7. The Rise of Opposition, the Contraction of the State and the Road to Independence

The Gorbachev era freed Soviet society politically; however, democratic consolidation occurred only in a handful of the former Soviet republics; in many of them the transition from authoritarian rule did not take place. Economic factors in the 1990s undoubtedly contributed to the sluggishness of post-communist transformation, but *perestroika* had equally devastating effects on all Central Asian republics, yet only Tajikistan succumbed to acute civil conflict, virtual dissolution of the state and fragmentation of the country. A hypothesis deserving of proper consideration in this sense is that ‘the consolidation of democratic rule depends not only on economic growth and a broad distribution of benefits; it also depends on the development of political institutions that can effectively mediate policy debates and coordinate the relations among contending social and economic interests’.\(^1\) Additionally, a strong argument can be put in favour of the high degree of indeterminacy in the process of transition from Soviet authoritarian rule, whereby ‘unexpected events (*fortuna*), insufficient information, hurried and audacious choices, confusion about motives and interests, plasticity and even indefiniteness of political identities, as well as the talents of specific individuals (*virtù*) are frequently decisive in determining outcomes’.\(^2\)

As Jonathan Steele has observed, ‘the Communist system was not democratic, but it was an effective administrative machine, which worked and where the “estates” … had a framework for presenting their interests’.\(^3\) Gorbachev had broken this machine, and, during 1990–91, it was up to political elites in every republic to put something new in its place. Unfortunately for Tajikistan, its leaders in this crucial period proved to be incapable of the task.

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Proto-Opposition: Public Movements and Localised Action Groups

In early 1991, Grzegorz Ekiert wrote that

on the one hand, the swift disintegration of one-party states has left a dangerous political vacuum, setting in motion an often chaotic process of political change. On the other hand, the restoration of individual and collective rights, as well as [the] opening of public spaces, has triggered rapid political mobilisation. As a result, the power vacuum has been permeated by highly fragmented political forces prone to radicalisation not only around political and economic issues but also around ethnic and religious cleavages.⁴

In Tajikistan, the absence of stable class cleavages and mezzo-structures based upon them, as well as the general lack of civic culture, inhibited the formation of political parties that are characteristic of liberal-democratic systems. Their main functions—interest aggregation, constituency representation and structuring the vote during elections—were performed by other institutions that had nothing to do with the classical left–right continuum.

The events that took place in Dushanbe in February 1990 signalled the end of the monolithic social order, and served as a powerful catalyst for the emergence of a variety of public entities that were not in compliance with the regime. Outwardly, they appeared as mass public associations and political parties, but it will be argued here that essentially they were little more than facades for elite factions in disagreement with the ruling faction on policy questions. Henceforth, although institutional analysis is important in understanding formal structures in any polity, the transactional approach first developed by Dankwart A. Rustow, which implies that ‘the key actors in the transition process are political elites, whether in the government or opposition, not interest groups, mass organisations, social movements, or classes’,⁵ remains the major theoretical tool in this chapter.

The opening of Tajik society in 1989 and early 1990 was marked by a rapid rise in various public associations—that is, partially institutionalised collectivities with some structure but no formal membership. Although quite often they protested and opposed government policies, they never explicitly sought to gain power. Instead, they strove to limit it; this distinguished their ‘protest activities

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and civil actions from opposition political party activities’. It is possible to single out five types of such associations that came into being in this period in Tajikistan, according to their objectives, membership and methods of operation.

I.

The Ru ba Ru (‘Face to Face’) Political Club was set up in February 1989 at the initiative and under the aegis of the Tajik Komsomol (Lenin Communist Union of Youth) Central Committee. Its initial statute, while pledging allegiance to the CPSU and perestroika, contained a number of rather radical (for that time), programmatic provisions, such as:

- formation of national and political self-awareness of Tajik youngsters
- upholding of human rights and their primacy in the national legislation
- all-round development of the Tajik language
- endorsement of parliamentary candidates at all levels
- environmental protection and making public the true records of the ecological situation in the republic.

The club, based in Dushanbe, was run by a nine-member council, and all discussions were supposed to be held in Tajik. Its major form of work consisted of inviting senior party and state officials for round-table discussions. More often than not, these officials would demonstrate incompetence and plain illiteracy, much to the satisfaction of the approximately 400 members of Ru ba Ru. By September 1989, the Komsomol CC had grown weary of the club’s independence, disbanded its elected council and removed controversial items from its agenda. From that time on, Ru ba Ru was ordered to discuss only those problems that had been approved by the Komsomol’s bureau—41 in total, including such items as the ‘Psychological Culture of a Komsomol Propagandist’ and ‘Nationalism—A Tool of Subversive Activity of Imperialism’. Very quickly, Ru ba Ru lost all its attractiveness to the public and slipped into oblivion.

According to some sources, the club was established with the blessing of the KGB, which planned to collect data on potential dissidents at its gatherings. Even if this were true, Ru ba Ru objectively played an important role in diversifying the political landscape of Tajikistan: it served as a role model for similar clubs throughout the republic, and, more importantly, provided leaders of proto-opposition groups, such as Rastokhez, with a forum in which they could disseminate their views and recruit followers.

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7 Proekt polozheniia o politicheskom klube ‘Ru Ba Ru’, Typewritten document dated 14 March 1989, courtesy of Zafar Saidaev, then head of the Ideological Department of the Komsomol CC.
II.

The People’s Movement of Tajikistan in Support of Perestroika (hereinafter Rastokhez)\(^\text{10}\) held its first conference in Dushanbe on 30 December 1989,\(^\text{11}\) but its pamphlets, mostly in handwritten form, were in circulation throughout the republic from early 1989. Rastokhez had coalesced around a group of intellectuals, including the poet Bozor Sobir, the philosopher Mirbobo Mirrahim and the economist Tohir Abdujabbor. In January 1988, Mirbobo Mirrahim published an article entitled ‘Till When Shall the Water Flow Under the Ice?’,\(^\text{12}\) which called for the revision of the following aspects of Soviet policy:

- national nihilism
- atheistic extremism
- unjust territorial delimitation
- the suppressed status of the Tajik language.

It should be remembered that as part of Gorbachev’s drive for centralisation, many educational and research organisations in Tajikistan were stripped of their autonomy, and in 1987 Moscow ordered the switch to Russian as a universal medium of teaching in the Tajik State University and other tertiary institutions.\(^\text{13}\) Henceforth, ideas propounded by Mirrahim found ample support amongst Tajik intellectuals. The language issue became, albeit for a short period, the most important and unifying component of their political thought, and resulted in the adoption of the Law on Language by the Supreme Soviet of Tajikistan in July 1989, which proclaimed Tajik the only state language. Article 23 of the law stipulated that ‘in all vocational-training schools, specialised secondary and tertiary educational institutions of the Tajik SSR, regardless of their organisational affiliation, teaching is carried out in the state language’.\(^\text{14}\) Russian was downgraded to the status of the language of interethnic communication, but its free circulation was guaranteed.\(^\text{15}\) Overall, despite Rastokhez being a mono-

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\(^{10}\) The word *rastokhez* has a dual meaning in Tajik: first, revival or resurgence, and second (rarely used), revolt, commotion and disorder. The Tajik government press interpreted the name as a sign of its subversive nature and linked it to its namesake organisation in Iran (*Tojikistoni soveti*, 23 February 1990). While it is true that the Rastokhez party existed in Iran between 1975 and 1979, it was set up by the Shah to enforce a ‘centralised and absolute system, centering largely around his own personality’ (Amin Saikal, *The Rise and Fall of the Shah: 1941–1979* [London: Angus & Robertson, 1980], p. 189), and as such could hardly be regarded as a destabilising element.

\(^{11}\) The first organisational assembly of Rastokhez took place on 14 September 1989, but its participants were just a handful of ‘awakened and concerned representatives of the public of Dushanbe and adjacent districts’ who petitioned authorities for recognition and provision of office space, as can be seen from a letter sent by the chairman of the Rastokhez, T. Abdujabbor, on 15 September 1989 to the chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the TSSR and the chairman of the Executive Committee of Dushanbe.

\(^{12}\) ‘To ba kai ob az tagi yakh meravad?’ *Komsomoli Tojikiston*, 6 January 1988, pp. 1–2.

\(^{13}\) Abdulov, *Rohi behbud*, p. 8.

\(^{14}\) *Novye zakony Respubliki Tadzhikistan. Sbornik. (Chast’ IV)* (Dushanbe: Kontrakt, 1992), p. 74.

\(^{15}\) *Novye zakony Respubliki Tadzhikistan. Sbornik. (Chast’ IV)*.
ethnic nationalist political party, its platform did insert moderate language calling for democracy, human rights, and equality for all citizens of Tajikistan regardless of ethnicity or religion.16

Having assessed the situation in Tajikistan as political, economic, ecological, cultural and spiritual crises, the first conference of Rastokhez called on all inhabitants of the republic to think and act on five major issues.17

• First, all land, mineral and other natural resources, as well as all factories, should become the property of the populace of Tajikistan. The republic should attain complete ‘economic and material sovereignty’.
• Second, in the process of establishing the economic sovereignty of the republic, the most urgent task was to reform prices for goods produced inside Tajikistan, cotton in particular. Central organs must be deprived of the ability to dictate prices.
• Third, relations with other republics, regions and states should be based on mutual agreements that recognise the equal rights of each, and on the sale and purchase of processed goods and raw materials according to the laws of the market.
• Fourth, Rastokhez would issue an all-embracing concept of economic sovereignty of the Tajik SSR that would realise ‘all hopes and expectations of the peoples inhabiting the republic’.
• Fifth, the future of the Tajik nation depends on the success of democracy, hence it is imperative to elect a new parliament that is responsible and answerable to the people.

Documents of the Rastokhez conference were filled with references to the process of democratisation instigated by Gorbachev and a general appreciation of the leading role of the reformed Communist Party in implementing progressive changes in Tajikistan; they designated ‘some individual officials in the apparatuses of the CPT CC and the Komsomol CC who distort truth, as they did in the years of personality cult and stagnation’,18 as the major impediment to perestroika’s triumph in the republic. The newly elected chairman of Rastokhez, Tohir Abdujabbor, sent a letter to Qahhor Mahkamov, in which, in a rather humble tone, he asked the first secretary to peruse and endorse programmatic statements of Rastokhez.19

16 Kilavuz, Understanding Violent Conflict, p. 139; Niyazi, ‘The Year of Tumult’, p. 275. The point on the mono-ethnicity of Rastokhez was made by Niyazi based on its public meetings and its publications.
19 Document A/396, received by the CPT CC Secretariat on 24 January 1990, courtesy of Zafar Saidov, spokesperson of President Emomali Rahmonov.
history, noting that it had enough ambiguity in its charter that it did not specifically condemn communism, nor did it prohibit members from holding Communist Party membership or even high-level positions in the Communist Party. Niyazi stresses that Rastokhez was more like a ‘coordinating centre’ in that at an early point it did not openly oppose the Communist Party and preferred instead to lobby the government.\(^{20}\)

In handwritten pamphlets, however, Rastokhez leaders severely criticised the ruling elite, but on somewhat different grounds:

> If we scan through periodicals and archive documents for the past 100 years, we shall find representatives of the same families as leading officials; if we acquaint ourselves, however briefly, with the lists of leading staff of Party and executive committees at various levels, we shall discover the eventual monopoly of people of Leninobodi extraction on controlling the upper echelons of power [italics added].\(^{21}\)

Rastokhez even demanded a disproportionate redistribution in the Tajik Supreme Soviet away from population-based distribution of seats towards one that would favour the city of Dushanbe (where Rastokhez was strongest), a move that would hurt the Leninobod Province.\(^{22}\) From such statements and demands, it appears that the perceived injustice in traditional power-sharing arrangements, rather than ideological oppression, was the major grievance harboured by Rastokhez’s creators.

In mid 1989, Rastokhez leaders claimed to have up to 10 000 sympathisers throughout the republic,\(^{23}\) leading up to the government’s official recognition of Rastokhez as a legal entity on 21 June 1991;\(^{24}\) however, Rastokhez remained an extremely poorly organised and fragmented entity.\(^{25}\) Rastokhez was dominated

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\(^{21}\) Grazhdanske dvizheniia v Tadzhikistane, p. 39.
\(^{22}\) Mavlon Makhamov, ‘Islam and the Political Development of Tajikistan after 1985’, in Central Asia: Its Strategic Importance and Future Prospects, ed. Hafeez Malik (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1994), p. 199. Rastokhez ‘pointed out bluntly that “higher circles of the state apparatus were controlled by natives of Leninabad,” and demanded that this injustice be removed. In order to implement this demand, the Central Council of Rastokhez proposed on June 2, 1990, that the Leninabad province should be entitled to elect only 30 deputies to the new parliament. Ironically, one-fourth of the republic’s population lived in Leninabad, while Rastokhez’s supporters were to elect 50 deputies. In Dushanbe, where Rastokhez was expected to win the elections, 100 deputies were to be elected.’ In Rastokhez’s eyes, this reshuffling of electoral seats would have rectified the ‘wrongs’ of the past. Citing Rastokhez, No. 2 (July 1990).
\(^{23}\) Javononi Tojikiston, 22 September 1989.
\(^{25}\) Clause 7.5 of the Rastokhez (PMR) Charter, for example, stated that ‘[t]he PMR Presidium and its city and district chapters do not bear responsibility for each others’ activities’. 
by secular urban intellectuals, a group who enthusiastically joined reform movements and political parties. This was a problem politically as these urban intellectuals were isolated from the broader Tajik society and their networks did not extend outside their small circles; however, urban intellectuals were not the only members. Some Rastokhez supporters originated from very different social strata. On the one hand, there were highly educated urban intelligentsia, members of the Academy of Sciences, writers and journalists, who genuinely believed in reforming and modernising Tajik society. On the other hand, there were lumpenproletarians in big cities, new arrivals from impoverished rural areas in the south and east, bazaar traders, and various shadowy figures involved in black and grey-market activities who treated the conditions created by perestroika as an opportunity to rapidly improve their social status.

The dichotomy in composition resulted in Rastokhez’s failure to work out a clear-cut political platform that would enable it to become a genuine nationalist opposition on the lines of the popular fronts that emerged at the time in the Baltic republics and Transcaucasia. The ‘intellectual’ wing of Rastokhez promoted ideas of national revival based on rediscovery of the history and culture of ancient Tajiks, invoking rather sophisticated rhetoric and theoretical concepts. The motto of Rastokhez—'Pindori nek, guftori nek, kirdori nek' (Good thoughts, good words, good deeds)—was borrowed from Zoroastrian ethics. According to Bozor Sobir, Rastokhez was not unlike a sort of mystical order with its sacred ‘mission’—to be the guide and staff (aso—a well-known Sufi symbol) of the nation—and with its very own spiritual leader:

A thousand thanks,
A thousand bows,
A thousand praises
To Ulughzoda, the pir of Rastokhez,
The patron-prophet of Rastokhez.

26 Olimova, ‘Opposition in Tajikistan’, p. 252; Kilavuz, Understanding Violent Conflict, p. 139. Kilavuz describes these intellectuals as ‘writers, artists, teachers, and other members of the urban intelligentsia’, some of whom were former Communist Party members ‘though not apparatchiks’.
29 In Marxist terminology, that segment of the working class without class consciousness which will likely not acquire that consciousness, and which is actually an obstacle to a Marxist revolution.
31 Satym Ulughzoda, born in 1911, is considered the father of modern Tajik historical drama and prose. His works on Rudaki, Abu Ali ibn Sino and Vose have been widely published in many languages. Ulughzoda represents an interesting case of an indigenous intellectual raised and recognised by Soviet power: he fought courageously during the Great Patriotic War, translated Lenin’s writings into Tajik and eventually became a corresponding member of the Tajik Academy of Sciences. See: Bolshaiia sovetskaia entsiklopediia, Vol. 26 (Moscow: Izdatelstvo BSE, 1977), p. 606. Ulughzoda, originally from around Namangan, always advocated the idea of restitution of all lands inhabited by Tajiks to Tajikistan, thus endearing himself to young radical intellectuals.
Davlat Khudonazarov, while not a member of Rastokhez, has given perhaps the best summary of the secular Tajik intelligentsia’s philosophical outlook:

Unlike Christianity, Islam cannot be conducive to moral resurgence of the people, this is an aggressive religion which consolidated stagnation and backwardness. Iranian peoples—the Tajiks’ ancestors—had possessed the highest culture and beautiful religion prior to the Islamic conquest; Islamisation led to the slowing down and almost complete halting of social progress, the destruction and decay of culture, and, indirectly, served as a cause of Central Asia’s backwardness as compared to Europe.32

Anti-Islamism, nationhood and Western-type modernisation were the ideas that drew freethinking professors, poets and artists in Tajikistan to Rastokhez.

The ‘populist’ wing of Rastokhez, however, held somewhat different and rather simplistic views on the past, present and future of the Tajik nation. For them, it was the preponderance of ‘foreign elements’ in the republic that made life unbearable. While Tohir Abdujabbor believed that ‘Russians, Uzbeks and representatives of other nationalities can easily join us in solving problems we face’,33 his less-refined colleagues pushed forward their scenario of revivifying the Tajik nation: ‘We shall go to the districts of the republic, organise meetings in student dormitories and raise them to struggle against the Russians and leaders of the republic. We have special scores to settle with the Uzbeks, with whom we shall deal after we expel the Russians.’34 Many have noted the preoccupation with Uzbekistan amongst the membership of ‘Dushanbe’s reform movements’.35 Grievances over the Tajik–Uzbek border delimitation, the historically ethnic Tajik cities of Samarkand and Bukhara in Uzbekistan, and the Tajik minority in Uzbekistan were prominent themes in these movements,36 with rhetoric among certain members occasionally quite unrealistic. This included not just identifying Uzbekistan as a threat to Tajikistan, but also arguing for the formation of a ‘Greater Iran’ that would include Samarkand and Bukhara—a view that obviously aggravated the Government of Uzbekistan.37

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33 Grazhdanske dvizheniia v Tadzhikistane, p. 37.
35 Dudoignon’s terminology here allows the inclusion of the DPT with Rastokhez.
pamphlets distributed by young Rastokhez activists, despite their leadership’s view on Islam, even called for a *jihad* to purify Tajikistan.\(^{38}\) Safar Mastonzod, a worker at the footwear factory in Dushanbe and member of the Central Council of Rastokhez, thus outlined his political views:

Seventy years of pro-Russian chauvinist propaganda have addled our brains … The planned pillage of the republic is taking place. They pump everything they can out of Tajikistan … We don’t know what political culture is, but we need to channel the national movement into the riverbed of democracy … I am against the law based on shari’a. I would like Sweden to be the model of our social order … We do not lay claims on the Bukhara and Samarkand *oblasts* [of Uzbekistan] in their entirety, just on traditional lands of the Tajiks who undergo real genocide there. Those are the cities of Bukhara and Samarkand, a narrow corridor adjacent to Panjakent and part of the Qashqadarya *oblast*.\(^{39}\)

It can be argued that it was this incoherent mixture of conflicting democratic, nationalist and populist ideas, and not persecution by communist authorities, that contributed to the weakness and ultimate demise of what had been conceived as a broad popular movement.\(^{40}\)

III.

Throughout 1989, a number of public associations emulating the organisational structure and methods of work of Ru ba Ru appeared in regional and district centres. They proved to be more viable and independent than Ru ba Ru, for they articulated grievances of established local communities. Their populist notions of wellbeing and equity based on regionalism were more comprehensible for common people, especially in rural areas, than any nationalist platform.

The unofficial sociopolitical organisation Oshkoro (the Tajik term for Gorbachev’s *glasnost*) operated under the very simple slogan: ‘Kulob—to Kulobis!’ Its membership included the USSR people’s deputy, B. Safarov; the *sarkhatib* (chief preacher) of Kulob’s Friday mosque—essentially, the official head of all Muslims of the region—Haydar Sharifzoda; honoured teacher of the republic, Rustam Abdurahimov; and many other dignitaries, Soviet and traditional, united by considerations of local patriotism. They raised seemingly mundane problems, such as why there was not enough meat in the city’s stores, why the number

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40 The program and charter of Rastokhez, written in September 1989, were not published until October 1990, although the movement started its own newspaper in May 1990. This reluctance was explained by the Rastokhez ideologues’ fear of not being understood by ‘wide urban and rural strata of the population, from which they were utterly separated’. See: *Grazhdanskie dvizheniia v Tadzhikistane*, p. 35. The first representative congress of Rastokhez was convened as late as March 1991.
of workshops in villages remained negligible, or why transport links with neighbouring Qurghonteppa were so hazardous. At times, however, up to 15,000 people would attend Oshkoro meetings—a figure Rastokhez leaders could only dream of.\footnote{Rohi Lenini, 16 November 1989.} The suggested solution to those problems was also clear—a thorough overhaul of republican and regional leadership: ‘All persons of authority in the Party and state apparatus are Leninobodis. Is it fair? Kulob is quite capable of producing leaders from its own midst.’\footnote{Grazhdanskie dvizheniia v Tadzhikistane, p. 57.}

The Ehyoi Khujand (‘Revival of Khujand’) movement, based in Leninobod, was preoccupied with the restoration of the city as the most important economic and cultural centre of Tajikistan—a status ‘it had been robbed of illegally by a partocratic oligarchy’.\footnote{Rastokhez, No. 3 (August 1990), p. 5.} In conjunction with its sister organisation in Uroteppa (Istaravshon) called Vahdat (‘Unity’), Ehyoi Khujand advocated greater autonomy for the northern region and closer ties with Uzbekistan. Both refrained from criticism of the CPT and emphasised the importance of compromise and cooperation with the authorities. Their main political tenets included a broadening of the powers of local Soviets and more transparency in the process of decision-making at the republic level.\footnote{Komsomolets Tadzhikistana, 15 September 1989.}

The La’li Badakhshon (‘Ruby of Badakhshan’) movement demanded elevation of the GBAO to an autonomous republic. It strove to preserve the distinct local culture and languages;\footnote{In 1989, a heated polemic flared amongst Soviet ethnographers in regards to the Pamirs. One group of scholars, especially those based in Dushanbe, believed that ‘in the years of Soviet power the process of assimilation of Pamiri nationalities unfolded peacefully and harmoniously, along the path predetermined by history and without any abuses on the part of republican and local authorities’, while their opponents maintained that ‘everything that has happened and is happening to the Pamiri languages, script and folklore of the Pamiri nationalities reflects the policy of their forced assimilation, spanning several decades’. See: A. L. Grunberg and I. M. Steblin-Kamenskii, ‘Neskolko zamechanii po povodu otklika A. S. Davydova na stat’iu S. V. Cheshko’, Sovetskaia etnografiia, No. 4 (1989), p. 37.} the movement’s leaders believed that by no means were the Pamiris part of the Tajik nation.\footnote{B. Shokirov and A. Mahmadkarimov, Paidoyeshi hizbu sozmonhoy nav dar Tujikiston va fa’oliyati onho (solhoi 1989–1992) (Dushanbe: Donishgohi agrarii Tujikiston, 1994), p. 34.} Their economic program envisaged that Badakhshan should have the right to deal with the outside world on its own, bypassing Dushanbe, in order to take full advantage of the rich mineral deposits in its territory.\footnote{A typical argument in favour of economic independence for the region was as follows: ‘American, English, French and Japanese companies show interest in the GBAO. According to Academician Fersman, “The Pamirs is a real treasury of the world.” All elements from Mendeleev’s [periodical] table are present here. Those are all strategic raw materials … Even a non-specialist can understand our advantages if a direct route from Badakhshon to the Indian Ocean is laid.’ See: Nezavisimaia gazeta, 27 August 1994.}

On a lower level, entities like Hisori Shodmon in Tursunzoda, Zarafshon in Panjakent and Dirafshi Koviyon in Norak indulged in semi-autonomous
political activity, contributing greatly to the institutionalisation of public life around local communities. The example of the Khovaling-based political club Hamroz (‘Confidant’) is illuminating in this respect: though it claimed affiliation with both Rastokhez and Ru ba Ru, its main concerns stood aloof from abstract struggles for democracy and nationhood, covering the immediate day-to-day needs of the town’s population.48

At the grassroots level, local representative councils, regardless of their exact composition, rather than party committees, began to be viewed as decision-making organs. Usually they were village and town soviets, but sometimes discrete bodies of local strongmen were created to solve parochial problems. An action committee set up in the Komsomolobod raion in August 1989 to prevent construction of the Roghun hydro power station serves as an example of such ad-hoc organs. This committee comprised the raion party secretary, chairman of the local soviet, village elders, and a number of eminent people of Komsomolobod origin living elsewhere at the time: scientists and a Ru ba Ru functionary from Dushanbe, representatives of Gharmi settlers in the Vakhsh Valley, and so on. On 12 August 1989, it convened a meeting of protest attended by some 3600 residents of settlements that would be submerged if the Roghun project were to proceed.49 This was the first public demonstration sanctioned by local authorities in Tajikistan in defiance of policies introduced by the CPT CC, and it signified the devolution of power and authority from Dushanbe to the periphery.

Unofficial societies with local agendas began to affect politics at the republic level in two ways. First, they were successful in imposing their specific, and often extremist, outlooks that contradicted official political ideas on substantial segments of the population. The program of the Union of Democratic Youth, Bokhtar (‘Bactria’), garnered wide support far beyond its birthplace of Khovaling in the Kulob oblast, having become the manifesto of southern regionalism.50

Politics in Tajikistan is all about the struggle between two varieties of Tajiks—the Northern and the mountain ones ... If justice is not restored

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48 Hamroz, in its plan of activities, seeks, through negotiations and consultations with party and state authorities of the district, to facilitate implementation of the following measures in the district: 1) compilation of a general plan of the district’s development; 2) a share from the exploitation of natural resources of the district, such as oil, gas and gold, will be earmarked for the district’s development; 3) the number of livestock will be limited to 30,000 on state farms and 30,000 in private hands to avert land erosion; 4) other districts will be prohibited from using local pastures; 5) mulberry and walnut orchards will be expanded; 6) distribution of meat will be strictly controlled; 7) gas supply to households will be accelerated; 8) loss-making state farms will be helped; 9) the issue of housing for young people will be dealt with; 10) drinking-water supply will be improved in the district centre and villages; 11) a sports complex will be built, using the proceeds from the oil, gas and gold fund; 12) a slaughterhouse will be built, which will fully satisfy people’s demands for meat.


50 Grazhdanske dvizheniia v Tadzhikistane, pp. 64–5.
any time soon, that is, if the Party and government leadership is not altered in favour of the majority of Tajiks, confrontation will ensue. Skirmishes between Kulobis and Pamiris are simply friendly rehearsals before the fight against Leninobodis … They [northerners] are essentially Uzbeks in half-Tajik skins who have been planting pan-Turkism in Tajikistan for 70 years, trying to transform Tajiks into Uzbeks … Being at the helm, they have cardinally changed our native Persian language, they have bred hatred towards Iranians and Tajiks of Afghanistan, they have maintained the cult of the Uzbek tongue. But they have achieved nothing, only stirred the wrath and fury of the Mountain Tajiks. Our people has preserved its language (Persian-Dari), culture, art … In the long run, if we cannot become united with the half-Uzbek North of Tajikistan, we shall have to put forward the question of autonomy, up to the expulsion of the Leninobod oblast from the Tajik SSR. Let them live with their beloved brethren in Uzbekistan. To get rid of these scoundrels is the dream and hope of every Mountain Tajik. Just imagine, the dialect, songs and verses of Northern half-Uzbek Tajiks are repulsive to the Mountain Tajik; still, they have occupied radio, television, press and literature. One has to be an idiot or an animal not to feel disgust at all this. This aim is set before every informal organisation existing in the districts of the Khatlon oblast and mountainous Tajikistan.

Second, they created branches in the capital city to lobby for regional interests and, if necessary, exert physical pressure on the government. In 1989, residents of Dushanbe from the north, the Pamirs and Kulob were respectively united in societies called Hamdilon, Nosiri Khisrav and Mehri Khatlon. There is a strong argument that these groups played a significant role in the events of February 1990, acting as a sort of ‘fifth column’ for regional cliques in Dushanbe.\(^{51}\)

IV.

In 1989, a number of non-governmental organisations which represented the interests of ethnic minorities were initiated in Tajikistan. The Uzbek Society of Tajikistan, the Russian and Ukrainian Communities, the Association of Soviet Koreans, the Society of Friends of Jewish Culture ‘Khoverim’, the Armenian Society named after Mesrop Mashtots, the Georgian Society ‘Satvistomo Iberia’ and several similar groups explicitly eschewed political activism of any kind, concentrating instead on cultural issues. The Uzbek Society’s charter stated its main goals as\(^{52}\)

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51  Komsomolets Tadzhikistana, 1 April 1990.
52  Tozhikiston Uzbek zhamiyati (Dushanbe: Tojikiston, 1992), p. 5.
• exploration and propagation of the common history and traditions of Tajiks and Uzbeks
• securing a better understanding of the spiritual foundations of Uzbek culture
• establishment of Uzbek clubs, dance troupes and dramatic theatres in Dushanbe and provincial centres of Tajikistan
• promotion of Uzbek-language programs on radio and TV in Tajikistan
• facilitating quality teaching of Uzbek language and literature in secondary and tertiary education institutions
• improvement of Uzbek-language publications in Tajikistan
• rendering assistance to the needy through public foundations and relief committees.

At the same time, these organisations often served as venues of resource mobilisation to resolve issues of immediate practical importance to a given ethnic community. For instance, under Soviet rule Koreans had virtually monopolised production of rice, maize and onions in Tajikistan, deriving substantial profits from trade in these stocks. In the late 1980s they began to face competition from Gharmis and Uzbeks, who often resorted to unfair practices to evict Koreans from Tajikistan’s bazaars. The Association of Soviet Koreans, which could rely on 7000 well-to-do compatriots in Dushanbe alone, hired qualified lawyers, bribed officials and even set up physical protection squads to rectify the situation.53

V.

Tajiks living outside their republic formed a number of associations whose primary tasks were the preservation and transmission of language and culture from one generation to another. Organisations of Tajiks residing in Uzbekistan, such as Ehyoi farhangi Bukhoro (‘Revival of Bukhara’s Culture’), Oryoni buzurg (‘Great Land of Aryans’), Oftobi Soghdiyon (‘The Sun of Soghdians’) and ‘Samarkand’, were especially active and numerically strong. Before World War II there were only two Uzbek, two Armenian and a handful of Russian schools in Samarkand—the rest were Tajik; in 1989, not a single Tajik school operated in this city.54 The group Samarkand’s program proclaimed that ‘[w]e have the right to be indignant and to appeal directly to our people … Without creation of a Tajik autonomy within Uzbekistan or oblasts of Uzbekistan, full equality and resolution of problems we raise is impossible.’55 The leadership of Tajikistan supported the creation of Tajik cultural centres in Uzbekistan and elsewhere. The Society of Surkhandarya Tajiks in Dushanbe, Basvand (‘Addition’), and

53 Interview with Victor Kim, vice-president of the Association of Soviet Koreans, Dushanbe, 16 March 1995.
54 Rahimov, ‘K voprosu o sovremennykh tadzhiksko-uzbekskikh mezhnatsionalnykh otnosheniakh’, p. 22.
particularly one outspoken member, historian Rahim Masov (who also was
one of the founders of Rastokhez), spearheaded a rather aggressive ideological
campaign of Tajik reassertiveness:

There are some 900,000 Tajiks living in Uzbekistan … and a considerable
number of Tajiks whose ancestors had been forcibly registered as
Uzbeks. It is high time the historical justice prevailed for those who
have not been assimilated, who have not lost their mother tongue and
national (ethnic) self-awareness … People who reassume their genuine
nationality should not be subject to any limitations and should be
guaranteed against any discrimination on the part of local authorities.

In 1991, dissemination of books and articles by Masov in Uzbekistan was
prohibited, and members of Samarkand smuggled this literature in to satisfy
the high demand.

In October 1989, the Society for Relations with Compatriots Abroad, Paivand
(‘Family Link’), was set up in Dushanbe. It operated under the aegis of the
Council of Ministers, had many eminent Tajik intellectuals in its ranks and was
entrusted with the mission of spreading information about the achievements
of Soviet Tajiks throughout the world, even though its primary targets
were the descendants of some 900,000 emigrants who had left Central Asia,
escaping from the Russian and then Soviet incursions, and who had then
settled in Afghanistan, Iran and China. Members of Paivand established broad
connections with cultural figures in Iran and Afghanistan, and very soon the
Soviet-style propaganda activities of this organisation were augmented by ideas
of creating a Greater Tajikistan.

In January 1989, Tajiks residing in Moscow, mostly students, professors
and creative intelligentsia, founded the Society of Tajik Culture, Soghdiyon
(‘Soghdiana’). They organised courses in the Tajik language and Sunday schools
for children of Tajik expatriates, offered counselling services to the newly
arrived students, and so on. At the same time, they maintained strong ties with

56 Masov, Istoriia topornogo razdeleniia, pp. 110–11.
57 N. R. Hafizova, ‘Omukhtani problemaho hessi grazhdani dar kursi siyosatshinosi’, Report at the I
59 Confidential sources in Dushanbe. Interestingly, the ill-fated Tajik ruler of Afghanistan Habibullah-khan,
alias Bachai Saqaw (1928–29), was hailed by some Paivand members as the true champion of the Tajik cause;
one of them proudly showed the author a copy of a book allegedly smuggled from Afghanistan in 1991 that
eulogised Habibullah and praised his efforts to found a mighty Tajik state with the centre in Bukhara. See:
Rastokhez, Ru ba Ru and influential politicians of the younger generation, such as Davlat Khudonazarov. Soghdiyon was the most vociferous critic of Mahkamov’s administration.  

By the end of 1989, an area beyond the CPT’s direct control had evolved within which limited interest articulation and interest aggregation were allowed. This phenomenon was as much the result of pressure from Moscow to ‘democratise’ as it was the product of the internal dynamics of Tajikistan’s political system. The aforementioned informal groups did not constitute serious political opposition to Mahkamov’s government; however, their very existence denoted the emergence in the republic of the classic ‘Dahl dilemma of mixed regimes’: if the authorities could tolerate some opposition, could they indefinitely enforce any limits to toleration short of the wide limits set in polyarchies?  

The Failure of Public Movements  

Freizer argues that the activities of civil society organisations during the early glasnost period in Tajikistan ‘attracted mainly the urban middle classes—scientists, professors, teachers and students—and bypassed many rural communities’. Olimova describes a similar constituency for the first early social movements, noting that their support at the end of the 1980s came first from the ‘[W]estern-oriented national intelligentsia’. Mavlon Makhamov, referring to the groups that formed in 1989 and 1990, wrote that their gestation was an urban process and that ‘rural society mostly stayed out of the process of politicization of social life’. Whatever the exact composition of these groups, it was clear that...
while they were growing, they still had relatively limited numbers and their active members made up only a very small percentage of the total population of Tajikistan.\footnote{Muriel Atkin, ‘FAST Case Study: Tajikistan’ (Bern: Swiss Peace Foundation, Institute for Conflict Resolution, 3 February 1999), p. 1.}

In regards to the goals of these new groups, Freizer stresses that while some individuals wanted massive changes in the system of government, generally the civil society groups of the 1980s did not oppose the state and focused mostly on local issues.\footnote{Freizer, ‘Central Asian Fragmented Civil Society’, p. 117.} Also, there were additional issues on the agenda in the late 1980s beyond just nationalist and religious ones, evidenced by critical newspaper articles regarding the economy, health and the environment.\footnote{Kilavuz, Understanding Violent Conflict, p. 138.} In the opinion of Makhamov, however, most active civil society groups had a very low level of influence.\footnote{Makhamov, ‘Islam and the Political Development of Tajikistan after 1985’, p. 199. Makhamov provides some examples of these groups: ‘Ehya-i Khojent (Revival of Khojent); the sociocultural association of Samarkand; Oftab-i Sugdian (the Sun of Sogdiana); Vahdat (Unity); a popular front of supporters of reconstruction; Oshkoro (Publicity); society Maihan (Homeland); and Haverim (society of the friends of Jewish culture).’} Dudoignon provides an explanation for why the Soviet government allowed these non-state actors to form: ‘The alternative political organisations and parties in Tajikistan were initially tolerated because they were thought to provide so many necessary and convenient outlets for the frustrations of the country’s urban population, and ensure that these did not escalate into inter-communal violence.’\footnote{Dudoignon, ‘Political Parties and Forces in Tajikistan’, pp. 56–7.} Niyazi has a similar, but more cynical explanation for the emergence of certain groups in the late glasnost period:

The authorities try to counteract the opposition by using ‘nonformula’ organisations such as social-political clubs like ‘The Workers’ Perestroika’ of the Dushanbe Railway District Committee of the CPSU, ‘Ru ba Ru’ (face to face) of the Komsomol Central Committee, and ‘Tajdid’ (renewal or renaissance) of the Vakhsh Komsomol District Committee. They were all set up and continue to be controlled by the authorities. It is quite evident, however, that they are unable to give any really effective support to the regime.\footnote{Niyazi, ‘The Year of Tumult’, p. 285.}  

While Freizer’s and Mahkamov’s above assessments may work for a narrow definition of civil society and public movements, they do not describe the late-glasnost political opposition movements very well. Atkin writes that ‘by the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, a growing number of people advocated more substantial change than the republic-level leadership was willing to allow’.\footnote{Atkin, ‘FAST Case Study’, p. 1. For example, in 1990, ‘[t]he Tajik ex-apparatus reformers proposed turning the USSR into a commonwealth of independent states, long before the term existed … They hoped to
7. The Rise of Opposition, the Contraction of the State and the Road to Independence

early opposition movements—possibly with strategic motives. For example, while the communist government had previously criticised nationalism and the influence of religion, it eventually coopted some of the opposition’s platform. Starting in 1989 the government started to implement elements of the nationalist agenda, including the passage of a language law favouring Tajik.72

The decline of Rastokhez is most fully analysed by Lawrence Markowitz. He argues that Rastokhez continued to use the themes of Tajik nationalism and cultural revival as its main mobilising frame at a time when the people and government of Tajikistan had more tangible concerns—particularly the increasingly regionalised nature of power. In response to its declining support, Rastokhez allied with the Islamic Revival Party (IRP) and the Democratic Party of Tajikistan—both of which were able to ‘usurp’ the Rastokhez program—leaving it redundant as early as late 1990.73 Niyazi adds further to the discussion of Rastokhez’s decline. He argues that their credibility was harmed when the group became involved in the political manoeuvring surrounding the February 1990 riots and the attempt to force the leadership of the Tajik SSR to resign. Niyazi’s harsh assessment is that

[the February events showed that Rastokhez failed when put to the democratic test. Many of its leaders were drawn into ‘palace intrigues’. They became members of the Vahdat committee and joined forces with influential functionaries. Then they sought power on the wave of the riots and were ready to accept any top positions in the party and government that happened to become vacant. They did not threaten the pyramid power structure. Only its summit and the blocks immediately supporting it did not suit them.74

Niyazi stresses that the Tajik media’s biased coverage of the February 1990 events further contributed to damaging Rastokhez’s reputation;75 however, even though nine members of the Temporary Committee for Crisis Resolution belonged to Rastokhez, and despite a massive media campaign to present Tohir

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72 Kilavuz, Understanding Violent Conflict, pp. 144–5. As well as ‘the appearance of nationalist concerns in official newspapers’ and ‘the establishment of a cultural foundation to preserve Tajik heritage’.
Abdujabbor and his colleagues as power-thirsty villains, people had little doubt in their minds about the main forces responsible for the conflict in Dushanbe (Table 7.1).

Table 7.1 Who is to Blame for the Events in February 1990 in Dushanbe? (Results of a poll conducted throughout Tajikistan in May–June 1990)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Force</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communist leadership of Tajikistan</td>
<td>35.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law enforcement agencies</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal associations</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious circles</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dushanbe city authorities</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary institutions’ professors</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative intelligentsia</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Nevertheless, these attacks resulted in Rastokhez changing its tactic to ‘tough defence’ and ‘open confrontation with the government’, whereas previously Rastokhez had been more focused on lobbying the government and seeking cooperation.\(^{76}\) Rastokhez, despite its ‘tough defence’, would soon be eclipsed by a splinter party founded by disgruntled members: the Democratic Party of Tajikistan (DPT).

### The Emergence of Political Opposition: The Democratic Party of Tajikistan

Prior to February 1990, the communist regime successfully maintained barriers to broad public participation in the political process. There was no legislation regulating the activities of unofficial organisations—they were invariably ‘attached’ to some government organ (Komsomol central or district committee, the Council of Ministers, soviets and so on), or, like Rastokhez, operated without registration, on a semi-legal basis. They had no publications of their own, and their access to state-controlled media was limited. As a result, even Rastokhez was relatively unknown to the bulk of the population and had no ability to mobilise the masses.

Part of the ‘deal’ brokered by Boris Pugo in February 1990 included the diversification of political space in Tajikistan to create checks and balances vis-a-vis the omnipotent apparat, according to the formula suggested by Gorbachev for the rest of the USSR. Already on 20 February 1990, the Tajik SSR

Supreme Soviet Presidium adopted a resolution ‘On the Temporary Procedure of Registering Charters and Programs of Public Associations of Citizens of the Tajik SSR’, which was an exact copy of an All-Union document. On 12 December 1990, the Supreme Soviet of Tajikistan passed a law ‘On Public Associations of the Tajik SSR’, providing for further institutionalisation of non-governmental organisations. Between February 1990 and November 1992, 208 requests for registration were lodged with the Ministry of Justice of Tajikistan; 143 requests, including those of Rastokhez and most regional political groups, were approved.

The Democratic Party of Tajikistan was founded on 10 August 1990 as a faction led by the philosopher Shodmon Yusuf (Yusupov), who had left Rastokhez along with many others. The DPT claimed a membership of 7000, of which about 85 per cent were ethnic Tajiks. The leadership, including a few ethnic Russians, was similar to Yusuf, coming almost entirely from academia and the intelligentsia. During the August 1990 DPT conference, the newly elected chairman, Shodmon Yusuf, thus summarised the objectives of his 4000-strong party:

1. The most important task of the DPT is the creation in Tajikistan of a law-based, authentically democratic civil society with a free economy and genuine state sovereignty and welfare of all citizens regardless of their national, racial, language, religious and philosophical identification.

2. The USSR cannot continue to exist in its present form. It should be transformed into a confederation of sovereign and independent states.

3. Tajikistan should conduct an independent foreign policy with special emphasis on good relations with Afghanistan, Iran, India, Pakistan, China and the Arab countries.

4. The republic should become independent economically through the promotion of a free market and various forms of ownership.

5. Education at all levels should combine classical traditions and progressive achievements of world civilisation.

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77 Kommunist Tadzhikistana, 21 February 1990.
78 Narodnaia gazeta, 27 April 1993.
80 Sh. Yusupov, ‘Neobkhodimost’ sozdania Demokraticheskoi partii Tadzhikistana i ee bliizhaishe zadachi’, Transcript of Sh. Yusuf’s speech at the Constituent Conference of the DPT, 10 August 1990, courtesy of Dr V. M. Zaichenko, Dushanbe.
6. The DPT is motivated by the cultural heritage of the ancient Tajiks, respects religious values and fights for the unswerving implementation of the Law on the National Language.

7. The Tajiks should maintain close ties with democratic Russia, the Baltic states, the Caucasus, and Central Asian peoples.

8. The DPT is ready to cooperate with all political parties and movements standing on positions of democracy, whose goals do not contravene truth and justice.

9. Environmental protection and public health are a major concern of the DPT.

According to one prominent leader of the Russian Social-Democratic Party, ‘the DPT’s program was not different from the platform of the Russian democratic movement (especially the Democratic Party of Russia), and at times it was appropriate to speak about conscientious copying of the latter’. Similar to Rastokhez, the DPT advocated for the abolishment of one-party communist rule and for the promotion of democracy, sovereignty, religious freedom and civil rights while condemning the ideology of Marxism-Leninism.

In practice, however, the Tajik democrats’ vision of building a new society in the republic proved to be as blurred and eclectic as that of their ideological predecessors—the members of Rastokhez. Its program claimed that ‘the DPT draws from such great thinkers as Marx, Engels, Plekhanov, Bakunin, Lenin, Kautsky, Bernstein and others’. Elsewhere, Shodmon Yusuf opined that socialism was the right choice, if it combined elements from the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad and Jesus Christ, the ideas of Lenin ‘shortly before his death’ and modern European social-democratic thought. The dynamic DPT chairman, who possessed the academic degree of Candidate of Philosophical Sciences, was renowned for bombastic statements based on Western liberal parlance that carried little or no meaning to the wider public.

The authors of the DPT program correctly discerned the economic distortions occurring in Tajikistan, particularly in the industrial sector; however,

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83 Adolat, No. 1 (September 1990).
84 Charoghi ruz, No. 2 (June 1991).
85 For example: ‘We shall form an Opposition that will induce the Communist Party to become cleaner and more humane, we shall block the path to totalitarianism. As a philosopher, I am against all parties altogether. If the CP dissolved itself, we would follow its example immediately … If our people taste real freedom, the advent of a dictator will be impossible. As it is impossible in the USA, France and England … I understand the culture of France a little, and I would like to go to that country to lead a normal life.’ See: Komsomolets Tadzhikistana, 10 August 1990.
they had an evidently weak understanding of the reasons for these distortions and the ways and goals of reforming the economy. Most importantly, they completely failed to comprehend the real socio-economic conditions of Tajikistan, ignoring the fact that the republic had been a subsidised region for decades, and had become incapable of providing itself with vitally important produce without carrying out deep social and economic changes which were not even mentioned in this document.\(^{86}\)

‘Easy’ solutions were sought and found by the DPT experts: ‘the main role in the economy and well-being of the peoples of Tajikistan will be played by precious stones, noble, non-ferrous and rare metals … today not more than one-tenth of the profits of the mining industry remains in the republic.’\(^{87}\)

The DPT became the first organised political force, apart from the CPT, that had openly declared its intention to fight for power in Tajikistan, by using parliamentary procedures, moulding public opinion and building political coalitions. Mahkamov’s regime was alarmed by the emergence of a serious rival. In a confidential CPT CC memorandum circulated in October 1990, it was acknowledged that the ruling party was losing members to the DPT, and a number of countermeasures were suggested, ‘taking into consideration the special menace posed by the DPT leaders … who, speaking against the totalitarianism of the Communist party, have nothing against establishing a totalitarian state system of their own under the guise of a government of national concord’\(^{88}\). As a result, the DPT faced major difficulties in establishing regional and district chapters because local soviets delayed and frustrated their registration, sometimes using preposterous excuses: in Ordzhonikidzeobod (later Kofarnihon, now Vahdat), the letterhead of the DPT committee was pronounced ‘not befitting the image of a solid organisation’.\(^{89}\)

The DPT structure presented a mixture of principles borrowed from communists (only ‘democratic centralism’ was renamed ‘democratic unity’) and traditional organisational forms: Clause 4.1.1 of its charter envisioned flexibility of its primary cells, which could consist of family members, mahalla neighbours, cultural clubs and so on. Unlike Rastokhez, the DPT had rudiments of intra-party discipline, membership cards and permanent executive bodies: the Central Coordination Committee, the Central Revision Commission and the Main Editorial Council. Nevertheless, as Eden Naby has pointed out, ‘the Democratic Party remains chiefly rooted in regional politics with an agenda similar to the old Rastakhiz Party … The problem is that [this] party neither cuts across

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86 Bushkov and Mikulskii, ‘Tadzhikskaya revoliutsiia’ i grazhdanskaia voina, p. 17.
87 Rastokhez, No. 6 (March 1991).
88 Rastokhez, No. 4 (October 1990).
89 Komsomolets Tadzhikistana, 23 November 1990.
regions nor does it have widespread backing’. In terms of election success, the DPT was only successful in securing votes from Dushanbe’s ‘radical youth’ and ‘intellectual circles’—and in a few limited cases in special circumstances outside Dushanbe in the small centres of Uroteppa (Istaravshon), Kofarnihon (Vahdat) and Fayzabad.

**Table 7.2 Public Support for Political Parties in Tajikistan in November 1991 and June 1992 (percentage of those polled)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>IRP</th>
<th>DPT</th>
<th>Rastokhez</th>
<th>Communists</th>
<th>No party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>November 1991</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 1992</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In terms of its support base, close scrutiny reveals that from the start Gharmis and Pamiris dominated the DPT. Its chairman, Shodmon Yusuf, was born in Vakhyo—the most conservative part of Qarotegin—while the independent Davlat Khudonazarov, widely accepted in Moscow and the West as the envoy of the Tajik democratic movement, represented the GBAO. The DPT received financial support for its activities, especially publication of the newspaper *Adolat*, from Gharmi merchants and the Islamic establishment. In the eyes of anti-Leninobodi regional cliques it was a more efficient vehicle to promote their interests than Rastokhez, and by 1991 the latter showed signs of decay, ‘retaining just a few motley groupings … and a couple of familiar faces (Tohir Abdujabbor, H. Homidov and several others)’.

The reforms of the late 1980s had, in Markowitz’s words, ‘emboldened many of the informal groups’ in the republic while the ‘elites’ of the Communist Party ‘had not yet regrouped from the attacks on their patronage bases’. Starting in September 1991 and continuing through the winter of 1991–92, the DPT was preoccupied with condemning the Communist Party elites’ strategy of creating joint ventures that would be out of reach of any future election winner’s attempts to take over Communist Party-controlled economic assets. In particular, DPT-aligned journalists attacked Kulobi apparatchiks in print and

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91 Dudoignon, ‘Communal Solidarity and Social Conflicts in Late 20th Century Central Asia’, pp. 10–11. Dudoignon describes the special circumstances: ‘Ura-Teppa in the north (a traditional rival of Khujand), Kafirnihan (an industrial satellite of Dushanbe) or Fayzabad (situated between Dushanbe’s plain and Gharm’s valley, and fatherland of the popular poet Bazar Sobir, spokesman of the radical intelligentsia against the political apparatus).’
93 Charoghi ruz, No. 1 (June 1991).
wrote about ‘illegal capital transfers from Dushanbe to Khujand’. During this time public approval ratings for the DPT plummeted and their support fell by half (Table 7.2).

Any assessment of Tajikistan’s political landscape would be deceptive if based primarily on an exploration of ideological concepts and political thoughts—the easiest and most conventional path taken by many Western scholars. When it comes to the translation of programmatic statements of these groups into concretely identifiable behaviour, such an approach proves faulty; it cannot, for example, explain why secular democratic forces in the republic failed to unite in 1990–91, and why in 1992 some of them deemed it possible to form a coalition with Islamic organisations. Cultural traits, particularly local identification, and not ideological considerations, played the pivotal role in these processes. The glow of liberalism and nationalism of the DPT catered to international public opinion and flickered brightly: Shodmon Yusuf, despite his stated fondness for France, also claimed to aspire to emulate the experience of Kuwait, Singapore and other illiberal states in Tajikistan, depending on which country he was touring at the time.

95 Dudoignon, ‘Communal Solidarity and Social Conflicts in Late 20th Century Central Asia’, p. 18. The DPT claimed that a ‘considerable number’ of journalists and media professionals were members. See: Makhamov, ‘Islam and the Political Development of Tajikistan after 1985’, p. 198.

96 Kosach, ‘Tajikistan’, pp. 134–6, citing Ozhidaniia i nadezhdy liudei v usloviah stanovlenia gosudarstvennosti (Oput sotsiologicheskikh issledovanii v Tadzhikistane, Kazakhstane, Rossii i na Ukrainye) (Moscow: Russian Academy of Management, 1992), pp. 29–43. No polling was conducted in GBAO. Polling was conducted in the Leninobod, Qurghonteppa and Kulob oblasts, Dushanbe and surrounding regions such as Hisor and Tursunzoda. The poll does not break down respondents into nationality/ethnicity. Industrial workers were heavily dominated by Russian speakers. Kosach remarks on the survey: ‘Despite all the errors, which are unavoidable in this type of work, these surveys obtained information on the social base of the political parties which can be considered generally accurate.’ See: ibid., pp. 133–4.

97 Even such an astute observer as Muriel Atkin has followed it: ‘In Tajikistan, as in other countries, the fact that some political groups had pronounced regional associations did not preclude their also having political platforms. The outcome of the power struggle will determine not only who will govern but also toward what ends they will do so, whether the political clock will be turned back to the Brezhnev era or whether some form of post-Communist political system will evolve.’ See: Muriel Atkin, ‘The Politics of Polarisation in Tajikistan’, in Central Asia. Its Strategic Importance and Future Prospects, ed. Hafeez Malik (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1994), p. 212.

98 There were at least two attempts initiated by the DPT to form the Union Party on the lines of Russia’s Movement for Democratic Reforms, but both times Rastokhez and regional blocs objected feverishly. See: Mirzoi Salimpur, ‘Infarkti savvumi KPSS’, Charoghi ruz, No. 4 (July 1991), p. 1.

99 As Honi Fern Haler has suggested, ‘each coalition is made up of separate groups, and each group has an identity. Where do they get this identity if not by coming together as a community, drawn together by similar interests, needs, or in other words, by similar (partial) identities?’ See: Honi Fern Haler, Beyond Postmodern Politics: Lyotard. Rorty. Foucault (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 128.

100 Dustov, Zakhir bar jismi vatan, p. 145.
The Failure of the Intelligentsia

The people who dominated the base of support for Rastokhez and the DPT were at times a dysfunctional group. Aziz Niyazi, himself a Tajik academic and son of a prominent intellectual,\textsuperscript{101} clearly has a high level of disdain for some of his peers:

It was mainly among social scientists that the Soil Movement developed and continues to develop. It has a strong tendency to focus on ethnic, nostalgic and pseudo-rationalist ideas and has weak links with reality. It has a lot in common with the Russian ‘patriotic bloc,’ and in the same way does considerable harm to the movement for national and cultural renaissance. It prefers to use feelings of hurt national pride and ignorance. By encouraging Russophobia and Turkophobia, the ideologists of the Tajik Soil Movement transfer the evil of the system to the peoples. They seem to believe that national consciousness can be cemented by hatred towards other nations.\textsuperscript{102}

Concerning ‘Turkophobia’, Uzbek-themed insults were used amongst rival intellectuals with some of the newer generation (native-born and usually from the mountains or the migrant communities in the Vakhsh Valley) accusing the older generation (intellectuals from Khujand and Samarkand) of secretly being foreign Uzbeks who arrived to Dushanbe in the late 1930s after the CheKa secret police allegedly killed off the ‘true’ Tajik intelligentsia.\textsuperscript{103} These fights were even found in television production studios in the 1970s.\textsuperscript{104} There was a marked generational difference, as older Tajik intellectuals were equally at ease in Uzbek and Tajik, plus Russian, while younger intellectuals were mostly limited to Tajik and Russian.\textsuperscript{105} The main enemy was never clearly singled out, and intellectuals among the literary community variably attacked Russia (as the ‘evil step-mother’), Uzbekistan (the ‘evil step-father’) and Khujand (the ‘half-brother’—that is, not a full, genuine Tajik).\textsuperscript{106}

\textsuperscript{101} Aziz Niyazi is currently employed as a researcher at the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow. His father is the Samarkandi Tajik author Shavkat Niyazi, whose family moved to Dushanbe in the early 1930s. For more on the Niyazi family, see: Iraj Bashiri, Prominent Tajik Figures of the Twentieth Century (Dushanbe, Tajikistan: Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan & International Borbad Foundation, 2002), pp. 213–14.

\textsuperscript{102} Niyazi, ‘The Year of Tumult’, p. 278.

\textsuperscript{103} Dudoignon, ‘Communal Solidarity and Social Conflicts in Late 20th Century Central Asia’, p. 18.

\textsuperscript{104} Moukhabbat Khodjibaeva, ‘Television and the Tajik Conflict’, Central Asia Monitor, No. 1 (1999), p. 11. Khodjibaeva writes that nationalist discussion regarding Samarkand and Bukhara took place amongst the producers of Tajik TV in an environment in which southerners expressed resentment towards those from the north and their alleged pro-Turkic/Uzbek ‘intentions’. And it was in the 1970s that the first southern Tajik was appointed chair of the State TV and Radio Committee.


\textsuperscript{106} Khudonazar, ‘The Other’, pp. 3–4.
A further divide is described by Dudoignon, a specialist on the history of intellectuals in Tajikistan, who notes that the older Tajik intelligentsia changed their strategy and stopped advocating for reforms when it became clear that the reforms could threaten their careers. This led to a rift with the younger generation, which had no such privileged positions and much less to lose.\footnote{Dudoignon, ‘Communal Solidarity and Social Conflicts in Late 20th Century Central Asia’, p. 18.} Additionally, Dudoignon writes of a rift between the ‘young radical students’ and the older intellectuals of the DPT that occurred when the urban youth supporters of the DPT became dissatisfied with the ‘liberal intelligentsia’s’ level of verbal attacks on the CPT ‘conservatives’.\footnote{Dudoignon, ‘Communal Solidarity and Social Conflicts in Late 20th Century Central Asia’, p. 11. Dudoignon points to one incident as particularly important in this process. On 8 January 1991, Gorbachev approved ‘a measure which made the kolkhoz and sovkhoz presidents the true directors—and virtual beneficiaries—of any future agrarian reform. More and more unsatisfied with this economic policy, the young Tajik intellectuals began to radicalize their discourse about nationality problems inside the republic, accusing the power in place of betraying the interests of the local population at large.’ Ibid., p. 9.} And, as noted above by Dudoignon,\footnote{Dudoignon, ‘Communal Solidarity and Social Conflicts in Late 20th Century Central Asia’, p. 18.} members of the newer generation of intellectuals were usually from the mountains or from the migrant communities of the Vakhsh Valley (that is, Gharmi). Dudoignon, using the terms ‘Kuhistanian’\footnote{An awkward translation from French that should instead be ‘Kuhistani’: literally a person from ‘Kuhistan’, or ‘mountainous area’. The term is also used in Afghanistan and Pakistan.} and ‘muhajir’\footnote{In Tajikistan this term is broadly used to describe migrants of all sorts, not just the religious refugees to whom this term is usually applied. Here it is used to denote the Gharmi Tajiks who were forcibly transferred to the lowlands and valleys.} in place of Gharmi, Qarotegini or ‘Mountain Tajik’ below, notes how aspiring students from these areas were pushed into powerless social niches.\footnote{Dudoignon, ‘Communal Solidarity and Social Conflicts in Late 20th Century Central Asia’, pp. 21–2. Mullojonov makes a similar point about the rural Gharmi students who came to Dushanbe. He refers to the ‘the anti-establishment organizations of young urban intelligentsia—the Tajik “second intelligentsia,” which were being formed since the 1980s notably by the first waves of migrant Gharmi youth coming from Qurghonteppa’s cotton farms to the suburbs of Dushanbe, where they enrolled mostly in the humanities’. See: Mullojonov, ‘The Islamic Clergy in Tajikistan Since the End of the Soviet Period’, p. 249.}

Kuhistanian intellectual elites were victims of the division of work created since the mid-1970s inside Tajik higher education and professional distribution system[s]. Increasing numbers of students from Kuhistan and muhajir communities of central and southern Tajikistan were oriented, during two decades, toward ‘literary’ faculties and deprived of real possibilities of acquiring ‘interesting’ technical abilities (in such fields as law or economics).

As mentioned above, political party networks that relied on urban intellectuals lack the means to extend into broader parts of society. And the intellectuals who were most prominent—the academics and scientists—did not hold any positions of influence in government, a fact admitted at the 1990 annual session
of the Tajik Academy of Sciences. The intelligentsia, deprived of influence in the politics of the republic, was quite vulnerable. Dudoignon offers a harsh assessment:

The fondness felt by many Tajik intellectuals of the apparatus for the institutions and political sphere handed down by the USSR can be explained in part by their awareness that radical political reform would fell the branch on which they were comfortably perched: the intellectual mediocrity prevalent in Dushanbe, as in all the Soviet provincial capitals, precluded any hope of the intelligentsia’s survival.

The ‘liberal intelligentsia’, who were often ‘official writers and technocrats closer to the Communist party’, became worried about preserving their careers and became increasingly uncomfortable with the alliance with the ‘Islamists’. In Tajikistan, as elsewhere in the Soviet Union, the ‘technocrats initially allied with elements of the intelligentsia to support perestroika against an entrenched party apparat’. The violence of the February 1990 riots, however, and the increasingly radicalised nationalism of the DPT and the ‘Islamic politics’ of the IRP ‘pushed the old intelligentsia and the technocrats back into an alliance with the apparat’. The lack of any broad support that could be mobilised in any forceful manner was fatal in 1992 when the DPT ‘apparatus would be submitted to hard pressure from the power [sic] and many of its members would more or less rapidly return to the bosom of the Communist party’. One DPT leader even conceded later that the weakness of the party lay in its lack of ‘armed supporters’.

Characterising and Categorising the Political Organisations

Sporadic attempts at categorising major political parties and public associations in Tajikistan using the conventional arsenal of ideological criteria have so far yielded somewhat equivocal results. Two scholars from Tajikistan have offered the following typology: 1) conservatives—orthodox members of the CPT; 2) liberal reformers—Paivand, Khoverim, Oryoni buzurg, Ehyoi Khujand, Vatan,

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115 Dudoignon, ‘Communal Solidarity and Social Conflicts in Late 20th Century Central Asia’, p. 11.
118 Dudoignon, ‘Communal Solidarity and Social Conflicts in Late 20th Century Central Asia’, p. 10.
Oshkoro, Hamdilon and some others; 3) reactionary radicals—the IRP, the DPT, Rastokhez, Ru ba Ru and La’li Badakhshon. Unfortunately, the authors have not gone into great detail to explain it. An equally obscure yet popularly accepted scheme portrayed the following picture: 1) quasi-communism—the Communist Party; 2) political pluralism—the DPT; 3) Islamic liberalism—Rastokhez; 4) Islamic fundamentalism—the IRP; 5) irredentism—La’li Badakhshon. It appears that even such a basic dichotomy as ‘programmatic parties’/‘electoral parties’ is not fully applicable to Tajikistan, because those who participate in party activities often do so not by virtue of sharing that party’s ideology or pursuing elective office, but rather by following traditional collective incentives, such as familial, local or regional solidarity. A satisfactory theoretical solution, perhaps, should be credited to Zsolt Enyedi, who has introduced the notion of the ‘subcultural party’: a party ‘involved directly or indirectly, in non-political (i.e., cultural, recreational, educational, religious, etc.) activities and surrounded by different, strongly interlinked social organisations, though sometimes the party itself can be regarded as the satellite organisation of other subcultural bodies’. In Tajikistan, as can be seen from the foregoing account, the bulk of the newly established political organisations in the late 1980s and early 1990s served to promote and defend the interests of particular regional cliques and local strongmen. The definition of the opposition as a ‘coalition of democrats, nationalists, Islamists, and inhabitants of regions seldom represented in the government’ should have read ‘a coalition of inhabitants of regions underrepresented in the ruling elite who used democratic, nationalist and Islamic slogans’.

In Tajikistan, even under mono-organisational socialism, mobilisation rooted in traditionalism, localism and regionalism ordered the social behaviour of the majority of the population. Communism, viewed not as a Marxist dogma but rather as a specific form of social organisation in which all elite groups are centralised and abide by common codes of conduct, allowed these elites to maintain a stable regime. Once it was undermined, the need for elites to find a new way to frame their mobilisation efforts arose, and was finally realised under the guises of ‘liberalism’, ‘democracy’, ‘Islamism’ and ‘orthodox communism’. The DPT and the IRP, by and large, represented the same community: the deprived people of Gharm, Qarotegin and elsewhere. They used different political languages,

120 Shokirov and Mahmadkarimov, Paidoyeshi hizbu sozmonhoi nav dar Tojikiston va fa’oliyati onho, pp. 12–13.
symbols and ideas to mobilise specific segments within those sub-ethnic groups according to their educational, residential and occupational status. By the same token, organisations like Oshkoro and Vahdat employed communist rhetoric not because their leaders and rank-and-file members believed in the withering away of the state or permanent revolution, but because the communist order, especially in its Central Asian variant, provided, at least potentially, for the privileged position of their respective localities.

**Regional Aspects of Political Organisations**

Towards the end of 1990, Mahkamov had been unable to reconcile the ‘increasingly radicalized reformist movements and a “reactionary” wing of the Communist Party’.\(^{125}\) With Mahkamov becoming increasingly weak, the DPT and the IRP became the strongest supporters of further reforms. The opposition supporters placed themselves in a position of conflict with the conservative elements of the Communist Party with their demands for further reforms in Kulob, Qurghonteppa and Leninobod.\(^{126}\) Markowitz writes that as part of this process the collective farm bosses began to lose the protection of the ‘conservative political elites’ to whom they were tied through mutual ‘regional interests’, resulting in ‘ideological divisions in the centre [becoming] increasingly tied to regional interests’.\(^{127}\) This strategy placed the opposition movement in conflict with the incumbent elites in these regions as Gharmi and Pamiri elites started to also use the new opposition movements as a tool to mobilise against their rivals.\(^{128}\) Olimova argues that Pamiri and Gharmi/Qarotegini elites had accumulated some economic strength by the late Soviet period. Elements within these two groups then decided to use the new glasnost-era opposition movements as a vehicle to gain a greater share of the political power. As a result, ‘regional origin exerted a major influence on the choice of behavioural strategy of the new elites’, while support or opposition to the ‘Soviet imperial centre’ was ‘determined by regional affiliation’.\(^{129}\)

The political competition immediately after independence in 1991 pitted the opposition, which included Rastokhez, the Democratic Party, the Pamiri party

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125 Markowitz, *Collapsed and Prebendal States in Post-Soviet Eurasia*, p. 103. Elsewhere, Markowitz writes: ‘ideological divisions widened between political elites in the centre, juxtaposing those who sought to dismantle the political-administrative system and its ties to the republic’s lucrative cotton economy against those elites who sought to preserve that system.’ See: Markowitz, ‘How Master Frames Mislead’, p. 12.


128 Olimova, ‘Opposition in Tajikistan’, p. 249. On a related note, Roy stresses that Gharmis in the government apparatus were not displaced by mullahs as the only source of power in the Gharmi community, even as the IRP made gains around this time. See: Roy, ‘Is the Conflict in Tajikistan a Model for Conflicts throughout Central Asia’, p. 139.

La’li Badakhshon, and the heavily Gharmi Tajik IRP, against the Khujandi-dominated faction in power. Opposition leaders, allied with the leaders of ‘solidarity networks in disenfranchised regions, appealed to regional loyalties in officials of various agencies of state control’. Olimova assessed the results of this strategy: ‘Gradually, the proportion of members belonging to a specific Tajik ethno-regional group grew in all these organizations, and under cover of an all-national purpose, regional interests became distinct … The regional elites turned to the parties as instruments of political mobilization and political struggle.’ Specifically, the Gharmi/Qarotegini and Pamiri ‘regional elites, having achieved economic clout, sought to change the balance of forces in their own interest and used the newly emerging opposition movements to this end’. In regards to Kulobis, Nabiev had chosen to enter into a more solid alliance with the Kulobi faction in the autumn of 1991. The reasoning for this strategy, according to Parviz Mullojonov, is that they seemed to be the weakest in the republic. Other reasons could include the obvious: the Kulobis were not using opposition movements to rally against the incumbent government, or they were the only partners with any mobilisation capabilities available in the vicinity of the capital. Another option could be that the Kulobis were not strangers to alliances with the dominant Leninobodi elite group in power. Starting in the early 1970s there was a level of power-sharing involving the Kulobi elites in a patronage relationship with the dominant elites of the central government. The creation of the South Tajik Territorial Manufacturing Complex also brought Kulobi and Khujandi elites closer in terms of mutual economic interests. One example of the Khujandi/Leninobodi-Kulobi arrangement was the composition of the Interior Ministry during the 1980s. Kulobis dominated the ranks until the Pamiri Mamadayoz Navjuvonov was appointed minister of the interior. After this a process began in which Kulobis were pushed out in favour of Pamiri police officers. And an even more recent tying together of Khujandi and Kulobi

131 Zartman, Political Transition in Central Asian Republics, p. 94.
136 See the section on Kulob.
interests was seen in early to mid 1990 in the wake of the February events.\textsuperscript{138} All of these factors facilitated a more formal arrangement between the northern elites and their junior Kulobi partners. In Rubin’s characterisation, the Kulobis ‘thus fit the prototype of a conservative impoverished group attached to an old regime by the small share of power it gave them and resistant to a new order that might displace them’.\textsuperscript{139}

After independence, the leaders of most Central Asian states were able to maintain the system of regional patronage networks; however, due to the weakness of the system in Tajikistan (for example, the purges of cadres), the elites of previously less privileged regions successfully challenged the dominant Leninobod faction for an increased share of power and resources.\textsuperscript{140} Before independence, starting in 1990, the capabilities and power of the government in Tajikistan rapidly deteriorated,\textsuperscript{141} with different parts of the state apparatus divided between the different regional factions.\textsuperscript{142} After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the central government in Tajikistan became even weaker, deprived of the perception of control and order in the eyes of its population. Furthermore, the state was now facing political opposition from various groups.\textsuperscript{143} Atkin argues that the Khujandi/Leninobodi elite—and their new Kulobi allies as junior partners—wished to preserve the system, not for reasons of ideology, but to keep the monopoly of power and the control of resources that they enjoyed during the Soviet era.\textsuperscript{144} Dudoignon writes that at this time the ‘two newly shaped sides’ were settled: northern ‘Khujand Communists’ and the southern Kulobis on one side versus the Pamiri party La’li Badakhshon, the DPT, and the Ghardim-dominated IRP on the other side. Dudoignon writes further that both sides ‘were almost ready for an armed conflict and would prepare themselves for it during winter 1991–92. [By] February 1992 … everybody would have chosen his side once and for all’.\textsuperscript{145} Despite the government’s efforts, by spring 1992 the country was divided among various regional factions and the central government was completely ineffective.\textsuperscript{146}

\textsuperscript{138} See the section on the February 1990 demonstration and riots.
\textsuperscript{139} Rubin, ‘Russian Hegemony and State Breakdown in the Periphery’, p. 151.
\textsuperscript{141} Niyazi, ‘Tajikistan I’, p. 146.
\textsuperscript{142} Roy, ‘Is the Conflict in Tajikistan a Model for Conflicts throughout Central Asia’, p. 146.
\textsuperscript{143} Nourzhanov, ‘Saviours of the Nation or Robber Barons’, p. 111; Menon and Spruyt, ‘Possibilities for Conflict Resolution in Post-Soviet Central Asia’, p. 113.
\textsuperscript{145} Dudoignon, ‘Communal Solidarity and Social Conflicts in Late 20th Century Central Asia’, p. 14.
\textsuperscript{146} Niyazi, ‘Tajikistan I’, p. 146.
There were numerous exceptions to the rule of region of origin determining political loyalty. Atkin and Kilavuz both note prominent exceptions at the elite level, both on the opposition and the pro-government sides. Some prominent Pamiris and Gharmis supported Rahmon Nabiev while certain prominent Kulobis and Khujandis/Leninododis supported the opposition parties. As for pro-government politicians from regions whose elites trended towards the opposition, Atkin remarks that those who benefited personally under ‘the old order’ were likely to work towards preserving that system. This resulted in ‘veteran politicians’ from Gharm and Badakhshon who had previously benefited from the existing system of power distribution working on the pro-government side in an effort to preserve it, along with their positions of power. Nevertheless, the overall trend was towards regionalisation of political loyalties.

The Disintegration of the Soviet Political System

Prior to 1985, regional elites in Tajikistan were united in a single political organisation, publicly professed the same ideology, and conducted elementary consensual activity inside the CPT Central Committee. With the commencement of perestroika, elite factions gained an opportunity to take opposition stances in public, and in February 1990 eventually took the risk of pushing them to violent confrontation. But even then an elite settlement could be achieved within existing institutional structures. With the rapid decay of the mono-organisational system, especially following the twenty-eighth CPSU congress in July 1990, the national elite in Tajikistan quickly reached a ‘disunified’ state, characterised by ‘ruthless, often violent, inter-elite conflicts. Elite factions deeply distrust each other, interpersonal relations do not extend across factional lines, and factions do not cooperate to contain societal divisions or to avoid political crises.'
In the second half of 1990 and in 1991, the CPT continued to contract and implode, following the All-Union pattern. Internal haemorrhaging of the CPSU and the CPT proceeded along different lines, however, the former was splitting on ideological grounds, and the latter disintegrating according to the territorial criterion. This was especially evident during the seventh plenum of the CPT CC, held in February 1991. While the mandatory report of Qahhor Mahkamov was, as always, filled with empty phrases and commitments ‘to defend staunchly positive democratic gains of perestroika’, his colleagues from regions and districts were surprisingly frank and businesslike. Representatives of Leninobod and Kulob, interested in maintaining the status quo, deplored the party’s loss of its governing functions; they argued that perestroika was ‘a succession of precocious, inconsequent, incompetent decisions and mistakes in the national economy’ and that ‘as a result of the Party’s withdrawal from administration economic decay has become visible, negative processes in social and moral spheres have been unfolding and the Soviet people have been suffering hardships’. The first secretary of the Khorog gorkom, Qozidavlat Qoimdodov, spoke in favour of reforms that were defined somewhat narrowly but brazenly as an increased share for Pamiris in the leadership. A group of raikom functionaries, without going much into high politics, insisted on delegating the right to use party property from the CPT CC to district committees. The demolition of central control in the CPT was in the making. In 1990 its membership contracted by 2070—a 1.6 per cent decrease—whereas the CPSU shrank by 1.3 per cent. It is illuminating that the greatest numbers of defectors were registered in Dushanbe (one-third of the total) and in the Gharm group of districts, while the Leninobod oblast organisation actually grew by 804 people. The party was exhibiting a tendency towards becoming a political organisation of northerners par excellence.

Despite its emaciation and fragmentation, and despite its inability to cope with the mounting problems in Tajikistan, the CPT was still viewed by many as the only institution guaranteeing a semblance of stability and national unity. A political observer of the opposition newspaper Charoghi ruz wrote in June 1991: ‘Contrary to the triumphant shouts of the opposition that “Communists have lost dignity and prestige” … the Communist party remains a formidable

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151 In March 1991 there were up to 10 platforms and factions operating in the party. See: Gill, *The Collapse of a Single-Party System*, p. 144.
156 Nazare ba ta’rikh: Ma’lumotnomai mukhtasar (Khujand: Komiteti viloyati Leninobodi partiyai kommunistii Tojikiston, 1994), p. 16.
political force in Tajikistan … the insignificant level of public protest against measures of the Communist government signifies that the CPT enjoys sufficient political respect here.'\(^{160}\) Opinion polls corroborated this conclusion.\(^{161}\)

The results of the referendum on the preservation of the USSR held on 17 March 1991 also indicated strong public support for the continuous Soviet corporatist compromise in Tajikistan. The CPT called on the population to vote for retaining the Soviet Union as a rejuvenated federation of sovereign republics with equal rights, while the DPT and Rastokhez urged it to boycott the poll. At the end of the day, the overwhelming majority of the people of Tajikistan participated in the referendum and said ‘yes’ to the union by 96.2 per cent to 3.1 per cent.\(^{162}\)

The CPT still formed the centrepiece of the republic’s political system; it had lost its control and implementation functions, but its role in strategic decision-making remained substantial, and all positions of authority in state structures were still staffed with communists. There were forces within the party, grouped around the deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers, Abdujalil Samadov, who favoured dialogue with opposition groups and offered balanced solutions to the socioeconomic problems that Tajikistan faced. In November 1990, they published a document entitled ‘The Program of Concrete Measures of Economic Stabilisation and Transition to a Market in the Tajik SSR’,\(^{163}\) which envisaged

- continuing economic cooperation within the USSR
- partial price liberalisation
- gradual privatisation of state property
- encouragement of small businesses and private entrepreneurship
- creation of a market infrastructure
- land reform
- rationalisation of the government apparatus
- adoption of laws conducive to the emergence of a market economy.

Qahhor Mahkamov failed to rally the reformist elements in the CPT to secure the regime’s gradual adaptation to changing conditions. He followed Gorbachev’s

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160 *Charoghi raz*, No. 1 (June 1991), p. 3.
161 Trust in the CPSU and the CPT in 1990–91 differed strongly. In autumn 1990, the CPSU was trusted by less than 10 per cent of people union-wide, and less than 6 per cent one year later. In contrast, in Tajikistan the CPT was trusted by 40 per cent of people in autumn 1990 and by 36 per cent one year later. Sources: Matthew Wyman, *Public Opinion in Post-Communist Russia* (London: Macmillan, 1997), p. 63; *Narod i politika. (Tadzhikistan: iyun’ 1992 goda)*, A confidential analytical report prepared for the Cabinet of Ministers of Tajikistan, Typewritten document dated 22 July 1992 and signed by Professor V. Boikov of the Russian Academy of Social Sciences, p. 6; *Vybory Prezidenta Respubliki Tadzhikistan: Sotsiologicheskii monitoring* (Dushanbe: Press-sluzhba KM RT, 1991), p. 16.
163 *Programma konkretnykh meropriiatii po stabilizatsii ekonomiki i perekhodu k rynku v Tadzhikskoi SSR. Proekt* (Dushanbe: [No publisher], 1990).
path, neither breaking completely with the party nor using its potential. In November 1990, the Supreme Soviet elected Mahkamov president of the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic. He faced strong opposition in the person of Rahmon Nabiev, but persuaded the deputies to vote for him by making all manner of promises and resorting to political jockeying. President Mahkamov received vast executive powers—most importantly, to rule by edict, and appoint and dismiss senior public servants at his will. He used these powers not to initiate and oversee reformist policies, but to secure his position and the wellbeing of his immediate supporters.

Mahkamov’s regime had to achieve accommodation at three levels: a) within the upper state leadership itself, b) with organised opposition, and c) with political actors in the regions and districts. While handling top bureaucrats, Mahkamov employed the tactics of political musical chairs, arbitrary political appointments and frequent changes to the institutional and legal frameworks of administration. As one Tajik MP lamented in July 1991: ‘Is it normal that every session of the Supreme Soviet has to approve a new government structure? Top echelon cadres … are replaced every 3–4 months. As a result, for example, the republic’s agriculture does not have a unified structure and lacks coordination.’

Still the CPT CC first secretary, Mahkamov, in February 1991, sanctioned transferral of the party’s assets to an obscure holding company, EKOMPT. This firm took over the CPT’s polygraphic facilities, transport pool and construction organisations, and used them in tourism, entertainment and export–import businesses, refraining, however, from channelling profits to ‘material-financial support of the CPT activities’. The CPT apparatchiks, even in the Leninobod oblast, began talking about the ‘betrayal on the part of the leaders which has pushed the Communist Party from the political arena’.

Mahkamov acted as if opposition parties and organisations did not exist. Martial law, introduced in February 1990 in Dushanbe, precluded them from holding mass rallies in the capital, and infrequent meetings of the DPT and

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164 One of Mahkamov’s arguments was that Gorbachev, who had become the Soviet Union’s president five months previously, would disburse 1 billion roubles to cover Tajikistan’s 30 per cent budget deficit more easily if he were elected. See: Nasriddinov, Tarkish, p. 133.
165 Kommunist Tadzhikistana, 19 July 1991. The Tajik leadership copiously reproduced Gorbachev’s patterns of administration, with a time lag of four–five months. The USSR’s prime minister, Nikolai Ryzhkov, came up with the following statement in November 1990: ‘Control has been totally lost at all levels of the state structure. Authority has been paralysed … Universal destructiveness is basically becoming the norm. One can say with sufficient conviction and grounds that, throughout the greater part of the country’s territory, a situation has been created in which no one is in charge, and that this has led to a complete or partial deterioration of all systems of administration.’ Quoted in: John P. Willerton, ‘Executive Power and Political Leadership’, in Developments in Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics, eds Stephen White, Alex Pravda and Zvi Gitelman (London: Macmillan, 1992), p. 65.
Rastokhez supporters in Leninobod and Kulob were regularly disrupted by members of local action groups with tacit police approval. The IRP kept a low profile, and the handful of vociferous opposition parliamentarians could be safely ignored. In fact, the Supreme Soviet of Tajikistan in 1990 and 1991 was an amorphous collection of communist and ex-communist officials with little or no experience of the legislative process, factionalised according to regional affiliation and rather easy to manipulate. It also resembled a glorified *gashtak*: women were all but expunged from its ranks, the judgment of the *bobo*—that is, the president—was seldom questioned, and its entire modus operandi bore an imprint of patrimonialism:

> When a parliamentary commission head or a member of the government is to be appointed, they take into consideration how many seats representatives from this or that locality already have ... Sometimes an appointment can be blocked if there is an evident surplus of a particular clan’s representatives amongst office-holders. Some instances of blackballing are truly laughable, when members of the parliament, forgetting their democratic image, begin to discuss openly the place of birth and clan affiliation of a vacancy-seeker. Hundreds of thousands of Tajikistan’s residents witnessed such debates in the parliament on TV not long ago.  

In March 1991, another blow was dealt to the old system of checks and balances inside the power structure. A new law on local government suggested merging the positions of chairman of the soviet and chairman of the executive committee of the soviet. Henceforth, at the district-town level, legislative and executive powers became vested in one person, who was elected by the corresponding soviet, but who could be dismissed directly by the president. Mahkamov hoped that this move would help him in combating the *oblast* leaders, but very soon local bosses developed political resources that made their positions virtually unassailable either by the head of state or by regional authorities. Of 60 newly elected chairmen of executive committees only 10 were communist functionaries; others were local strongmen of various description, ranging from *sovkhоз* and factory directors to shadowy traders.

Qahhor Mahkamov tried to create a number of executive bodies, not necessarily mentioned in the Constitution, to advise him in setting policies and to control their implementation. The most important of them was the 15-strong Presidential Council, established in February 1991. This organ had considerable potential to evolve as a forum for negotiations amongst elite factions, but the president

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appeared to have selected its members on the basis of personal loyalty rather than political influence and ability. With the exception of the vice-president, Izatullo Khayoev, and the minister of the interior, Mamadayoz Navjuvonov, the council consisted of rather nondescript characters—the Kulob region, for example, was represented by a sixty-eight-year-old pensioner, Nizoramo Zaripova, who may have commanded respect due to the fact that she was well advanced in years, but who had no influence in the decision-making process. The council sank into oblivion without leaving a trace in Tajikistan’s political history.

In the meantime, the economic situation in the republic was nearing a critical point. In 1990, Tajikistan’s GDP contracted by 2.2 per cent, but the national income used actually grew by 6.4 per cent due to transfers from the centre. By the second half of 1991, the following grim picture had emerged:

- production of 56 of 77 major commodity groups lagged far behind targets
- civil construction stood at 50 per cent of the 1990 figure
- scarcity of food in cities was a pressing problem
- the budget deficit exceeded 1.7 billion roubles, and there were absolutely no internal resources to cover it.

Mahkamov’s regime did nothing to reform the economy. As always, he pinned all his hopes on Moscow. The communiqué of the leaders of Central Asian republics published on 14 August 1991 stated that they wholeheartedly supported the new union treaty prepared by Gorbachev whereby this region would continue to receive ‘financial resources for socio-economic development and for covering compensation pay-outs to the population’. The signing of the treaty was preempted by the abortive coup in Moscow on 19–21 August 1991, in the wake of which any continuation of the Soviet Union, even as a loose confederation of states, was impossible. Following other Central Asian republics, Tajikistan proclaimed its independence on 9 September 1991; to borrow Martha Brill Olcott’s expression, it was ‘a freedom more forced on them than acquired or won’.

President Mahkamov’s mishandling in Tajikistan of the August 1991 attempted coup against Gorbachev led to protests that ended in his resignation. Mahkamov did not support the putsch, contrary to popular myth. Mahkamov’s actions

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171 Narodnoe khoziaistvo Tadzhikskoi SSR v 1990g., pp. 3, 6.
172 Kommunist Tadzhikistana, 6 August 1991.
175 According to Ben Fowkes, ‘only Mahkamov (Tajikistan) came out directly in favour of the coup’. 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. 191. For additional arguments that stress that Mahkamov supported the coup, see: Markowitz, Collapsed and Prebendal States in Post-Soviet Eurasia, p. 104; Schoeberlein-Engel, ‘Conflicts in
around the time of the coup were neither in support nor in rejection, but rather cautious non-involvement and then denial once it was clear that the coup had failed.\textsuperscript{176} He was disoriented and confused, and did not come up with any political statements concerning the political struggle in Moscow—years of subservience to the Kremlin had obviously taken their toll.\textsuperscript{177} The opposition used this as an opportunity to accuse the government of supporting the coup. In response, the opposition held a large rally in Dushanbe’s Shahidon Square and demanded Mahkamov’s resignation.\textsuperscript{178}

On 27 August 1991, Mahkamov signed a decree disbanding the CPT structures in government agencies and sequestrating its property. On 28 August, he and the chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, Qadriddin Aslonov, formally quit the party. The next day, under pressure from inside and outside the republic, Mahkamov resigned as president of Tajikistan. On 9 September 1991, the Government of Tajikistan declared independence. The communist era in the history of Tajikistan came to an end.

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Over 70 years the Soviet political system in Tajikistan embraced and coopted elements of the traditional culture, cultivated legal, semi-legal and illegal links amongst various units of society and restrained fissures within it. This system was based on the communist mono-organisational order, and, eventually, ‘the communists were better adapted to this neotraditional society than the mullahs or the “democrats”’.\textsuperscript{179} The system was altered and ultimately destroyed in the Gorbachev period, primarily by exogenous forces. In a society in which

\textsuperscript{176} Kilavuz, \textit{Understanding Violent Conflict}, pp. 146–8.

\textsuperscript{177} When asked by the opposition whom he had sided with during the failed putsch against Gorbachev, Mahkamov claimed that he was not being informed about the unfolding events. See: Monica Whitlock, \textit{Land Beyond the River: The Untold Story of Central Asia} (New York: St Martin’s Press, 2003), pp. 150–1. Akbar Turajonzoda recollected that when he called Mahkamov on 19 August and asked about his reaction to the coup, Mahkamov simply said, ‘I don’t know.’ See: \textit{Nezavisimata gazeta}, 18 September 1991. As a Tajik political expert has put it, ‘the enemies of the [Tajik] state presented this silence as unconditional support for the GKChP [State Committee for the State of Emergency]. Government media did not bother to deny this categorically. Mahkamov did not have the skill, wisdom and shrewdness of Nazarbaev [President of Kazakhstan], who officially hailed the coup but two days later denounced it, having received hundreds of millions of roubles from the leaders of Russia—investment into their countries’ independence.’ See: Ibrohim Usmon, \textit{Soli Nabiev} (Dushanbe: [No publisher], 1995), pp. 6–7.


\textsuperscript{179} Roy, \textit{The Civil War in Tajikistan}, p. 22.
political life was characterised by consensual activity and direct bargaining by local and regional groups and self-interested politicians, the institutionalisation of political opposition was premature. All opposition figures were interested in gaining access to power rather than concerned with the expression of independent attitudes. The absence of a viable economy, the reluctance of the political leaders to form broad coalitions under the banner of nationhood, the flimsiness of the constitutional framework for political process, and the breakdown of state mechanisms of social control presaged a turbulent future for the independent Republic of Tajikistan.