

9. From Political Confrontation to Civil War, 1991–1992

The immediate consequence of Gorbachev's political reforms in Tajikistan was a constant flux in the rules of the political game. The transition from a mono-organisational type of national elite to a disunified one was well advanced. Additionally, non-elite involvement in the political process showed potential for growth: in September 1991, approximately 20 per cent of Tajikistan's population felt that they had been driven to the edge by the deteriorating economic situation,¹ providing radicals from all elite factions with potential followers. The presence of deep cleavages in Tajik society, mainly of a sub-ethnic and regional nature, always suggested the possibility of an acute internal conflict; however, assuming that 'civil wars are about a crisis in national sovereignty, and thus about the ability of nation-states to control national space',² it can be argued that the practical realisation of this possibility was conditioned by deliberate acts of (or inaction by) elite leaders affecting the functioning of the state. It was not inevitable that Tajikistan would follow the path of destruction; like the USSR, it 'succumbed to ill-conceived reforms originating in the leadership, to poor governance, and to bad fortune'.³

The relatively open social and political environment during the *glasnost* era in the Tajik SSR (late 1980s to 1991) allowed for increased freedom of expression and for the emergence of many new civil society groups and political parties. At the same time that political parties and various independent social groups were forming, the state bureaucracy was being restructured. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Gorbachev's union-wide efforts at *perestroika* reforms included attacks on and removals of 'conservative' apparatchiks in favour of 'reformist' cadres who would assist rather than obstruct the implementation of reforms. In Tajikistan this created an intersection of interests whereby pro-*perestroika* reformists in the state bureaucracy were supported by, and in turn supported, the anti-incumbent agendas of the newly emerging political parties and social movements. Another agenda that must be factored into this political environment is that of the regional elites and their local patronage networks. Local elites in Leninobod, Hisor, Kulob, and to a certain extent in Qurghonteppa,⁴ worked to maintain their positions in the face of the *perestroika* bureaucratic

1 *Sotsialno-politicheskie usloviia perekhoda k rynku v Tadzhikistane (Itogi sotsiologicheskogo analiza)* (Moscow and Dushanbe: Rossiiskaia akademiia upravleniia, 1991), p. 19.

2 Michael Humphrey, 'Lebanon: The "Cellular" Society', in *Lebanon Beyond 2000*, eds Amin Saikal and Geoffrey Jukes (Canberra: Centre for Middle Eastern and Central Asian Studies, ANU, 1997), p. 37.

3 Rush, 'Fortune and Fate', p. 19.

4 In Qurghonteppa this would not include the Gharmi Tajiks, who overwhelmingly supported the opposition parties.

reforms. On the other side, regional elites from the Pamirs and Gharm (including Gharmis in Dushanbe and Qurghonteppa Province) increasingly began to use the political parties and Gorbachev's reforms as a vehicle to make political gains, as the government often appointed Pamiri and Gharmi reformists to newly vacated positions. Soon, region of origin became associated with support for, or opposition to, the *perestroika* reforms—both in the bureaucracy in Dushanbe and in the rural areas where local elites (for example, collective farm bosses and provincial/district leaders) had much to gain or lose from the reforms. In Qurghonteppa, the competition between Gharmi and Kulobi administrators for local government positions and control of collective farms was especially intense.

The competition for state resources and positions of influence continued into the post-Soviet era. At the same time, political parties mobilised in opposition to the incumbent leaders, who also sought to mobilise their own supporters. The combination of an election failure on the part of the opposition, continuing harassment of the opposition and the increased use of large street demonstrations in the capital, plus the reckless rhetoric and actions on both sides, led to an increasingly dangerous political and social atmosphere. The overwhelming belief on the part of both sides—in the face of the mutual security dilemmas—of the need to arm themselves soon turned to escalating violence and eventually open military combat, mainly along the lines of the 'deep cleavages' mentioned above.

The New Institutional Setting and Moscow-Imposed Conflict Regulation

The Extraordinary Session of the Supreme Soviet that sat in two stages from 29 August to 4 October 1991 introduced substantial changes to the political system of the Republic of Tajikistan

- the president was to be elected by popular vote forthwith
- the institution of vice-president was created
- the Cabinet of Ministers was to be formed by the president, but every member of the Cabinet was answerable to the Supreme Soviet
- presidiums of regional legislatures were abolished and, as at the district-town level, the chairman of the executive committee became head of the *oblast* soviet
- the president lost the ability to remove chairmen of executive committees at all levels.

Tajikistan's parliament also addressed the Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR and the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation with a passionate plea for help:

We face a real threat of food and energy crisis, ecological catastrophe and a new escalation of social and ethnic tensions ... We are convinced that alone, deprived of our cooperation of many years, we cannot overcome the present deep crisis ... We cannot imagine our future outside the Union and without ancient indissoluble ties that linked it [Tajikistan] with Russia and other brotherly republics.⁵

Tajik government elites were quite prepared to cede attributes of independence and sovereignty for the sake of retention of the reformed Soviet Union.

On 31 August 1991, the Supreme Soviet of Tajikistan elected the Gharmi Tajik Qadriiddin Aslonov—its current chairman—to serve as interim president until the 24 November presidential elections.⁶ Opposition forces, which had insignificant representation in the national legislature, tried to find alternative ways to influence the decision-making process. Rastokhez and the DPT held one meeting after another in front of the Supreme Soviet's building, demanding dissolution of the Supreme Soviet and new elections, the government's resignation and prohibition of the Communist Party of Tajikistan (CPT). The *Qoziyot* and the IRP for the time being refrained from active political action, but, according to Narzullo Dustov, in late August to early September 1991, Akbar Turajonzoda, Tohir Abdujabbor and Dushanbe's mayor, Maqsud Ikromov, held several clandestine meetings with acting president, Qadriiddin Aslonov, in his house.⁷ The opposition, sensing its offensive advantage, continued to pressure the incumbents. On 21 September, the IRP brought its supporters by bus from the Vakhsh Valley and from the mountains of Gharm/Qarotegin to the city, where they camped.⁸ In response (or possibly planned ahead of time), on 22 September, Aslonov 'decided to accommodate the crowds by placing a ban on the activities of the Communist Party and by seizing all its property'.⁹ The same day, Mayor Ikromov authorised the removal of Lenin's statue from the central square of Dushanbe, an action that was carried out in front of cheering demonstrators.¹⁰

5 *Kommunist Tadjikistana*, 3 September 1991.

6 Kilavuz, *Understanding Violent Conflict*, p. 148.

7 Dustov, *Zakhm bar jismi vatan*, pp. 88–9.

8 Whitlock, *Land Beyond the River*, p. 151.

9 Flemming Splidsboel-Hansen, 'The Outbreak and Settlement of Civil War: Neo-Realism and the Case of Tajikistan', *Civil Wars*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (1999), p. 7.

10 Whitlock, *Land Beyond the River*, p. 152; Kilavuz, *Understanding Violent Conflict*, p. 148. Both officials exceeded their powers: an existing political party could have been outlawed only by the Supreme Court of Tajikistan, and the removal of any monument should have been approved by the city soviet.

Instead of merely acting as a caretaker, Aslonov had implemented major reforms (including banning the Communist Party and its activities while legalising the IRP) that 'would destabilize the political situation, and polarize different forces in the republic'.¹¹ In attempting to ban the activities of the Communist Party, Aslonov was attacking the tool with which the Leninobodis and their junior partners distributed patronage. Previously, the removal of the interior minister and the purge of Kulobis in law enforcement and security bodies (resulting in gains for Pamiris)¹² were significant, as these actions removed the Kulobis' guarantee of law enforcement protection. Now their farm bosses and regional politicians were 'vulnerable to future reforms'.¹³ Markowitz cites this vulnerability as the key in the shift from 'disaffection' to defensive mobilisation.¹⁴

The response of the overwhelming communist majority (94 per cent) in the Supreme Soviet to Aslonov's decrees—reforms that were reached without any consensus among communist leaders—was to force Aslonov out of office on 23 September during an emergency session of the Supreme Soviet and to appoint Rahmon Nabiev, a previous first secretary of the Tajik SSR, to the chairmanship of the Supreme Soviet and to the position of interim president. The Supreme Soviet immediately moved to reverse Aslonov's decrees—re-banning the IRP while reinstating the Communist Party. The Supreme Soviet reintroduced a state of emergency and martial law in Dushanbe and instructed the procurator-general, Nurullo Khuvayduloev, to investigate the incident with Lenin's monument. In response, the opposition restarted their demonstrations in Dushanbe, this time for three weeks.¹⁵

On 24 September 1991, the IRP, the DPT and Rastokhez, in defiance of martial law, brought 10 000 people to a demonstration in the capital. This was a well-planned event: the participants had tents, medical units, a press centre and a 300-strong security force; the chairman of the permanent meeting, *imam-khotib* Qosim Rahmonov from Qurghonteppa, admitted to enjoying generous financial and material support from the southern and eastern districts as well as from City Hall.¹⁶ The state of emergency had no effect in Dushanbe as thousands moved

11 Kilavuz, *Understanding Violent Conflict*, p. 148.

12 Niyazi writes: 'From 1990 [Pamiris] made a rather impressive addition to the personnel of the Interior Ministry, in the police.' See: Niyazi, 'Tajikistan I', p. 151. Similarly, Roy describes a 'massive entry' of Pamiris into the KGB and Ministry of the Interior in the 1980s. See: Roy, *The New Central Asia*, pp. 106, 114.

13 Markowitz, *Collapsed and Prebendal States in Post-Soviet Eurasia*, pp. 104–5.

14 Markowitz, *Collapsed and Prebendal States in Post-Soviet Eurasia*, pp. 104–5. In regards to the Interior Ministry, Markowitz writes: 'Prior to Makhkamov's appointment of Leninabadi K. Polatov (1986–89), a member of Kuliab's provincial elite, Ismail Kurbonov, held the office (from 1980–86).' See also: Dudoignon, 'Communal Solidarity and Social Conflicts in Late 20th Century Central Asia', pp. 17–18; Zviagelskaya, *The Tajik Conflict*, n.p.; Akhmedov, 'Tajikistan II', p. 175.

15 *Narodnaia gazeta*, 3 October 1991; Markowitz, *Collapsed and Prebendal States in Post-Soviet Eurasia*, p. 106; Kilavuz, *Understanding Violent Conflict*, pp. 125–6, 148–9, 163–4; Splidsboel-Hansen, 'The Outbreak and Settlement of Civil War', pp. 7–8.

16 *Narodnaia gazeta*, 3 October 1991.

into the city to join the protests. This failure on the part of the government is no surprise considering not only the Tajik government's lack of effective security forces, but also that the Soviet military announced that it would not enforce the state of emergency. In response, deputies in the Supreme Soviet voted to end the state of emergency on 30 September 1991.¹⁷

In addition to its previous demands, the opposition pressed for the resignation of Nabiev, procurator Khuvaydulloev and the chairman of the State Broadcasting Committee, Otakhon Sayfulloev, as well as for the reversal of the Supreme Soviet's decisions made on 23 September. For the first time 'democratic' and 'Islamist' oppositions openly confronted the government as a unified movement; however, some Tajik liberal intellectuals were appalled. According to *Narodnaia gazeta*, the prominent academic Rahim Masov left Rastokhez in protest against the

chaos unleashed by the meeting frenzy [*mitingovschina*] and the conviction that political goals can be attained through pressure, which conviction is espoused by leaders of various parties who draw in people remote from politics ... The meeting, its conduct, the masses of people brought from the districts—not from the city!—mainly the elderly and adolescents ... created an impression of a well-directed theatrical performance. Foreign journalists who arrived in Dushanbe somehow discerned a protest of defenders of democracy in what was happening ... The clergy had become the moving force, the spring of the events, though democrats and *Rastokhez* posed as its organisers.¹⁸

The Supreme Soviet's supporters organised parallel demonstrations in Dushanbe, using methods similar to those of the opposition: people were transported to the capital city from Kulob and Hisor on orders from local strongmen. In Leninobod, industrial managers issued warnings to the opposition that unless pressure on the parliament stopped they would go on strike. On 30 September, work in 11 of the largest factories in Khujand stopped. Political turmoil seriously affected Tajikistan's economy, especially agriculture.¹⁹

In the meantime, Gulrukhsor Safieva, by then a USSR people's deputy, and seven Sufi leaders from Gharm and Qarotegin went on a hunger strike. This move received sympathetic coverage in the Moscow-based media. Telegrams from opposition supporters poured into the Kremlin requesting intervention.²⁰

17 Splidsboel-Hansen, 'The Outbreak and Settlement of Civil War', p. 8.

18 *Narodnaia gazeta*, 26 October 1991.

19 For example, by 4 October only 28.5 per cent of the cotton crop had been harvested—half of the 1990 figure. See: *Narodnaia gazeta*, 4 October 1991.

20 One of them, signed by eight members of Tajikistan's and the All-Union legislatures, including Davlat Khudonazarov, Bozor Sobir, Akbar Turajonzoda and Asliddin Sohibnazarov, read: 'On 23 September 1991 in the city of Dushanbe reactionary Communist forces set out to restore the totalitarian regime in our republic ...

Gorbachev reacted by sending a conciliation team to Dushanbe. The activity of this team formed one of the stranger events in the modern history of Tajikistan and once again highlighted the ineffectual character of Gorbachev as the leader of a multinational state. The team comprised two members of his Political Consultative Committee: St Petersburg's mayor, Anatolii Sobchak, and vice-president of the USSR Academy of Sciences, academician Evgenii Velikhov. Both were ardent reformist democrats but had no experience of Central Asia, so they were accompanied by an advisor, an American citizen, Alexander Yanov, a history professor from the City University of New York. The juridical status of the Sobchak-Velikhov expedition was dubious—it had not been invited by the government of independent Tajikistan, and it had no clearly defined agenda. Velikhov disclosed in October 1991 that the president of the USSR had not bothered to determine their powers or to discuss possible actions and outcomes, and went on with a remarkable narrative of the mission:²¹

Gorbachev did not hold any briefing with us prior to our departure ... we just packed up quickly and flew to Dushanbe ... We did not receive any useful information from Yanov ... We did not offer any solutions ... but we said sternly that we would not go back to Moscow while people starve themselves to death in the square ... Though I am not a specialist in this field, I have made the following conclusions, having acquainted myself with the developments *in situ*: I believe, a union between Islam and democracy is necessary in the republic today. And if this union is durable and if its activities are open and understandable for the people, it will be the basis for consolidation of the main forces in the society.

Between 1 and 4 October 1991, Sobchak and Velikhov conducted a series of negotiations with Rahmon Nabiev, the Supreme Soviet leadership, *Qozikalon* Turajonzoda and major opposition figures, and spoke in front of the meeting in Ozodi Square. As a result, most of the opposition's demands were met

- the CPT (which changed its name to the Socialist Party of Tajikistan on 21 September) was suspended for two months pending an investigation of its activities during the coup
- the state of emergency was lifted
- the ban on the formation of religious parties was lifted

During numerous speeches Communist people's deputies befouled the honour and dignity of M. S. Gorbachev, B. N. Yeltsin and other democratic leaders of the Union and Russia, and called them traitors ... We ask for your help to build democracy in the republic and request that until it happens, all economic, political and other ties [between Moscow and Dushanbe] be severed.' Quoted in: Dustov, *Zakhm bar jismi vatan*, pp. 115–16.

21 E. Velikhov, 'Nel'zia taschit' liudei na krest—eto kazhdyi reshaet sam', *Glasnost*, No. 42 (October 1991), p. 3. Sobchak said something very similar. See: 'Interview with Anatoly Sobchak, Yevgeny Velikhov and Head of Tajik Moslems Kazi Akbar Turanzhonzoda in Dushanbe on October 6, 1991', *Official Kremlin International News Broadcast* (8 October 1991).

- Rahmon Nabiev stepped down as the chairman of the Supreme Soviet for the duration of the presidential race and was replaced with Akbarsho Iskandarov, a Pamiri
- representatives of the DPT, Rastokhez and the *Qoziyot* were included in the Electoral Commission of the Republic of Tajikistan
- presidential elections were postponed from 27 October to 25 November in order to allow opposition parties to campaign properly
- new parliamentary elections were promised, but without setting a specific date.

Sobchak addressed the meeting in front of the Supreme Soviet with the following words: 'Our task is to assist democratic forces and all political movements of the republic to find a common platform, something that would unite you all in order to help the republic start solving its economic and social problems.'²² A Tajik eyewitness commented on this address as follows:²³

People like Sobchak fly here from Leningrad and without understanding anything make speeches in front of Islamists gathered in the square: 'Citizens of Leningrad greet in your presence true democrats. You are the future of Tajikistan. Already the great democrat Herzen said' ... Well, if you ask bearded Gharmis who watch the orator from Leningrad expressionlessly who Herzen is, you are unlikely to get a coherent answer. It is laughable.

While their attempts to rally the crowds may have fallen flat, Sobchak and Velikhov, perhaps, unbeknownst to them, tipped the balance of power in favour of the elite factions from Gharm, Qarotegin and the Pamirs. They had a strong bargaining chip in dealing with the incumbent Tajik leadership: the threat to sever financial support from Moscow. As Yanov frankly admitted, had they been sent with a similar mission to the economically strong Ukraine, they would have achieved nothing.²⁴ Central Asian leaders, Nazarbaev in particular, severely criticised Sobchak's 'mediation efforts' at the time.²⁵ Sobchak, while publicly declaring himself to be one of the 'initiators' of the unification of 'democratic forces in the center with the national-democratic movements in the republics', also acknowledged the important divides in Tajikistan: 'There are also serious difficulties in relations among different sections of the Tajik population ... Hence, when we hear today talks about various clans, existing in this or that locality, we realize the danger they create for national consolidation.'²⁶

22 *Narodnaia gazeta*, 5 October 1991.

23 *Biznes i politika*, No. 43 (November 1993), p. 3.

24 *Narodnaia gazeta*, 24 October 1991.

25 Abdulov, *Rohi behbud*, p. 35.

26 'Interview with Anatoly Sobchak, Yevgeny Velikhov and Head of Tajik Moslems Kazi Akbar Turanzhonzada in Dushanbe on October 6, 1991'.

On 26 October 1991, the IRP held its first congress in Dushanbe. Muhammadsharif Himmatzoda was re-elected as its chairman and Davlat Usmon became his deputy. Although the congress that represented 15–20 000 members of the party reiterated the policy line aimed at building a ‘law-based democratic secular state’,²⁷ Himmatzoda put forward the thesis about moving to an Islamic state of Tajikistan by non-violent means, remarking that ‘Western countries have their democracy and we shall have ours. Our democracy is incompatible with the Western one.’²⁸ The legalisation of the IRP and the suspension of the CPT were undoubtedly the most important political events in Tajikistan in autumn 1991. As Grigorii Kosach has noted:

[T]he communists were not in a position to resume their legal activities until December 1991, when the ban on them was lifted. But by now this was a party that had been divorced from Tajikistan’s power structures and lost not a few adherents ... The absence of the centre’s tutelage and the communists’ loss of control over the entire ruling elite turned the confrontation between the two political camps into an open bid for power by the opposition, in which the differences in ideology and principle became ancillary to other considerations.²⁹

The two camps would clash in earnest during presidential elections in November 1991.

The Clouding Horizon: Parties, Elections and Shaky Compromises

In September 1991 the number of candidates for the presidency exceeded twenty. Every region and every substantial political organisation (except the CPT) had nominated a hopeful. By 24 November, only eight remained. From the abovementioned figures, only Rahmon Nabiev and Davlat Khudonazarov were serious contenders, with other candidates such as Hikmatullo Nasriddinov (Kulob) and Akbar Makhsumov (Gharm) not strong candidates.³⁰ Nabiev represented the bloc of Leninobodis, Kulobis and Hisoris, and Khudonazarov was supported by elite factions from Gharm, Qarotegin, the GBAO (Pamirs) and *muhajirs* (that is, Gharmis in Qurghonteppa Province). The legitimate question is, then, why would strongmen in Kulob support Nabiev versus their recognised

27 *Narodnaia gazeta*, 29 October 1991.

28 *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 18 September 1991.

29 Kosach, ‘Tajikistan’, pp. 124–5.

30 Others, including Tohir Abdujabbor, Shodmon Yusuf and Akbar Turajonzoda, had quit the race. The remaining contenders were: Ismoil Davlatov (Pamirs); Davlat Khudonazarov (Pamirs); Akbar Makhsumov (Gharm); Rahmon Nabiev (Khujand); Hikmatullo Nasriddinov (Kulob); Burikhon Salimov (Kulob); Bobisho Shoev (Pamirs); Saifiddin Turaev (Uroteppa).

leader, Nasriddinov, and, similarly, why would Gharmis vote for Khudonazarov rather than their own Akbar Makhsumov? The answer may be partially found in population statistics. Table 9.1 shows that no politician with a power base in only one particular region could have counted on electoral success. It is also indicative of the fact that this success would be heavily dependent on voters' behaviour in highly heterogeneous Qurghonteppa and Dushanbe, which accounted for one-third of the total vote between them.

Table 9.1 Regional Composition of Tajikistan's Electorate

Leninobod <i>oblast</i>	31%
Qurghonteppa <i>oblast</i>	21%
Gharm zone and eastern districts of republican subordination	16%
Kulob <i>oblast</i>	12%
Dushanbe	12%
Hisor	5%
GBAO (Pamirs)	3%

Source: *Itogi Vsesoiuznoi perepisi naseleniia 1989 goda po Tadzhikskoi SSR*, Vol. II (Dushanbe: Goskomstat TSSR, 1991), pp. 10–39.

For the presidential election of 24 November 1991, the incumbent candidate, Rahmon Nabiev, was not unfamiliar with top-level leadership, as he had been first secretary of the Tajik SSR from 1982 until 1985 when Gorbachev removed him due to his lack of enthusiasm for planned reforms.³¹ Outside analysts offer critical appraisals of his character. Whitlock assesses the then fifty-nine-year-old unfavourably, stating that he had heart issues, a drinking problem and a poor work ethic.³² Shahram Akbarzadeh has come up with the following characterisation of Rahmon Nabiev: 'a hardliner with no reformist pretences. As the epitome of the Soviet "*nomenklaturnyi*" [sic] he was used to top-down command with no taste for compromise. Nabiev had no experience in negotiating policies with diverse political currents or in seeking support from his opponents.'³³ This description needs some qualification. Nabiev was a master of traditional clan politics and temporary coalition-building, and by no means was he bound by any ideological commitments. In 1990, especially in the period preceding the twelfth session of the Supreme Soviet at which Mahkamov was elected president of the Tajik SSR, Nabiev became quite close to Akbar Turajonzoda, Asliddin Sohibnazarov, Tohir Abdujabbor and other influential opponents of Mahkamov. Opposition groups sponsored Nabiev's comeback to politics after five years of inactivity and separation from the summit of power and 'actively promoted his image as an advocate of the independence of Tajikistan

31 Bliss, *Social and Economic Change in the Pamirs*, p. 272.

32 Whitlock, *Land Beyond the River*, p. 153.

33 Akbarzadeh, 'Why Did Nationalism Fail in Tajikistan', pp. 1110–11.

and the well-being of its people. All their publications contained one refrain: weak-willed Mahkamov must be replaced by strong Nabiev. Undoubtedly, the *Qoziyot* and the IRP rendered Nabiev serious assistance. He suited them in the transitional period.³⁴ As soon as Qahhor Mahkamov stepped down as president and the IRP was legalised, the tone of the opposition's statements changed rapidly: 'The election of Nabiev [as chairman of the Supreme Soviet] is wrong ... Aren't there any other cadres in our republic apart from Mahkamov and Nabiev ... How often is Nabiev sober? Whose fate is more attractive to Nabiev—Pinochet's, Mussolini's or Ceausescu's?'³⁵

In the autumn of 1991, Nabiev managed to rally the majority of the northern 'clans' around him. He formed an alliance with Abdumalik Abdullojonov; the latter was offered indemnity from any inquiry into the activities of the Ministry of Grain Products, and his relative, Temur Mirzoev, was promised the position of mayor of Dushanbe.³⁶ A prominent politician, Safarali Kenjaev, who had a power base in the Ayni district of the Leninobod *oblast*, as well as in Hisor, became Nabiev's campaign manager.³⁷ Sayfiddin Turaev, representative of a powerful Uroteppa (Istaravshon) group of clans and another runner-up for the presidency, was seriously weakened when one of his associates, deputy procurator-general, Amirqul Azimov, defected to Nabiev's camp. Nabiev also had a substantial following in the Kulob *oblast*. By October 1991, the group of Hikmatullo Nasriddinov had become largely a spent force, for it had failed to use the post-February 1990 elite settlement to improve economic conditions in the Kulob region. Local groups, such as Oshkoro, and charismatic strongmen, such as the criminal authority Sangak Safarov, canvassed for Nabiev. Generally, Kulobis remembered Nabiev's tenure as the party leader in 1982–85 as a period of growth and prosperity; this perception received a further boost when in September 1991 massive shipments of food and consumer goods from Leninobod

34 G. Khaidarov and M. Inomov, *Tadzhikistan: tragediia i bol' naroda* (St Petersburg: LINKO, 1993), p. 15. Akbar Turajonzoda corroborated this conclusion in 1995: 'Since the Communist party had ostracised Nabiev and he was completely forgotten, it was only thanks to us that he was resurrected. I very much regret this move.' See: 'Interview with Qadi Akbar Turajonzoda', *Central Asia Monitor*, No. 2 (1995), p. 10.

35 Ibrohim Usmon, *Soli Nabiev* (Dushanbe: [No publisher], 1995), pp. 15–16.

36 Confidential sources in Dushanbe, January 1996. According to some reports, which could not be verified, Abdullojonov also handed Nabiev 3 million roubles for the election campaign in October 1991.

37 Safarali Kenjaev was born in 1942 in Ayni. He belongs to a family of traditional Yagh nobles, hence his influence on both sides of the Hisor mountain range. Kenjaev has known Akbar Turajonzoda since childhood and for some time lived in the same *mahalla* with him. Kenjaev is a qualified lawyer; in 1983–89 he acted as the regional Central Asian railway procurator and the transport procurator of the TSSR, and in 1990–91 headed the Control Commission under the President of Tajikistan. His solidarity web included several local administration heads (Qairoqqum, Varzob). In February 1990, he was put in charge of the Supreme Soviet commission to investigate the bloody events in Dushanbe, which helped him to become known throughout Tajikistan.

to Kulob commenced. Unsurprisingly, more than half of all telegrams and letters from labour collectives nominating Nabiev that were received by the Electoral Commission originated from Kulob.³⁸

Nabiev's selection of Narzullo Dustov as vice-president was a carefully designed measure: the latter was born in Darvoz, in the Pamirs, but his paternal ancestors used to live in Baljuvon of Kulob. Dustov was a hardworking transport official devoid of any political ambitions, who had a reputation of being not particularly clever.³⁹ He had no patronage web behind him but enjoyed the reputation as a person sympathetic to the problems of the common people. In his election program, Nabiev announced that 'the accelerated growth of productive forces of the Kulob *oblast*, the GBAO, Qarotegin Valley and other mountainous districts should become the decisive element of our socio-economic strategy',⁴⁰ but, overall, this document was little more than an assortment of populist promises and did not touch upon the principles of state building in independent Tajikistan at all. The problem of sub-ethnic fragmentation in the country deserved one short line: 'regionalism has increased.'⁴¹

The IRP, the DPT, La'li Badakhshon, Rastokhez and a number of creative unions and public associations nominated the Pamiri cinematographer Davlat Khudonazarov as their presidential candidate. Khudonazarov is a unique and tragic figure in the political history of Tajikistan. At the age of sixteen, he was admitted to the All-Union Institute of Cinematography in Moscow. His work as a cameraman and later film director won accolades throughout the country and abroad. Although his father, Khudonazar Mamadnazarov, was a high-ranking CPT official, Khudonazarov himself was always at loggerheads with the Soviet establishment. He was a disciple of Andrei Sakharov, and after becoming a USSR people's deputy in 1989, he joined the reformist Interregional Group faction in the Soviet parliament. Gorbachev coopted him to the CPSU CC alongside 60 other reformers. Khudonazarov did not formally belong to any political organisation in Tajikistan, but his ties with the DPT and Rastokhez were well known.⁴² Khudonazarov was one of the few Tajik politicians who openly castigated regionalism in the republic's politics.⁴³ Khudonazarov understood

38 Abdulov, *Rohi behbud*, p. 47. See also: Niyazi, 'Tajikistan I', p. 149.

39 The opposition referred to him as the 'village fool'. See: *Charoghi ruz*, No. 2 (80) (1995), p. 13.

40 *Barnomai amalii nomzad ba raisi jumhuri Tojikiston Nabiev Rahmon Nabievich* (Dushanbe: [No publisher], 1991), p. 12.

41 *Barnomai amalii nomzad ba raisi jumhuri Tojikiston Nabiev Rahmon Nabievich*, p. 8.

42 For a brief biography of Khudonazarov, see: Abdullaev and Akbarzadeh, *Historical Dictionary of Tajikistan*, pp. 204–5. His first name is also given as Davlatnazar, while his surname is also given as the de-Russified Khudonazar. Regarding his artistic accomplishments, see: Bashiri, *Prominent Tajik Figures of the Twentieth Century*, pp. 150–1.

43 Khudonazarov deplored 'the division of the nation as a result of the half-a-century-long usurpation of power by the leaders who defended only clan and localistic interests. The elevation of regionalism to a state policy over a lengthy period of time made the society accumulate enormous destructive energy.' See: Davlat Khudonazarov, 'Tadzhikskii rezhisser v dalnem zarubezh'e', *Iskusstvo kino*, No. 7 (1994), p. 41.

that, being a Pamiri, he had no chances of being elected on his own, so he accepted the endorsement of the force to which he had natural antipathy—that is, the Islamists. Even then he knew that his victory would require a major miracle. Still, Khudonazarov decided to fight to reform the system.

The opposition banked on Khudonazarov for purely pragmatic reasons: he was likely to attract the votes of the cosmopolitan intelligentsia and the Pamiris.⁴⁴ Even more importantly, Khudonazarov had exceptionally good ties in the Kremlin (as well as later in the West)⁴⁵ and could provide the opposition with the international publicity it so badly needed. Indeed, during the presidential campaign, Moscow-based journalists spared no effort to support his cause; Channels 1 and 2 aired a series of trailers in November that urged the voters in Tajikistan to make a decision in Khudonazarov's favour. Khudonazarov's colleagues had the following to say about his qualities.⁴⁶

- Ella Pamfilova, USSR MP: 'As a presidential candidate, Davlat is marked by a truly statesmanlike way of thinking ... He is one of those politicians who can introduce an element of lofty morality to politics.'
- Iurii Ryzhov, chairman of the Science Committee of the USSR Supreme Soviet: 'If we want to come to a civil society and social justice, we need people with a European mode of thinking. Davlat is one of them.'
- Vladimir Volkov, USSR MP: 'He enjoys great authority with the leaders of Russia, Boris Yeltsin in particular. Personal links between state leaders are extremely important, voters in Tajikistan should remember this.'
- Aleksandr Iakovlev, chief advisor to President Gorbachev: 'Democracy is the essence of life for him. He is a Man of Freedom of the *perestroika* epoch.'

Khudonazarov's supporters even attempted to solicit endorsement from as far abroad as California, with the presumption that the president of Stanford University would have an interest in the upcoming elections in Tajikistan.⁴⁷

During the campaign Nabiev put emphasis on stability and gradual change, while Khudonazarov and his would-be vice-president and the DPT deputy

44 Narzullo Dustov has reproduced a conversation he claims he had with Akbar Turajonzoda on 20 April 1992: the revered *Qozikalon*, with no little cynicism, explained to the slightly petrified vice-president of Tajikistan that 'we do not have any respect for the Pamiris at all, they are not accomplished Muslims anyway. The Pamirs [region] is necessary to us today in order to reach our goal, that is, state power; henceforth, we use them temporarily, then we shall part company and leave them to face their fate.' See: Dustov, *Zakhm bar jismi vatan*, p. 7.

45 This hagiography of Khudonazarov mentions his time, post Tajikistan, at the US Institute of Peace and at the Kennan Institute: Robin Wright, 'The Artful Exile from Dushanbe: First Davlat Khudonazarov Lost the Presidency of His Beloved Tajikistan, Then He Lost Everything Else. Forced Into Exile, the Charismatic Filmmaker and Politician May Be His Country's Great Hope for Unity', *Los Angeles Times* (15 May 1994).

46 Adopted from a collation of promotional trailers of Davlat Khudonazarov. Courtesy of deputy director of the Tajik Film Authority, Safar Haqdod.

47 Gregory Freidin, 'Coup II: Tadjikistan's Havel Fights Back; Davlat Khudonazarov', *The New Republic*, Vol. 205, No. 16 (14 October 1991), p. 16.

chairman, Asliddin Sohbnazarov (who represented the interests of a group of districts to the east of Dushanbe bordering on Gharm), actively exploited the themes of reformism, nationalism and Islam. Sociological monitoring conducted by the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Tajikistan showed that Nabiev’s supporters had a much clearer idea about their candidate than those of Khudonazarov (Table 9.2). Nabiev had managed to capitalise on his image as an experienced and paternalistic leader; it is noteworthy that in both cases commitment to democratic ideals did not feature as an important criterion. Moreover, Khudonazarov’s nationalist stance eventually repelled the non-Tajik voters (aside from of course the Pamiris), and Nabiev acquired a substantial lead amongst all ethnic electoral cohorts (Table 9.3).

Table 9.2 Personal Qualities Most Appreciated by Loyal Voters in Presidential Candidates, October 1991

	Rahmon Nabiev	Davlat Khudonazarov
Ability to unite different parties	48%	34%
Modesty	57%	25%
Moral purity	48%	32%
Good knowledge of Tajik literature and language	42%	44%
Knowledge of economics	63%	18%
Faithfulness to Islam	17%	70%
Attention to people’s needs	64%	20%
Skills of managing the state	68%	19%

Note: The survey involved 1361 respondents in all regions and districts of Tajikistan, except the GBAO.

Source: *Vybory Prezidenta Respubliki Tadjikistan. Sotsiologicheskii monitoring* (Dushanbe: Press-sluzhba KM RT, 1991), p. 21.

Table 9.3 Election Preferences of Ethnic Groups, October– November 1991

Ethnic cohort	For Rahmon Nabiev		For Davlat Khudonazarov	
	28–31 October	14–16 November	28–31 October	14–16 November
Tajiks	66%	58%	28%	26%
Uzbeks	89%	74%	14%	16%
Russians and Ukrainians	56%	79%	35%	15%
Other nationalities	47%	73%	41%	16%

Source: *Vybory Prezidenta Respubliki Tadjikistan. Sotsiologicheskii monitoring* (Dushanbe: Press-sluzhba KM RT, 1991), p. 20.

The returns of the poll on 24 November 1991 were as follows: Nabiev, 56.92 per cent, and Khudonazarov, 30.07 per cent.⁴⁸ Generally, traditional factors proved to be decisive in the election's outcome. The structure of the vote corresponded to the regional affiliation of the candidates: Nabiev and Dustov scored 80–100 per cent in northern constituencies, 90 per cent in Kulob, but, for example, only 0.02 per cent in Qalai Khumb in the GBAO.⁴⁹ The vote in Dushanbe and Qurghontepa was split fifty–fifty.

Nabiev's team had skilfully used prejudices to smear Khudonazarov: he was pronounced unworthy of becoming the leader because 'he was born illegally, for he was conceived by his real father when his mother was married to another man'.⁵⁰ Khudonazarov, an Ismaili Pamiri, endured pro-incumbent taunts during the election campaign labelling him a 'Badakhshani kafir' (that is, a non-Tajik and an infidel).⁵¹ Mullahs in Kulob habitually referred to Khudonazarov as an unbeliever or a heretic, successfully 'fanning the fire of suspicion and hatred against the Ismaili sect'.⁵²

The opposition claimed the vote was fraudulent, arguing that Khudonazarov had actually received 40 per cent of the vote;⁵³ however, Khudonazarov accepted defeat with bitterness but as something naturally determined;⁵⁴ the opposition chose not to challenge the results, although there were likely irregularities, 'in view of the widely regarded fairness of the election process'.⁵⁵ In other words, the opposition could only realistically claim that its losing margin was less than official figures. On 2 December 1991, Rahmon Nabiev took an oath as the first popularly elected president of the Republic of Tajikistan. Clearly, the elections and the accusations and rhetoric surrounding them 'further polarized forces in the republic'.⁵⁶

48 The also-rans: S. Turaev, 5.03 per cent; H. Nasriddinov, 1.28 per cent; B. Shoev, 0.37 per cent; A. Makhsumov, 0.23 per cent. In total, 84.6 per cent of eligible citizens cast their vote. See: *Narodnaia gazeta*, 26 November 1991.

49 Dustov, *Zakhm bar jismi vatan*, p. 7.

50 Bushkov and Mikulskii, 'Obschestvenno-politicheskaia situatsiia v Tadjikistane', p. 13.

51 Kilavuz, *Understanding Violent Conflict*, p. 198. The use of 'kafir' also appeared in IRP rhetoric: 'Unlike other parties and political organizations, the IRP had declared that any Muslim residing in Tajikistan could join the party. Those who refused to support this Islamic party were declared infidels (Kafirs)'. See: Makhamov, 'Islam and the Political Development of Tajikistan after 1985', p. 201.

52 Akbarzadeh, 'Why Did Nationalism Fail in Tajikistan', p. 1111.

53 Abdullaev and Akbarzadeh, *Historical Dictionary of Tajikistan*, pp. 204–5; Kilavuz, *Understanding Violent Conflict*, pp. 149–50, 172.

54 He was quoted as saying that 'our place of birth predetermined our lot'. See: Usmon, *Soli Nabiev*, p. 109.

55 Naby, 'Tajik Political Legitimacy and Political Parties', p. 199.

56 Kilavuz, *Understanding Violent Conflict*, pp. 149–50.

Rahmon Nabiev's Presidency

Nabiev was certainly capable of maintaining the elite's consensual unity using his authority, flexibility, communication skills and personal charm in a *stable* mono-organisational political system. But in December 1991, he inherited a system that had become highly unstable, where the old rules of the elite settlement had been annulled and new ones had not yet emerged.⁵⁷ In the neighbouring republics at the time, Islom Karimov and Saparmurat Niyazov were feverishly constructing overtly authoritarian regimes, while Nursultan Nazarbaev and Askar Akaev opted for quasi-democratic coalitions dominated by a strong executive.⁵⁸ Nabiev as president remained somnolent: 'he was sure that after gaining power, he would inherit automatically absolute subordination to the will of "the First," which had existed before, when the system itself reliably guaranteed the functioning of various spheres of the Republic's life ... Nabiev was not ready to work under new conditions.'⁵⁹

In Uzbekistan, where friction amongst regional elites had also been on the rise since the beginning of *perestroika*,⁶⁰ President Islom Karimov, elected in December 1991, continued to depend confidently on the renamed and de-ideologised Communist Party, while building a political system with a de facto strong executive, despite dispersal of powers enunciated in the Constitution.⁶¹ In contrast, Nabiev's attempt to build a strong presidency failed miserably. He could not even run his personal office properly. His chief of staff, Karim Abdulov, who had a staff of 33 people, has left a scathing description of how the office operated over the 10 months in 1991–92:⁶²

Nobody worked with us. The President did not have time. The Vice-President met with our officers once, and that was it. Every Councilor and Adviser worked on his own problems. Weekly briefings were deemed unnecessary by the President ... Most meetings of the President took

57 Like any other leader in a transitional polity, Nabiev had a choice: 'rules can be imposed unilaterally by a dominant actor and the other players may obey them out of fear or respect, or they can be elaborated multilaterally by implicit agreements or by explicit pacts.' See: O'Donnell and Schmitter, 'Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies', p. 68.

58 Nazarbaev must have learned certain lessons from the 'meeting frenzy' in Tajikistan: when in June 1992 several hundred people assembled in front of the parliament building in Almaty under democratic banners, he ordered police to disperse them at once, saying that 'we shall preserve stability in the republic at any cost, even relying on tough measures'. See: *Izvestiia*, 18 June 1992. A more detailed account of the Kazakh president's policy can be found in: Kirill Nourzhanov and Amin Saikal, 'The New Kazakhstan: Has Something Gone Wrong?' *The World Today*, Vol. 50, No. 12 (1994), pp. 225–9.

59 Khaidarov and Inomov, *Tajikistan*, p. 17.

60 On regionalism in Uzbekistan, see: Donald S. Carlisle, 'The Uzbek Power Elite: Politburo and Secretariat (1938–1983)', *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 5, Nos 3–4 (1986), pp. 91–132; and Sharaf Khoja, 'Uzbekistan: Friendship Gains Victory in Government's Struggle against Corruption', *Russia and the Moslem World*, No. 10 (1994), pp. 41–5.

61 Carlisle, 'Islam Karimov and Uzbekistan', p. 199.

62 Abdulov, *Rohi behbud*, pp. 59, 86.

place without preparation ... [Eventually t]he traffic of visitors began to be controlled by the group of Anatolii Omoev [Nabiev's bodyguard of many years] ... Day by day Omoev's and his friends' clients poured in to talk with the President ... However, government officials who wanted to discuss issues of state importance did not have a hope of being given an audience.

The aggregation of pro-Nabiev support was implemented by a variety of vertical and horizontal structures, united temporarily by considerations of preserving the status quo. It would have taken immense institutional craftsmanship to make them stick together. Following his victory, Nabiev did nothing to create a political machine behind his regime.⁶³ In early 1992 it was disclosed that 'the relations between R. Nabiev and the Communist Party are rather complicated. According to sources close to the President, R. Nabiev will try to finish the Party off because he had suffered from the Party arbitrariness in the mid-1980s.'⁶⁴ The Supreme Court of Tajikistan cleared the CPT's name and on 18 January 1992 it held its twenty-third congress, but Nabiev refused to restore the bulk of its property, including the building of the Central Committee in Dushanbe. The newly elected CPT leader and Mahkamov's long-time ally, Shodi Shabdolov, was not on speaking terms with Nabiev.⁶⁵

Nabiev rewarded his supporters by promoting them to senior positions in the civil service. Of course, he was not unique in making non-merit-based bureaucratic appointments and sinecures for loyalists the order of the day, but in a nascent independent state like Tajikistan there was a great need for skilled bureaucrats and stable government structures. Experienced personnel from Mahkamov's era faced wholesale dismissal; entire ministries were dissolved and then resuscitated, chaos prevailed, and the 'heavy burden of serving the people and dealing with the republic's problems landed on the shoulders of just 7–8 capable officials'.⁶⁶

In late 1991, a think tank attached to the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Tajikistan sent a detailed memorandum to the Presidential Office, pinpointing the main problems that the regime faced. This document concluded in particular that⁶⁷

- under conditions of deepening economic crisis and decaying social welfare, political struggle is conducive to processes of disintegration in society

63 Barnett Rubin is certainly wrong when asserting that Nabiev relied on the renamed CPT. See: Rubin, 'Tajikistan', p. 213.

64 Bushkov and Mikulskii, 'Obschestvenno-politicheskaia situatsiia v Tadjikistane', p. 35.

65 Interview with the first secretary of the CPT city organisation of Dushanbe, Isomiddin Salohiddinov, Dushanbe, 4 April 1995.

66 Abdulov, *Rohi behbud*, p. 69.

67 *Sotsialno-politicheskie usloviia perekhoda k rynku v Tadjikistane*, pp. 12–22.

- the government's authority is weakened by the instability of legal foundations, the absence of mechanisms to carry out laws and decisions and weak control over their implementation, which leads to misuse of power by local structures
- the unceasing redistribution of political and economic powers between the centre and peripheral organs and executive and legislative institutions disorients the populace
- the structures of presidential authority are characterised by blurred functions, lack of levers of social mobilisation and inherent instability.

The experts' recommendation was clear: it was imperative to consolidate social control by all possible means through establishing a strong presidency; they also believed that it could be done quickly and painlessly.⁶⁸ Nabiev failed to heed this advice. He made mistake after mistake. He did not even try to gain control over regional administrations (as Karimov successfully did in Uzbekistan in January 1992 by introducing the institution of appointed governors who existed parallel to elected soviets). He was in no hurry to set up national armed forces. He retained General Anatolii Stroikin, invited in July 1991 from Kazakhstan, as the chairman of the Committee of State Security—the successor to Tajikistan's KGB; Stroikin 'could not orient himself properly in the intricate and complex situation, which led to a split in [Tajikistan's] security organs'.⁶⁹

The economic situation in the country was critical. Food shortages were common in the cities.⁷⁰ In his radio address to the people on 29 January 1992, Nabiev said: 'You all know better than anyone else ... that the republic has no reserves and no potential. The budget has been fixed only for the first three months of the year, unfortunately, and contains many faults.'⁷¹ Yet, instead of cutting budget expenditure and introducing market reforms, Nabiev, in a truly populist fashion, blamed greedy merchants and the nascent strata of businessmen for the economic troubles and launched an attack on them under the new law 'On Strengthening Control over Cooperatives': 'In Dushanbe, regional centres and districts ... cooperatives, small enterprises and procurement shops began to be liquidated. Tens of thousands of people were rendered jobless.'⁷² Tajikistan joined the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in December 1991, but relations amongst its member states desperately lacked proper institutionalisation.

68 The reason given was: 'the great proportion of the population is tired of political confrontation and is interested in putting key issues of economic life outside the brackets of political ambitions and passions.' *Sotsialno-politicheskie usloviia perekhoda k rynku v Tadzhikistane*, pp. 16–17.

69 Khaidarov and Inomov, *Tadzhikistan*, p. 26.

70 In some places bread was rationed at 170–240 g a day per person, compared with 600 g during the most difficult months of World War II. See: *Narodnaia gazeta*, 1 November 1991.

71 Bess Brown, 'Central Asia', *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report*, Vol. 1, No. 7 (14 February 1992), p. 20.

72 *Russkaia mysl'*, 3 July 1992.

Nabiev showed remarkable slackness in this respect—for instance, by June 1992, Tajikistan remained the only Central Asian republic that had not signed a cooperation agreement with the Russian Federation.⁷³

After his inauguration, Nabiev appointed a new cabinet. Akbar Mirzoev, the chairman of the Executive Committee of the Kulob *oblast*, became premier. Nabiev also secured the election of Safarali Kenjaev as the chairman of the Supreme Soviet, instead of acting chairman, Akbarsho Iskandarov. Thus the prerogative of the Pamiris and Gharmis to head Tajikistan's legislature was violated. Both Mirzoev and Kenjaev had substantial political resources of their own and could act independently of the president. As an opposition observer wrote in May 1992 in an article entitled 'The Flailing King', 'in the ruling triumvirate Nabiev is just a figurehead ... whose brain has shrunk due to excessive consumption of alcohol, and who, naturally, does not play any role in running the state'.⁷⁴ While this statement was an obvious exaggeration, Hikmatullo Nasriddinov, who at the time chaired one of the Supreme Soviet committees, concurred that 'Akbar Mirzoev considered some of the requests, suggestions and edicts of Rahmon Nabiev unacceptable and even rejected them or left them unattended'.⁷⁵ Clearly, the presence of regional strongmen at the top undercut state capabilities to extract and distribute resources, mobilise the masses and regulate social relations.

Following the presidential elections, there was a lull in the struggle amongst elite factions, while they regrouped and prepared for future battles. Relative tranquillity was also maintained by the personal efforts of Nabiev, who met with *Qozikalon* Turajonzoda and opposition leaders more frequently than with his own executives.⁷⁶ This provided a feeble alternative to working out an overarching intra-elite pact, which theoretically should have: a) confined the sphere of political action to rational, controllable processes, such as elections and parliamentary debates; b) precluded intervention of extraneous forces in decision-making; and c) envisaged a more equitable distribution of benefits amongst regional factions.

In regards to the president's strategy for dealing with the opposition, Nabiev and his allies, perceiving themselves as 'powerful and unchallengeable ... began a crackdown against the entire opposition'.⁷⁷ Nabiev's tactic was to initiate a broad attack against both his internal competition within the Communist Party

73 *Diplomatiia Tadjikistana* (Dushanbe: [No publisher], 1994), p. 58. The Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance between Tajikistan and Russia was signed as late as 25 May 1993.

74 Mirzoi Salimpur, 'Shohi mu'allaq', *Charoghi ruz*, No. 20 (41) (1992), p. 2.

75 Nasriddinov, *Tarkish*, p. 151.

76 Abdulov recounts: 'he would tell them [opposition leaders] "Let us discuss things" and "Please, table your requests", and so on ... Most of the time the President would receive them tête-à-tête and negotiate with them secretly.' See: Abdulov, *Rohi behbud*, p. 84.

77 Kilavuz, *Understanding Violent Conflict*, pp. 125–6, also 9–10, 163.

and all the opposition parties at the same time; however, his purges pushed some government figures into the opposition while his attacks on opposition figures and parties served to help unite them against the political leadership of Tajikistan. The result was a larger and more united opposition. At the beginning of 1992, the government strengthened its campaign against the opposition parties. The government began legal proceedings against members of the DPT, Rastokhez and the IRP. In addition, the government passed new laws restricting press freedom and the right to assemble in public. Freedom of expression was also curtailed, with government prosecutors charging various opposition leaders with insulting government leaders.⁷⁸ The conflictive environment persisted in Tajikistan and needed only a single impetus to erupt into violence. It came in March 1992.

The Use and Abuse of Mass Mobilisation: Spring 1992 Street Demonstrations

The government coalition struck first. On 6 March 1992, the pro-opposition mayor of Dushanbe, Maqsud Ikromov, was arrested on charges of corruption.⁷⁹ On 11 March 1992, one of the Rastokhez leaders, Mirbobo Mirrahim, was sentenced to two years of imprisonment for defamation of the chairman of the Supreme Soviet, Safarali Kenjaev.⁸⁰ On 25 March 1992, Kenjaev convened the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet and led televised investigations into the Interior Ministry, particularly its failure to act against anti-government demonstrators in September 1991. Kenjaev's efforts were focused on the head of the ministry, Mamadayoz Navjuvonov—an ethnic Pamiri. Kenjaev's investigation recommended that Nabiev dismiss Navjuvonov, 'for blatant violations in personnel policy, inept leadership, connivance in illegal privatising of state-owned vehicles and personal immodesty'.⁸¹ The government attacks on Navjuvonov led several hundred

78 Kilavuz, *Understanding Violent Conflict*, pp. 125–6, 150, 163–5, 205–6. 'In particular, the law on the press adopted in spring 1992 made criticism of the government a crime. Mirbobo Mirrahim, one of the leaders of Rastokhez, was put on probation for allegedly insulting Kenjaev. Legal proceedings were brought against the leader of the DPT, Shadmon Yusuf, for insulting the honor and dignity of President Nabiev.'

79 Kilavuz writes: 'The mayor of Dushanbe, Maqsud Ikromov, was arrested on March 6, 1992 on corruption charges, but according to many, the real reason was related to the removal of the Lenin statue.' See: Kilavuz, *Understanding Violent Conflict*. His place was taken by Mirzotemur Mirzoev—a close relative of Abdumalik Abdullojonov. This move was widely interpreted in Dushanbe as Nabiev's 'repayment' for Abdullojonov's support during the presidential elections.

80 In February 1990, Mirrahim was put under investigation, conducted by a special commission headed by Kenjaev. Kenjaev tried to present Mirrahim as the culprit behind bloodshed and violence in Dushanbe. A bitter personal feud sprang up between the two of them. See: 'Ba Mirbobo chi shud?' *Adolat*, No. 8 (1991), p. 3.

81 Bess Brown, 'Whither Tajikistan', *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report*, Vol. 1, No. 24 (12 June 1992), p. 2; *Tadzhikistan v ogne*, p. 154. The real reason for Navjuvonov's dismissal was his reluctance to obey orders from the Supreme Soviet to enforce the state of emergency and disperse demonstrators in the autumn of 1991. Nabiev promised to remove him if he became president. See: *Sadoi mardum*, 31 October 1991. Nabiev later backed down on this promise.

Pamiri members of La'li Badakhshon—who viewed the firing of Navjuvonov as an 'intolerable insult to their nationality'⁸²—to start demonstrating in Shahidon Square against the government and in support of Navjuvonov.⁸³ Navjuvonov himself also framed his case in regional-ethnic terms and 'accused the Government of persecution towards the Badakhshani [Pamiri] people'.⁸⁴ The mood amongst some Pamiris, at least in their home region, had already been quite confrontational earlier in the winter. In December 1991 demonstrators organised by La'li Badakhshon in Khorugh gathered and demanded that the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO) declare independence and recall its deputies from the Supreme Soviet in Dushanbe. A compromise was reached with local authorities, who agreed to declare the Pamirs an autonomous republic within Tajikistan. A motion was passed by the GBAO soviet and then sent to Dushanbe for ratification (which never materialised).⁸⁵

The opposition saw this as a good time to counterattack. The Pamiri demonstrators were soon joined by supporters of other opposition parties, including the DPT and the IRP.⁸⁶ This began the next phase of the opposition alliance, the first being for the November 1991 presidential elections.⁸⁷ As in September 1991, reinforcements from rural areas of Gharm and Qurghonteppa were brought in, and very soon the number of people in Shahidon Square reached 3000. On 27 March 1992, Shodmon Yusuf (DPT), Muhammadsharif Himmatzoda (IRP), Davlat Usmon (IRP), Tohir Abdujabbor (Rastokhez) and the chairman of La'li Badakhshon, Amirbek Atobek, on behalf of the participants of the meeting, put forward a list of demands, which included: the resignation of Kenjaev; the release of Ikromov from custody; dissolution of the Supreme Soviet; adoption of a new constitution; organisation of multi-party elections to the new legislature—the Majlisi milli; and cessation of reprisals against the opposition.⁸⁸ The leaders of the young political groups that developed in Tajikistan were, as noted by Akiner, 'inexperienced and prone to adopt extreme, uncompromising positions'.⁸⁹ These

82 Brown, 'Whither Tajikistan', p. 2. See also: Kilavuz, *Understanding Violent Conflict*, p. 150. Also, the firing of Navjuvonov could leave the ethnic Pamiris in the ministry vulnerable to a purge. On Pamiri domination in the ranks of the ministry, see: Schoeberlein-Engel, 'Conflicts in Tajikistan and Central Asia', p. 37; Matveeva, 'The Perils of Emerging Statehood', p. 7.

83 Juraeva, 'Ethnic Conflict in Tajikistan', p. 265; Schoeberlein-Engel, 'Conflicts in Tajikistan and Central Asia', p. 37; Roy, *The New Central Asia*, pp. 139–40. Juraeva stresses that Pamiris 'were also outraged by what they consider Kenjaev's dismissive remarks concerning their ethnic group'.

84 Mullojonov, 'The Islamic Clergy in Tajikistan Since the End of the Soviet Period', p. 240. See also: Kilavuz, *Understanding Violent Conflict*, p. 179.

85 Galina Gridneva, 'Pamir Highlanders Achieve New Status Compromise', *ITAR-Tass* (10 December 1992), *ITAR-Tass*, 0756 gmt (10 December 1991), in *SWB SU*, 1255 (14 December 1992), B/1.

86 Schoeberlein-Engel, 'Conflicts in Tajikistan and Central Asia', pp. 36–7; *Tajik Radio*, 1200 and 1700 gmt (31 March 1992), in *SWB SU* [Third Series], 1345 (2 April 1992), B/8.

87 Kilavuz, *Understanding Violent Conflict*, p. 151.

88 *Vechernii Dushanbe*, 1 April 1992.

89 Akiner, *Tajikistan*, p. 3. Akiner does not specify parties.

tactics were soon to be employed by the opposition at Shahidon Square. The opposition's initial demands escalated, and by mid April the opposition began to make increasingly radical demands, including the resignation of Nabiev.⁹⁰

The ability of the opposition to coordinate effectively in a unified manner against the government—in addition to being a by-product of the government attacking all elements of the opposition at once⁹¹—was, in the opinion of Kilavuz, thanks to the mediating efforts of Qozi Turajonzoda, 'who established links between formerly unrelated opposition groups'.⁹² The IRP, however, contributed the most to the demonstrations at Shahidon Square,⁹³ as this organisation had a strong network extending into many rural areas, unlike their allies. The IRP leadership was able to mobilise support through mullahs at mosques and collective farms, with the Turkmeniston farm—the home base for then IRP third-in-charge, Sayid Abdullo Nuri—mentioned most prominently.⁹⁴ While some demonstrators came to Shahidon willingly—and expressed their enthusiasm⁹⁵—IRP-affiliated mullahs coerced those less enthusiastic with threats of religious penalties.⁹⁶

Nabiev, Kenjaev and Dustov urgently summoned representatives of the power agencies in order to make an inventory of what forces they could count on. The results were not encouraging for them⁹⁷

90 Splidsboel-Hansen, 'The Outbreak and Settlement of Civil War', pp. 10–11; Kilavuz, *Understanding Violent Conflict*, pp. 151–2; *Tajik Radio*, 1200 and 1700 gmt (31 March 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1345 (2 April 1992), B/8; *Postfactum*, 0945 gmt (30 March 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1345 (2 April 1992), B/8. Demonstrators' demands included the dissolution of parliament, the resignation of Kenjaev, 'establishment of national *majlis*', resignation of the government and formation of a coalition government, land redistribution, 'distribution' of factories and plants to workers, a 50 per cent price cut on all goods produced in Tajikistan, removal of amendments to the press freedom law, an 'end to persecution of democratic forces', and so on. *Tajik Radio*, 1700 gmt (7 April 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1352 (10 April 1992), B/1.

91 In regards to the government attacking the entire opposition, see: Kilavuz, *Understanding Violent Conflict*, pp. 125–6, also p. 163.

92 Kilavuz, *Understanding Violent Conflict*, p. 167, also p. 168. Kilavuz writes: 'Turajonzoda had relations with both "official" and "unofficial" mullahs, and was the link between the nationalist and Islamic opposition. Because of his position, he was able to mediate among the different opposition groups. Turajonzoda was not a member of any political party. He did not join any of the parties within the united opposition. Rather, he played the role of major link uniting opposition groups.' Turajonzoda had played the role of a 'uniter' as early as the November 1991 elections, when he persuaded all the opposition parties to field a single candidate—Khudonazarov—against Nabiev. See: *ibid.*, p. 172.

93 Brown, 'Whither Tajikistan', p. 3.

94 Kilavuz, *Understanding Violent Conflict*, p. 179. See also: Anderson, *The International Politics of Central Asia*, p. 175. Kilavuz mentions the Qurghonteppa region as the primary source of IRP demonstrators, with Kulob a secondary mention.

95 See, for example: Gillian Tett, 'Poverty Brings Tajikistan's Political Tension to the Fore', *Financial Times* (28 April 1992), International p. 2; Whitlock, *Land Beyond the River*, p. 156.

96 For example, Whitlock and Kilavuz provide examples of demonstrators going to Shahidon or providing material support because mullahs had threatened to religiously annul their marriage and/or declare them a non-Muslim. See: Whitlock, *Land Beyond the River*, p. 156; Kilavuz, *Understanding Violent Conflict*, p. 193.

97 Kenjaev, *Tabadduloti Tojikiston*, Vol. 1, pp. 39–42.

- the state councillor, Major General Bahrom Rahmonov, disclosed that Nabiev's edict on the creation of a 700-strong national guard,⁹⁸ dated 22 December 1991, was never implemented, and that the National Guard servicemen who took an oath in January 1992 in front of Vice-President Dustov were in fact disguised Russian soldiers assembled to 'intimidate the opposition'
- the chairman of the Defence Committee, Major General F. Niyozov, reported that he had received 37 armoured personnel carriers (APCs) and other heavy equipment, which, however, could not be used for lack of trained personnel
- the military commissar of Tajikistan, Major General M. Mahmadjonov, said that he had prepared lists of 1000 officers and NCOs of the reserve ready to be drafted; further questioning revealed that those lists contained only names, without addresses, military qualifications and personal data, and, henceforth, were useless
- the deputy minister of interior, Major General A. Qahhorov, deplored the preponderance of Gharmis and Pamiris in the police force, who not only refrained from active action against the demonstrators but deserted to them in whole units, following Shodmon Yusuf's appeal
- the Committee for State Security (KGB) chairman, General A. Stroikin, proclaimed the neutrality of his officers in domestic strife and expressed the personal opinion that the opposition meeting was not a 'serious business' anyway
- the Border Troops commander (under CIS/Russian jurisdiction), General L. Martovitskii, said that his soldiers would not interfere in Tajikistan's domestic affairs under any circumstances
- the Dushanbe military commandant, also the commander of the Russian 201st Motorised Rifle Division (MRD), Colonel V. Zabolotny, explained that without explicit permission from the president of the Russian Federation, Boris Yeltsin, and the commander-in-chief of the CIS Armed Forces, Air Marshal E. Shaposhnikov, he could not help the government of Tajikistan in any way.

Having no desire to acquiesce to the protesters' demands and unable to resort to coercion, the government set up the Committee for Protection of Constitutional Order (CPCO) on 28 March 1992, which comprised activists from Leninobod, Kulob and Hisor. On 1 April 1992, they organised a mass meeting in support of President Nabiev and the Supreme Soviet. Thus, two permanent sit-ins came

⁹⁸ On 24 December 1991, President Nabiev decreed the creation of the 'Tajikistan National Guard', a unit that was to number 700 men and be subordinate directly to the president. Major General Bahrom Rahmonov (aged forty-two), the 'former chairman of the defence support organisation', was appointed commander, as well as being appointed Nabiev's 'defence, national security and law enforcement adviser'. The tasks of the National Guard were to 'ensure security of state installations and officials, maintain order in society, and take part in state ceremonies'. See: *Tass World Service*, 1333 gmt (24 December 1991), in *SWB SU*, 1266 (31 December 1991), B/15.

into existence in Dushanbe: one in Shahidon Square backed the opposition, and another in Ozodi Square, in front of the Supreme Soviet, supported the government.

In Shahidon Square slogans of political pluralism, freedom of the press and human rights may have been uttered, but, as a correspondent of the Russian reformist newspaper *Nezavisimaia gazeta* observed,

[T]he vast majority of the ‘democrats’—bearded people in peasant robes and skull-caps—had a weak understanding of political intricacies and quite often did not understand the very word ‘democracy,’ but during confidential conversations eagerly told the correspondent that they had been instructed to come to the meeting by a mullah.⁹⁹

The ‘defenders of the constitutional order’, assembled only a mile away, had been mobilised by traditional leaders in a similar fashion. In the village of Avangard in the Bokhtar *raion*, the chairman of the local soviet together with the village mullah explained to the residents in plain words that the government did not send grain to the village any longer because of ‘non-Muslim mullahs’, democrats and ‘*Rastokhezis*’; the CPT used to feed them, but once the ‘*Rastokhez* mullahs’ came to the fore, their dinner table went empty; Turajonzoda was the ‘puppet of Iranians’, but, *inshallah*, Nabiev assisted by Russian soldiers would dispose of him.¹⁰⁰ After this fiery pep talk, enthusiastic crowds boarded buses and lorries and motored to Dushanbe to join the Ozodi Square meeting. Demonstrators were soon able to affect government business in Dushanbe. In particular, the new session of the Tajik Supreme Soviet started on 11 April 1992 but immediately voted to suspend until the demonstration ended.¹⁰¹ By 12 April, Nabiev—increasingly frustrated with the negotiating tactics of the opposition—remarked on radio that their demands ‘are increasing day-by-day’.¹⁰²

On 12 April 1992, *Qozi* Akbar Turajonzoda and six Sufi leaders announced their support for the opposition. The number of protesters in Shahidon Square had swollen to 50 000 by then. The government was plunged into panic, and a split in the ruling coalition emerged. Two Kulobis who held a personal grudge against Nabiev, Davron Ashurov and Hikmatullo Nasriddinov, resigned from the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet. Akbar Mirzoev, on the pretext of illness, real or feigned, withdrew from the power struggle.¹⁰³ On 19 April, Nabiev gave demonstrators an ultimatum to leave by the next morning or security forces

99 *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 21 January 1993.

100 *Charoghi ruz*, No. 17 (38) (1992), p. 1.

101 *ITAR-Tass* (11 April 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1355 (14 April 1992), i.

102 Nabiev mentions the opposition leaders whom he held direct talks with as Himmatzoda (IRP), Usmon (IRP), Yusuf (DPT), Abdujabbor (Rastokhez) and Turajonzoda (Qazi Kalon). No mention is made of La’li Badakhshon. See: *Tajik Radio*, 1300 gmt (12 April 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1358 (17 April 1992), B/1.

103 Bushkov and Mikulskii, “‘Tadzhikskaiia revoliutsiia’”, p. 63.

would use 'more drastic measures';¹⁰⁴ however, no 'drastic measures' materialised, either because security forces were unwilling or because Nabiev was bluffing. Whatever the case, Nabiev would likely have appeared increasingly ineffective and weak.

On 20 April 1992, the thirteenth session of the Supreme Soviet commenced, which was supposed to find a solution to the political crisis. On 21 April the Supreme Soviet passed a vote of confidence in Kenjaev ('against his resignation'). In response, the same day, armed squads from the opposition occupied the parliament building and took some 20 people hostage, including 16 MPs and two deputy premiers. Safarali Kenjaev, either as a response to the taking of hostages or as a result of his inability to control the capital, resigned and opposition forces withdrew.¹⁰⁵ On the morning of 22 April, the hostages were released¹⁰⁶ and the opposition was granted many of their other demands,¹⁰⁷ besides just the resignation of Kenjaev. While these concessions ended the opposition's round of protests, they also re-initiated pro-government demonstrations, which began again on 24 April in Ozodi Square, where protesters—many of them Kulobis mobilised by the Kulobi mullah Haydar Sharifzoda and the Kulobi underworld figure Sangak Safarov—demanded Kenjaev's reinstatement, the removal of Turajonzoda as *Qozi* of Tajikistan and the rescinding of concessions granted to the opposition.¹⁰⁸

As a response to, or emboldened by, the Ozodi Square demonstrations, the government appointed Kenjaev to chair the State Security Committee (the KGB successor).¹⁰⁹ Kenjaev replaced Anatolii Stroikin, who was blamed by

104 *Interfax* (20 April 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1360 (21 April 1992), i.

105 Bushkov and Mikulskii, "'Tadzhikskaja revoliutsia'", p. 63; *ITAR-Tass* (22 April 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1362 (23 April 1992), i.

106 *ITAR-Tass* (22 April 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1362 (23 April 1992), i.

107 Tajik government and opposition leaders reached this comprehensive agreement: Kenjaev's resignation was confirmed, the law on 'rallies, meetings and gatherings' would be revoked, amendments to Article 104 of the criminal code adopted during the twelfth session would be revoked, a date for parliamentary elections would be set, five opposition members would be added to the Constitutional Commission, the president would pardon all participants at Shahidon, the arrest of Mayor Ikromov for bribery would be reviewed, the committee investigating Navjuvonov would report as soon as possible, and the Supreme Soviet would consider 'the issue of changing the Gornyy Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast into the Badakhshan Autonomous Republic'. In return the opposition would vacate Shahidon Square by 24 April and refrain from holding future rallies, except pre-election rallies, and observe the laws of the republic. See: *Tajik Radio*, 1200 gmt (22 April 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1362 (23 April 1992), B/2.

108 Mullojonov, 'The Islamic Clergy in Tajikistan Since the End of the Soviet Period', p. 241; Kilavuz, *Understanding Violent Conflict*, pp. 151–2, 179–80; *Postfactum*, 1219 gmt (25 April 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1365 (27 April 1992), B/3. *Postfactum* notes 500 people at Ozodi on the first night and several times more by the next day. Tett writes: '[Kenjaev's] well-organised supporters were brought by bus into the capital. They are bitterly opposed to the republic's powerful religious leader, Kazi Akbar Turajonzoda, and support Mullah Haidar Sharif, who is sympathetic to the government. Moreover, they believe that the opposition plans to create an Islamic government.' See: Tett, 'Poverty Brings Tajikistan's Political Tension to the Fore', p. 2. Gavhar Juraeva, an academic who was active in the opposition, accused Kenjaev of escalating the conflict by 'hiring mercenaries from Kulob' and transporting them to Ozodi Square. See: Juraeva, 'Ethnic Conflict in Tajikistan', p. 265.

109 Kilavuz, *Understanding Violent Conflict*, pp. 151–2.

vice-president, Narzullo Dustov, for not preventing the taking of deputies as hostages.¹¹⁰ Kenjaev's appointment resulted in the opposition restarting its demonstrations in Shahidon Square. There were now two very large, sustained demonstrations in the capital making demands from the government in opposition to each other.¹¹¹ By 29 April, when the Supreme Soviet finally met—and postponed the session the same day due to the lack of a sufficient number of deputies¹¹²—as many as 100 000 people were on the streets demonstrating. At the same time, a third demonstration with about 7000 people was initiated by a group of Dushanbe residents and tertiary students at Sadriddin Ayni Square, demanding an end to the first two demonstrations.¹¹³

On 30 April 1992, Nabiev introduced direct presidential rule in Tajikistan, but both the opposition and Nabiev's confederates ignored it. All elite factions hastily armed themselves, and their leaders negotiated directly, bypassing the president. Kenjaev and Dustov met with Turajonzoda, Khudonazarov held talks with Haydar Sharifzoda, and, generally, the political process in Tajikistan degenerated into a squabble amongst region-based strongmen. In Davlat Khudonazarov's words, 'the political antagonism was reflected externally through inertia (a red flag with hammer or sickle for the government, a tri-colour banner for the opposition), but it was regional antagonism that was rapidly gaining strength'.¹¹⁴ On 6 March 1992, Mirzo Samiev and Abdullo Ochilov, the only two Leninobodis in the DPT top leadership, left their party and joined Nabiev's camp.¹¹⁵ That same month the Kulob regional organisation abandoned the DPT. *Charoghi ruz*, the de facto publication of the 'liberal' opposition that used to preach national unity of the Tajiks, suddenly admitted that in Tajikistan

regionalism has never been a malaise, it is rather a social phenomenon that, to an extent, is a natural part of the national psyche of our people ... Politicians who understand the situation in the republic well have not criticised the rise of localistic organisations, they have come to head them.¹¹⁶

110 *Postfactum*, 1219 gmt (25 April 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1365 (27 April 1992), B/3.

111 Kilavuz, *Understanding Violent Conflict*, pp. 151–2.

112 *RIA*, 1507 gmt (29 April 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1369 (1 May 1992), B/2. The additional reason given for the postponement was that Nabiev and Turajonzoda were 'still discussing their problems'.

113 *Radio-1* (29 April 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1368 (30 April 1992), i. This estimate is according to the Supreme Soviet's official press service: *ITAR-Tass* (30 April 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1369 (1 May 1992), i. Panfilov describes the third demonstration as being composed mainly of neutral tertiary students from Dushanbe educational institutes. See: Oleg Panfilov, 'Tajikistan', *Nezavisimaia gazeta* (30 April 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1371 (4 May 1992), B/3; and Brown, 'Whither Tajikistan', p. 3. *Postfactum* provides smaller numbers: Ozodi Square on 29 April had 10 000 people while Shahidon Square had 35 000 (including 7000 white-bandana opposition 'guard members' surrounding the presidential palace). See: *Postfactum*, 0615 gmt (1 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1371 (4 May 1992), B/5–6.

114 Khudonazar, 'The Conflict in Tajikistan', p. 258.

115 In a televised statement, both anathematised the DPT's 'Bolshevism' and 'extremism', and warned that if it came to power, 'the best and honest cadres [that is, northerners] will be killed'. See: Usmon, *Soli Nabiev*, p. 29.

116 *Charoghi ruz*, No. 33 (54) (1992), p. 5.

Any constructive political dialogue between the government and opposition became virtually impossible, not least because of the weakness of the central authorities. Opposition leaders realised that they could gain more by exerting direct pressure on government structures.

The most alarming development in April 1992 was the rapid militarisation of the struggle for power: most political figures of any degree of prominence, including Kenjaev, Khudonazarov, Turajonzoda, Abdullojonov and even Qahhor Mahkamov, acquired private armed units.¹¹⁷ Political assassinations became a harsh reality. On 3 May 1992, the editor-in-chief of the pro-government newspaper *Sadoi mardum* and member of the Supreme Soviet, Murodullo Sheraliev, was gunned down. Four days later a popular radio journalist and DPT activist, Olim Zarobekov, was killed. Anarchy and violence were engulfing Dushanbe, and, as in February 1990, criminal structures made their entry to the political arena.

Organised Crime and Politics

In 1990, there were more than 1200 known criminal recidivists living in Tajikistan.¹¹⁸ Many of them formed gangs specialising in extortion, narcotics, smuggling and gambling. The number of these mafia-type entities rose from four in 1989 to 22 in 1992.¹¹⁹ The notorious gang of Rauf Soliev (a Samarkandi) that operated in Dushanbe consisted of several hundred well-armed people; it was alleged that the gang enjoyed the patronage of Tajikistan's procurator-general, Nurullo Khuvayduloev, and had taken an active part in the events of February 1990.¹²⁰ An important feature of organised crime in Tajikistan is its rootedness in traditional social institutions. A contemporary study showed that in the country 'a criminal group is frequently organised and maintained by ties of kinship amongst its members'.¹²¹ Quite often a criminal gang encompasses male

117 D. Mikulskii, 'Svidetelstvo voiny v Tadjikistane', in *Islam v Rossii i Srednei Azii*, eds Igor Ermakov and Dmitrii Mikulskii (Moscow: Lotus Foundation, 1993), pp. 253, 256.

118 *Kommunist Tadjikistana*, 5 April 1991.

119 Data disclosed by Dr Rahmatillo Zoirov during a seminar at the Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan, Dushanbe, 14 February 1995. They also constantly tried to perfect their structure and methods of operation: in every gang 'executive' groups (up to 30) committed crimes; the leader and his immediate entourage—the council—did not participate in concrete crimes, confining themselves to strategic planning; and the support unit tackled financial issues, recruited personnel and took care of internal and external security. See: V. A. Alexeev, I. N. Borisov and A. S. Emelianov, "'Organizovannaia prestupnost': kriminalizatsiia funktsii uchastnikov prestupnykh formirovaniy', *Sovetskoe gosudarstvo i pravo*, No. 10 (1991), pp. 67–8.

120 Mikulskii, 'Svidetelstvo voiny v Tadjikistane', pp. 254–5. In the autumn of 1991, Soliev became one of the field commanders of Kenjaev's People's Front of Tajikistan.

121 R. Zoyirov and S. Sharopov, 'Kriminologicheskaia kharakteristika i analiz tendentsii razvitiia organizovannoi korystnoi prestupnosti', in *Vlast', upravlenie, pravoporiadok, Vypusk I* (Dushanbe: Ikbol, 1995), p. 82.

youths from one *mahalla*,¹²² and, given the regionalistic patterns of settlement in Dushanbe and other cities, it is sensitive to issues of sub-ethnic rivalry. Soliev's gang was based in the capital's suburb Obdoron, inhabited primarily by Kulobis; his deputy, Yaqubjon Salimov, was a Kulobi, which may explain the gang's involvement in the anti-Mahkamov coup in 1990. On the other hand, Dushanbe's Ispechak and Shomansur quarters, populated by Gharmis, had their own mobsters.¹²³

On 29 April 1992, 13 criminal groupings that had assumed the collective name of Youths of Dushanbe City (YDC), mostly of Gharmi extraction, from Shomansur, Ispechak, Ovul, Qozikhon and Qarotegin Street, held a meeting in one of Dushanbe's squares where they supported the opposition's political demands¹²⁴ and demanded Nabiev's resignation.¹²⁵ Two days later armed units from Shomansur attacked the TV centre. They encountered no resistance from the 'neutral' police and handed control of the centre to the opposition.¹²⁶ As Aziz Niyazi has described the Islamist movement in Tajikistan, 'to say the least, the IRP turned into a regionalistic, monoethnic organisation that found itself associated with mafia and other corrupt groups'.¹²⁷ The same characterisation could have been applied to practically every political organisation, pro-government or opposition: 'each side's regionalist ties solidified in response to the security threat posed by the other side',¹²⁸ and political leaders were not fastidious in using the underworld elements with whom they were linked by business, conjugal and patrimonial ties. One of the founding fathers of Oshkoro in 1989 was sixty-one-year-old Sangak Safarov, who had spent 23 years in jail on various charges, including homicide.¹²⁹ His influence in the Kulob *oblast* was hard to overestimate. According to the region's chairman of the executive

122 In 1991, there were some 140 *mahalla*-based youth groupings 'with aggressive orientation' in Dushanbe, which often clashed in neutral zones such as Putovskii market in the centre of the city. Interview with the deputy minister of labour of the Republic of Tajikistan, Bekmahmad Qurbonov, Dushanbe, 18 March 1995.

123 The city's law enforcement agencies had even developed psychological profiles of 'Khujandi', 'Kulobi', 'Samarkandi', 'Shomansuri' and other criminals according to their local identification. See: Kenjaev, *Tabadduloti Tojikiston*, Vol. 1, p. 285.

124 Bushkov and Mikulskii, "'Tadzhikskaja revoliutsiia'", p. 63.

125 One of the orators proclaimed that 'these days only Mountain Tajiks are in all Dushanbe squares, and the government can play them against each other. In the Ozodi Square, Kulobis support Kenjaev, Nabiev and Saifulloev. [But t]hey have no relation to Kulobis ... Nabiev must pay for pitting Mountain Tajiks against one another. We have one issue today—Nabiev's resignation. We must drive him away from Tajikistan.' See: Usmon, *Soli Nabiev*, p. 64.

126 *Jumhuriyat*, 15 June 1992.

127 Niyazi, 'Tajikistan', p. 184.

128 Barnett R. Rubin, 'The Fragmentation of Tajikistan', *Survival*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (Winter 1993–94), p. 78.

129 Contrary to some speculation, Safarov was not a 'thief-in-law'—the highest informal rank in the Soviet underworld; he was a 'cormorant'—a lower rung, which, however, ensured his authority amongst criminal figures not only in Tajikistan but also elsewhere in Central Asia. See: Arkadii Dubnov, 'Katastrofa v Tadzhikistane, o kotoroi v Rossii pochti nichego ne znaiut', *Novoe vremia*, No. 4 (1993), p. 14.

committee, Qurbon Mirzoaliev, who became acquainted with Safarov in 1980, he was honoured to be addressed as 'brother' by *bobo* Sangak—then ostensibly an obscure bar owner.¹³⁰

Regional Nature of Political Competition and Protests

The counter-demonstrators, who set up close to the opposition demonstrators, were brought in mainly from Kulob, Hisor and Leninobod.¹³¹ Numerous writers focus on the prominent role of Kulobis at the counter-opposition demonstrations, some in very explicit regional terms. Roy, for example, writes that the 'Leninabadis then received back-up from the Kulabis',¹³² while Rubin notes that '[s]ince the Khujandis had no forces in the south to counter the mobilization of Garmis and Pamiris by the DPT and IRP, they called on the Kulabis'.¹³³ When, on 1 May 1992, Nabiev declared a state of emergency, he relied on men from Kulob to man his newly formed 'National Guard'.¹³⁴ Atkin focuses on one particular Kulobi—stressing that Nabiev relied on Sangak Safarov to lead the counter-demonstration at Ozodi Square.¹³⁵ Parviz Mullojonov also emphasises the presence of Kulobis, noting that earlier in April thousands of counter-demonstrators arrived in Dushanbe from Kulob with the assistance of Sangak Safarov and the Kulobi mullah Haydar Sharifzoda.¹³⁶ Kilavuz expands the geographical base of mobilisation and notes that Safarov was also able to bring demonstrators from the Qurghonteppa region,¹³⁷ presumably some of the many

130 Nozir Yodgori, *Saddi otash: Yoddosht, Khotira, Andesha* (Dushanbe: Firdavs, 1993), p. 82.

131 Markowitz, *Collapsed and Prebendal States in Post-Soviet Eurasia*, pp. 107–8. Roy portrays the regional origins of the protesters in a more comprehensive manner: 'It was enough to look at the out-of-town numberplates and the names on the placards to see that this was a localist mobilisation. Shahidan Square brought together Garmis from Karategin and Kurgan-Teppe, people from Ramit and Kafirnehan, Darwazis, Pamiris and people from Zarafshan (who came individually). To Liberty [Ozodi] Square, on the other hand, came people from Kulab, Leninabad, Hissar, Shahrinaw, Tursunzade, Lenin and Varzab.' See: Roy, *The New Central Asia*, p. 140. Kilavuz qualifies the presence of northerners at the protests: 'The Khujandi elite was not unified, and did not act as a group. Many of its members did not support Nabiev, come to the squares during the demonstrations, or become involved in the war.' See: Kilavuz, *Understanding Violent Conflict*, p. 185.

132 Roy, *The New Central Asia*, p. 140.

133 Rubin, 'Russian Hegemony and State Breakdown in the Periphery', p. 153.

134 Bess A. Brown, 'The Civil War in Tajikistan, 1992–1993', in *Tajikistan: The Trials of Independence*, eds Mohammad-Reza Djilili, Frederic Grare and Shirin Akiner (New York: St Martin's Press, 1997), p. 90; Rubin, 'Russian Hegemony and State Breakdown in the Periphery', p. 153.

135 Muriel Atkin, 'A President and His Rivals', in *Power and Change in Central Asia*, ed. Sally N. Cummings (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 102. Markowitz also writes that during the demonstrations Safarov emerged as a prominent leader of the pro-government forces. See: Markowitz, *Collapsed and Prebendal States in Post-Soviet Eurasia*, p. 107.

136 Mullojonov, 'The Islamic Clergy in Tajikistan Since the End of the Soviet Period', p. 241. See also: Brown, 'Whither Tajikistan', p. 3.

137 Kilavuz, *Understanding Violent Conflict*, pp. 179–80. This of course does not mean that the demonstrators from Qurghonteppa were not Kulobis, as plenty of Tajiks from the Kulob region were sent to the Vakhsh Valley

Kulobis living in Qurghonteppa. While some express puzzlement at the alliance between the incumbents and these particular Kulobis,¹³⁸ this arrangement with Kulobi powerbrokers was likely a continuation of the political arrangements leading up to November 1991, when Sangak Safarov and Akbar Mirzoev¹³⁹—a client of Nabiev’s and the chairman of the Kulob Province Executive Committee—mobilised support for Nabiev’s election campaign.¹⁴⁰

Whitlock, among many others, mentions that the ‘pro-government’ side did not organise demonstrations to challenge the opposition’s presence in the street until very late. In contrast, she notes the early opposition success in mobilising Pamiris and Gharmis.¹⁴¹ This successful mobilisation showed resilience over time, and as late as 30 April large vehicle convoys bound for Shahidon were leaving Gharmi and Pamiri areas of eastern Tajikistan.¹⁴² These anti-government demonstrators had one particular reason for feeling safe in Dushanbe. Schoeberlein-Engel writes that because most of the police in Dushanbe were Pamiris, ‘many in the city believed that this would deter Nabiev and his predominantly Leninabadi government from staging a violent crackdown’.¹⁴³ On 2 May, however, Nabiev circumvented the security forces and formed a ‘National Guard’ (also known as ‘Presidential Guard’) by distributing weapons to the counter-demonstrators while unnamed persons also distributed weapons to the demonstrators at Shahidon.¹⁴⁴ Schoeberlein-Engel explicitly labels the newly formed and armed

during the Soviet migration schemes.

138 For example: Said Akhmedov shares Aleksandra Lugovaya’s puzzlement over the Kulob-Leninobodi/Khujandi alliance. Akhmedov’s best guesses are that the population of Kulob was instilled with a ‘pro-Soviet mood’, fear of an Islamic state and the presence of ‘religious contradictions’ between Gharm/Qarotegin and Kulob, or the possibility that the savvy Khujandi leaders took advantage of Kulob’s ‘naivety’. See: Akhmedov, ‘Tajikistan II’, p. 174, citing Aleksandra Lugovaya, ‘Politicheskii krizis v Tadzshikistane byl neizbezhen’, in *Tadzshikistan v ogne* (Dushanbe: Irfon, 1993–94).

139 For his efforts, Mirzoev was rewarded with the position of chairman of the Council of Ministers. See: Kilavuz, *Understanding Violent Conflict*, p. 178.

140 Kilavuz, *Understanding Violent Conflict*, p. 178.

141 Whitlock, *Land Beyond the River*, p. 161. Whitlock points to one factor mentioned in a Russian newspaper (*Komsomolskaya pravda*, 22 May 1992) that explains why the opposition had the early success in mobilising their demonstrations, this being the ‘presence of a mighty idea in the minds of some, and its absence in that of others’. This quip may sound meaningless, but it can be elaborated upon using what is referred to in sociology and political science as ‘frames’. Framing theory is defined by M. N. Zald as ‘strategic framing of injustice and grievances, their causes, motivations, and associated templates for collective action’. See: M. N. Zald, ‘Culture, Ideology, and Strategic Framing’, in *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements. Political Opportunities, Mobilising Structures, and Cultural Framings*, eds D. McAdam, J. McCarthy and M. N. Zald (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 261. For an application of frames to Central Asia, see: Fumagalli, ‘Framing Ethnic Minority Mobilisation in Central Asia’. Alternatively, and more cynically, one could just posit an ‘offensive advantage’ on the part of the opposition. According to Flemming Splidsboel-Hansen, this included the fact that the opposition was initially ‘more determined to change the status quo than the pro-government side was on preserving it, and thus willing to take greater risks’. See: Splidsboel-Hansen, ‘The Outbreak and Settlement of Civil War’, pp. 10–12.

142 Panfilov reported that on 30 April a 100-vehicle convoy left Khorugh (Pamirs) while 30 vehicles left Tojikobod (upper Qarotegin/Gharm). See: Panfilov, ‘Tajikistan’.

143 Schoeberlein-Engel, ‘Conflicts in Tajikistan and Central Asia’, p. 37.

144 Markowitz, *Collapsed and Prebendal States in Post-Soviet Eurasia*, pp. 107–8. Markowitz does not name the source for the weapons at Shahidon.

National Guard as composed of out-of-town 'Kulobi demonstrators'.¹⁴⁵ After several days of clashes, with the state unable to control the violence, the counter-demonstrators retreated from Dushanbe. As a result, Nabiev wavered and entered into a power-sharing agreement with the opposition in the form of the Government of National Reconciliation (GNR), which included many Gharmis and Pamiris.¹⁴⁶

Protests Transitioning to Violence in 1992

With a majority of the opposition-aligned deputies absent, the Supreme Soviet voted on 30 April 1992 to confer special presidential powers upon Nabiev for the next six months. These powers included: control over the legislative, executive and judicial branches; the right to 'suspend' any political party or organisation; and the right to end rallies and demonstrations.¹⁴⁷ The opposition soon publicly restated its demand for the resignation of Nabiev at a 2 May 1992 press conference.¹⁴⁸ On 3 May, the Supreme Soviet reappointed Kenjaev as its chair (a position he would hold in addition to remaining chair of the National Security Committee), scheduled new *Qoziyot* elections for 14 May, and recommended that Turajonzoda be arrested. At the same time Nabiev decreed the creation of a 'national guard corps' (alternately 'President's Guards' or 'National Guards within the Presidency'; hereinafter 'National Guards') within two weeks. In response, Ozodi Square demonstrators, '[i]ntoxicated with [their] first major victory', demanded the repeal of all earlier concessions given to the opposition.¹⁴⁹ The time line for the creation of the National Guards was shortened drastically when, on the same day, the government armed anywhere from 400 to 3000 demonstrators at Ozodi Square. This armed unit—dominated by Kulobis—was to presumably report directly to Nabiev and Kenjaev.¹⁵⁰

On the night of 3–4 May, the Shahidon demonstrators attempted to enter the presidential palace, but were stopped by security forces. The Ozodi

145 Schoeberlein-Engel, 'Conflicts in Tajikistan and Central Asia', p. 38, citing Brown, 'Whither Tajikistan', pp. 1–6.

146 Markowitz, *Collapsed and Prebendal States in Post-Soviet Eurasia*, pp. 107–8.

147 *ITAR-Tass*, 1640 gmt (30 April 1992), and 0900 gmt (1 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1370 (2 May 1992), B/9.

148 *Postfactum*, 1154 gmt (2 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1371 (4 May 1992), B/4. Yusuf read the statement while Turajonzoda was in attendance.

149 *ITAR-Tass* (3 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1371 (4 May 1992), i; *Postfactum*, 1639 gmt (3 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1373 (6 May 1992), B/5; *Tajik Radio*, 0400 gmt (1 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1371 (4 May 1992), B/4-5. Procurator-general, Nurullo Khuvaydullov, declined to press charges against Turajonzoda, saying that there 'were no grounds to initiate criminal proceedings'. See: *Postfactum*, 1639 gmt (3 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1373 (6 May 1992), B/5.

150 Juraeva, 'Ethnic Conflict in Tajikistan', p. 266; *Postfactum*, 1154 gmt (2 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1371 (4 May 1992), B/4; Brown, 'Whither Tajikistan', p. 3. Juraeva claims 1700 weapons were handed out at Ozodi, while *Postfactum* provides a wide-ranging estimate for the number of National Guards at 400–3000. Brown gives 2 May as the day on which weapons were distributed.

demonstrators then tried to move on Shahidon Square, but were also stopped by security forces and turned back.¹⁵¹ On 5 May, a state of emergency signed by Nabiev was declared on radio. This included: a curfew from 9 pm to 5 am, demonstrations and strikes were prohibited, the activities of political parties, ‘popular movements’ and ‘other social organizations’ were banned, and the City of Dushanbe area of responsibility was to be put under the control of the military commissar of Tajikistan, Major General Mamadjonov.¹⁵² In response to a question about how the government would deal with some of the more ‘outrageous’ demands of the opposition, an aide to President Nabiev replied, ‘What measures were used in [the] Los Angeles [riots] last week?’¹⁵³

At this time (midday on 5 May) there were 100 000 demonstrators in Dushanbe. It was on this same day that the violent conflict started, but not in the city. Several people were killed in a shooting at a blockade outside the city in the Yovon district at the Lenin (Rudaki) district crossroads. Soon after, shooting started in the city.¹⁵⁴ Overnight, pro-opposition forces took control of the TV building, the presidential palace, the railway station, the main roads and, briefly, the airport.¹⁵⁵ By the morning of 6 May, all main routes into the city were blocked by ‘opposition patrols’ checking incoming and outgoing cars.¹⁵⁶ On the same day, some members of the Supreme Soviet attempted to flee the city, while opposition supporters took four deputies hostage.¹⁵⁷ As for Nabiev, he took refuge in the blockaded Supreme Soviet building.¹⁵⁸ During the previous night, ‘the power ministries—that is, those whose personnel had the right to carry arms—took sides’.¹⁵⁹ At 10 pm guardsmen at the Presidential Palace joined the demonstrators. At 2 am ‘a large number of Interior Ministry men—the police force—came over to the opposition, bringing with them their arsenal. The Security Ministry, still generally known as the KGB, stayed with the government.’¹⁶⁰ According to a report by the Henry Dunant Centre, the opposition forces rapidly gained momentum and resources:

151 *Interfax* (4 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1372 (5 May 1992), i.

152 *Tajik Radio*, 1712 gmt (5 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1375 (8 May 1992), C1/1. The top two in the Interior Ministry (Rajabov and Kaharov) were named his deputies.

153 Walter Ruby, ‘Tajik President Creates Guard to Crush Protests; Democratic and Muslim Opposition Denounce “Leninabad Mafia”’, *Christian Science Monitor* (6 May 1992).

154 This incident is further analysed in a later section in this chapter.

155 *Postfactum*, 1050 gmt (6 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1375 (8 May 1992), C1/3; *ITAR-Tass*, 0756 gmt (6 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1374 (7 May 1992), C2/1–2. The National Guards were able to quickly take back the airport. The opposition took over the TV broadcasts, but the signal was cut off outside the city and the government maintained control over radio. See: *Tajik Radio*, 1750 and 1900 gmt (5 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1375 (8 May 1992), C1/1.

156 *Postfactum*, 1628 gmt (6 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1375 (8 May 1992), C1/2. Opposition forces at roadblocks were stopping vehicles carrying food from going to Kulob.

157 *Channel 1 TV*[Moscow], 1100 gmt (6 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1375 (8 May 1992), C1/3.

158 *ITAR-Tass*, 0835 gmt (6 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1375 (8 May 1992).

159 Whitlock, *Land Beyond the River*, p. 163.

160 Whitlock, *Land Beyond the River*, p. 163. Whitlock notes that senior officers were non-Tajik, while one official told her that there were ‘more Islamic Party members than communists’ in the rank and file of the

If the opposition's arsenal was initially nothing more than a few hunting rifles and some Molotov cocktails, it quickly developed. For example, when they occupied the Presidential Palace, the opposition forces already had 250 automatic weapons and one tank. Also, on May 5, an entire OMON unit (Special Forces) of the Ministry of the Interior joined the opposition. This contributed 12 tanks, and 600 Kalashnikovs. Local police stations also quickly became a good source of weapon procurement.¹⁶¹

On 6 May, Major General Bahrom Rahmonov, an advisor to President Nabiev and the man picked to lead the National Guards, joined the opposition.¹⁶² The next day, the top two men in the Interior Ministry also joined the opposition. This was especially significant in the capital as the deputy leader in the ministry was the commandant of Dushanbe.¹⁶³

In response to the growing chaos, CIS military officers forcefully persuaded the government and opposition to compromise.¹⁶⁴ In particular, Colonel Viacheslav Zabolotny of the CIS 201st MRD forces—a Belorussian—demanded that the opposing sides meet, and threatened the leaders of both sides with arrest if they did not reach an agreement.¹⁶⁵ On the morning of 7 May, the preliminary agreement was announced on the radio. The initial protocols on the Government of National Reconciliation, which were signed by all the main government leaders—including Nabiev and Kenjaev—and opposition leaders plus Khudonazarov, included: bilateral disarmament, dissolution of the National Guards, the halting of all ongoing investigations, the removal of blockades from all buildings and facilities, no prohibitions on parties and organisations, dissolution of the Presidium and Presidential Council, the placing of the Committee for National Security and the Committee for Defence under the control of the GNR, and the banning of all further rallies, including the ending

KGB (Committee on National Security) in 1992. Tett also reports that forces of the Ministry of the Interior also joined the opposition. See: Gillian Tett, 'Tajikistan Opposition Militia Seizes Control of Capital', *Financial Times* (7 May 1992), p. 2.

161 Henry Dunant Centre, 'Humanitarian Engagement with Armed Groups', pp. 14–15. See also: Kathleen Collins, 'Tajikistan: Bad Peace Agreements and Prolonged Civil Conflict', in *From Promise to Practice: Strengthening UN Capacities for the Prevention of Violent Conflict*, eds Chandra Lekha Sriram and Karin Wermester (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2003), p. 276.

162 *Postfactum*, 1628 gmt (6 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1375 (8 May 1992), C1/2-3; *ITAR-Tass*, 0835 gmt (6 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1375 (8 May 1992), C1/4; *ITAR-Tass*, 1808 gmt (6 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1375 (8 May 1992), C1/4; *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report*, Vol. 1, No. 21 (22 May 1992), pp. 76–7. Zartman (*Political Transition in Central Asian Republics*, pp. 108–9) portrays General Rahmonov's move favourably: 'In one of many efforts to prevent conflict escalation, Nabiev's military advisor General Bahrom Rakhmonov went over to the side of the opposition and Nabiev's government temporarily collapsed.' Zartman cites Juraeva ('Ethnic Conflict in Tajikistan', p. 266); however, she merely states that he joined the opposition.

163 *Russia's Radio*, 0100 gmt (7 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1375 (8 May 1992), C1/5. The head of the ministry was Navjuvonov, and Major General Kakharov was the deputy.

164 Zartman, *Political Transition in Central Asian Republics*, pp. 108–9.

165 Michael Orr, 'The Russian Army and the War in Tajikistan', in *Tajikistan: The Trials of Independence*, eds Mohammad-Reza Djalili, Frederic Grare and Shirin Akiner (London: Curzon Press, 1998), p. 152.

of both demonstrations.¹⁶⁶ Immediately after the signing of the GNR agreement many of the pro-government demonstrators started to leave Ozodi.¹⁶⁷ Later in the day Nabiev decreed the end of the state of emergency and announced a plan for the disarmament process.¹⁶⁸ Nabiev had clearly lost, and on 7 May 1992 he signed a protocol accepting the opposition's demands, dismissing senior government figures, disbanding the National Guards and lifting the state of emergency. For two days it was not clear who controlled the situation in Dushanbe; opposition leaders announced the creation of the Supreme Consultative Council, but at the same time an armed group that had occupied Tajikistan's radio station, presumably the Youth of Dushanbe City, broadcast a statement on behalf of the 'Revolutionary Council of the Union of Progressive Forces' claiming to have taken over the state.¹⁶⁹ After a short period of confusion, the opposition chose to refrain from a blatant violation of constitutional norms and on 9 May made Nabiev sign a power-sharing agreement. The president ceded most of his powers to the cabinet, including control over personnel appointments, coercive structures and mass media. Fresh parliamentary elections were slated for December 1992.

Certain individuals seemed unhappy with—or perhaps even emboldened by—the government's concessions. One DPT member stated that 'we can't say that the victory is total and final ... The struggle is continuing. We have beheaded the dragon, but his poisonous tail and claws are still here.'¹⁷⁰ Meanwhile, many opposition demonstrators remained at Shahidon Square and demanded the resignation of Nabiev. By 10 May there were—with further negotiations ongoing—still thousands of demonstrators at Shahidon, amid a 'mood of irreconcilability'.¹⁷¹ The leaders of the DPT, La'li Badakhshon and Rastokhez called for an end to the Shahidon Square demonstrations. In fact, much of the top opposition leadership rejected the demand for Nabiev's immediate

166 *Tajik Radio*, 1015 gmt (7 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1376 (9 May 1992), C1/1.

167 *Radio-1* [Moscow], 1500 gmt (7 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1376 (9 May 1992), C1/3. The military from a 'local garrison' searched a column leaving for Kulob and confiscated weapons.

168 *Tajik Radio*, 1345 gmt (7 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1376 (9 May 1992), C1/2.

169 *Izvestiia*, 8 May 1992.

170 Larry Ryckman, 'Tajik President Appeals for Peace; Opponents Control Capital', *The Associated Press* (8 May 1992).

171 *ITAR-Tass*, 0917 gmt (10 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1377 (11 May 1992).

resignation for reasons of stability.¹⁷² One leader, the DPT's Shodmon Yusuf, called for Nabiev's resignation, but only once the situation had stabilised under a new government.¹⁷³

The Islamic opposition negotiated in a somewhat different style. In Dushanbe 'radical activists'¹⁷⁴ of the IRP continued their protests at Shahidon, demanding the removal of Nabiev and his cabinet, the dissolution of the Supreme Soviet and trials for the government leaders—demands that were not supported by IRP leader Himmatzoda.¹⁷⁵ On 7 May, Mullah Qiyomuddin, going by the title 'General Sayyid Qiyomuddin *Ghozi*', had led 10 000 protesters in a chant:¹⁷⁶

'What do you want?'
'Islam, Islam, Islam!'
'Do you want an Islamic state?'
'Yes, Yes, Yes!'

Qiyomuddin was one of the last hold-outs on the issue of Nabiev's continued leadership. On 12 May he bluntly announced that 'everyone responsible for the bloody events, first and foremost President Rakhmon Nabiyev, deserves a just punishment by law'.¹⁷⁷ Another of those who went against the top echelons of the opposition on the issue of Nabiev's potential removal was future IRP leader Abdullo Nuri. On 12 May he was quoted as saying that Nabiev 'must resign. After this bloodshed, he has no right to remain in power ... that is my last word'.¹⁷⁸ IRP deputy leader, Davlat Usmon, also denounced Nabiev and forcefully stated that the death of protesters who attempted to storm the

172 Correspondent Sergei Shatunov gave an explanation for the opposition leadership not wanting to remove Nabiev. Leaving Nabiev in office would: 1) preserve Nabiev's regional base of Leninobod as part of the republic, which is needed for its economy; 2) leave a familiar face for foreign affairs; and 3) leave a weakened and compliant leader in the presidency to the benefit of the opposition. See: *Channel 1 TV* [Moscow], 1800 gmt (10 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1378 (12 May 1992), C1/4. On 12 May, Turajonzoda said that Nabiev's resignation was not 'under consideration'. Turajonzoda remarked that '[h]e is behind the times, he has the old mentality, but the president is guarantor of the integrity of Tajikistan'. See: *ITAR-Tass*, 0903 gmt (12 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1379 (13 May 1992), C1/1. Turajonzoda stressed that it was a group decision by the opposition leadership. See: Bess Brown, 'Tajikistan: The Fall of Nabiev', *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report*, Vol. 1, No. 38 (25 September 1992), p. 13. See also: *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report*, Vol. 1, No. 21 (22 May 1992), pp. 76–7; Brown, 'Whither Tajikistan', p. 3. At a press conference, DPT leader Yusuf said that Nabiev must resign, but not until after the parliament was replaced and the new government was formed, since he guaranteed the republic's territorial integrity. See: *Interfax* (13 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1380 (14 May 1992), i.

173 *Interfax* (13 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1380 (14 May 1992), i.

174 Unnamed in the *Postfactum* citation below, but likely referring to Mullah/*Ishon* Qiyomiddin, 'an organizer of the opposition's national guard'. On 12 May, he said that Nabiev could not be part of the new government and called for him to be prosecuted. See: *ITAR-Tass*, 0903 gmt (12 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1379 (13 May 1992), C1/1.

175 *Postfactum*, 1545 gmt (10 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1378 (12 May 1992), C1/1-2.

176 Reuters, 'Tajikistan Opposition Takes Control; President Flees as City in Chaos', *The Globe and Mail* (8 May 1992).

177 *Interfax*, 0850 gmt (12 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1379 (13 May 1992), C1/1.

178 Reuters, 'President Keeps His Job as Tajikistan Creates Coalition', *The Globe and Mail* (12 May 1992).

KGB building ‘closes the door to negotiations’.¹⁷⁹ Of course, Usmon was at this time negotiating privately for the position of deputy prime minister. But even after this point Usmon maintained that ‘[o]ur main demand is the resignation of Nabiyev’.¹⁸⁰

On 11 May, after further negotiations mediated by Zabolotny, Nabiev signed another decree on the GNR coalition, with eight of 24 cabinet positions going to the opposition and Nabiev remaining in office. After the announcement an unstated number of the remaining protesters at Shahidon Square began to leave;¹⁸¹ however, some demonstrators stayed. On 13 May, with negotiations ongoing, the now opposition-controlled state TV channel urged demonstrators to stay in Shahidon Square for the next few days. Finally, on 14 May, the opposition demonstrators left Shahidon.¹⁸²

Some analysts make a note of the opposition receiving only one-third of cabinet positions, after remarking that the opposition had forcefully taken the capital. They frame the concessions as the opposition failing to make significant gains;¹⁸³ however, the GNR was in fact dominated by representatives of Gharm and Badakhshan, which is why its legitimacy was immediately rejected by Kulob and Leninobod.¹⁸⁴ The opposition gained more control over central decision-making than corresponded with one-third of the seats in the Cabinet. In many spheres, most importantly security, the opposition did in fact dominate, or at least make significant gains. In other cases the gains were made via the removal of pro-incumbent officials. Examples include the following.

179 Thomas Ginsberg, ‘Tajik President, Muslim Opposition Agree on Coalition Government’, *The Associated Press* (11 May 1992).

180 M. Warren, ‘Coalition Hopes Raised in Tajikistan’, *Herald Sun* (12 May 1992).

181 Whitlock, *Land Beyond the River*, p. 164; *ITAR-Tass*, 0600 gmt (11 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1378 (12 May 1992), C1/1; *Tajik Radio*, 1430 gmt (11 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1379 (13 May 1992), C1/1. Opposition cabinet portfolios included chair of the Defence Committee, chair of the State Radio and Television Committee, chairs of the Republican Bank, Sport and Tourism, the State Statistics Committee, and Minister of Education. According to Zabolotny, at the 11 May meeting, he said to Nabiev, Mirzoev and opposition leaders: ‘Authorized as the garrison’s commander I will arrest all of you, and no one will leave this study until you finally resolve all the disputable questions among yourself [sic].’ He said the agreement on the GNR was then reached. He also stressed his unit’s continued neutrality. Zabolotny then, according to his version, noted that talks continued on 12 May, this time without his presence. See: *Postfactum*, 1703 gmt (12 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1380 (14 May 1992), C1/3.

182 *Russia’s Radio*, 0000 gmt (13 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1380 (14 May 1992), C1/2; *Interfax*, 1553 gmt (14 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1382 (16 May 1992), C1/1.

183 Kilavuz, *Understanding Violent Conflict*, p. 152; Zartman, *Political Transition in Central Asian Republics*, pp. 108–9. Specifically, Zartman, in regards to the opposition, writes that ‘[t]his small coalition participation does not justify any claim that they “seized power”’. Others give a higher proportion for the opposition in the new cabinet: eight of 20 portfolios. See: Timur Kadyr, ‘Hot Spot: Powder Keg Under the Roof of the World’, *Megapolis-Express* (16 September 1992), p. 20, in *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*, Vol. XLIV, No. 37 (14 October 1992).

184 Nourzhanov, ‘Saviours of the Nation or Robber Barons’, pp. 111–12. Similarly, Kilavuz writes: ‘the local governments in Leninabad and Kulyab did not recognize Nabiev’s concessions, or the legitimacy of the new government.’ See: Kilavuz, *Understanding Violent Conflict*, p. 152.

- On 12 May, the government announced that elections for the head *Qozikalon* were cancelled, keeping safe the position of Turajonzoda—a man the counter-demonstrators had the most grievances with and who was arguably the most influential opposition member.¹⁸⁵
- On 12 May, after negotiations, Nabiev decreed that a *Majlis* (national assembly) would be formed. This 80-person assembly, which was to be split evenly between the government and opposition, was supposed to have functioned until new elections on 6 December 1992.¹⁸⁶
- On 13 May, Davlat Usmon, the deputy leader of the IRP, gained the position of deputy premier, as the deputy president position was abandoned. Usmon's duties required him to 'oversee' the National Security Committee (KGB), the Procuracy Office¹⁸⁷ and the Defence Committee. In addition, he 'would be responsible for the law enforcement bodies'.¹⁸⁸ Further areas of control included customs, archives, religious and regional policies.
- On 13 May, as part of the announcement of new cabinet positions, Navjuvonov regained the position of interior minister.¹⁸⁹
- Rastokhez leader, Mirbobo Mirrahim, took over state TV and radio, allowing the opposition to control the airwaves.¹⁹⁰
- Rezo Tursunov, recently appointed chair of the Committee for National Security (KGB), fled immediately after the GNR was announced.¹⁹¹

185 *Interfax*, 1616 gmt (12 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1380 (14 May 1992), C1/6. For example, see previous mentions of Turajonzoda in this section. For more extreme examples of anger against Turajonzoda, particularly a portrayal of him as the opposition mastermind, see: Khaidarov and Inomov, *Tajikistan*. For a more accessible source, see: Tett, 'Poverty Brings Tajikistan's Political Tension to the Fore'. As an example of Turajonzoda's power, by 7 May the opposition headquarters was stationed at the *Qoziyot* headquarters. See *ITAR-Tass*, 0750 gmt (7 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1375 (8 May 1992), C1/6.

186 *ITAR-Tass*, 1756 gmt (12 May 1992), and *Tajik Radio*, 1635 gmt (12 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1380 (14 May 1992), C1/1; *Interfax* (13 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1380 (14 May 1992), i; *Postfactum*, 2043 gmt (13 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1380 (14 May 1992), C1/2.

187 The Procuracy Office—or *Prokurator*—was an institution independent from local authorities that could initiate investigations and bring criminal charges against government officials. For an analysis of the procuracy in the late Soviet era, see: Gordon B. Smith, 'Procuracy, Citizens' Rights and Legal Reform', *Columbia Journal of Transnational Law*, Vol. 28 (1990); Gordon B. Smith, *The Soviet Procuracy and the Supervision of Administration* (Netherlands: Sijthoff & Noordhoff, 1978).

188 *Postfactum*, 2043 gmt (13 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1380 (14 May 1992), C1/2; *Interfax* (13 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1380 (14 May 1992), i.

189 *Tajik Radio*, 1430 gmt (11 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1379 (13 May 1992), C1/1. A day previously he was mentioned as the new minister. See: *Postfactum*, 1545 gmt (10 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1378 (12 May 1992), C1/2. The following day, Navjuvonov was not mentioned in the list of cabinet appointees; however, he was mentioned as head of the ministry later in the summer. See: *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report*, Vol. 1, No. 24 (28 August 1992).

190 *Tajik Radio*, 1430 gmt (11 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1379 (13 May 1992), C1/1.

191 *Russia's Radio*, 1900 gmt (12 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1380 (14 May 1992), C1/7; Aleksandr Karpov and Otakhon Latifi, 'Actions of Dushanbe Garrison Command Deemed Absolutely Correct', *Izvestiya* (13 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1380 (14 May 1992), C1/2-3. Specifically, Tursunov—after only a week in office—burned the documents on the February 1990 incident, when he was then deputy KGB leader. The replacement for Tursunov was A. Solibaev.

- On 13 May, the opposition announced that Kenjaev and the vice-president, Narzullo Dustov (a Kulobi), both fled the city after the GNR agreement.¹⁹²
- The Presidium of the Supreme Soviet decided to appoint Akbarsho Iskandarov, an ethnic Pamiri (but not an opposition member), to what had been Kenjaev's position: chair of the Supreme Soviet.¹⁹³
- Opposition members Sayfiddin Turaev, Akbar Turajonzoda and Asliddin Sohibnazarov were made members of the Supreme Soviet Presidium.
- A new constitution was to be drafted by July 1992 by a commission that included five representatives from each of the following organisations: the IRP, the DPT, Rastokhez, La'li Badakhshon and the *Qoziyot*.
- Opposition forces captured the main leaders of the counter-demonstrators, all of whom were Kulobis and at least one of whom was tortured for an extended period.¹⁹⁴
- Major General Bahrom Rahmonov—as well as many in the Interior Ministry—had joined the opposition. On 11 May, Rahmonov announced at a press conference that the armed forces of Tajikistan consisted wholly of those present at Shahidon Square.¹⁹⁵
- The armed (and unarmed) Kulobis at Ozodi Square had left Dushanbe defeated while opposition supporters celebrated.¹⁹⁶

Incendiary Rhetoric and Security Dilemmas

Throughout the protests both sides engaged in inflammatory rhetoric and the spreading of rumours.¹⁹⁷ Some accusations, however, were based on leaders'

192 *Postfactum*, 2043 gmt (13 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1380 (14 May 1992), C1/2; *Chanel 1 TV* [Moscow], 1400 gmt (14 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1382 (16 May 1992), C1/1. Kenjaev left Tajikistan for Uzbekistan and Dustov left to Kulob and then onwards to Khujand.

193 *Interfax*, 1855 gmt (13 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1380 (14 May 1992), C1/5. Atkin ('Tajikistan', p. 615) notes that Iskandarov, while a Pamiri, was actually an ally of Nabiev. Nevertheless, this still represents the loss of a strong pro-incumbent leader and his replacement with a weak one. 'Pro-government' forces in Kulob, Hisor and Leninobod were clearly not impressed by the fact that Nabiev and an ally retained control over the top two positions in government—evidenced by the fact that they rejected the authority of the central government and lost faith completely in Nabiev.

194 These three were Sangak Safarov, Mullah Sharifzoda and Rustam Abdurrahimov. The imprisonment lasted for five days and ended thanks to the intervention of Nabiev and/or Turajonzoda. See: Gretskey, 'Qadi Akbar Turajonzoda', p. 22; Khaidarov and Inomov, *Tajikistan*, p. 33.

195 *Tajik Radio*, 1850 gmt (11 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1380 (14 May 1992), C1/5.

196 For an example of early celebrations, see: *ITAR-Tass*, 0503 gmt (9 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1377 (11 May 1992), C1/1. Oleg Panfilov writes that the Kulobi Presidential Guards were defeated because of their shortage of weapons. See: Oleg Panfilov, 'Tajikistan: The Opposing Sides Open a Second Front', *Nezavisimaia Gazeta* (22 September 1992), p. 3, in *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*, Vol. XLIV, No. 38 (21 October 1992).

197 For example: IRP leaders blamed the United States—secretary of state, James Baker, in particular—for 'police rule and suppression of opposition'. *Postfactum*, 0945 gmt (30 March 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1345 (2 April 1992), B/9. On 7 April, DPT leader, Shodmon Yusuf, repeating a report by *Izvestia* from 3 April, claimed that 'Internal Troops of the Republic of Kazakhstan' had arrived in Dushanbe. *Kazakh Radio*, 0100 gmt (9 April 1992), and *Tajik Radio*, 1700 gmt (9 April 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1353 (11 April 1992), B/7. Abdullo Ochilov, a

actual statements, which were often hastily retracted. DPT leader Yusuf was especially guilty of this, demonstrated by his veiled threats against non-Tajik ethnicities¹⁹⁸ and his suggestion that Afghanistan may have a role to play in supporting the opposition.¹⁹⁹ Yusuf's position on Afghanistan was briefly shared by General Rahmonov, who then also retracted his statements.²⁰⁰ The likely force behind the retractions and apologies of various opposition figures was Turajonzoda, who would usually contradict the more extreme positions in the opposition and attempt to reassure the public.²⁰¹ The discourse on the role of Islam was also a destabilising factor in spring 1992. Statements on the opposition side concerning the establishment of an Islamic state had to be refuted, with Turajonzoda again having to get involved in moderating IRP statements.²⁰² As part of the GNR, the IRP 'had to tone down its fundamentalist slogans' as it

'leader of the pro-government rally', in a television interview, labelled the DPT and Rastokhez as 'terrorist organisations'. *RIA* (27 April 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1366 (28 April 1992), i. Oleg Panfilov reported that rumours that 'several thousand [Loqay Uzbek] horsemen ... supporters of the government, have set out for Dushanbe from Kulob are unconfirmed', and that, according to a 'reliable source', Haydar Sharifov (Sharifzoda), 'imam of the Kulyab mosque', has made a list of DPT and IRP members to be 'persecuted'—and 'one victim ... had his ears cut off'. He notes further that opposition members are getting 'their children out of the way, fearing for their lives'. Panfilov, 'Tajikistan'.

198 Yusuf, speaking of 'crude [Russian] interference in our affairs', said this in Russian on *Tajik Radio*: 'I want again to warn the cold leaders of the CIS that there are a large number of Russian speakers in the town ... I would absolutely and utterly not want, in the wake of events, this ... to weigh on inter-ethnic relations in the town.' *Tajik Radio*, 1635 gmt (10 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1378 (12 May 1992), C1/3. A representative for the Russian 'Migration Society' interpreted Yusuf's comments as meaning that minorities 'could well be used as hostages'. *Interfax*, 1315 gmt (9 June 1992), and *Radio Moscow*, 0700 gmt (10 June 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1405 (12 June 1992), B/6.

199 After Nabiev declared the state of emergency and armed the National Guards, DPT leader, Shodmon Yusuf, declared in a statement that the opposition 'had the right to ask' for help from neighbours, especially Afghanistan. He later appeared on TV and apologised and tried to reassure the public that this was not the case. See: Brown, 'Whither Tajikistan', p. 5. See also: *Postfactum*, 2043 gmt (13 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1380 (14 May 1992), C1/2. Perceptions of Afghan involvement at this early state were likely not helped by the fact that Afghan President Rabbani sent a telegram to Turajonzoda, saying that Afghanistan's leaders would protect him (*Postfactum* [2 May 1992], in *SWB SU*, 1371 [4 May 1992], i), nor by Yusuf's statement that *mujahideen* leader, Ahmad Shah Massoud, was a 'great son of the Tajik people' (*Postfactum*, 2043 gmt [13 May 1992], in *SWB SU*, 1380 [14 May 1992], C1/2).

200 Rahmonov initially said that assistance from Afghanistan would not be ruled out. A day later he announced that assistance from Iran and Afghanistan was 'ruled out, the more so—military assistance'. *Tajik Radio* (11 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1379 (13 May 1992), i; *Postfactum*, 1136 gmt (12 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1380 (14 May 1992), C1/4.

201 For example: Turajonzoda met with representatives of Dushanbe's Russian community to reassure them that no-one in Tajikistan would be allowed to express 'anti-Russian sentiments' or 'perpetrate anti-Russian actions'. See: *Russia's Radio*, 1900 gmt (12 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1380 (14 May 1992), C1/7. On Turajonzoda as a mediator, see: Kilavuz, *Understanding Violent Conflict*, pp. 167–8, 172.

202 IRP leader, Muhammad Sharif Himmatzoda, said 'that he will work for the creation of an Islamic republic in Tajikistan. However, he said that the question of changing the social structure of the state must be decided by the people, not at a demonstration.' See: *Interfax*, 1553 gmt (14 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1382 (16 May 1992), C1/1. Turajonzoda—not a member of the IRP at this time—provided an opposing view on the establishment of an Islamic government: 'Only in a democratic society can religion develop normally in a non-violent way, by means of freedom of choice. So we do not make it our aim to create, to organize in Tajikistan a theocratic state, a religious state. We are all for a secular society.' See: *Channel 1 TV* [Moscow], 1800 gmt (10 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1378 (12 May 1992), C1/4. Davlat Usmon, the vice-premier and deputy leader of the IRP, said in an interview that he 'shared the view' of Turajonzoda that 'the decades of communist rule have

was now a partner with Rastokhez and the DPT.²⁰³ The opposition also accused the pro-government demonstrators at Ozodi Square of being against Islam—accusations that the Supreme Soviet condemned as lies.²⁰⁴ Furthermore, both sides made threats of violence against the other.²⁰⁵

As early as the first half of April this type of rhetoric did not escape the notice of President Nabiev, who said in a radio address:

Today we have two alternatives. We can either listen to common sense or whip our horse of emotions ... At the meetings slogans have appeared which are of a provocative nature. The more we had hindered them the louder these slogans would have sounded. Those slogans from which comes the scent of war and blood cannot under any circumstance be connected to democracy.²⁰⁶

Neither side of the increasingly rancorous political conflict in the capital heeded Nabiev's warning. For example, *RIA* reported that 'government supporters in Ozodi Square had threatened to kill [Turajonzoda] ... And issued an ultimatum for the opposition to clear Shahidan square or they would empty it themselves'.²⁰⁷ Eventually even Nabiev joined the chorus of angry voices.²⁰⁸

killed the trust of many people in God, and they would apparently take more than a year to accept the idea of an Islamic republic on their own'. His statement, however, only qualifies the time line for the establishment of an Islamic state. See: *Interfax*, 1047 gmt (5 June 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1400 (6 June 1992), B/5.

203 Dudoignon, 'Political Parties and Forces in Tajikistan', p. 67.

204 According to unnamed sources, the following slogans were heard at Ozodi: 'Down with Islam', 'Down with democracy, which split the Soviet Union' and 'Long live Safarali Kenjaev'. *Postfactum*, 0615 gmt (1 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1371 (4 May 1992), B/6. In response, the Supreme Soviet issued a statement thanking demonstrators at Ozodi and condemning rumours spread by the opposition that Ozodi protestors are against 'Islam and the Shari'ah'. The statement stressed that Ozodi demonstrators were 'indeed Muslim believers'. *Tajik Radio*, 0800 gmt (4 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1372 (5 May 1992), B/7. See also: Olimova and Olimov, 'The Islamic Renaissance Party'.

205 Davlat Usmon of the IRP said that if war broke out 'the current government of Tajikistan will be wiped out'. *Interfax* (27 April 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1367 (29 April 1992), i. Also, Whitlock reported that '[o]ne government man initially in sympathy with the Shahidan group froze in horror when someone there yelled "Burn the communists' houses and let them suffocate in the smoke!" He was not alone in feeling that things had gone too far, and that people had begun to play dangerous parts.' See: Whitlock, *Land Beyond the River*, p. 161.

206 *Tajik Radio*, 1300 gmt (12 April 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1358 (17 April 1992), B/3.

207 *RIA* (27 April 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1367 (29 April 1992), ii. Also, Whitlock reported that '[s]ome Azadi demonstrators shouted wildly that Turajanzada was a criminal, and should be put on trial'. See: Whitlock, *Land Beyond the River*, p. 161.

208 At the beginning of May, the president addressed the Supreme Soviet with this statement: 'The tolerance exhibited by the government and the lengthy talks are aimed at one goal—to avert bloodshed ... I shall be frank with you. If we get away from slogans, the crux of the matter is as follows—the meeting in front of the Supreme Soviet building is a resolute protest of the people against the opposition meeting. It is a meeting in favour of a constitutional order and a law-based democratic state ... The Qoziyot has overtly become the headquarters of the [opposition] meeting. The IRP and qozi have become its leaders. They have lied to such an extent that they have begun to believe their own fibs. They frighten people by saying that the government will close mosques, burn the sacred books and destroy Muslims ... We have tolerated this so far. Tolerated it to a degree that astonished the world ... Let me repeat: our people are a peaceful people ... But we also should be aware of the fact that there are limits to any patience. We were patient when the opposition

One incident is credited as particularly reckless. This occurred when Mullah Qiyomiddin announced at Shahidon Square that opposition demonstrators were armed with 27 000 weapons,²⁰⁹ a move that opposition supporter Gavhar Juraeva argues was 'an attempt to forestall officially sanctioned violence against the opposition'.²¹⁰ On 24 April, the IRP chairman denied the rumours about 27 000 armed men, saying only that 'self-defence groups' had been formed.²¹¹ Sul-ton Hammad, a security adviser to the opposition, later said that '[i]t was a bold rather than a realistic number. But his declaration ignited rumours that both sides were arming their people, which forced each side to think about the need to actually arm their people.'²¹² Zartman labels this a 'classic security dilemma', in that he believes the mullah was attempting to deter a potential forceful government response to the opposition demonstrators.²¹³ Davlat Usmon, at the time the IRP leader, later explained what happened:

Before May 1992 we did not think of taking up arms. But, when on April 27–28 a rumour appeared that the government was preparing an armed militia we also started to act. We armed the first 40–50 people. All they had for weapons were one pistol, two grenades and 30–40 hunting rifles. We then started to prepare Molotov cocktails.²¹⁴

On 1 May 1992, Nabiev made the last desperate attempt to create a loyal military force behind the presidency. His Decree No. 76 provided for the formation of a Special Tasks Battalion (STB), also referred to as the National Guards, from volunteers in Ozodi Square.²¹⁵ Soon after, on 2 May, the demonstrators at Ozodi Square matched the opposition rhetoric on weapons when Mullah Haydar Sharifzoda called for the Ozodi crowd to be given weapons to defend against

took a group of parliamentarians and two Deputy Premiers hostage. We were patient even when for two and a half days officials of the President's Office and the Cabinet were held hostage ... Praised be our patience. But, perhaps, enough is enough. We respect the opposition. But it seems that we respect it too much, it has sat on our heads and continued to put forward demands. The respect must be mutual. The opposition does not respect us. This is its will. If so, we shall not respect it any longer ... Let it be known that I shall undertake all necessary measures to guarantee normalisation of the situation and people's security.' Source: *Vechernii Dushanbe*, 5 May 1992.

209 Henry Dunant Centre, 'Humanitarian Engagement with Armed Groups', p. 13. Qiyomiddin was also known as *Ishon Qiyomiddin*, *Qori Qiyomiddin Ghozi* and *Said Gaziev*.

210 Juraeva, 'Ethnic Conflict in Tajikistan', p. 266.

211 *RIA*, 1229 gmt (24 April 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1365 (27 April 1992), B/4. He also denied that the IRP had relations with Afghan *mujahideen*.

212 Henry Dunant Centre, 'Humanitarian Engagement with Armed Groups', p. 13.

213 Zartman, *Political Transition in Central Asian Republics*, pp. 107–8. Zartman also conveys the opposition's talking points, writing that 'Kenjaev ordered a few public murders and violence escalated. Pamiris, a CIS officer and some journalists were shot.'

214 Henry Dunant Centre, 'Humanitarian Engagement with Armed Groups', p. 13. Usmon continues: 'Before the attack on the Presidential Palace, during the night from May 4, when two officers of the government forces came to the demonstration, I asked one of them: "Major, do you see a war?" and I asked the demonstrators to show their weapons. They showed bottles with inflammable oil. There were about 1500–2000 bottles.'

215 Dustov, *Zakhm bar jismi vatan*, p. 239.

opposition demonstrators.²¹⁶ A while later the CIS garrison commander in Dushanbe had to deny Turajonzoda's allegation that a CIS armoury in Kulob had lost its weapons.²¹⁷ On 3 May the security dilemma was in full effect as the government distributed as many as 1700 assault rifles to pro-government demonstrators at Ozodi Square.²¹⁸ In response, firearms were issued to the Shahidon Square militia, headed by 'people's General' Mullah Qiyomiddin from Qurghonteppea,²¹⁹ who, with active cooperation from the head of the State Automobile Inspectorate, Colonel Habib Sanginov, cut the roads leading from Kulob to Dushanbe. Opposition commanders reached a 'gentlemen's agreement' with police authorities in Kofarnihon whereby the latter surrendered weapons and vehicles to Qiyomiddin's forces.²²⁰

The Outbreak of Fighting in Dushanbe

Both the police and the military present in Dushanbe made claims of neutrality. Colonel Zabolotny, the head of the CIS 201st MRD, said that his unit would only act on orders of the top CIS commander and that his unit—in which only officers and warrant officers were armed—was 'adhering strictly to a policy of neutrality'.²²¹ On the police side, a Slav commander in OMON—a special police unit within the Interior Ministry—announced on 6 May that OMON units would be maintaining neutrality, only guarding their locations and patrolling the city. On the same day, however, they did repel an attempt by the opposition to take over a local radio station.²²² And, as earlier mentioned, one OMON unit had already joined the opposition.

216 *Interfax*, 1246 gmt (2 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1372 (5 May 1992), B/9.

217 *ITAR-Tass*, 0750 gmt (3 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1372 (5 May 1992), B/9. Commander Zabolotny said unsuccessful attempts by unknown persons had been made to bribe for or steal weapons.

218 Juraeva, 'Ethnic Conflict in Tajikistan', p. 266; Dustov, *Zakhm bar jismi vatan*, p. 239.

219 The quantity and source of this weaponry are not clear. One author has written about a truckload of submachine guns, 'not less than 5–6000', delivered from the *Qoziyot*. Usmon, *Soli Nabiev*, p. 73. This information could not be confirmed. Earlier Qiyomuddin made an interesting statement: 'We have armed groups. So far 27 thousand have signed up ... We are able to arm them all. We have very strong ties with our mojahed brothers—Ahmad Shah Mas'ud, Burhonuddin Rabbani and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.' See: *Sadoi mardum*, 25 April 1992. Qiyomuddin was renowned for his unsubstantiated albeit eloquent utterances (Turajonzoda once called him Dr Goebbels of the Tajik people).

220 Kenjaev, *Tabadduloti Tojikiston*, Vol. 1, p. 68. Kenjaev claims that 275 machine guns, 180 pistols and 10 vehicles were provided.

221 *ITAR-Tass*, 0750 gmt (3 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1372 (5 May 1992), B/9; *Postfactum*, 1628 gmt (6 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1375 (8 May 1992), C1/2.

222 *Channel 1 TV*[Moscow], 1100 gmt (6 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1375 (8 May 1992), C1/4; *ITAR-Tass*, 1808 gmt (6 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1375 (8 May 1992), C1/4; *Interfax*, 1740 gmt (6 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1375 (8 May 1992), C1/5. The commander's name was Sergei Vasilenko

As noted above—and aside from earlier minor incidents²²³—fighting started on 5 May in the outskirts of Dushanbe. This date can be regarded as the beginning of the civil war in Tajikistan. A shoot-out occurred between drivers delivering supplies to Ozodi Square from Kulob and opposition forces at a roadblock to the south of Dushanbe, with alternative versions of events blaming either side.²²⁴ The fighting then spread overnight, with shooting between armed opposition forces and National Guards.²²⁵ The violence continued throughout the next day, including deaths at Ozodi.²²⁶ On the same day (6 May), the security forces offered no resistance as the opposition demonstrators—now in possession of Interior Ministry weapons and armoured vehicles—took over the presidential palace and airport.²²⁷

As mentioned above, on 5–6 May, Major General Bahrom Rahmonov joined the opposition. Rahmonov, an ethnic Uzbek who was initially appointed to head the National Guards, switched to the opposition side. Having declared himself a grandson of Sufi *sheikh* Abdurahmon from Qarotegin (Gharm), he defected to the opposition with seven APCs and 450 firearms,²²⁸ and was appointed chief of staff of Mullah Qiyomiddin's militia, which by then had also named itself the National Guard (both sides were calling their units 'National Guards', or some variation thereof). The next day the opposition National Guards took control of Dushanbe's key facilities, including the presidential palace, the airport, bus terminals and the radio committee.²²⁹ It soon became clear, however, that Rahmonov had brought little human resources to the opposition. Rahmonov—promoted to chair the National Defence Committee under the GNR—admitted as

223 For example, according to an opposition spokesman, unnamed authorities arrested two young Kulobis for an attempted arson attack at Turajonzoda's house. See: Panfilov, 'Tajikistan'. Also, the opposition displayed at a press conference a year 11 student from Kulob who admitted to being paid to attempt to throw a grenade into the Shahidon Square crowd. See: *Postfactum*, 1154 gmt (2 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1371 (4 May 1992), B/4.

224 These sources state that the National Guards shot at opposition supporters who were attempting to block Kulobis from entering Dushanbe: *Channel 1 TV* [Moscow], 1700 gmt (5 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1374 (7 May 1992), C2/1; *Postfactum*, 1818 gmt (5 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1374 (7 May 1992), C2/1; *ITAR-Tass*, 0765 gmt (6 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1374 (7 May 1992), C2/1-2; *Postfactum*, 1628 gmt (6 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1375 (8 May 1992), C1/2. On the other side, Whitlock writes that the first instance of violent conflict happened as a convoy of counter-demonstrators was arriving in Dushanbe from Kulob. In her version, unknown persons fired on the convoy, an incident that the opposition leaders maintain did not involve their supporters. See: Whitlock, *Land Beyond the River*, p. 161. See also: *Charoghi ruz*, No. 20 (41) (1992), p. 3.

225 *ITAR-Tass*, 1808 gmt (6 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1375 (8 May 1992), C1/4; *Postfactum*, 1628 gmt (6 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1375 (8 May 1992), C1/2.

226 On 6 May, unknown people threw a grenade into Ozodi Square from an ambulance and then shooting started. During the fighting unknown shooters killed a Supreme Soviet deputy at Ozodi Square on the stairs of the Supreme Soviet. The deputy was Nurullo Sherahiev, the editor of the *Sado-yi Mardum* (*Golos Naroda*) newspaper. See: *Postfactum*, 1628 gmt (6 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1375 (8 May 1992), C1/2; *Postfactum*, 1539 gmt (7 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1376 (9 May 1992), C1/4; *Russia's Radio*, 0800 gmt (7 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1376 (9 May 1992), C1/3.

227 *Postfactum*, 1628 gmt (6 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1375 (8 May 1992); Whitlock, *Land Beyond the River*, p. 163.

228 Abdulov, *Rohi behbud*, p. 57.

229 *Adolat*, No. 20 (32) (1992), p. 3.

much at a press conference on 11 May. While he spoke forcefully (for example, ‘we must raise the people to fight against all the filth which surrounds us’), when asked about manpower he gave an honest answer:

Q: [W]hat forces do the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Tajikistan have at its disposal at present and what do you have under your command at the moment?

A: I can say unambiguously that at present the armed forces of the Republic of Tajikistan consist of all the people present here in the [Shahidon] square at the moment. I can’t say more than that just now.²³⁰

Rahmonov, while having had good relations with the opposition and local journalists,²³¹ unsurprisingly admitted that relations between Nabiev and himself were poor.²³²

One media outlet reported that demonstrators at Ozodi started to leave the city on 7 May immediately after the announcement of the preliminary GNR agreement was announced.²³³ While a ‘deal’ may have been reached—in Whitlock’s version—it clearly did not apply to the Kulobi leaders at Ozodi, several of whom were imprisoned and tortured by the opposition.²³⁴ The meeting in Ozodi Square was terminated; its Kulobi participants retreated to their home region, carrying hundreds of arms received for the National Guards. At a higher level, Narzullo Dustov fled to Kulob, Safarali Kenjaev escaped to Uzbekistan, and Otakhon Saifulloev and other highly placed Leninobodis fled to Khujand.²³⁵ By late in the day on 7 May—with the pro-government forces at Ozodi defeated and having left the square—the only ‘centre of power’ not controlled by the opposition was the National Security Committee (KGB) building, where Nabiev was being sheltered by the CIS 201st MRD.²³⁶

230 *Tajik Radio*, 1850 gmt (11 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1380 (14 May 1992), C1/5.

231 An undetermined number of journalists applauded Rahmonov at a press conference after one reporter used his/her question to thank him. A second questioner, from *TajikFilm*, then thanked him profusely. *Tajik Radio*, 1850 gmt (11 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1380 (14 May 1992), C1/5. In their enthusiasm, unnamed opposition leaders declared Rahmonov the ‘general of the people’. *Postfactum*, 1628 gmt (6 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1375 (8 May 1992), C1/3.

232 *Postfactum* (12 May 1992), and *Russian TV*, 1900 gmt (12 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1380 (14 May 1992), C1/5-6.

233 *Radio-1* [Moscow], 1500 gmt (7 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1376 (9 May 1992), C1/3. Whitlock, however, describes what sounds more like a negotiated military retreat.

234 These three were Sangak Safarov, Mullah Sharifzoda and Rustam Abdurrahimov. The imprisonment lasted for five days and ended thanks to the intervention of Nabiev and/or Turajonzoda. See: Gretskey, ‘Qadi Akbar Turajonzoda’, p. 22; Khaidarov and Inomov, *Tajikistan*, p. 33.

235 *Adolat*, No. 20 (32) (1992), p. 3.

236 *Russia’s Radio*, 0800 gmt (7 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1376 (9 May 1992), C1/3; Whitlock, *Land Beyond the River*, p. 163.

By the night of 8–9 May, the city was mostly calm, with APCs flying green flags driving through the city and opposition supporters celebrating.²³⁷ Violent conflict restarted, however, on 10 May when opposition supporters surrounded the National Security Committee building—where President Nabiev was taking refuge. In the standoff and resulting violence, as many as 10 people in the opposition crowd were killed.²³⁸ The opposing sides assigned blame in irreconcilable narratives, with each side the villain in the other's version.²³⁹ After this incident—with as many as more than 100 deaths²⁴⁰ in Dushanbe over five days—the demonstrators, in Kilavuz's words, 'returned to their hometowns, at which point fights began in these regions'.²⁴¹ By mid May the violence in the capital ceased;²⁴² however, this was not to last for long.

* * *

In the twilight of the Soviet era, the pattern of escalating political competition in Tajikistan became increasingly based on regional affiliation. The relatively

237 *ITAR-Tass*, 0503 gmt (9 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1377 (11 May 1992), C1/1.

238 *Tajik Radio*, 0400 gmt (11 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1378 (12 May 1992), C1/4-5; *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report*, Vol. 1, No. 21 (22 May 1992), pp. 76–7; Whitlock, *Land Beyond the River*, p. 163.

239 *Tajik Radio*, now under opposition control, maintained that the crowds outside were unarmed, and blamed the 'barbaric and inhumane action on the part of the KGB forces'. See: *Tajik Radio*, 0400 gmt (11 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, /1378 (12 May 1992), C1/4-5. *Tajik Radio* makes no mention of any attempt to enter the building on the part of the crowd, which *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* reports. See: *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report*, Vol. 1, No. 21 (22 May 1992), pp. 76–7. An anonymous KGB officer provides another version, saying that three people were killed when armed IRP gunmen followed by protesters approached the building. He further claims that two APCs and armed gunmen opened fire on the building, which housed the KGB and the Interior Ministry. See: *RIA*, 1733 gmt (10 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1378 (12 May 1992), C1/5. Local witnesses of unknown sympathies said that a group approached the building escorted by 10 OMON troops with a white flag and a list of demands to convey, and that people inside the building opened fire. See: *RIA*, 1917 gmt (10 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1378 (12 May 1992), C1/5. An OMON commander said that he was tasked to stop demonstrators advancing, but that they were unarmed from his perspective; however, unknown shooters shot him in the leg. See: *Russian TV*, 1000 gmt (11 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1379 (13 May 1992), C1/2-3. Major General Martovitskiy, head of the local branch of the Central Asian Border District—whose headquarters was housed inside the building—said that demonstrators were asked to leave but they refused. The OMON fired warning shots and someone in the crowd fired back. He also mentions that APCs from the garrison (it's not clear if it was the 201st or the Border District garrison) then showed up. See: *Russian TV*, 1000 gmt (11 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1379 (13 May 1992), C1/2-3; *Interfax*, 0850 gmt (12 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1379 (13 May 1992), C1/3.

240 On 11 May, *Tajik Radio* reported a total of 74 deaths in Dushanbe. See: *Tajik Radio*, 0800 gmt (11 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1378 (12 May 1992), C1/4. Later, *Charoghi ruz* reported that 108 people perished, 233 were wounded and 104 were reported missing as a result of skirmishes in the capital city. See: *Charoghi ruz*, No. 20 (41) (1992), p. 3. For earlier tallies, see: *Radio-1* [Moscow], 1500 gmt (7 May 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1376 (9 May 1992), C1/3; *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report*, Vol. 1, No. 21 (22 May 1992), pp. 76–7. The exact count could be complicated since, as noted earlier by a police spokesman, locals might bury their deceased without informing the authorities. See: John-Thor Dahlburg, 'Dissidents Rout Tajikistan's Hard-Line Leader; Central Asia', *Los Angeles Times* (7 May 1992), p. 23.

241 Kilavuz, *Understanding Violent Conflict*, p. 152.

242 Aleksandr Karpov, 'Tajikistan: There Was Shooting in the Capital, and Now There's Shooting in the Provinces', *Izvestia* (11 June 1992), p. 2, in *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*, Vol. XLIV, No. 23 (8 July 1992).

open political and social environments allowed for groups and individuals to mobilise and demand changes to the structure of the state and society—whether through elections, bureaucratic appointments or large demonstrations in the capital. Regional elites who were Gharimi and Pamiri were especially likely to back Gorbachev’s reforms and, later, the Tajik opposition parties against the northern elites—and their secondary allies from Kulob and Hisor—who dominated the central government. At stake for regional elites were not just powerful positions in the capital, but also local administrative and collective farm positions that involved the distribution of and control over local economic resources. In Qurghonteppa this resulted in competition between Gharimi Tajiks who backed the opposition and Kulobi Tajiks who backed the government and worked against the reforms.

The use of mass demonstrations in the capital, and the accompanying threats of violence, brought the political competition into the streets and increasingly into the hands of reckless individuals who were prepared for the use of force. By the time the government weakened and violent conflict started in May 1992, the only willing and able factions were the Gharimi Tajik-dominated IRP and their Pamiri allies in the security forces on one side and the Kulobi and Hisor-based actors on the other. While at this time there were still numerous exceptions to the rule of region of origin determining political loyalty, it is clear that the factions had a strong regional base and composition, especially in regards to those in leadership positions. This regional factor was to increase steadily as the level of violence increased throughout southern Tajikistan in the summer and autumn of 1992.