs, agriculture and personnel, a situation which none of his predecessors had contrived in anything like such a short time (if at all)'.⁹⁷ It has been argued that Gorbachev may have needed to strengthen his primacy within the party before he could embark upon systemic reform,⁹⁸ but people who worked closely with him, such as his chief of staff, Valery Boldin, have suggested that unlimited power was a goal in its own right for the new Soviet leader.⁹⁹

Gorbachev's methods of re-establishing Moscow's firm hand in Central Asia included wholesale purges, unfair trials and a massive influx of 'trusted cadres' from the centre. First secretary of the CPT CC, Rahmon Nabiev, vehemently objected to the Politburo's plans to place 78 'outsiders' in positions of authority in Tajikistan,¹⁰⁰ and was dismissed in December 1985.¹⁰¹ His replacement, Qahhor Mahkamov,¹⁰² was expected to be more amenable to Gorbachev's plans. From early 1987 to the end of 1989, Mahkamov—using what Markowitz terms

96 Donald S. Carlisle, 'Islam Karimov and Uzbekistan: Back to the Future?' in *Patterns in Post-Soviet Leadership*, eds Timothy J. Colton and Robert C. Tucker (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1995), p. 195.

97 T. H. Rigby, 'Old Style Congress—New Style Leadership?' in *Gorbachev at the Helm: A New Era in Soviet Politics?* eds R. Miller, J. Miller and T. H. Rigby (New York: Croom Helm, 1987), p. 33.

98 Graeme Gill, *The Collapse of a Single-Party System: The Disintegration of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 32.

99 Valery Boldin, *Ten Years that Shook the World: The Gorbachev Era As Witnessed by His Chief of Staff* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), p. 112.

100 *Nomzad ba raisi jumhuri Tojikiston Rahmon Nabievich Nabiev* (Dushanbe: [No publisher], 1991), p. 5.

101 The Resolution No. 157 of the Bureau of the CPT CC of 14 December 1985 did not specify the pretext for Nabiev's dismissal; however, well-informed sources within the CPT maintained that he had been set up on order from Moscow. Allegedly, Rahmon Nabiev was secretly filmed while participating in a drunken binge during a business trip to Badakhshan; the compromising videotape was shown to the Politburo members, and in the paranoid atmosphere of Gorbachev's anti-alcohol campaign his fate was sealed. The CPSU CC secretary responsible for personnel matters, G. P. Razumovsky, was dispatched to Dushanbe, and Nabiev was out of office in a matter of days. (Interviews in Dushanbe, December 1994 – January 1995.)

102 Mahkamov, an ethnic Tajik, was born in Leninobod in 1932. He was a graduate of the Leningrad Mining Institute. In 1961 he was appointed 'Chairman of the Leninabad City Soviet Executive Committee, then Chairman of the Tadzhik SSR State Planning Committee and at the same time, beginning in 1965, Vice-Chairman of the Tadzhik SSR Council of Ministers. In 1982 he was appointed Chairman of the Tadzhik SSR Council of Ministers.' See: 'Party Congress Finishes Up; Biographies of the 24 Politburo Members', *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*, Vol. XLII, No. 36 (10 October 1990), p. 20.

‘attacks’, ‘reforms’ and an ‘anti-corruption campaign’—attempted to dismantle the patronage networks within the Communist Party.¹⁰³ These included actions against the elites of patronage networks in Kulob, Qurghonteppa and Mahkamov’s home province of Leninobod. Mahkamov removed many regional elites from their administrative positions and appointed ‘reformist politicians’—often Pamiris and Gharmis/Qaroteginis—in their place.¹⁰⁴

This portrayal of Mahkamov as a motivated reformer needs to be qualified. In particular, the reforms he carried out need to be placed in the context of the Soviet Union, in particular Moscow’s relationship with and control over the republics. Mahkamov was widely regarded as a mere puppet of the Kremlin. Although he had spent many years in high government positions and served as the chairman of the Council of Ministers of Tajikistan between 1982 and 1986, Mahkamov did not have a wide-ranging power base built on parochial and solidarity ties. On top of that, Mahkamov obviously lacked features necessary for an authoritative national leader in Tajikistan. Unlike Nabiev, he did not belong to a traditional noble family; in fact, he was orphaned at age fourteen. Nor did he use marriage to create any alliances: his wife was a Tatar; his elder son married a Korean, and his daughter a Lithuanian.¹⁰⁵ He owed his position exclusively to good relations with higher-ups in Moscow; the real power in Tajikistan became concentrated in the hands of the second secretary of the CPT CC, a close associate of Gorbachev. Karim Abdulov, the chief of staff for President Nabiev (1991–92), writes disparagingly of Mahkamov as an ‘inept’ and ‘slow-witted’ leader who was dictated to by Moscow *desantniks* (literally, ‘paratroopers’; figuratively, aggressive and arrogant outsiders who arrive suddenly and without invitation). Chief among these outsiders, in Abdulov’s opinion, was the second secretary (1986–89) and true power in Tajikistan, the Moldovan Petr K. Luchinsky—better known nowadays as Petru Lucinschi, president of Moldova from 1997 to 2001. Abdulov is quite open in his feelings towards the ‘chauvinist’ Luchinsky, whom he blames for using and exacerbating regionalism (*mahallagaroyi*) in his placement and removal of cadres in Tajikistan.¹⁰⁶ Abdulov maintains that Luchinsky’s tactics worsened the regional divides in Tajikistan and pushed the country towards war.¹⁰⁷ Abdulov is adamant about the effect of the Mahkamov–Luchinsky reforms, especially the increased level of regionalism. He points to the period from 1985 to 1990

103 Markowitz, *Collapsed and Prebendal States in Post-Soviet Eurasia*, pp. 5, 102–3.

104 Markowitz, *Collapsed and Prebendal States in Post-Soviet Eurasia*, pp. 5, 102–3, 118–21.

105 *Kommunist Tadjikistana*, 2 April 1991.

106 Karim Abdulov, ‘Tojikiston va Chin’, n.d., online: <http://www.abdulov.tj/bk19_1.php>; ‘100 Solagii Rakhim Jalil: Ohanraboi Millat’, n.d., online: <http://www.abdulov.tj/bk15_1.php>

107 Abdulov writes: ‘I am confident of what I have concluded and I can emphatically say this: Luchinsky’s contribution to the tragedies of my people and nation today is quite large. Many times he separated my people to the north and south, to the east and west. With dozens of lies and deceitful acts he took away stability and made Tajik children homeless through war.’ See: Karim Abdulov, *Rohi Behbud* (Dushanbe: [Self-published], 1995), p. 16.

as a time when the people of Tajikistan 'became slaves of the centre', and when '[e]veryone became concerned with only themselves, their own families, and their own relatives'.¹⁰⁸ While other analysts are less concerned with assigning blame, they do agree on the increased importance of region of origin as a result of how the reforms of the late 1980s were implemented.¹⁰⁹ Initially, in the mid 1980s, the dividing lines for struggles among the *nomenklatura* were between the 'northerners' (Leninobod) on one side and the 'southerners' (Gharmis, Kulobis and Pamiris) on the other. The southern apparatchiks were optimistic about their chances of gaining positions of power as the hold of the Soviet centre over the Tajik SSR's mechanisms of power weakened. This process quickened considerably as Gorbachev's *perestroika* reforms took effect. Soon Makhamov was attempting to defuse the situation by appointing representatives of Kulob, the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO) and Gharm to high positions in the state apparatus. By the late 1980s, thanks to *perestroika*, non-Leninobodis from the south (Pamiris, Kulobis and Garmis) were brought into high government positions, resulting in 'ambitious hopes among southerners'.¹¹⁰

None of the CPT CC secretaries of the 1985 vintage remained in office in 1987. By the end of 1986, all *oblast* leaders had been replaced in Tajikistan, and so had more than 80 per cent of party officials at *raion* (town) level.¹¹¹ There are reasons to believe that Moscow was preparing a frontal assault on the Tajik political elite along the lines of the 'Uzbek affair'.¹¹² In 1986, a special group of investigators was seconded to the republic from the USSR's General Procurator's Office with unlimited powers to investigate and uproot corruption. The Kulob *oblast* had been singled out, and in 1987 the *obkom* first secretary, Salohiddin Hasanov, and the head of the Regional Procurement Authority, Halil Karimov, were arrested on charges of bribery and abuse of office.¹¹³ As in Uzbekistan,

108 Abdulov, *Rohi Behbud*, p. 19.

109 For example, see Markowitz's points on the appointments of Pamiris and Gharmis to the newly vacated positions.

110 Niyazi, 'Tajikistan I', p. 155. For example, Goibnazar Pallaev (Pamiri) became chairman of the Supreme Soviet; Izatullo Khayoev (Kulobi) was appointed chairman of the Council of Ministers; Shodi Shabdolov (Pamiri) was appointed Communist Party secretary for industry and ideology; Mamadayoz Navjuvonov (Pamiri) was appointed minister of the interior; and Buri Karimov (Gharmi) was appointed head of GOSPLAN, while also serving as deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers.

111 Assessment is based on the analysis of name entries in the CPT confidential telephone directories.

112 The total purge of Brezhnev-era cadres in Uzbekistan from 1983 to 1989 came to be known as the 'Uzbek' or 'Cotton affair'. Under Gorbachev, it was accompanied by a massive propaganda campaign in Soviet media conveying the message that 'bound up in the general criminal conspiracy were not nearly all but absolutely all the party, state, Komsomol, trade union and economic managers of the republic and of its regions'. See: Arkady Vaksberg, *The Soviet Mafia* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1991), p. 116. From 1985 to 1988, 58 000 senior officials in Uzbekistan were replaced. See: Carlisle, 'Geopolitics and Ethnic Problems of Uzbekistan and Its Neighbours', p. 79.

113 Hasanov wrote later: 'The investigative group was busy not establishing the truth, but incessantly collecting dubious documents that "confirmed" this or that version that would satisfy the powers that be. I was pressed to give false testimony against First Secretary of the CC, Q. Mahkamov, Chairman of the Council of Ministers, I. Khayyoev, Chairman of the republic's Supplies Agency [GOSSNAB], S. Ashurov, Chairman of the Supreme Court, I. Khojaev, Party and Soviet leaders of the Kulob *oblast* ... Defamatory materials were

in Tajikistan prosecutorial attacks and judicial arbitrariness were hallmarks of Gorbachev's centralisation drive. Moreover, General S. M. Gromov, who headed the inquisition team in Tajikistan in the late 1980s, later confessed that 'violations of legality committed by investigative officers in Tajikistan were incomparably greater than in any other republic of the former Soviet Union'.¹¹⁴ In 1991, Hasanov, Karimov and dozens of other high-ranking Tajik officials were fully acquitted. Lieutenant Colonel V. A. Shushakov from the USSR Ministry of Interior, who had initiated a number of illegal criminal cases in the Kulob *oblast*, went into hiding in 1990 after he became a subject of investigation himself.¹¹⁵

Gorbachev's frontal attack on the old *nomenklatura* in Tajikistan was successful in the sense that it did excoriate the elaborate system of patronage networks in Tajikistan. For the time being the Kremlin regained full control over all recruitment there; between 1986 and 1990, 'no *kolkhoz* chairman, no workshop director, no university lecturer could be appointed without Moscow's permission'.¹¹⁶ The Tajik elite surrendered its positions without much resistance due to internal friction based primarily on regional rivalry. Henceforth, there was no need for a mass campaign similar to the 'cotton affair' in Uzbekistan—which had made the words 'crook' and 'Uzbek' synonyms in the Soviet media. Gorbachev's victory, however, quickly backfired. As James Critchlow has noted, the old Soviet elites in Central Asia,

whatever their shortcomings, helped the Party to maintain political stability while promoting economic development and a degree of social change in the face of challenges of many kinds. These elites evolved over many decades in response to the Party's needs for an apparatus that could deal with a largely Islamic-traditionalist, nationalistic, elder-venerating, agrarian, male-dominated society with inherent hostility to change. Now the equilibrium of many years has changed.¹¹⁷

Gorbachev, Luchinsky and their lieutenants brought in from the European Soviet Union¹¹⁸ could not and did not pay any attention to the intricacies of

being gathered that implicated the Minister of Interior Pulatov, deputy Procurator of the republic Emomov and many others who were destined to experience the gloom and darkness of prison cells ... Several goals were pursued in the process: those who were wholly subordinate to Moscow but still had the audacity to have personal opinion were removed, and soulless marionettes replaced them. Thus, the influence of Moscow was becoming infinite and the republic was being deprived even of the trappings of autonomy.' See: *Biznes i politika*, 8 January 1994.

114 *Biznes i politika*, 31 July 1993.

115 *Kommunist Tadjikistana*, 3 July 1991.

116 Abdulov, *Rohi behbud*, p. 10.

117 James Critchlow, 'Prelude to "Independence": How the Uzbek Party Apparatus Broke Moscow's Grip On Elite Recruitment', in *Soviet Central Asia: The Failed Transformation*, ed. William Fierman (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1991), p. 153.

118 Their collective nickname in Tajikistan was 'paratroopers'; indeed, they appeared out of the blue sky, without the slightest idea about local culture and traditions, but with an enormous sense of superiority. A certain Vladimir V. Ruzanov presents a typical case in this respect. A Russian, who had spent all his life

Tajik domestic policies. Jabbor Rasulov and Rahmon Nabiev were very skilled operators who managed to maintain a *modus vivendi* amongst regional cliques. Between 1986 and 1989, the balance of parochial interests in Tajikistan was irreparably damaged. The fragmentation of the national power elite reached new heights. At republic level, four major competing groups emerged.

1. The group of Qahhor Mahkamov, first secretary of the CPT CC, which embraced representatives of relatively minor clans from the north, such as the CPT CC secretary, Guljahon Bobosadykova, and deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers, Habibullo Saidmurodov, from Uroteppa (Istaravshon). It also included some prominent politicians from Leninobod who were in personal opposition to Rahmon Nabiev—the charismatic regional first secretary, Rifat Khojiev, and another CPT CC secretary, Temurboy Mirkholiqov. Since Mahkamov's status was not rooted primarily in the local community, he had to rely heavily on the 'paratroopers' from Moscow and a rather limited circle of people who owed him favours.¹¹⁹
2. The group of Rahmon Nabiev. Though ousted from the top leadership, Nabiev continued to command wide respect in his patrimony, Leninobod. Old-time *nomenklatura* cadres sacked or demoted after 1985 tended to coalesce around him; they were not only northerners but influential Kulobis as well—most notably, former minister of education Talbak Nazarov. Rahmon Nabiev was chairman of the Society for Environmental Protection of Tajikistan in 1986–90, a post that allowed him to travel widely on official business and maintain personal contacts with leaders in Moscow and Central Asian capitals.
3. The group of Kulobis headed by Hikmatullo Nasriddinov, minister of irrigation and the CPT CC secretary under Nabiev. Technically, Izatullo Khayoev, the chairman of the Council of Ministers of Tajikistan, was the most senior representative of the Kulob region in the government, but he was regarded as a weak leader loyal to Mahkamov rather than to his patrimony.
4. The group of Ghoibnazar Pallaev, the chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of Tajikistan, comprised officials of Gharmi and Pamiri extraction including the first deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers, Akbar Makhsumov—son of the widely respected first *Revkom* chairman of Tajikistan from 1924 to 1933, Nusratullo Makhsum—and Dushanbe's mayor, Maqsud Ikromov.

in Ukraine, he was transferred in 1986 from the humble position of a *raikom* instructor to head a sector in the Ideological Department of the CPT CC, and in 1988 became first deputy head of this department. He was notorious for his indiscriminately denigrating attitude toward all his native subordinates and peers, for he believed them to be clandestine Muslims and hence anti-communists. (Taped interview with Iskandar Asadulloev, former head of sector in the CPT CC, Dushanbe, 6 January 1995.)

119 A *Pravda* correspondent once observed that he 'is too lenient to his coterie; perhaps, he has not been selective enough while forming his "team"'. Indeed, he is surrounded by a fair number of quite strange persons whose presence by his side is hard to explain.' See: *Tadzhikistan v ogne* (Dushanbe: Irfon, 1993), p. 144.

Kulobis and Gharmis became primary targets of restructuring and reorganisation campaigns launched by Mahkamov and Luchinsky. Luchinsky, for his part, was a leader who wanted to completely dismantle certain regional groupings, Kulobis in particular;¹²⁰ however, the Gharmis sustained the most humiliating losses (at the national level), especially when Akbar Makhsumov was sacked from the government and made head of the republic's botanic garden. The program of accelerated industrial development of the south had been abandoned; in 1989, the Leninobod *oblast* received 60 per cent of the funds earmarked by Moscow for Tajikistan, whereas Kulob received a mere 6 per cent.¹²¹ Thus, the main line of confrontation in the late 1980s appeared to be between the north and the south (that is, valley Tajiks and mountain Tajiks). Toshmat Nozirov, then chairman of the Executive Committee of the Farkhor *raion* in the Kulob *oblast*, reminisced that 'the conflict was brewing on the regionalistic grounds then ... A group of unsavoury politicians based their intrigues on this dichotomy to play for power'.¹²²

In 1989 it became clear that Gorbachev's experimentation had led to 'a diminishing of the regime's power over society, even as he sought to increase his own power over the regime'.¹²³ Having failed to extract the obedience of the party *apparatus*, he attempted to downgrade it and use other institutions, such as the legislature, the army and security establishment, as his power base, but with little or no success. The 'mature' Gorbachev practised what Joel Migdal has called the 'politics of survival'—a 'pathological style at the apex of the state', which incorporated 'a mechanism of deliberately weakening arms of the state and allied organisations in order to assure the tenure of the top state leadership'.¹²⁴ Creation of the presidency, *glasnost*, an invitation of the masses to politics through popular referenda and contested elections, also contributed to the atmosphere of legal and political uncertainty in Central Asia.

As for the populace of Tajikistan, they held very strong, negative views on Gorbachev's reforms.¹²⁵ A sociological study conducted in the Tajik State University in 1989 revealed that students and staff members

120 Luchinsky once remarked: 'these churlish Kulobis should be completely and utterly destroyed.' See: Nasriddinov, *Tarkish*, p. 32.

121 Vadim Lifshits, 'Politicheskaiia situatsiia v Tadjhikistane (Ieto 1993)', *Rossiiia i musulmanskii mir*, No. 10 (1993), p. 36.

122 *Biznes i politika*, 8 March 1994.

123 W. J. Tompson, 'Khrushchev and Gorbachev as Reformers: A Comparison', *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 23, Part 1 (1993), p. 89.

124 Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States*, pp. 217, 264.

125 For example, the 'Public Views on Perestroika in Tajikistan' in one 1990 survey found: 13 per cent positive, 35 per cent ambivalent, 32 per cent negative and 'hard to say' 20 per cent. See: Alimov and Saidov, *Natsionalnyi vopros*, p. 87. In another poll the responses in Tajikistan were far more negative when the survey was in regards to 'Public Attitude towards Transition to A Market Economy' in June 1990: 4.9 per cent

link *perestroika* with the emergence of negative phenomena in the life of modern society, such as: organised crime, economic chaos, absence of concrete deeds ... aggravation of ethnic relations, inertia and reversals in social development, growth of alcoholism and its consequences, profiteering, lawlessness ... absence of social protection, evanescence of public consumption goods.¹²⁶

A year later it was disclosed that

while seven Balts and Georgians out of every ten say there is too little freedom and very few people claim there is too much, Central Asians are quite different; only 28 percent of the Turkmen and Tadjiks and 36 percent of the Uzbeks complained of restriction on freedom, and 20 percent of the Tadjiks say there is too much freedom.¹²⁷

Confronted with increasing dissatisfaction with his line in the union republics, Gorbachev failed to amend it: 'Given his complete lack of understanding, Gorbachev was simply dumbfounded when one nationality after another demanded attention.'¹²⁸ Gradually, the incumbent ruling elite in Tajikistan came to realise that reliance on the decaying centre could not guarantee its stay in power. It might have embarked upon the path of adapting the political machine to the new conditions, mobilising the masses under the slogans of nation-state building, as was done in the neighbouring Central Asian republics; instead, Mahkamov's clique deployed its own version of the 'politics of survival', which pursued the sole objective of pre-empting the emergence of competing power centres in Tajikistan. Coalition-building along regional lines and pitting sub-ethnic groupings against each other were two important elements of this strategy.

Mahkamov's northerners found an unlikely ally in the face of the Pamiris, who were promised greater political and economic autonomy. During the fifteenth plenum of the CPT CC in December 1989, Mahkamov declared that

there are already shifts in this field. For example, the Chairman of the [Badakhshan] *oblast* Soviet of People's Deputies will have the status of Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the republic. The right of

positive; 19.3 per cent ambivalent; 56.9 per cent negative; 2.7 per cent indifferent; 15.8 per cent 'hard to answer'. Meanwhile, the Soviet average for 'positive' in this poll was 9.9 per cent and in Estonia 34.4 per cent. See: *Vestnik statistiki*, No. 2 (1991), p. 61.

126 *Vuzovskaia molodezh*, Vypusk 1, pp. 61–2.

127 Roy D. Laird, *The Soviet Legacy* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1993), pp. 171–2.

128 Anders Åslund, 'Russia's Road from Communism', *Daedalus*, Vol. 121, No. 2 (Spring 1992), p. 78.

legislative initiative has been granted to the *oblast*. A certain quota for the GBAO representatives in the Supreme Soviet should be envisaged in the future.¹²⁹

The appointment of Mamadayoz Navjuvonov, a Pamiri army colonel with no police experience, to the position of minister of interior in March 1989 signalled a major departure from established personnel practices—previously this crucial post had been occupied exclusively by Kulobis (or by someone who allowed Kulobis to dominate in the ranks). In the words of one prominent opponent, Navjuvonov ‘elevated regionalism to its repulsive heights. He placed his relatives and friends in important positions in regions, districts and towns of the republic, and especially within the Ministry of Interior.’¹³⁰ The significance of this change in the Ministry of Interior for regionally based grievances is clear.

Competition in Qurghonteppa and Kulob

The struggle for dominance in Qurghonteppa involved Kulobis, Gharmis and Uzbeks (the last made up almost one-third of the population).¹³¹ Aziz Niyazi describes the situation in the Qurghonteppa *oblast*:¹³²

In the second half of the 1980s and at the beginning of the 1990s local conflicts constantly erupted in the region, both between Tajiks and non-Tajiks and among Tajiks themselves originating from different regions of the republic. Sharp nomenklatura infighting broke out, mostly between Uzbeks, Garm and Kuliabi Tajiks over administrative and managerial posts at all levels. It was there, in a region being industrialized at full speed, with its ethnic and subethnic mosaic, that the sores that would later affect the body of the republic first came to a head. Regional contradictions and interests were spreading over into parochial struggles involving the district and regional authorities. The localist threads of intraregional nomenklatura games were reaching out into the central power apparatus.

In the 1980s, the pattern of sharing power in Qurghonteppa was as follows: *obkom* first secretary from Kulob, chairman of the executive committee from Gharm and head of the local cooperative society (*Tojikmatlubot*) an ethnic Uzbek. In 1988 there was a restructuring of the administrative status of southern Tajikistan when Kulob and Qurghonteppa lost their *oblast* status. There are several conflicting versions for the motivations behind the merging

129 *Kommunist Tadzhikistana*, 8 December 1989.

130 Dustov, *Zakhm bar jismi vatan*, p. 24.

131 Rubin, ‘Tajikistan’, p. 211.

132 Niyazi, ‘Tajikistan I’, p. 154.

of the Kulob and Qurghonteppa *oblasts* into the united Khatlon *oblast* in April 1988: a) the leadership of Kulob had secured the merger on their initiative; b) the consolidation of Kulob and Qurghonteppa was aimed at reducing the power of Kulobi elites;¹³³ and c) the merger was an attempt on the part of the ruling elites to create fragmentation amongst the southerners, who were at this time starting to agitate against northern domination.¹³⁴ The Kulobis had received most of the top administrative jobs in the newly established Khatlon *oblast*, much to the annoyance of Gharmi settlers in the Vakhsh Valley, who had by that time 'gained control of transport and trade, the spheres that had always brought much profit'.¹³⁵ Nevertheless, Mahkamov's bureaucratic changes had also allowed Gharmis to secure some important positions in the Qurghonteppa regional government.¹³⁶ According to Rahmon Nabiev, the merger was a purely political exercise, costly, unnecessary and not warranted by any economic considerations.¹³⁷ Kulob and Qurghonteppa would eventually regain *oblast* status in January 1990 with the dismantling of Khatlon. At this time the locals in Kulob were able to take back control over the local government apparatuses. But while the attacks on local elites had now ended, the Kulobis were still excluded from national-level positions while Pamiris and Qarotegini (Gharmi) Tajiks were now increasingly being appointed to national-level positions. This led to an even further disaffection between the Kulobi elite and the centre as the Kulobi elite no longer saw any beneficial relationship to be had with the centre.¹³⁸

Additionally, in 1988 a series of clashes between Gharmis and Uzbeks erupted in the Qurghonteppa region, especially in its southern Kolkhozobod *raion*. Uzbeks, who were the indigenous population, demanded fairer distribution of scarce arable lands and the break-up of collective farms into smaller units on an ethnic basis. The CPT leadership showed remarkable inability to cope with the problem. The crisis lasted a whole month and ended only when local elders took the initiative into their hands and demarcated fields and living quarters, bypassing the civic authorities. Trespassing was strictly prohibited, and ethnic militias armed with clubs and hunting guns were formed, for the first time in the Soviet period.¹³⁹ At one point the Kolkhozobod district party committee was ransacked during a mass rally:

It was the first political gathering that claimed blood ... People driven to the edge had realised that the leader of the Tajik state, Mahkamov, was incapable and his government was in a state of paralysis. Preparations

133 Markowitz, *Collapsed and Prebendal States in Post-Soviet Eurasia*, pp. 97–100.

134 G. Khaidarov and M. Inomov, *Tajikistan: Tragedy and Anguish of the Nation* (St Petersburg: LINKO, 1993), p. 22.

135 Khaidarov and Inomov, *Tajikistan*, p. 22. See also: Niyazi, 'Tajikistan I', p. 151.

136 Markowitz, *Collapsed and Prebendal States in Post-Soviet Eurasia*, pp. 118, 121.

137 *Tojikistoni Soveti*, 23 February 1990.

138 Markowitz, *Collapsed and Prebendal States in Post-Soviet Eurasia*, pp. 97–100.

139 *Haqiqati Kolkhozobod*, 3 October 1991.

for overthrowing Q. Mahkamov's regime were underway amongst the Gharmis, Qaroteginis and Pamiris residing in the Qurghonteppa region.¹⁴⁰

The stalemated pattern of leadership at the top was about to be challenged by civil violence, focusing on political issues but rooted in much deeper cultural cleavages.

While Roy pointed to the relative personal wealth of Gharmis in Qurghonteppa,¹⁴¹ it was control of collective farms that was the most contentious issue in the competition between local Gharmi and Kulobi elites, as well as between the memberships of their respective networks. The collective and state farms of Qurghonteppa's Vakhsh River Valley accounted for 40 per cent of the value of Tajikistan's agricultural production, resulting in the competition for influence and control here being 'one of the greatest sources of inter-regional tension in the republic'.¹⁴² As elsewhere in Central Asia, in Qurghonteppa Province administrators traditionally had very long tenures, the powerful chairmen of collective farms in particular. For example, in a sampling of 15 Qurghonteppa farm bosses from the late 1930s to the mid 1980s, Markowitz finds that the mean number of years in office was more than 23; however, starting in the early 1980s there was significant turnover of political and economic leaders in Qurghonteppa. The purges of the second half of the 1980s included the replacement of the purged leaders with Russians, Pamiris and Gharmis. The very brief tenure of district first secretaries in Qurghonteppa Province, as opposed to the long tenure of their predecessors, illustrated this trend. Despite these actions, the reforms in Qurghonteppa were not successful in asserting control over the local power structures, even as the old elites' patronage networks were dismantled. Established patterns of political and economic power were not easy to displace.¹⁴³ Markowitz describes the situation in Qurghonteppa leading up to independence:

[T]he provincial elite was divided from 1988 onwards, splitting districts and even collective farms with some tied to reformist cadres

140 Nasriddinov, *Tarkish*, p. 44.

141 Roy, 'Is the Conflict in Tajikistan a Model for Conflicts throughout Central Asia', p. 139. Roy writes: 'For reasons that have yet to be elucidated, the Gharmis rapidly acquired a dominant position locally [in Qurghonteppa]: their wealth is apparent from their houses (often multi-storied) ... [They are w]ell off, but excluded from Communist power.' Colette Harris studied Gharmi communities in Khatlon (Qurghonteppa) and offered this assessment of their income levels before the war: 'the Gharmis increased their incomes substantially by selling fruit from their private plots in Russia at high prices. Before the civil war many Gharmi families in this area possessed several cars as well as at least one television set, radio, sewing machine, and refrigerator—that is, most of the larger consumer goods available in the former Soviet Union.' See: Colette Harris, 'Coping with Daily Life in Post-Soviet Tajikistan: The Gharmi Villages of Khatlon Province', *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (1998), pp. 657–8.

142 Markowitz, *Collapsed and Prebendal States in Post-Soviet Eurasia*, p. 52.

143 Markowitz, *Collapsed and Prebendal States in Post-Soviet Eurasia*, pp. 114–15, 119–21.

(who primarily originated from the Karategin Valley [Gharmis] and GBAO [Pamiris]) and others tied to the old guard (who had close ties to Leninabad and Kuliab) being appointed to posts in the region following Makhkamov's resignation in August 1991.¹⁴⁴

Makhkamov's campaign included law enforcement investigations into areas that were previously under the protection of local party officials. Of course, the turnover was implemented in a manner that would keep Leninobodis/Khujandis in a dominant position. But still, Pamiris and Tajiks from Qarotegin were appointed to significant national-level positions for the first time since the 1940s. In reaction to Makhkamov's policies, the elites in Kulob no longer saw a mutually beneficial patronage relationship with the central government. They soon started embezzling agricultural profits while taking over local law enforcement and judicial agencies as a way to protect their scheme. By the end of the Soviet period, farm bosses and regional politicians in Kulob exercised 'significant influence' over law enforcement agencies and the courts while increasingly relying on illegal income.¹⁴⁵

Stephane Dudoignon describes an intensified competition during 1990–91 at the elite level in Qurghontepa between the Brezhnev-era elite on one side and Gharmi and Pamiri elites on the other. The Pamiri and Gharmi elites continued to push for political and economic reforms that would bolster their decreasing power and influence.¹⁴⁶ In competition with the Gharmi and Pamiri elites were many apparatchiks from Kulob who were—since autumn 1991 during the lead-up to elections—working as part of an alliance with Nabiev.¹⁴⁷ Makhkamov's bureaucratic changes had allowed Gharmis to secure important positions in the Qurghontepa regional government. But the situation changed by late 1991 when President Nabiev's counter-reforms allowed Kulobis to gain 'unprecedented access' to powerful positions in Qurghontepa.¹⁴⁸ This was part of an effort by

144 Markowitz, *Collapsed and Prebendal States in Post-Soviet Eurasia*, p. 121.

145 Markowitz, *Collapsed and Prebendal States in Post-Soviet Eurasia*, pp. 84–90, 95, 99, 101.

146 Markowitz, *Collapsed and Prebendal States in Post-Soviet Eurasia*, p. 122.

147 Parviz Mullojonov, 'The Islamic Clergy in Tajikistan Since the End of the Soviet Period', in *Islam and Politics in Russia and Central Asia (Early Eighteenth to Late Twentieth Centuries)*, eds Stéphane Dudoignon and Komatsu Hisao (London: Kegan Paul, 2001), p. 248. Matveeva, however, notes that there was an earlier relationship. As early as the 1970s more personnel from Hisor and Kulob were brought into the 'ruling establishment'. This is as opposed to Gharmis, who 'had little standing' at the time. See: Anna Matveeva, 'The Perils of Emerging Statehood: Civil War and State Reconstruction in Tajikistan', *Crisis States Working Papers*, Series No. 2, Paper No. 46 (March 2009), p. 7.

148 Markowitz, *Collapsed and Prebendal States in Post-Soviet Eurasia*, pp. 118, 121.

Kulobi elites that Schoeberlein-Engel terms an attempt to ‘dominate and even annex’ Qurghontepa,¹⁴⁹ however, not as many old elites were able to retake their positions as those in Kulob had done.¹⁵⁰

By early 1992 in Qurghontepa the competing Gharmi elites—some tied to ‘patrons in the Karategin valley’—on one side and elites tied to Kulob and Leninobod on the other ‘increasingly viewed their interests as under attack from the other’ as each side made ‘repeated efforts [to] gain ground over the other’ in the competition for control over state-controlled resources.¹⁵¹ Markowitz argues that ‘[t]ension and barely concealed hostility within the provincial elite left the region primed for the outbreak of conflict’.¹⁵² The situation worsened once President Nabiev agreed to form a ‘Government of National Reconciliation’ in May 1992. The emboldened opposition leaders then attempted to remove selected leaders in the Qurghontepa regional administration, many of whom had been appointed in late 1991 when Nabiev returned to the top leadership position. Markowitz argues that the administrators appointed by Nabiev ‘had come to represent a foreign occupying force among those with patronage ties to the Karategin Valley [that is, Gharmis]’.¹⁵³ Under pressure, Nabiev allowed his new appointee to the top administrative position in Qurghontepa to remove several politicians and attempt to remove others with ties to Kulob; however, the new appointee, Nurali Qurbonov, did not have the power to remove the strongest local politicians and economic actors. The action further polarised the two sides in Qurghontepa.¹⁵⁴

The Failure of Nationalism

During the period 1988–91, Gorbachev destroyed the mechanisms of legitimacy for state socialism and eviscerated the party’s monopoly on political socialisation. Various alternative forms of social and political aggregation came into being to fill the void left by the shrinking CPSU. Analysing Gorbachev’s political reforms, T. H. Rigby has observed that ‘whereas in Russia proper the most influential unofficial organisations were concerned with general issues of political and social reform, in the non-Russian republics those focusing on national causes quickly came to the fore’.¹⁵⁵ Ostensibly, Tajikistan was no

149 John Schoeberlein-Engel, ‘Bones of Contention: Conflicts over Resources’, in *Searching for Peace in Central and South Asia: An Overview of Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Activities*, eds Monique Mekenkamp, Paul van Tongeren and Hans van de Veen (Boulder, Colo., and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), p. 89.

150 Markowitz, *Collapsed and Prebendal States in Post-Soviet Eurasia*, p. 118, 121.

151 Markowitz, *Collapsed and Prebendal States in Post-Soviet Eurasia*, pp. 118–19, 122–3.

152 Markowitz, *Collapsed and Prebendal States in Post-Soviet Eurasia*, pp. 122–3.

153 Markowitz, *Collapsed and Prebendal States in Post-Soviet Eurasia*, p. 123.

154 Markowitz, *Collapsed and Prebendal States in Post-Soviet Eurasia*, pp. 123–4.

155 Rigby, *The Changing Soviet System*, p. 218.

exception to the rule—institutional processes in the republic had a distinctly nationalist imprint; however, ethnic mobilisation ultimately failed there (as did Islamist mobilisation), and political activism took the form of regional factionalism. Why did this happen?

Michael Rywkin, hardly one of Brezhnev's admirers, has assessed his era as 'the culmination of what Soviet nationality policy and the socialist economy were capable of delivering'.¹⁵⁶ In 1982, Rahmon Nabiev, then first secretary of the CPT CC, wrote:

From the heights of the present day we can clearly see the heroic path covered by the Tajik people, toilers of the republic, during the years of Soviet power, the path from feudalism to developed socialism, from a state of possessing no rights to freedom, from poverty and ignorance to a peak of economic and spiritual prosperity.¹⁵⁷

However bombastic and preposterous this statement may appear, the Great Socialist Myth did indeed take root in Tajik society, at least in its upper strata. And 'once a myth has been propounded in a closed society, it can be nurtured and developed through the almost unlimited controls at the disposal of the regime'.¹⁵⁸

Intellectuals have always been the bearers of national consciousness in developing societies. In Tajikistan 'an impressive quota of Tajik novelists, essayists, historians, and poets from all classes and regions converged within the unerring guidelines of the writers' unions in Moscow and Dushanbe to define the republic's literary personality. As compensation for political subordination, the Tajiks ... had developed a cultural superiority complex.'¹⁵⁹ The Tajik intelligentsia was characterised by spiritual dualism: its commitment to traditional cultural values and forms had to coexist with the aesthetic and ideological imperatives of the Soviet era.¹⁶⁰ Beginning in the late 1960s, in the general context of Brezhnev's politics of 'normalcy', the moral dilemma of intellectuals lost its acuteness to an extent; the new generation of poets, writers and artists was able to express a plurality of views, albeit in camouflaged form.

156 Michael Rywkin, *Moscow's Lost Empire* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1994), p. 181.

157 R. N. Nabiev, *Sovetskii Tadzhikistan* (Moscow: Izdatelstvo politicheskoi literatury, 1982), p. 106.

158 Lowell Tillett, *The Great Friendship: Soviet Historians on the Non-Russian Nationalities* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969), p. 5.

159 John B. Perry, 'Tajik Literature: Seventy Years Is Longer Than the Millennium', *World Literature Today*, Vol. 70, No. 3 (Summer 1996), p. 572.

160 A Tajik writer reminisced in 1994 that 'if we go back to the socialist epoch, poets then were on the top of social influence, unlike Islamists, and were making a substantial contribution to the Weltanschauung [world view] of the people ... The poet in the Orient is more than a poet. This formula ... has always been supported by the Bolsheviks in our country ... Many politicians in Tajikistan took pride in friendship with *literati* ... It was not simply a matter of prestige, but also the recognition of poetry as the main cultural component of the Oriental mentality.' See: *Literaturnaiia gazeta*, No. 41 (12 October 1994), p. 7.

Professor Rahimi Musulmoniyon, a renowned Tajik anti-communist, has written that it was a time when a lot of young, talented people not afraid of telling the truth came to the fore.¹⁶¹ Eventually a number of discursive fields emerged in Tajik culture where national and Soviet themes organically merged—the unprecedented heroism of Tajiks during the Great Patriotic War for one.¹⁶²

Gradually the denigrating Khrushchev-era image of Tajiks as primitive Asians led out of a historical backwater by progressive forces from European Russia¹⁶³ gave way to a much different appraisal of reality, based on praising the glorious past and creative present of the Tajik people. Publication in 1970 of Bobojon Ghafurov's monumental work *The Tajiks: Archaic, Ancient and Mediaeval History*,¹⁶⁴ which laid claim to most of the classical Persian canon, was a milestone in the process of reinventing Tajik history. It quickly became the bible of every Tajik intellectual: in 1989, 62 per cent of tertiary students of the titular nationality had this book in their possession.¹⁶⁵ Ghafurov gave rise to a whole school of academics who propagated the notion of the uniqueness of the Tajiks and their mission to transmit knowledge of the past in Central Asia. The prominent Tajik historian Rahim Masov has insisted that 'without the knowledge of the Tajik language, study of the cultural heritage of Turkic peoples is impossible ... All pre-revolutionary spiritual culture of the peoples of Central Asia can be comprehended only with the assistance of the Tajik language.'¹⁶⁶

The alleged outright Russification of non-Slavic ethnic groups used to be one of the favourite themes of Western experts on Soviet nationality policy; some of them propounded truly apocalyptic views such as 'the languages of the non-Russian peoples of the USSR seem doomed to eventual extinction'.¹⁶⁷ In reality, the 1970s

161 *Adolat*, No. 2 (November 1990), p. 7.

162 During the war, 13 997 Tajiks received orders and medals of the USSR; 14 of them became Heroes of the Soviet Union. See: *Natsionalnaia politika KPSS v deistvii* (Tashkent: Uzbekistan, 1979), p. 257.

163 See, for instance, the sycophantic statement made by the CPT CC first secretary, Tursun Uljaboev, in February 1960: 'Who helped us to gain freedom, to become consolidated as a nation ... to build up an industry and the kolkhoz system, to liquidate illiteracy once and for all, to create a culture national in form and socialist in content—The Communist Party, the great Russian people.' See: V. Borysenko, 'The 1959 Purges in the Communist Parties of the Soviet National Republics', *Problems of the Peoples of the USSR*, No. 5 (1960), p. 13.

164 B. G. Ghafurov, *Tadzhiki: drevneishaia, drevniaia i srednevekovaiia istoriia*, 2nd edn (Dushanbe: Irfon, 1989). According to Ghafurov, works by Omar Khayyam, Abdurrahman Jami and even Hafiz were classics of Tajik literature. *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, pp. 163, 250, 255.

165 *Vuzovskaia molodezh*, Vypusk 1, p. 29.

166 Masov, *Istoriia topornogo razdeleniia*, pp. 16–17. Generally, one has to agree with Teresa Rakowska-Harmstone that 'the massive effort to adapt the traditional modes of cultural expression to the reality of the new Soviet system has been impressive, and has produced some interesting results on the part of the new Tadzhik Soviet intellectuals and artists ... The dominant theme ... has been the desire to preserve the traditional and Persian classical characteristics in as unadulterated a form as possible. This does not mean that the Soviet content has been wholly rejected; some of its features—especially those touching on the improvement in the economic and social conditions—appear to have been fully absorbed.' See: Rakowska-Harmstone, *Russia and Nationalism in Central Asia*, p. 267.

167 Michael Bruchis, 'The Effect of the USSR's Language Policy on the National Languages of Its Turkic Population', in *The USSR and the Muslim World: Issues in Domestic and Foreign Policy*, ed. Yaacov Ro'i (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1984), p. 146.

saw more extensive use of indigenous languages in public communication in Central Asia, at the expense of Russian.¹⁶⁸ In 1971, the Terminology Committee of the Academy of Sciences of the Tajik SSR published an instruction that provided for greater usage of Tajik words and grammatical constructions in state affairs and science; this was 'an important step in the direction of strengthening and formalising the national basis of the Tajik semantics'.¹⁶⁹ The percentage of Tajiks who claimed fluency in Russian did not increase after the 1970s and was only 30 per cent at the time of the 1989 census.¹⁷⁰

A combination of factors, such as the autonomy of the nativised bureaucracy, the existence of a stratum of indigenous intellectuals, and a growing ability to express national identity through artistic means, had contributed to the phenomenon of 'Soviet-encouraged cultural nationalism'¹⁷¹ in Central Asia. It remained confined, however, by and large, to specialised and governing elites in Tajikistan. In Donald Carlisle's words, 'the intelligentsia and middle class, and urban settings as opposed to rural locales, are the initial incubators for nationalism. But unless such restive elites have mass backing and their urban base expands into rural support, no powerful national amalgam emerges and no successful national movement can be born'.¹⁷² Modernist city-based intellectuals were as alien to their traditionalist compatriots in the countryside as hi-tech factories were to the agricultural economy of Tajikistan. Moreover, the competence and breadth of outlook of writers, artists, scholars and other professionals who were trained inside and outside the republic in quite sufficient numbers¹⁷³ were often inadequate. In the 1980s, only one-quarter of all research projects pursued under the aegis of the Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan corresponded to the All-Union level.¹⁷⁴

In the national republics 'the reproduction of intellectual and governing elites had acquired unprecedented proportions ... For the sake of maintaining the symbols of national statehood enormous resources were pumped into the structures of local academies of science, professional creative unions, cinematography, theatre, elite sports, etc.'¹⁷⁵ The new indigenous middle class in Tajikistan was reared for one purpose only: to serve USSR, Inc.; it was part of the *nomenklatura*. There was little danger that 'Soviet cultural nationalism' in

168 James Critchlow, *Nationalism in Uzbekistan: A Soviet Republic's Road to Independence* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1991), p. 26.

169 Muhammadjon Shukurov, 'Nazare ba tahavvoli prinsipoi istilohsozii Tojiki', *Akhboroti Akademiiai Fanhoi RSS Tojikiston: Seriyai sharqshinosi, tarikh, zamonshinosi*, No. 4 (24) (1991), p. 6.

170 *Vestnik statistiki*, No. 5 (1991), p. 74.

171 Bryant Leroy Larson, *The Moslems of Soviet Central Asia: Soviet and Western Perceptions of a Growing Political Problem* (PhD Thesis: University of Minnesota, 1983), p. 207.

172 D. S. Carlisle, 'Power and Politics in Soviet Uzbekistan: From Stalin to Gorbachev', in *Soviet Central Asia: The Failed Transformation*, ed. William Fierman (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1991), p. 120.

173 L. I. Kalendarova, 'Podgotovka kadrov khudozhestvennoi intelligentsii v Tadzhikestane (1976–1985gg.)', *Izvestiia AN TSSR. Seriya: vostokovedenie, istoriia, filologiia*, No. 2 (26) (1992), pp. 45–50.

174 Usmanov, *Tekhnicheskaiia rekonstruktsiia industrii Tadzhikestana v usloviakh perestroiki*, p. 54.

175 V. Tishkov, 'O prirode etnicheskogo konflikta', *Svobodnaia mysl*, No. 4 (1993), p. 12.

the republic would become political nationalism. Asliddin Sohibnazarov, one of the genuine proponents of Tajik nationalism, has remarked bitterly that at the beginning of *perestroika* there were just ‘one–two dozen ... Tajik intellectuals who had accepted progressive [that is, nationalist] ideas’.¹⁷⁶

The socialist type of modernity created serious identification problems, of which national identification was just a part. Figure 6.1 depicts a hierarchy of identities in Soviet Tajikistan in ascending order. Traditional forms of spatial organisation were supplemented by affiliation with the Soviet Union and Tajikistan; in fact, as far as this affiliation was concerned, it was quite possible to speak about the ‘fusion of national and imperial identities under both the Tsarist Russia and, in a different way, the Soviet regime’.¹⁷⁷ The fact that socialism was mapped onto the heterogeneous Tajik community by external forces need not have undermined the viability of new identities.¹⁷⁸ Soviet authorities created the national republic of Tajikistan; it was associated with communist rule in people’s minds, and remained a potent source of identity so long as the regime’s coercive and redistributive functions remained intact.

Figure 6.1 Spatial Hierarchy of Identities in Soviet Tajikistan



Source: Author’s research.

176 *Tajik-Press*, No. 3 (20–27 May 1992), p. 2.

177 Veljko Vujacic, ‘Historical Legacies, Nationalist Mobilisation, and Political Outcomes in Russia and Serbia: A Weberian View’, *Theory and Society*, Vol. 25, No. 6 (December 1996), p. 769.

178 ‘A sense of identity may be consistent with inauthenticity and great impoverishment of character. In malign environments, a sense of identity may even depend upon inauthenticity of character or personality except in the most philosophically wise individuals.’ See: Morton A. Kaplan, *Alienation and Identification* (New York: The Free Press, 1976), p. 164.

Alexandre Bennigsen wrote in 1979 that 'sub-national and supra-national loyalties remain strong in Central Asia and actively compete with national ones';¹⁷⁹ however, his thesis that this supra-national identity ought to be based on anti-Russian 'pan-Turkestanism' with the Uzbeks as its directing element is difficult to accept, at least as far as Tajikistan is involved. To begin with, in the years before *perestroika*, publically expressed anti-Russian feelings were practically unknown in Tajikistan.¹⁸⁰ Ethnic Tajiks dominated in all spheres of human activities in the republic, except for industry, construction and science.¹⁸¹ There was practically no occupational competition between Tajiks on the one hand, and Russians and other Europeans on the other. In contrast, Uzbeks, who lived predominantly in rural areas of Tajikistan and were involved mostly in agriculture, presented a potential target for ethnic antagonism. Additionally, discriminatory policies pursued by Uzbek leaders throughout the Soviet era towards Tajiks living in Uzbekistan had led to a situation in which 'language, culture, national feelings and interests of Tajiks in these cities [Samarkand and Bukhara] were deeply harmed. Negative developments in the field of Uzbek–Tajik interlingual and interethnic relations have created perceptible social strain.'¹⁸² Still, sociological data gathered in 1989 demonstrated that while throughout the USSR 29 per cent of the population characterised the state of interethnic relations in the country as 'very tense and prone to further exacerbation', only 14 per cent of those surveyed in Tajikistan shared this pessimistic view.¹⁸³

Thus, it appears that affiliation with the Soviet Union was the dominant supranational identity for the Tajiks; it also served as a major source of modern political and cultural values on the national level. Old values derived vitality from traditional identities, of which regionalism was the highest form.¹⁸⁴ For decades the communist authorities suppressed and, to an extent, utilised regionalism in Tajikistan, but ultimately failed to overcome it. The native elite in the republic was uniform in the sense that 'it was poisoned by conformism, duplicity, cowardice and selfishness ... Being its sole employer, the state had

179 Alexandre Bennigsen, 'Several Nations or One People? Ethnic Consciousness among Soviet Central Asian Muslims', *Survey*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (108) (Summer 1979), p. 62.

180 As Ben Fowkes has noted, corporatist compromise under Brezhnev allowed the titular nation 'to lord it over the non-titular nationalities'. See: Ben Fowkes, *The Disintegration of the Soviet Union: A Study in the Rise and Triumph of Nationalism* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1997), p. 103.

181 The share of employees of the titular nationality (that is, Tajiks) by branch in 1987 was: industry (48 per cent); agriculture (63 per cent); transport and communication (57 per cent); construction (48 per cent); trade and public catering (61 per cent); public health (56 per cent); arts and culture (56 per cent); sciences (31 per cent); government apparatus (51 per cent); communal services (56 per cent). See: V. Maltsev, 'Territorialnyi khozaschet: ot raspredeleniia k obmenu', *Vestnik statistiki*, No. 1 (1991), p. 8.

182 R. R. Rahimov, 'K voprosu o sovremennykh tadjiksko-uzbekskikh mezhnatsionalnykh otnosheniakh', *Sovetskaia etnografiia*, No. 1 (January–February 1991), p. 22.

183 Alimov and Saidov, *Natsionalnyi vopros*, p. 72.

184 David Harvey has commented that 'territorial place-based identity, particularly when conflated with race, gender, religious and class differentiation, is one of the most pervasive bases for both progressive political mobilisation and reactionary exclusionary politics'. See: David Harvey, 'From Space to Place and Back Again', in *Mapping the Futures: Local Culture, Global Change*, ed. Jon Bird (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 4.

secured its material and spiritual dependency'.¹⁸⁵ At the same time, the elite was highly compartmentalised along regional lines. According to Otakhon Saifulloev, secretary of the Writers' Union of Tajikistan between 1968 and 1973 and chairman of the State Broadcasting Committee of Tajikistan between 1991 and 1992, in the early 1970s there were 94 Tajik writers in the republic, who formed six rival groups; Saifulloev headed the largest faction of 25 Leninobodis, who dominated the Tajik literary landscape and had the lion's share of books published.¹⁸⁶

The 'imaginary community' of the Tajiks in the greater part of the twentieth century was a symbiosis construed through the political actions and poetics of Soviet nationalism and the Great Tradition of Central Asian Iranians. The importance of the Soviet component, with its specific political culture, forced indoctrination and modernisation drive, should not be underestimated. However contradictory, artificial and cruel, it constituted 'the thin film of modern notions over the formidable layer of values, motivations, role expectations and behavioural stereotypes inherent in each region's traditional culture'.¹⁸⁷ Once the institutional core of Soviet cultural overlay began to erode under Gorbachev, political activism in Tajikistan inevitably assumed the form of regional factionalism.

Institutional Changes and the Crisis of Social Control

Radicalisation of reforms ultimately reduced Gorbachev's power base and alienated all major elites in Soviet society. The second and final stage of *perestroika* included the following measures in the political realm

- liberalisation of formal political institutions
- democratisation of public expression and public association
- withdrawal of the party's key regulatory functions
- weakening of the state's coercive mechanisms.

The communist *apparat* eventually began to realise that its very existence was under threat, but it was too late: the dismantling of the mono-organisational order was out of control.¹⁸⁸ In January 1987, secret ballot and multi-candidate

185 *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 31 March 1994.

186 Taped interview, Khujand, 9 March 1995.

187 Olimov, 'Ob etnopoliticheskoi i konfessionalnoi situatsii v Tadjikistane i veroiatnosti mezhetnicheskikh konfliktov', p. 86.

188 As Charles Fairbanks views it, 'the enormous power of Gorbachev goes far to explain why the elite gave up power, contrary to our expectations. They gave up power because of their own reformism and because of fear of the public, but most of all because Gorbachev forced them to.' See: Charles H. Fairbanks, jr, 'The Nature of the Beast', *The National Interest*, No. 31 (Spring 1993), p. 55.

elections were introduced in all party organisations. Following the nineteenth CPSU conference in June 1988, party committees at all levels were stripped of the ability to oversee economic agencies, the bulk of administrative powers was transferred to the Soviets and contested elections to a new legislature were announced. In October 1988, Gorbachev was elected chairman of the USSR Supreme Soviet, signifying a shift of the loci of power from party structures. In spring 1989, the new Soviet parliament was convened, which elected Gorbachev president of the USSR. In February 1990, the CPSU formally renounced its monopoly on power. The role of the military in national decision-making decreased; withdrawal from Afghanistan, unilateral concessions to the West and usage of troops in police operations contributed to the decay of the armed forces. The KGB, an erstwhile tool of social control, was exposed to public criticism and lost, to an extent, its coercive edge.

Similar processes unfolded in Tajikistan, which remained 'the quietest and the most obedient of all the republics. Whatever the centre ordered, was accepted, with a thousand thanks.'¹⁸⁹ By 1989, the CPT CC apparatus had shrunk by one-third compared with 1986.¹⁹⁰ Party structures at lower levels were weakened to the point where they did not have the organisational capacity to implement social control: the committee of the Hisor *raion*, with a population of 230 000, had 12 staff, whereas, in comparison, four registered mosques in the district had 24 official mullahs alone.¹⁹¹ In spring 1988, 25 ministries and 17 state committees that operated in Tajikistan were reorganised into 12 new agencies.¹⁹² The Tajik KGB was especially badly crippled in the late Gorbachev period: its staff cuts were three times the All-Union ratio.¹⁹³ One major deviation from the Moscow pattern was that freedom of speech and freedom of association never really took off in Tajikistan. While in 1989 in Moscow alone there existed 500 unofficial organisations which 'strove to some degree or other to influence the domestic or foreign policy of the state',¹⁹⁴ Qahhor Mahkamov had the following to say on the subject of the proliferation of alternative associations:¹⁹⁵

And, really, let us think—is it appropriate today to put forward suggestions about creating this or that new public organisation, when we already have more than enough of them? Those who have a sincere desire to help *perestroika* can apply their energy, initiative and craving

189 Holiqzoda, *Ta'rikhi siyyosii Tojikon az istiloi Rusiyya to imruz*, p. 113.

190 Calculations based on the CPT CC telephone directories.

191 *Kommunist Tadzshikistana*, 27 February 1991.

192 *Izvestiia*, 5 April 1988.

193 *Biznes i politika*, No. 14 (120) (April 1995), p. 1.

194 Rigby, *The Changing Soviet System*, p. 217.

195 *Payyomi Dushanbe*, 8 December 1989.

to serve their people, and transform them into practical deeds, through Party, trade-union and Komsomol organisations, newly elected Soviets and our numerous existing public associations and creative unions.

At the beginning of 1990, the overall impression was that throughout Central Asia popular acceptance of the republican leaderships remained high; the participation of the population in political life was nowhere near 'as advanced or as widespread as was public involvement elsewhere in the country'.¹⁹⁶ The communist elite was still in charge in Tajikistan, and the major menace to its dominance emanated not from disgruntled masses of people, but from the internecine struggle inside the *apparat*.

February 1990 Demonstrations and Riots

On 25 February 1990, elections to the new Supreme Soviet of Tajikistan were to be held. In light of the latest developments in the USSR, positions in the republican legislature had acquired special attractiveness to members of the power elite. For the first time, at least some constituencies had a choice of candidates. In the absence of institutionalised forms of interest aggregation such as political parties and organisations, only belonging to the communist establishment could guarantee electoral success for would-be parliamentarians. It was clear that Mahkamov's coterie would dominate the Supreme Soviet unless something dramatic happened to change the alignment of forces in the CPT leadership. In February 1990, a desperate attempt was made by elements in the ruling oligarchy, heretofore alienated from supreme power, to oust Mahkamov. Intrigues and mini-coups were not uncommon in the Byzantine world of communist crypto-politics, but this time the attempt to redistribute power entailed mass civil disobedience that, intentionally or not, quickly turned to violence.

In early 1990, the southerners in Tajikistan understood quite well that Mahkamov's hold on power would receive further legitimisation through parliamentary elections. It was also evident to them that the incumbent regime had been weakened by Moscow-inspired reorganisations and, as the clashes in Isfara and Kolkhozobod had demonstrated, it enjoyed limited abilities to deal with public strife. They also remembered that militant manifestations and consequent interference by the centre in Tbilisi in April 1989 had resulted in the leadership change in Georgia.¹⁹⁷ A group of prominent southern elite leaders

196 Bess Brown, 'The Role of Public Groups in *Perestroika* in Central Asia', *RL Report on the USSR* (26 January 1990), p. 25.

197 On 8 April 1989, mass demonstrations took place in Tbilisi. Organised by Georgia's Popular Front, they put forward slogans demanding the solution of the Abkhaz problem. The Soviet Army units deployed in the

decided to trigger—or, at a minimum, take advantage of—collective action in the capital city of Tajikistan in order to challenge, and possibly destroy, the positions of incumbent power-holders from the north.

Shahidon ('Martyrs') Square—which was to become an important location for the 1992 opposition rallies—was renamed (and later unnamed)¹⁹⁸ in memory of the demonstrators and rioters killed there and elsewhere in the city during the events of February 1990. On 10–11 February, up to 300 young demonstrators gathered in front of the Communist Party Central Committee building in Dushanbe and demanded an explanation from the government—and from Qahhor Mahkamov in particular—about the rumours that Armenian refugees from Azerbaijan would be given priority housing in Dushanbe amidst a housing crisis (in fact, only 29 Armenians had arrived and were being hosted by relatives in Dushanbe). As the government evaded answering, demands expanded—along with the size of the crowd—to include the resignation of Mahkamov and the purging of government officials. Mahkamov was taken by surprise and failed to react adequately. The crowd grew in size until as many as 3000 to 5000 people were in the streets when violence started. Martial law and a curfew were declared as the first detachments of Interior Ministry troops from Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan arrived to restore order amidst looting, vandalism and attacks on civilian bystanders, including ethnic Russians and other non-Tajiks.¹⁹⁹ In one account, at 3 pm on 12 February, the size of the protest crowd increased dramatically and no further demands were heard at this time. Instead, an attack on the CPT building commenced, with stone-throwing and even armed

city to protect government buildings clashed with the protestors: 16 civilians were killed and 75 servicemen were wounded. On 14 April 1989, first secretary of the Georgian Communist Party Central Committee, Jumber Patiashvili, was relieved of his duties, ostensibly for exceeding his powers by having ordered the troops to open fire. See: *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, Part I USSR (18 April 1989), SU/0437 A1/2. See also: Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. 322–3.

198 What was Shahidon Square is now cut in half by a large security fence protecting the Presidential Palace. It now appears to be just a large T-intersection where Rudaki Avenue (formerly Lenin Avenue) and Somoni Street (Putovskii Street) meet. A memorial placard at this location was quietly removed several years ago and very few young people or recent migrants know this placename.

199 Schoeberlein-Engel, 'Conflicts in Tajikistan and Central Asia', pp. 22–5; Jonathan K. Zartman, *Political Transition in Central Asian Republics: Authoritarianism versus Power-Sharing* (PhD Thesis: University of Denver, 2004), pp. 97–101; Kilavuz, *Understanding Violent Conflict*, pp. 131–2; Aziz Niyazi, 'The Year of Tumult: Tajikistan after February 1990', in *State, Religion and Society in Central Asia: A Post Soviet Critique*, ed. Vitaly Naumkin (Reading, UK: Ithaca Press, 1993), p. 264; Aleksandr Karpov, 'Dushanbe: Rumors Spark Riots, Deaths', *Izvestia* (13 February 1990), p. 8, in *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*, Vol. XLII, No. 7 (1990), p. 12; *Kommunist Tadzhikistana*, 16 January 1991. Atkin stresses that the February 1990 demonstrations were anti-government, not anti-Armenian. See: Muriel Atkin, 'Tajikistan: Reform, Reaction, and Civil War', in *New States, New Politics: Building the Post-Soviet Nations*, eds Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 610. Some 41 200 citizens of Dushanbe, or 7 per cent of the entire population, were on the waiting list for housing. See: *Osnovnye pokazateli ekonomicheskogo i sotsialnogo razvitiia oblastei*, p. 14.

rioters.²⁰⁰ While it is unclear which side fired the first shot (or attacked first),²⁰¹ what is clear is that the rioters, some carrying only pistols, were outgunned by the security forces.²⁰² Hastily, the 29 Armenians, plus about a hundred other Armenians who were long-time residents of Dushanbe, were evacuated on an emergency flight.²⁰³

On 13 February the mass meeting in the city centre continued in defiance of martial law; bands of marauders proceeded to operate in the suburbs. Late in the day, demonstrators nominated a new group (or the group appointed itself), named the Provisional People's Committee or the Temporary Committee for Crisis Resolution (TCCR), also known as *Vahdat* ('Unity'), to negotiate. The TCCR, endorsed by the meeting and headed by the first deputy of the chairman of the Council of Ministers and chairman of GOSPLAN, Buri Karimov, entered negotiations with Mahkamov.²⁰⁴ Niyazi describes this group:

It comprised top state officials, leaders of the unofficial social-political organisation, *Rastokhez*, representatives of the intelligentsia, businessmen, one mullah and a worker. The Committee was headed by the Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers and the Chairman of the Republic's Planning Board, [Buri] Karimov ... The *Vahdat* representing the demonstrators put forward a number of demands including the resignation of the government. The committee warned that if this demand were not met there would be even worse violence.²⁰⁵

The various demands of the protesters included the expulsion of Armenian refugees, the resignation of the government and the removal of the Communist Party, the closure of an aluminium smelter in western Tajikistan for environmental reasons, equitable distribution of profits from cotton production, and the release of 25 protesters taken into custody.²⁰⁶

The attempt to secure the resignation of the government of the Tajik SSR, whether planned well before the demonstration and riots or hastily planned as a response to the opportunity offered by the chaotic situation, was nearly successful. On 14 February the first secretary, the chairman of the Supreme

200 Karpov, 'Dushanbe', p. 12. For a narrative that strongly condemns the rioters and praises the security forces, see: N. Sautin, 'The City Has Become Calmer', *Pravda* (20 February 1990), p. 6, in *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press* (28 March 1990), p. 25.

201 For the competing claims, see: Mariia Ianovskaia, 'Dushanbe-1990: russkii vzgliad', *Fergana News Agency* (1 March 2010), online: <<http://www.fergananews.com/article.php?id=6484>>; Tilav Rasul-zade and Mariia Yanovskaia, 'Ochevidtsy Dushanbe-1990: Pogromy cprovotsirovali kommunisty—KGB-shniki', *Fergana News Agency* (22 February 2010), online: <<http://www.fergananews.com/articles/6478>>

202 Charles M. Madigan, 'Gorbachev Seeks Quick Action against Rioting', *Chicago Tribune* (15 February 1990), p. 5.

203 Karpov, 'Dushanbe', p. 12.

204 Niyazi, 'The Year of Tumult', pp. 264–6; Karimov, *Qurboni duzakhma*, p. 77.

205 Niyazi, 'The Year of Tumult', pp. 264–6.

206 Esther B. Fein, 'Upheaval in the East', *The New York Times* (14 February 1990).

Soviet and the chairman of the Council of Ministers 'agreed to sign a protocol with the *Vahdat* on the resignation of the government'.²⁰⁷ The next day, Mahkamov, Khayoev and Pallaev announced their resignations. A group of high-ranking officials, including Buri Karimov,²⁰⁸ began organisational work to create a Temporary Bureau of the CPT CC;²⁰⁹ however, later in the same day a meeting of 'Dushanbe party and economic functionaries including members of the Central Committee and the Bureau' declared the protocol invalid on the grounds that it contradicted the decisions of the sixteenth plenary meeting of the Central Committee.²¹⁰ At this time, Soviet Interior Ministry troops were moving into the city, and by 15 February the police and military had Dushanbe under control. On 15 and 16 February, the seventeenth plenary meeting of the Central Committee was convened, where the members voted to reject the resignation of the first secretary and gave their vote of confidence.²¹¹ The Extraordinary Plenum of the CPT CC, which convened with the participation of the CPSU CC Politburo candidate member, B. K. Pugo, rescinded Mahkamov's resignation. Most notably, all northerners voted against the resignation, while Nasriddinov's group supported it.²¹²

Sporadic acts of violence continued until 19 February, but then 'everything changed abruptly overnight'.²¹³ Reports on the number of deaths vary—with the official Tajik government number initially given as five and unofficial accounts listing from 16 to 25 deaths.²¹⁴ During one week, more than 850 citizens were injured and, in the highest tally, 25 people were killed (all but four by firearms): 16 Tajiks, five Russians, two Uzbeks, one Azeri and one Tatar,²¹⁵ including a journalist and an uninvolved observer killed by shots fired from the CPT building.²¹⁶

While the demonstrations and riots did not start with anti-Russian motivations, the Russian-speaking population of Dushanbe soon came under attack. One journalist reported that he heard one crowd of Tajiks at the demonstration

207 Niyazi, 'The Year of Tumult', pp. 264–6.

208 These include minister of culture, N. Tabarov; deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers, O. Latifi; head of the State-Judicial Department of the CPT CC, N. Khuvaiddulloev; editor-in-chief of the *Tojikistoni Soveti* official newspaper, M. Mabatshoev; deputy minister of justice, Kh. Homidov; and Dushanbe mayor, Maqsud Ikramov. See: Karimov, *Qurboni duzakhma*, p. 77.

209 Karimov, *Qurboni duzakhma*, p. 77.

210 Niyazi, 'The Year of Tumult', pp. 264–6.

211 Niyazi, 'The Year of Tumult', pp. 264–6.

212 Karimov, *Qurboni duzakhma*, p. 77.

213 Viacheslav Zenkovich, 'Dushanbe: khronika semi dnei', *Dialog*, No. 7 (1990), p. 72.

214 Schoeberlein-Engel, 'Conflicts in Tajikistan and Central Asia', pp. 22–5; Niyazi, 'The Year of Tumult', pp. 264, 272; Zartman, *Political Transition in Central Asian Republics*, pp. 97–101; Kilavuz, *Understanding Violent Conflict*, pp. 131–2; *Rastokhez*, No. 3 (August 1990), p. 4.

215 *Rastokhez*, No. 3 (August 1990), p. 4.

216 Oleg Panfilov, 'Piat' let nazad v Dushanbe byla rasstreliana demonstratsiia', *Nezavisimaia gazeta* (February 1995), online: <<http://olegpanfilov.com/?p=1149>>

chanting ‘beat the Russians!’.²¹⁷ Hospital statistics revealed that more than 56 per cent of the injured and more than 41 per cent of the severely injured people treated at Dushanbe hospitals were Russian-speakers.²¹⁸ Later recollections by ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers²¹⁹ from Dushanbe reveal that gangs of young Tajik men specifically targeted Russians and Russian-speakers, particularly women. Russian men were attacked and lynched, while Russian and Russian-speaking women, as well as Tajik women wearing European styles of clothing, were targeted for beatings and rape.²²⁰ After the riots subsided various rumours of impending pogroms against the Russian population circulated, instilling further fear amongst the Russian-speaking population of Dushanbe.²²¹ The riots of 1990 would, soon after the event, and ever since, be cited as an important factor in the high number of Russians emigrating from Tajikistan.²²²

Predictably, accounts differ, with each side blaming the other for instigating the conflict. Some Western analysts prefer to cast blame on the ruling power structures, arguing that the escalation of the conflict was caused by the government’s tactics of violent suppression.²²³ The opposition’s talking points refer to those in positions of power as being responsible for the riots.²²⁴ For example, Muhammadali Hait,²²⁵ then a Rastokhez activist (who later switched

217 ‘Rioting Out of Control in Soviet City; 37 Killed’, *St Louis Post-Dispatch* (14 February 1990), p. 1A. The journalist cited, amongst the various wires services used for the story, is Alexei Shiryakhin.

218 ‘Soobshchenie komissii prezidiuma Verkhovnogo Soveta Tadjikskoi SSR po proverke sobytii 12–14 Fevralia 1990g. v Dushanbe’, *Sogdiana* [Moscow], No. 3 [Special Issue] (October 1990), pp. 2–8, as cited in Muriel Atkin, ‘Thwarted Democratization in Tajikistan’, in *Conflict, Cleavage and Change in Central Asia and Caucasus*, eds Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrot (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 297. One local expressed his opinion in a published appeal to the USSR Supreme Soviet: ‘The overwhelming majority of those injured during the days of terror were Russians; All of those assaulted were Russian; 82% of those who have left Tajikistan since the beginning of the year are Russian.’ See: A. Kruhilin, ‘These Days Hundreds of Russians Are Leaving the Tajik Capital—Forever’, *Literaturnaya Gazeta* (28 February 1990), in *SWB SU*, 0713 (15 March 1990), B/1.

219 Meaning those people whose first language is Russian, irrespective of ethnicity. This could include all Slavs, Germans, Jews, Tatars, various ethnicities from the Caucasus, and so on.

220 N. Ol’khovaia, R. Iskanderova, A. Balashov et al., ‘Raspad imperii: Dushanbe’, *Dikoe pole*, No. 6 (2004), online: <http://www.dikoepole.org/numbers_journal.php?id_txt=265>; V. Starikov, ‘I khotia zhivymi do kontsa doleteli’, *Vyatskii nablyudatel’*, No. 5 (5 January 1999), online: <<http://www.nabludatel.ru/numers/1999/5/13.htm>>; V. Starikov, ‘I khotia zhivymi do kontsa doleteli [Part 2]’, *Vyatskii nablyudatel’*, No. 6 (February 1999), online: <<http://www.nabludatel.ru/numers/1999/6/7.htm>>; Ianovskaia, ‘Dushanbe-1990’, n.p.

221 N. Sautin, ‘Emergency Situation: Not Force but Dialogue Decides’, *Pravda* (18 February 1990), p. 3, in *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*, Vol. XLII, No. 7 (21 March 1990), p. 14.

222 A. Karpov, ‘Skilled Labor Leaves the Republic’, *Izvestiia* (5 August 1990), p. 2, in *The Russian Press Digest* (5 August 1990); Schoeberlein-Engel, ‘Conflicts in Tajikistan and Central Asia’, p. 24; Rasul-zade and Yanovskaia, ‘Ochevidtsy Dushanbe-1990’, n.p.; Ianovskaia, ‘Dushanbe-1990’, n.p.

223 For example, see: Schoeberlein-Engel, ‘Conflicts in Tajikistan and Central Asia’, p. 23; Zartman, *Political Transition in Central Asian Republics*, p. 99.

224 Unofficial explanations also accuse anti-*perestroika* forces but identify them as those in power. They are said to have provoked the turmoil in order to reinforce their own position, establish a dictatorship and suppress all opposition. There is also the suggestion that the events were the result of the destructive activities of some sinister All-Union centre initiating national and social riots in different areas of the USSR with the same intention. In general the opposition tends to highlight social, economic and political reasons for the riots, including the intrigues and perfidy of the ruling clans. See: Niyazi, ‘The Year of Tumult’, pp. 265–6.

225 His name is given various spellings in the local press, including Mahmatali and Hayit.

his affiliation to the Islamic Revival Party), recently accused the KGB and Tajik government of having 'masterminded' the riots in order to discredit and oppress the opposition.²²⁶ Another opposition member, KGB officer-turned-exile Abdullo Nazarov, better known nowadays for being stabbed to death in the Pamirs, said the same—blaming the KGB for the entire incident.²²⁷ Opposition member Gavhar Juraeva draws on Nazi analogies ('Reichstag fire' and, possibly, the 'Armenian question') to blame the government for instigating the demonstrations, which then backfired on them.²²⁸ Twenty years later, Qahhor Mahkamov, providing very little details, cast vague blame on forces within the KGB both in Tajikistan and in Moscow while absolving the Tajik people as blameless in the events of February 1990.²²⁹

Niyazi, writing the most comprehensive account of the events, portrays both sides as reckless and violent.²³⁰ For example, he singles out opposition Rastokhez Party members and their incoherent tactics and inflammatory rhetoric.²³¹ The official government explanation casts blame widely. On 16 February the seventeenth plenary meeting of the Central Committee expressed its confidence in the first secretary and the chairman of the Supreme Soviet. It also issued a statement regarding the violence, which

blamed a conspiracy of anti-*perestroika* forces aimed at destabilising the situation, seizing leading positions and redistributing portfolios. The anti-*perestroika* forces were seen as comprising a group of apparatchiks (professional party men) craving power and acting in concert with criminal groups, members of the unofficial organisation *Rastokhez* and Islamic fundamentalists.²³²

The government may have reached this conclusion partly based on the negotiating group mentioned above that formed to represent the demonstrators.

The events that occurred in Dushanbe in February 1990 had several peculiar features. First, the disturbances in Dushanbe were not spontaneous. A concerted propaganda campaign, impressive logistical support (thousands of protestors were fed, sheltered and transported from one location to another) and activities

226 Avaz Yuldoshev, 'Massive Riots in Dushanbe in February 1990 Masterminded by KGB, Says IRP Deputy Leader', *ASIA-Plus* (12 February 2013), online: <<http://news.tj/en/news/massive-riots-dushanbe-february-1990-masterminded-kgb-says-irp-deputy-leader>>

227 Rasul-zade and Yanovskaia, 'Ochevidttsy Dushanbe-1990', n.p.

228 Juraeva, 'Ethnic Conflict in Tajikistan', p. 261.

229 'Qahhor Mahkamov: KGB va havodisi bahmanmoh', *BBC Persian* (9 February 2010), online: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/tajik/news/2011/02/110209_if_mahkamov.shtml>

230 Niyazi, 'The Year of Tumult', esp. p. 264.

231 'Thus between 11 and 18 February many members of Rastokhez did their best to transform the stormy riots into a peaceful political dialogue, to dampen emotions and prevent violence. But at the same time a number of Rastokhez leaders, pursuing their personal and collective ambitions regardless of the consequences, inflamed the crowd with populist and chauvinistic slogans.' See: Niyazi, 'The Year of Tumult', pp. 276–7.

232 Niyazi, 'The Year of Tumult', pp. 265–6.

by compact combat groups suggested careful planning. The organisers were also aware of the fact that at the time there were few interior troops in the city and its military garrison had been reduced.

Second, the majority of participants were not residents of Dushanbe, but people brought in from Kulob, Qurghonteppa and districts to the south of Dushanbe. Many of them did not realise what exactly they were doing in the capital, as, for instance, the 300 schoolchildren from the 'XXII Party Congress' *kolkhoz* in the Lenin *raion* who simply obeyed the orders of their four grown-up leaders.²³³ Indeed, many Dushanbe residents, both Russian and Central Asian, blamed out-of-town young men for the rioting and looting.²³⁴ Residents claimed that unnamed persons transported young men to the city and gave them 'money, drugs, and alcohol to encourage them to riot'.²³⁵ Yaacov Ro'i cites one rumour in which 'bearded strangers', some allegedly (and implausibly) ethnic Azeris, gave alcohol to schoolboys and paid them in order to incite the riot. At the same time the Tajik Komsomol press asked, in regards to the demonstrators/rioters: 'Who could have doped them with drugs and nationalist slogans?'²³⁶ These conspiratorial views are completely in line with the varied narratives of blame for riots and demonstrations throughout Central Asia around this time.²³⁷

Third, unofficial strongmen, such as *avlod* leaders and organised crime bosses, played an important role in challenging the political authorities. The heads of four major gangs in Dushanbe were asked to spring into action by the statesmen 'who feed them, protect them from law and keep them handy for a crucial time'.²³⁸ Targets for pilfering were selected carefully during the riots: in one street, some shops were looted, but others, under racketeer protection, remained intact.²³⁹

Fourth, contrary to the images disseminated by the Moscow-based media,²⁴⁰ the conflict did not have anti-Russian and/or pro-Islamic roots. A closer look reveals that it was a case of struggle for power, where one of the parties 'pursued its pragmatic political objectives *camouflaging* them artfully in nationalist and religious overtones'.²⁴¹ The leader of Muslims of Tajikistan, *Qozikalon* Akbar

233 *Tadzhikistan v ogne*, p. 61.

234 Schoeberlein-Engel, 'Conflicts in Tajikistan and Central Asia', p. 23; Kilavuz, *Understanding Violent Conflict*, p. 131, n. 14.

235 Schoeberlein-Engel, 'Conflicts in Tajikistan and Central Asia', p. 23.

236 Yaacov Ro'i, 'Central Asia Riots and Disturbances: Causes and Context', *Central Asia Survey*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (1991), pp. 34–5.

237 Ro'i, 'Central Asia Riots and Disturbances'.

238 *Pravda*, 10 May 1990.

239 *Komsomolskaia pravda*, 28 March 1990.

240 For example: Viktor Ponomarev, "'The Bells Of Hope'", *Pravda* (10 May 1990), in *SWB SU*, 0762 (12 May 1990), B/1. Similar views were expressed in the American press. See: David Aiman and Paul Hofheinz, 'Karl Marx Makes Room for Muhammad', *Time* (12 March 1990), p. 44.

241 Spolnikov and Mironov, 'Islamskie fundamentalisty v borbe za vlast', p. 27.

Turajonzoda, was asked by B. K. Pugo to join the mediating process between the TCCR and Mahkamov's group, and succeeded in cooling passions in the city precisely because he was viewed as a neutral figure.

Fifth, law enforcement structures proved themselves useless as a means of protecting the populace. Initially, the minister of the interior, Mamadayoz Navjuvonov, was made the military commandant of Dushanbe in charge of all armed formations. He was so grossly inefficient in this role that within hours General I. Senshov from the Central Asian Military District took over. Even then, the army and interior troops could provide security only for government institutions. On 13 February, Qahhor Mahkamov called on residents of Dushanbe to defend their lives on their own. Efficient self-defence units were instantaneously organised on the basis of *mahalla* committees and groups of apartment complex residents.²⁴² This was yet another lesson of *perestroika* for the people of Tajikistan: only local centres of power could offer viable strategies of survival in times of tumult.

The full truth about the events in Dushanbe has never been disclosed. Qahhor Mahkamov, at the time, limited his assessment to clichéd incantations concerning the 'human factor' so characteristic of the Gorbachev period:

Absence of attention to the man, to his necessities and demands, the second-rate attention given to this particular factor ... have led to the growth in unemployment, especially amongst youngsters, to the increase in crime. As a result, social tension has been aggravated in the republic, in the city of Dushanbe in particular.²⁴³

While the blame for the violence is hard to place, the effects of the violence are clear. Atkin writes that

this outburst of violence in the capital of the republic heightened political anxieties. Various elements of Tajikistani society, including Tajik reformers, supporters of the old Soviet order, and members of the Russian minority, saw the February events as a warning that their worst fears, ranging from the stifling of reform and perpetuation of repression to Islamic revolution and the persecution of non-Muslims.²⁴⁴

242 These self-defence units were 'a unique phenomenon. Nothing of this kind has existed in the short but horrid history of "hotbeds." People of different nationalities stood up shoulder-to-shoulder against pogrom-mongers.' See: *Raboचाia tribuna*, 26 October 1990. For further anecdotes illustrating the importance of self-defence groups based on place of residence, see: Rasul-zade and Yanovskaia, 'Ochevidtsy Dushanbe-1990'; Ianovskaia, 'Dushanbe-1990', n.p.; Starikov, 'I khotia zhivymi do kontsa doleteli', n.p.; Starikov, 'I khotia zhivymi do kontsa doleteli [Part 2]', n.p.; Ol'khovaia et al., 'Raspad imperii', n.p.

243 *Rasshirennyi XVIII plenum TsK KPT 3 marta 1990g. Stenograficheskii otchet* (Dushanbe: Irfon, 1990), p. 11.

244 Atkin, 'Tajikistan', p. 610.

Niyazi writes of the demonstration effect:

The February events were the first blow against the stability of the ruling group. They showed its lack of competence and inability to negotiate with people or to act without recourse to the usual party methods. As the analysis of large mass movements in the non-Soviet Middle East shows, such blows are not necessarily recognized immediately. Their effects are 'stored'. The results of the riots are transferred to the political sphere and become really apparent only after the ruling regime considers the crisis to have ended. Here much depends on the personal qualities and political abilities of the ruling elite.²⁴⁵

Interior minister, Mamadayoz Navjuvonov, stated that he believed similar events would happen again in Tajikistan. He stated bluntly that '[t]he force that provoked the events is a very serious force and it must be looked for in the higher echelons, the very high ones. And not simply be looked for but exposed and punished—disregarding the rank and the position.'²⁴⁶

The documents of the eighteenth plenum of the CPT CC held on 3 March 1990 to investigate the whole affair were loaded with vague references to 'certain anti-*perestroika* forces', 'several unexpected developments', 'demagogues and political profiteers', 'some leaders who overstepped norms of Soviet legality', and so on. No names were mentioned, except for Buri Karimov and Nur Tabarov, who were made scapegoats and expelled from the party for breach of party discipline, but Karimov even retained his post in the government. The likely real organisers of the events—leaders of southern regional groupings—remained in the shadows. Mirbobo Mirrahimov, TCCR member and one of the founding fathers of the Tajik democratic movement, though also refraining from mentioning names, was more frank:

Today's regime in Tajikistan is a dual power. First, this is a purely nominal power of the Soviets that have no rights. Second, this is the clan-based, party-administrative mafia of the republic, which is wrapped and permeated by threads of conjugal and localistic relations ... In order to strengthen its position, each clan has to compromise others. And only one goal unites them—preservation of the present regime ... As a result of the bloody tragedy the Party-clan mafias have strengthened their positions in the system of power. Some disarray and hostility in the CC and the Council of Ministers are temporary, very soon the clans

245 Niyazi, 'The Year of Tumult', p. 273.

246 A. Kruzhilin, 'Dushanbe: The Cost of Fears', *Literaturnaya gazeta* (14 March 1990), p. 11, in *The Russian Press Digest* (14 March 1990).

will unite again for the sake of the regime's stability. The events have shattered the leading clan and damaged its authority ... Other clans were in complete control and didn't lose a single member.²⁴⁷

What happened in Dushanbe in February 1990 was an attempt at an oligarchic coup; however, neither Buri Karimov nor his associates from the 17-strong TCCR, who included mostly intellectuals of Gharimi origin devoid of political influence, were the real culprits in this gambit. According to Narzullo Dustov, vice-president of Tajikistan in 1991–92, the whole scheme was masterminded by Ghoibnazar Pallaev, whose resignation alongside those of Mahkamov and Khayoev was just a manoeuvre.²⁴⁸ He was actively aided by the leaders of the Kulob faction: Kulobi youths formed the backbone of hit squads during the riots, commanded by a convicted criminal, Yaqub Salimov,²⁴⁹ who less than three years later would be made interior minister. Evidence suggests that the head of the Political Department of the Ministry of Interior, General A. Habibov, a Kulobi, collaborated with the rioters.²⁵⁰ Needless to say, the investigation never unmasked the real figures behind the bloodshed and violence. In January 1991, Tajikistan's procurator, G. S. Mikhailin, reported that 105 people had been sentenced (all 'small fry'—'hooligans' and arsonists), and that 'at this juncture the investigation cannot provide juridical evaluation of the deeds committed by Karimov, Tabarov and others'.²⁵¹ The groups within the ruling elite had reached an accommodation and wanted to forget the whole episode.²⁵²

The Kulobi faction benefited most from the new alignment of forces. A steady trickle of investments was diverted to the region again. The strategically important Kulob–Qurghonteppa railroad, a project that had been in the making for 50 years, finally received the necessary financing: the USSR Ministry of Railroad Transport agreed to foot half of the 260 million rouble bill for the construction to be completed by 1995.²⁵³ The breaking of the north–south polarisation and rapprochement between the elites from Leninobod and Kulob received symbolic capping in July 1990 when these two regional centres became sister cities. In the long run, Gharmis proved to be the major losers in the power-

247 *Rastokhez*, No. 1 (May 1990), p. 4.

248 Dustov, *Zakhm bar jismi vatan*, p. 28.

249 *Tadzhikistan v ogne*, pp. 72–3; Ponomarev, "'The Bells Of Hope'".

250 *Komsomolets Tadzhikistana*, 29 August 1990.

251 *Kommunist Tadzhikistana*, 16 January 1991. As an example of a low-level conviction, see the case of a twenty-nine-year-old imam sentenced to four years in prison for inciting the demonstrators. See: *ITAR-Tass* (10 September 1990), in *SWB SU*, 0866 (11 September 1990), i.

252 Amazingly, the former minister of culture, Nur Tabarov, who had played his part as a pawn in the coup, complained in September 1990: 'There is nothing I can blame myself for. I was, and remain loyal to the authorities ... I naively believed that the CC members could be objective and not make me the scapegoat. They are in no hurry to rehabilitate me ... In early March [1990], when I had a conversation with Mahkamov, he promised me to help with decent employment. I haven't heard from him since.' See: *Komsomolets Tadzhikistana*, 26 September 1990.

253 *Adabiyot va san'at*, 24 August 1990.

sharing scheme. Ghoibnazar Pallaev was relieved of his duties as the Supreme Soviet Presidium chairman. His replacement, Qadriddin Aslonov, though also a Gharmi from Qurghonteppa, did not have Pallaev's clout and influence. In March 1991 the Gharm zone of districts underwent administrative restructuring: the Komsomolobod and Gharm *raions* were broken up into smaller units with populations below 20 000 each.²⁵⁴ This measure was aimed at further reducing the organisational capabilities of local bureaucratic structures.

The elections to the new Supreme Soviet of Tajikistan went as planned; 95 per cent of those elected were communists, and only two of 225 were active members of the incipient democratic movement.²⁵⁵ In the lower-level soviets the communist share was not as high: 80 per cent in the *oblast* legislatures and slightly more than 50 per cent in city and *raion* soviets.²⁵⁶ The effects on elite politics are clear, as the February 1990 episode 'had the effect of strengthening the existing leadership, by enabling it to eliminate opposition within the party'.²⁵⁷ Similarly, Niyazi notes the increased 'authoritarian' style of administration after February 1990, including the merging of the positions of first secretary and chairman of the Supreme Soviet. When Qahhor Mahkamov was elected president on 30 November 1990, he then held executive and legislative powers. His legislative authority was certainly helped by the outcome of the 'closely supervised' Supreme Soviet elections of late February 1990 in which the Communist Party won 94 per cent of the seats.²⁵⁸ Outside the Communist Party, the government blamed opposition movements of the nationalist or Islamist persuasion for the violence and restricted their freedom to operate even further. In particular, the Islamic Revival Party was not able to gain official recognition until the end of 1991.²⁵⁹ Between February 1990 and August 1991, the incumbents in the government strengthened their hold on power by introducing emergency measures that included 'curfews and harassment of the opposition, as well as the usual censorship of the media and Communist party supervision of enterprises, universities and institutes'.²⁶⁰

Gorbachev's emissary Boris Pugo was instrumental in keeping Mahkamov's clique in power; however, the fact that he had to *negotiate* with the opposing sides rather than simply deliver Moscow's verdict, the failure to avert violence in advance and the sheer sluggishness with which law and order were restored in Dushanbe indicated that the Kremlin was again losing its grip on Central Asia. By 1990, bureaucrats in central government agencies, especially from industrial

254 *Kommunist Tadjikistana*, 1 March 1991.

255 *Komsomolets Tadjikistana*, 22 March 1990.

256 *Kommunist Tadjikistana*, 6 August 1991.

257 Kilavuz, *Understanding Violent Conflict*, p. 9, see also p. 132.

258 Niyazi, 'The Year of Tumult', pp. 272–3.

259 Kilavuz, *Understanding Violent Conflict*, p. 145; Schoeberlein-Engel, 'Conflicts in Tajikistan and Central Asia', pp. 24–5.

260 Schoeberlein-Engel, 'Conflicts in Tajikistan and Central Asia', p. 25.

ministries, had become Gorbachev's main adversaries. Not only was he forced to give up centralisation efforts in the periphery, he also had to seek the support of territorial bureaucracies against the recalcitrant *apparat* in Moscow. In a very short period, ruling elites in national republics regained their autonomy and legitimised it during what was referred to as the 'parade of sovereignties'. The Supreme Soviet of Tajikistan adopted the 'Declaration on State Sovereignty' on 24 August 1990. This document stated, in particular, that

the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic is a sovereign multinational state. The state sovereignty manifests itself in the unity and supremacy of the state power on all territory of the Tajik SSR and independence in external relations ... The Tajik SSR decides independently all questions related to political, economic, socio-cultural construction on its territory, except those which will be voluntarily delegated by it to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.²⁶¹

This was everything the incumbent elite could hope for. It did not long for complete independence, it simply wanted to have a free hand in commandeering and distributing its share of the Soviet budget, and to be backed up by the centre's security apparatus, if need be.

* * *

Political developments in Tajikistan from 1985 to 1991 were characterised by three main features. The first was economic decay. Tajikistan lived on an inherited endowment, gradually depleting its material and demographic resources. While the bulk of the people were still quiescent, deteriorating quality of life was about to result in a frustration-aggression reaction amongst the most deprived strata of the population. The second was the atmosphere of instability and uncertainty wrought by Gorbachev's reforms. Ideological cohesion, sets of specific values and identities, and modes of social behaviour were undermined and destroyed. The third feature was the deflation of the state, both in the sense of contraction of its agencies and in the loss of moral authority, especially after the bloody events of February 1990 in Dushanbe.

The central political authority of Tajikistan failed to adopt the national idea as a means of mass mobilisation, relying on Moscow to deal with all its problems. Consensual tasks were fulfilled more successfully on the subnational level through traditional components of the polity, primarily regional solidarity networks. Mono-organisational socialism gave the Tajik people a historical chance to emerge as a modern nation. With the demise of the Soviet order,

261 *Novye zakony Respubliki Tadjikistan. Sbornik (Chast' I)* (Dushanbe: [No publisher], 1991), p. 35.

this opportunity was gone. It is not beyond the imagination, however, that the people of Tajikistan might reconstruct a viable political organism and a cohesive national community along the lines suggested by their Central Asian neighbours and based on authoritarianism and relative isolationism.