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

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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, ‘Vospriyatiie naseleniemi novykh nezavisimikh gosudarstv istorii sovetskogo postsovetskogo periodov 11-ya volna, Aprl’-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

per cent in the first half of the nineteenth century. 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)**

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


With its population doubling every 20 years, and reserves of cultivable land all but exhausted, the demographic pressure 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. The corresponding figure for Tajikistan was considerably lower, and, generally, it was incapable of producing enough food to meet domestic demand. 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).

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

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

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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 Kyrgyz 
 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 Tadzhikskoi SSR (Dushanbe: Donish, 1984), 
p. 43.
18 Narodnoe khoziaistvo Tadzhikskoi SSR v 1990g., p. 7.
19 Khonaliev, Trudovye resursy Tadzhikistana, 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’,\(^\text{20}\) 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.\(^\text{21}\)

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.’\(^\text{22}\) 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.\(^\text{23}\)

In 1986, as many as 25.7 per cent of the working-age population may have been unemployed;\(^\text{24}\) the figure for rural areas was higher—probably in the region of 35 per cent.\(^\text{25}\) 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.\(^\text{26}\) Admittedly, Tajikistan fared badly even compared with its neighbours: ‘an absolute majority of the republic’s

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\(^{20}\) Kommunist Tadzhikistana, 31 May 1975.
\(^{25}\) 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. Seria: Filosofia i pravoovedenie, No. 3 (1992), p. 37.
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

29 ‘Qarori Soveti Olii RSS Tojikiston dar borai tadbirhoi ta’mini muhofizati manfiathoi modar va kudak, behtar namudani sharoioti mehnatu maishati zanon va vu’sat dodani fa’oliyyati onho dar hayyoti istehsoli va jam’iyyati’, in Sessiyai hashtumi Soveti Olii RSS Tojikiston: Da’vati yozdahum; Hisoboti stenografi (Dushanbe: Soveti Olii 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: Monogarova, ‘Struktura sovremennoi gorodskoi sem’i tadzhikov’, p. 24.
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

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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. Tadzhikskai 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 kompleksy: planirovanie i upravlenie, ed. A. G. Aganbegian (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1984), p. 120.
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.’ 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. 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’.

**The Spiral of Economic Decay**

Even in better years, returns on capital in Tajikistan were 10 per cent below the USSR’s average. 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 workforce 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. 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 envisaged:

- 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

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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, ‘Tadzhikiskaia Sovetskaia Sotsialisticheskaia respublika’, in *Naselenie soiuznykh respublik* (Moscow: Statistika, 1977), p. 252.
44 Usmanov, *Tekhnicheskaia rekonstruktziia industrii Tadzhikistana 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. Growth in industrial labour productivity was the slowest amongst Soviet republics, and in 1990 actually declined by 1.2 per cent, while in agriculture labour productivity sank by 1991 to 75.6 per cent of its 1980 level. On average, construction workers in Tajikistan took three times as long to build a house as their counterparts in Russia. 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. 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. 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. Throughout the Soviet period, Tajikistan had a negative trade balance with other republics. 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’.

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45 Narodnoe khoziaistvo Tadzhikskoi SSR v 1990g., p. 123.
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.
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’. 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, and 14–21 per cent of its budget revenues comprised direct subventions from Moscow.

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. 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. A sociological survey conducted that year revealed that people in Tajikistan were resolutely against Gorbachev’s economic reforms.

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

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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'. 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. 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’. 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. By 1991 this figure had increased to 87.3 per cent. 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. Even the food pyramid of an average Tajik family did not meet nutritional norms—as in centuries before, bread remained its major element.

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 sharoti qisqos bozorgoni’, Akhboroti Akademiyai fanhoi RSS Tojikiston. Suriyayi falsafa, iqtisodiyyot, huquqshinosi, No. 3 (1991), pp. 21–2.
62 Rashid, The Resurgence of Central Asia, p. 171.
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).
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. In Qurghonteppa, local mafias operated in the black market with some official protection during the 1980s. 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 Moscow—implemented a campaign against corruption between 1986 and 1991, resulting in a large turnover of political and economic elites. 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.

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’. 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. According to agronomic norms, plantations in Tajikistan should have produced 700 000 t of raw cotton a year in the 1980s. 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

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’.
73 In 1989, the humus content in land under cultivation was barely 30 per cent of the 1940 level. See: Kh. Umarov, ‘Sovremennye sotsialno-ekonomicheskie protsessy i problemy razvitiia sovetskoi Srednei Azii’, in Sovetologi o problemakh sotsialno-ekonomicheskogo razvitiia SSSR i soiuaznykh respublik (Moscow: Institut ekonomiki AN SSSR, 1990), p. 13.
1986—10 times the average for the USSR. 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’. 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’.

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. 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.’ To make the situation even worse, industrial sewage escapes in Tajikistan more than doubled over the period 1985–89. In 1990, 15 per cent of drinking water samples showed chemical pollution and 21 per cent of samples had bacteria infestation.

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’. 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 roubles—indicated not punishment but criminal indifference of the authorities to environmental protection. A study conducted

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75 Tojikistoni Soveti, 28 August 1988.
76 Ahmedov, KPSS v borbe za intensifikatsiyu khlopkovodstva, p. 278.
80 Narodnoe khoziaistvo Tadzhikskoi SSR v 1990g., p. 100.
82 Dustbaev, Problemy khimizatsii otraslei narodnogo khoziaistva Tadzhikistana, p. 75.
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 Tadzhikistana, No. 2 (1993), pp. 37–8.
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 Tadzhikistanu (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 uscherbnoi luny, [Documentary film] [Dushanbe: Tadzhikfilm, 1990].
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’. 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. 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. 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’. 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.

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94 Boboev, Ekonomicheskoie razvitie respubliki v usloviakh rynka, p. 33.
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.\footnote{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.}

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 a short time (if at all)’\footnote{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.}. It has been argued that Gorbachev may have needed to strengthen his primacy within the party before he could embark upon systemic reform,\footnote{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.} 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.\footnote{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.}

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,\footnote{Nomzad ba raisi jumhuri Tojikiston Rahmon Nabievich Nabiev (Dushanbe: [No publisher], 1991), p. 5.} and was dismissed in December 1985.\footnote{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.)} His replacement, Qahhor Mahkamov,\footnote{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.} was expected to be more amenable to Gorbachev’s plans. From early 1987 to the end of 1989, Mahkamov—using what Markowitz terms
attacks’, ‘reforms’ and an ‘anti-corruption campaign’—attempted to dismantle the patronage networks within the Communist Party.\footnote{Markowitz, *Collapsed and Prebendal States in Post-Soviet Eurasia*, pp. 5, 102–3.} 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.\footnote{Markowitz, *Collapsed and Prebendal States in Post-Soviet Eurasia*, pp. 5, 102–3, 118–21.}

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.\footnote{Kommunist Tadzhikistana, 2 April 1991.} 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.\footnote{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.} Abdulov maintains that Luchinsky’s tactics worsened the regional divides in Tajikistan and pushed the country towards war.\footnote{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>}

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
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’.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{109} Initially, in the mid 1980s, the dividing lines for struggles among the \textit{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 \textit{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 \textit{perestroika}, non-Leninobodis from the south (Pamiris, Kulobis and Garmis) were brought into high government positions, resulting in ‘ambitious hopes among southerners’.\textsuperscript{110}

None of the CPT CC secretaries of the 1985 vintage remained in office in 1987. By the end of 1986, all \textit{oblast} leaders had been replaced in Tajikistan, and so had more than 80 per cent of party officials at \textit{raion} (town) level.\textsuperscript{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’.\textsuperscript{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 \textit{oblast} had been singled out, and in 1987 the \textit{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.\textsuperscript{113} As in Uzbekistan,
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’. 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.

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’. 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.

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

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115 Kommunist Tadzhikistana, 3 July 1991.
116 Abdulov, Rohi behbud, p. 10.
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 Mirkholiavoy. 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.

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 Gharimi 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.

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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; 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. 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’.

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’. Having failed to extract the obedience of the party apparat, 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’. 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. A sociological study conducted in the Tajik State University in 1989 revealed that students and staff members

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120 Luchinsky once remarked: ‘these churlish Kulobis should be completely and utterly destroyed.’ See: Nasriddinov, Tarkish, p. 32.
122 Biznes i politika, 8 March 1994.
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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.’\textsuperscript{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
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.\textsuperscript{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.’\textsuperscript{130} The significance of this change in the Ministry of Interior for regionally based grievances is clear.

\section*{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).\textsuperscript{131} Aziz Niyazi describes the situation in the Qurghonteppa oblast:\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{129} Kommunist Tadzhikistana, 8 December 1989.
\textsuperscript{130} Dustov, Zakhm bar jismi vatan, p. 24.
\textsuperscript{131} Rubin, ‘Tajikistan’, p. 211.
\textsuperscript{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;\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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’.\textsuperscript{135} Nevertheless, Mahkamov’s bureaucratic changes had also allowed Gharmis to secure some important positions in the Qurghonteppa regional government.\textsuperscript{136} According to Rahmon Nabiev, the merger was a purely political exercise, costly, unnecessary and not warranted by any economic considerations.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{133} Markowitz, \textit{Collapsed and Prebendal States in Post-Soviet Eurasia}, pp. 97–100.
\textsuperscript{134} G. Khaidarov and M. Inomov, \textit{Tajikistan: Tragedy and Anguish of the Nation} (St Petersburg: LINKO, 1993), p. 22.
\textsuperscript{135} Khaidarov and Inomov, \textit{Tajikistan}, p. 22. See also: Niyazi, ‘Tajikistan I’, p. 151.
\textsuperscript{136} Markowitz, \textit{Collapsed and Prebendal States in Post-Soviet Eurasia}, pp. 118, 121.
\textsuperscript{137} \textit{Tojikistoni Soveti}, 23 February 1990.
\textsuperscript{138} Markowitz, \textit{Collapsed and Prebendal States in Post-Soviet Eurasia}, pp. 97–100.
\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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,\textsuperscript{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’.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{140} Nasriddinov, Tarkish, p. 44.
\textsuperscript{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) … [T]hey are well 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.
\textsuperscript{142} Markowitz, Collapsed and Prebendal States in Post-Soviet Eurasia, p. 52.
\textsuperscript{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 Kulib) 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 Qurghonteppa 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 Mahkamov’s bureaucratic changes had allowed Gharmis to secure important positions in the Qurghonteppa 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 Qurghonteppa.¹⁴⁸ This was part of an effort by

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¹⁴⁴ Markowitz, Collapsed and Prebendal States in Post-Soviet Eurasia, p. 121.
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’ Qurghonteppa;\(^{149}\) however, not as many old elites were able to retake their positions as those in Kulob had done.\(^{150}\)

By early 1992 in Qurghonteppa 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 Qurghonteppa 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 Qurghonteppa 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 Qurghonteppa.\(^{154}\)

### 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

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

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\(^{160}\) 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. 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.

Gradually the denigrating Khrushchev-era image of Tajiks as primitive Asians led out of a historical backwater by progressive forces from European Russia 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 Gafurov’s monumental work *The Tajiks: Archaic, Ancient and Mediaeval History*, 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. Gafurov 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.’

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’. In reality, the 1970s

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162 During the war, 13 997 Tajiks received orders and medals of the USSR; 14 of them became Heroes of the Soviet Union. See: *Natsional’naia politika KPSS v deistvi* (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.
165 *Vuzovskaiia molodezh*, Vypusk 1, p. 29.
166 Masov, *Istoriiia 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 Tadjhik 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.
saw more extensive use of indigenous languages in public communication in Central Asia, at the expense of Russian. 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’. 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.

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’ 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’. 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 numbers 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.

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.’ 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

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174 Usmanov, Tekhnicheskia rekonstruktsiia industrii Tadzhikhanea v usloviakh perestroiki, p. 54.
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’.\footnote{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’.\footnote{177} The fact that socialism was mapped onto the heterogeneous Tajik community by external forces need not have undermined the viability of new identities.\footnote{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**

- Soviet Union
- Central Asia (Turkestan)
- Tajikistan
- Region
- Group of villages
  - River valley
  - City
- Village
  - Mahalla
- Family

Source: Author’s research.

\footnote{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


\(^{180}\) 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 khozraschet: ot raspredeleniia k obmenu’, *Vestnik statistiki*, No. 1 (1991), p. 8.


\(^{183}\) Alimov and Saidov, *Natisonalnyi 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'. 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.

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’. 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. In January 1987, secret ballot and multi-candidate...
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.’ By 1989, the CPT CC apparatus had shrunk by one-third compared with 1986. 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. In spring 1988, 25 ministries and 17 state committees that operated in Tajikistan were reorganised into 12 new agencies. The Tajik KGB was especially badly crippled in the late Gorbachev period: its staff cuts were three times the All-Union ratio. 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’, Qahhor Mahkamov had the following to say on the subject of the proliferation of alternative associations:

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 siyosii Tojikon az istiloi Rusiya to imruz, p. 113.
190 Calculations based on the CPT CC telephone directories.
192 Izvestiia, 5 April 1988.
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 republic’s leadership 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’. 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 legitimation 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. A group of prominent southern elite leaders

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

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. 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.

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.

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

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

\(^{208}\) These include minister of culture, N. Tabarov; deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers, O. Latifi; head of the State-Juridical Department of the CPT CC, N. Khuvaidulloev; 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 dazakhma, p. 77.
\(^{212}\) Karimov, Qurboni dazakhma, p. 77.
\(^{215}\) Rastokhrez, No. 3 (August 1990), p. 4.
\(^{216}\) Oleg Panfilov, ‘Piat’ let nazad v Dushanbe byla rasstreliana demonstratsiia’, Nezavisimaiia gazeta (February 1995), online: <http://olegpanfilov.com/?p=1149>
chanting ‘beat the Russians!’.

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. Later recollections by ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers 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. After the riots subsided various rumours of impending pogroms against the Russian population circulated, instilling further fear amongst the Russian-speaking population of Dushanbe.

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.

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. The opposition’s talking points refer to those in positions of power as being responsible for the riots. For example, Muhammadali Hait, 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 ‘Soobshchение комиssии президiuma Verkhovnogo Soveta Tadzhikskoi SSR po proverke sobytii 12–14 Fevralia 1990г. v Dushanbe’, Sagdiana [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.
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 Mahmadali 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>
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.
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. Indeed, many Dushanbe residents, both Russian and Central Asian, blamed out-of-town young men for the rioting and looting. Residents claimed that unnamed persons transported young men to the city and gave them ‘money, drugs, and alcohol to encourage them to riot’. 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?’ These conspiratorial views are completely in line with the varied narratives of blame for riots and demonstrations throughout Central Asia around this time.

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’. Targets for pilfering were selected carefully during the riots: in one street, some shops were looted, but others, under racketeer protection, remained intact.

Fourth, contrary to the images disseminated by the Moscow-based media, 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’. The leader of Muslims of Tajikistan, Qozikalon Akbar

233 Tadzhikstan v ogne, p. 61.
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. 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.

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.

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

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

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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 Gharmi 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-

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 Adabiyyot 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. 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. 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. 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’. 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. 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. 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’.

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

255 Komsomolets Tadzikistana, 22 March 1990.
256 Kommunist Tadzikistana, 6 August 1991.
257 Kilavuz, Understanding Violent Conflict, p. 9, see also p. 132.
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.

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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,

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\(^{261}\) _Novye zakony Respubliki Tadzhikistan. 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.