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The Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan A Historical Analysis

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By Lea Perekrest

TAJIKISTAN: COUNTRY OVERVIEW

Capital: Dushanbe

Population: 8.2 million

Area: 143,199 sq. km

Major Languages: Tajik, Uzbek, Russian

GDP: \$23.3 billion

Independence: 9 September 1991 (from Soviet rule)

Chief of State: President Emomali Rahmonov (since 1994)

Ethnic Makeup: Tajik (84.2%), Uzbek (13.8%) and others, including Russians, Kyrgyz, Turkmen, etc. (2%)¹



Religious Overview: More than 90% of Tajikistan's population is Muslim, most of whom practice Sunni Islam in the Hanafi school of thought, and about four percent of whom are Ismaili Shia. Most of the estimated 150,000 Christians in Tajikistan are Russian Orthodox, although there are also Baptists, Roman Catholics, Adventists, Lutherans, Korean Protestants and small numbers of Baha'is, Hare Krishnas, Jehovah's Witnesses and Jews.²

Economic Overview: In 2015 Tajikistan's GDP was \$23.3 billion³, the lowest per capita GDP of the fifteen former Soviet Republics. To this day, Tajikistan's economy continues to suffer from the 1992-1997 Civil War. More than one million Tajik citizens live abroad, and remittances are equivalent to approximately 50% of the country's GDP. Other sources of revenue come from mineral extraction, metals processing, and agricultural products. Tajikistan's largest export partners are Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan; their largest import partners are China, Russia and Kazakhstan. It is also reported that revenue from narcotics transiting in the country is equivalent to 30-50% of the GDP.⁴

Historical Control:⁵

13th Century: Tajikistan, along with the rest of Central Asia, is taken over by Genghis Khan and becomes a part of the Mongol Empire.

1860-1900: Northern Tajikistan comes under Tsarist Russian rule while the south is annexed by the Emirate of Bukhara.

1921: Northern Tajikistan becomes part of the Bolshevik-designated Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (along with Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and parts of Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan). In 1929, this section of Tajikistan becomes a Soviet Socialist Republic.

1991: The Supreme Soviet declares Tajikistan independent from the Soviet Union.

¹ CIA World Factbook. "Tajikistan".

² USCIRF "Tajikistan". *Annual Report 2015* Page 121.

³ Amount in 2015 US dollars.

⁴ CIA World Factbook. "Tajikistan".

⁵ BBC Monitoring. "Tajikistan Country Profile".

The Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan

By: Lea Perekrests

Abstract: In August of 2015, the Tajik government, headed by President Emomali Rahmonov, declared the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan a terrorist organization. As a result, all party activities have been criminalized, and members and leaders have been subject to arrest. The purpose of this work is to outline the history and to analyze the relations between the Tajik government and the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan.

The Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT), also known as the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan, or in Persian as, *Hizbi Nahzati Islomii Tojikiston*, was founded by young radicals from the Kurgan-Tyube region in southwest Tajikistan. Created in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the IRPT was established in an attempt to construct a new Tajik state based on ideals of democracy and Islam.

Since the early 1990s, the IRPT has served as one of the main opposition parties. It was highly active in the Tajik civil war from 1992-1997 and has remained in the political limelight ever since, being met with waves of government-enforced oppression and periods of liberation. Most recently, in August of 2015, the government cracked down on the IRPT and banned the party altogether, arresting many members and leaders. In order to understand and analyze the recent actions of the IRPT and the Tajik government, it is necessary to look back at the history of the region since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Muslims Under Soviet Rule

In a Soviet climate where *glasnost* and *perestroika* thrived, political Islamic activities were severely muted. In June 1990 in the Russian city of Astrakhan, the All-Union Islamic Renaissance Party was created as a platform of unity for all Muslims in the Soviet Union. The leaders were mainly Tatars or from the Northern Caucasus.⁶ Broadcasting itself as a liberal democratic movement in the USSR, its political program stated its intention to operate in accordance with the Soviet constitution; the party pledged to not oppose the existence of the Soviet Union.⁷

The group condemned terrorism, discrimination, and extremism, and called for a democratic society in which people could choose the forms of administration that they found fitting with their traditions and religious values. The group also advocated for full transparency (*glasnost*) and accessibility to information regarding politics, demographics, ecological subjects, and economics. This openness was to include objectivity of the media. The first publications of the All-Union IRP included the party program and charter, which highlighted respect for equality of believers and non-believers. The party supported the USSR and sought to apply Gorbachev's political program for universal principles to the country's Muslim community. The dichotomy between the USSR and the 'Western world' also aligned with the party's agenda; some members went as far as to deem that Islam promotes equality and fairness more so than European models

⁶ Roy. Page 1.

⁷ Ibid. Page 3.

of democracy, and expressed the incompatibility of the traditional and political norms of Islam and European democracy.⁸

The All-Union IRP claimed an inherently Islamic nature, for its discourse and terminology relied on their defined Islamic ideals and vocabulary. Labeling itself a *ijtema'i wa siyasi* (social and political organisation), the party applied Islamic values to political and economic frameworks. It called for proselytizing work among Muslims and Christians (*dawat*), high-level Islamic education systems, an Islamic social justice based on alms giving (*zakat*) and voluntary donations (*sadaqat*), it also criticized the clergy for its lack of militancy. When it came to the foreign policy goals of the All-Union IRP, it largely remained vague and cautious, claiming to respect and recognize all international agreements that are not against religion.

The Party established representative branches in the caucuses and regions of the USSR, and the official Soviet local governments had the power to accept or deny the official registration of the All-Union IRP branches. While the Moscow branch had no trouble registering, the branches in the Central Asian regions had difficulties. Laws were passed in almost all of the Central Asian republics to ban political activities that were made in the name of Islam; in Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan the party was banned immediately. The All-Union IRP was therefore often adopted underground, which was the case in Tajikistan. The branch sprouted in the late 1970s when it was supported by an underground youth organization led by Said Abdullo Nuri.⁹

When the Soviet Union collapsed, these branches for the most part divided even further, developing specific doctrines and goals based on their specific contexts.

The Foundation of the IRPT

Despite their outlaw in Tajikistan, the IRPT held its inaugural conference in 1990 in a mosque in Chortut village. During this meeting the group declared itself the Tajik branch of the All-Union IRP (which would eventually become the largest IRP branch). This illegal event resulted in fines for the organisers of the meeting.¹⁰

When the Soviet Union crumbled, the group was granted official recognition by the newly independent Tajik state in November 1991.¹¹ From 1990-1992, Muslim organizations from all over the world became engaged in Central Asia, pouring in money to foster an Islamic revival in the newly liberated populations. Divisions in the reactions to this influx of 'Islamic' money and materials triggered competition and disagreements, further defining the IRP national sections and other Muslim movements.¹² With the presence of these foreign influences, which were often based on individuals of movements interacting as well as historical and cultural ties created on geographical convenience, each of the All-Union IRP branches developed new shapes. The Tajik delegation, being geographically and linguistically able to communicate with Iran, in couple with

⁸ Ro'i. Page 108.

⁹ Abdukkayev, Akbarzaheh. Page 182.

¹⁰ Ibid. Page 182.

¹¹ Roy. Page 2.

¹² Ibid. Page 6-7.

being of interest to the Pakistani strategy to increase control of the region, the IRPT was placed into the limelight. The IRPT felt pressured to distance itself from the Russian sectors, which maintained commitment to the Soviet-style regime, in order to solidify their refusal of a non-Muslim rule.

The exact timing and motivation for the split from the All-Union IRP is still debated. One source reads that a rift erupted during the Tajik presidential elections in December of 1991 when the All-Union IRP in Moscow pledged support for a former head of a communist party while the IRPT endorsed the democrat candidate, Dawlat Khodanzarov. This move would create an alliance with the IRPT and the democratic and nationalist opposition parties in Tajikistan. This division of preferred candidates became a point of contention with the All-Union IRP in Moscow, ultimately causing the IRPT to split. The Uzbek sector of the All-Union IRP would also soon follow suit and split.¹³

Another source states that the official split was decided upon in a meeting on 26 October 1991, when the Tajik branch met in Dushanbe with 657 delegates and 310 guests present. Here, the congress voted that the branch would leave the greater All-Union IRP and become an independent Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan. After this vote, the All-Union IRP immediately stopped relations and support of the IRPT.¹⁴ During this meeting, the Party's Charter was adopted by the First IRPT Congress.

IRPT Charter

The IRPT was created as a political organization based on the principles of Islam. The doctrine of the group, as outlined in their charter, applies their Islamic beliefs to civil society sectors, economics and political ideologies.

The program begins by emphasizing the Party's purpose, expressing that the repression under the Soviet regime has caused the need for the Muslims of Tajikistan to make the doctrine of the Holy Qur'an a model for themselves, and to include in their daily lives the Sunna of the Prophet and the achievement of Muslim theologians (in particular Muslim lawyers who seek to establish a just, humane, and democratic society).¹⁵

The opening line of the Charter reads "The IRPT is formulating its program on the basis of pure Islam. For the party Islam is the law and the guide in all political matters"¹⁶. It continues on, stating the goals of this religious-inspired, politically-aimed group:

"The ultimate aim of the IRPT is the building of a society founded on the basis of faith, a just, free and independent society in which, while preserving its national and religious character, will enable each member, regardless of nationality or religious affiliation, to live and work freely...[it] stands for a multi-party system and for free competition of

¹³ Ibid. Page 9.

¹⁴ Babak, Vaisman, Wasserman. Page 287.

¹⁵ Ibid. Page 298.

¹⁶ Ibid. Page 290.

parties... [and] maintains ties with all democratic forces in the republic... [and within] foreign states.”¹⁷

After describing the overall aims of the Party, it breaks down its policies and aims into multiple ‘spheres’ of life.

The Economic Sphere

Basing itself on Islamic doctrine, the IRPT considers that in the sphere of economics, satisfying the material and moral needs of people is the most important factor in an individual’s development. The IRPT claims that its economic program serves as a healthy foundation for satisfying the growing demands of the individual.

The economic initiatives have a largely anti-capitalist tone, emphasizing the moral decay of capitalism and the negative impacts of the colonial experience under Russian control. The Charter also addresses unfairness of income gaps in their resource-rich state. It calls for greater equality, employment of Tajiks, opposes monopolism, speculation, and usury on the basis of Shari’a, and supports the gradual transformation of the totalitarian economy into a free economy, amongst other themes.¹⁸

The Sphere of Science and Culture

In order to have a bright future, the IRPT calls for a good education system. It claims to be committed to creating educational institutions and to place educators among the most respected people in society. It argues that the best students should be sent to developed foreign countries, that institutes should teach religion and national Islamic culture, for the native language to be taught, to use literary works to propagate Islamic values, and for foreign, non-Muslim literature to be studied seriously.¹⁹

The Sphere of Health

Citing Islamic teaching that ‘a healthy and strong believer is better than a weak believer’, the Charter calls for a series of health-related reforms. It calls for increased clinics and hospitals in rural locations and for preventative medicine to be developed and understood from an Islamic point of view, amongst other reforms.

The Sphere of Ecology and Environmental Protection

The IRPT Charter places great emphasis on the preservation of the planet; “protecting the environment should be one of the basic elements of the economic programme if today’s and tomorrow’s generations are to live in healthy natural surroundings and be safeguarded against natural disasters”²⁰. To achieve this, the programme calls for the ban of environmentally dangerous activities including: building dangerous factories, artificial reservoirs in mountainous regions, installing irrigation systems in mountainous areas, and using chemical and mineral fertilizers in rural areas. The Charter also says the IRPT seeks to employ technology to minimize harmful waste and to move industrial sites away from water sources. It closes this section by

¹⁷ Ibid. Page 290.

¹⁸ Ibid. Page 290.

¹⁹ Ibid. Page 290.

²⁰ Ibid. Page 293.

saying “In order to study the problems of the environment from an Islamic point of view and publicize it in the Muslim community, the IRPT is creating a department of ecological propaganda”²¹.

In other spheres listed in the Charter, the Party calls for ensuring free elections, not tolerating corruption or appropriating the benefits of someone else’s labour, and guaranteeing the opportunity to satisfy basic needs of the population: housing, food, clothing, medical care, education, and raising a family. ²² The IRPT Charter created in the 1991 meeting serves as the basis for the IRPT goals, although, as shown later, the Party’s goals do slightly shift and evolve, like most movements do, as the needs and want of society develop over time.

Leadership

This meeting also served to delegate leaders of the movement. Muhammad Sharif Himmatzoda was elected chair of the party, and would lead the IRPT from 1990-1999. Abdullo Nuri was another key leader in the party from the time of its’ creation. Both Himmatzoda and Nuri were educated in the sciences; Nuri was an engineer in geodesics, and Himmatzoda was trained in mechanics. They both, however, also received religious education through clandestine schooling networks while under Soviet rule.²³

The ideologies of these leaders are thought to have been originally inspired by Muhammadjon Hindustoni, who had developed an Islamic curriculum in the early 1960s and taught it to Nuri and Himmatzoda. Hindustoni’s teachings were rooted in the Hanafi tradition, often taking conservative positions defending local customs and traditions, and taking a silent stance on question of politics. There is also influence from the Deobandi school of thought, which Hindustoni had studied earlier in his life. The Deobandi school of thought places significant stress on religious education, producing many religious scholars, some of the first of which worked to trace the history of their political philosophy. The school, since the mid-1800s, has renounced violent jihad.²⁴ In accordance with this, Hindustoni believed that the Muslim experience under Soviet rule was a test from God to be solved with patience (*sabr*) rather than through political or military tactics. Hindustoni’s students, however, often rebelled against him, expanding large debates about underground Islamic learning (*hujra*) and supporting the commonality of students adopting Hanbali rituals. Some students claimed that the Hanbali school was closer to Arab countries, and was therefore a “purer and ‘uncontaminated by local traditions’”.²⁵

For Himmatzoda and Nuri, their religious education during Soviet time seemed to have preached the necessity of education, patience, the ineffectiveness of violence, and the importance of local customs and traditions. While Hindustoni condemned the mixing of politics and Islam, the two leaders, as apparent by their participation in the creation of the IRPT, heavily relied on mutually-influencing initiatives of politics and Islam.

²¹ Ibid. Page 294.

²² Ibid.

²³ Roy. Page 4.

²⁴ Reetz. Page 131.

²⁵ Bleuer, Nourzhanov. Page 254.

IRPT & The Tajik Civil War

The divisions and alliances created during the 1991 elections carried on and intensified as violence broke out around the country, bringing about a civil war that lasted from 1992-1997. The death toll of the civil war is reported at approximately 60,000 deceased and 700,000 displaced.²⁶

While the IRPT and other pro-democratic parties supported democratic candidate Dawlat Khodanzarov, the communist candidate Rahmonov Nabiev won the election of 1991.²⁷ Nabiev, with strong support in the Khojand and Kulob region, as well as among the Uzbek and Russian minority populations, won the election with sixty percent of the vote, against thirty percent in favor of Khodanzarov. Upon the announcement of the results, opposition parties erupted in protest, calling for new, free and fair elections. Their protests sought to appeal to Nabiev's supporters by stating that ethnic minorities, particularly Russians, remain valued citizens of Tajikistan in their eyes. One of Nabiev's first political moves involved the re-legalization of the Communist Party and an agenda to smother opposition parties.²⁸

In 1992, the opposition groups held continual protests, and the IRPT began to place heavy emphasis on propaganda tactics, creating three newspapers: *Nadjhot* (Salvation), *Shahodat* (Testimony), and *Paemi Khak* (The Voice of Truth).²⁹

Eventually, in April 1992, the pro-government groups began counter-demonstrations. It is important to note that the two quarreling factions also had clear regional identities; the opposition supporters were mostly from Badakhshon and Qurghon-Teppa, while the pro-government supporters were largely from Kulob.³⁰

With growing unrest, Nabiev feared that he would lose his legitimacy and declared a state of emergency, employing a National Guard force. Consequently, the pro-government forces became armed, and violent clashes soon broke out.³¹ Throughout March and April 1992, the opposition forces gained ground, taking control over the Tajik state television station in Dushanbe.³² Nabiev's power was growingly unstable as his security forces began to hesitate to act on his demands.³³

By mid-May, the clashes had become extremely violent and the state of emergency and National Guard forces were retracted; the pressure on Nabiev forced him to create a 'Government of National Reconciliation'. This new body had representatives of the opposition parties; in which the opposition gained one-third of the cabinet posts,³⁴ five IRPT members were appointed, and the IRPT deputy chairman of the time, Dawlat Usman, became the state deputy prime minister.

²⁶ Karagiannis. Page 19.

²⁷ Ibid. Page 17.

²⁸ Horowitz. Page 133-134.

²⁹ Babak, Vaisman, Wasserman. Page 288.

³⁰ Horowitz. Page 134.

³¹ Ibid. .

³² Karagiannis. Page 17-18.

³³ Horowitz. Page 134.

³⁴ Ibid.

In addition, an interim parliament replaced the Supreme Council and official parliamentary elections were scheduled for December 1992.³⁵

This new agreement however, was not successful in ceasing the violence and did not appease all parties. The pro-government Khojand and Kulob-based Communist groups refused to accept the reform and threatened to unify their province with Uzbekistan. The Kulobi elites formed local armies (who had held onto their arms received with the deployment of the National Guard) and attempted to take over the opposition-controlled region of Qurghon-Teppa by force.³⁶ With attacks in their home regions, opposition forces and sympathizers began to seek refuge in neighboring Afghanistan. Around this time in June, Himmatzoda led a force of approximately 8,000 against these local armies.³⁷ Similar violence was seen from the elites hailing from the Kulyab region in the south-east and the Sughd region in the north in attempt to maintain control of the state after Nabiev attempted this negotiation.³⁸ The violence continued throughout the summer and Nabiev fought to reinforce his legitimacy by all possible means.

Nabiev began to look for support internationally, appealing to Russians for military aid (mainly to prevent arms from reaching opposition forces who had relocated to Afghanistan). The pro-government forces, many of which lived near and had relations with Uzbekistan, gained supplies and training from Russia and Uzbekistan and reinforced alliances with Uzbeks and local Turkic tribesmen.³⁹

With widespread violence and intense fighting in the capital, the interim parliament was physically unable to hold regular meetings for months, until their first meeting in August. One of the first actions was to select a chairman, Akbarsho Iskandorov; a decision that would add significant checks and balances to Nabiev's decision-making abilities.⁴⁰

By autumn 1992, the IRPT and allied forces essentially controlled Dushanbe.⁴¹ Heavy fighting had still not died down and the interim parliamentary assembly ultimately voted to impeach Nabiev on 2 September 1992. Upon hearing this, Nabiev went on the run, but on 7 September, he was captured and forced to resign at gunpoint.⁴²

With the ousting of Nabiev, Iskandorov became the new president, however, he too proved unable to bring the warring groups and the nation-wide chaos to an end. By 10 November, the entire cabinet at the parliament, which was predominantly comprised of individuals of the former Communist regime, resigned. In late November, the assembly again made the decision to change leaders, removing Iskandorov and replacing him with Emomali Rahmonov.⁴³

³⁵ Karagiannis. Page 18.

³⁶ Horowitz. Page 134.

³⁷ Abdullaev, Akbarzaheh. Page 159.

³⁸ Karagiannis. Page 18.

³⁹ Horowitz. Page 134.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Babak, Vaisman, Wasserman. Page 288.

⁴² Karagiannis. Page 18.

⁴³ Ibid. Page 18.

Rahmonov was supported by the Kulobi paramilitary commander, Sangak Safarov, and soon after he was elected, pro-government forces had a power surge and captured Dushanbe, most of the Gharm region, and Qurghon-Teppa. Rahmonov ruled with an iron fist; all opposition parties were banned and leaders were arrested and tried or charged in absentia. Independent mass media and religious institutions were also repressed. During this forceful takeover, some several thousand opposition fighters and civilians fled to Afghanistan, where they were warmly received by a largely Tajik Northeast population.⁴⁴ Included in those was Himmatzoda, who lived in exile in Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan.⁴⁵ When in exile in the neighboring countries, mainly Afghanistan, the displaced received supplies and training from regional warlords and local military commanders.⁴⁶ From this time forward, the conflict was no longer an urban struggle for the capital city, but a suburban and rural phenomenon. By early 1992, approximately 100,000 Tajiks had fled to Afghanistan,⁴⁷ which was responded to in March 1993 when Russia, in support of the government, sent CIS ‘peacekeepers’ to the border.⁴⁸

The Peace Process

In 1994, the three year peace-process began as a military stalemate took form. In this year, the opposition movements had formed a more unified alliance to coordinate initiatives. The new front would be called the United Tajik Opposition (UTO), with the IRPT at its core and Nuri as the leader. The opposition role in the peace process would be negotiated under the UTO flag and for the most part conducted by Nuri.

The United Nations had been active in Tajikistan in a fact-finding mission since September 1992. After collecting the necessary information and data, the United Nations decided to increase its efforts in the conflict in April of 1993 by appointing Ismat Kittani of Iraq as the leader of UN Special Envoy to Tajikistan. This special envoy would have an instrumental role in talking to both the UTO and pro-government factions to eventually bring them to the negotiating table in April of 1994.⁴⁹ (Sources do debate the extent to which the UN played in this role versus the Russian CIS ‘peacekeepers’; some sources claiming that it was the Russians who brought about the peace agreement, others giving the UN credit⁵⁰). Kittani’s Special Envoy worked to engage both parties within Tajikistan as well as external partners in the conflict, which enabled Russia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan to become official observers to the inter-Tajik talks. With this, the external forces began to push the Rahmonov government towards negotiations. For example, Russia, who had supported the government began to worry about the instability that could ripple through the region as a result of continued violence. Due to Russia’s immense support for the government (in military personnel, equipment, etc.), it was able to influence the government with ease. Other Central Asian

⁴⁴ Horowitz. Page 135.

⁴⁵ Abdullaev, Akbarzaheh. Page 159.

⁴⁶ Horowitz. Page 135.

⁴⁷ Karagiannis. Page 18.

⁴⁸ Horowitz. Page 135.

⁴⁹ McAliffe. Page 3.

⁵⁰ For example, Horowitz page 135 reads: “Russian-led mediation efforts produced a series of cease-fire agreements...”.

governments also made it clear that they would prefer negotiations rather than risk increasing instability in the region.⁵¹

Although the war had not yet tipped the parties into debt, militaries on both sides were suffering, with humanitarian conditions worsening, and political support falling over the mutually-destructive stalemate. The government, however, was not about to hand over its' power, and believed that agreeing to a ceasefire would give it time to revamp political support and generate economic growth to support military capabilities and political stability. The UTO saw a similar opportunity under a ceasefire, hoping that they could gain concessions from the government,⁵² and beginning to realize their inferiority economically and militarily, they sought to take this time to build up resources.⁵³ Another external factor that was on the minds of all parties involved was the civil disputes going on in Afghanistan and the fear that those strifes could expand into Tajikistan and further the instability.⁵⁴

The inter-Tajik negotiations began in April of 1994 and resulted in a final peace accord in June of 1997; a process of which Conor McAuliffe properly breaks down into a three-phase agreement in his piece "Tajikistan Peace Negotiations".⁵⁵

McAuliffe describes that from April 1994 to August of 1995 can be considered as the first phase of the peace process. In September of 1994, the first agreement between the UTO and the government was created. The agreement served as a temporary ceasefire and cessation of hostile acts that was signed by a head delegate of the government and a head delegate of the UTO. In this agreement, military activities including training and deploying troops were to be terminated, the external actors (Russian peacekeeping forces for example) were to remain neutral and comply with United Nations mandates, and the prisoners of war were to be released.⁵⁶ In August of 1995 a ceasefire agreement was created on the basis of a mutually-requested comprehensive political solution. To reach this agreement took long periods of deadlock, with waves of advances.⁵⁷

The second stage, which lasted until December 1996, was in essence a step backwards. Little process was made, and violence around the state began to increase again, breaking the ceasefire agreements. During these years, both sides still had military capabilities. In July of 1995, opposition forces began to return from Afghanistan and in early 1996 launched an offensive attack in the Tavildara region. The violence overtook the peace negotiations and became more prominent in the minds of both sides. However, neither side completely withdrew from communication, an effort which was aided by the invested governments of Russia and Iran.⁵⁸ In July 1996, the parties did agree to renew the ceasefire and exchange a number of prisoners of war, but shortly after, attacks erupted again.

⁵¹ McAuliffe. Page 3.

⁵² Ibid. Page 3-4.

⁵³ Olimova, Olimov. Page 27.

⁵⁴ McAuliffe. Page 3-4.

⁵⁵ See bibliography.

⁵⁶ Copy of the "Agreement on a Temporary Cease-fire and the Cessation of Other Hostile Acts on the Tajik-Afghan Border and within the Country for the Duration of the Talks". <http://www.incore.ulst.ac.uk/services/cds/agreements/pdf/taj12.pdf>.

⁵⁷ McAuliffe. Page 4.

⁵⁸ United Nations Mission of Observers in Tajikistan. "General Agreement and Expansion of UNMOT".

Finally, in December of 1996, after a year of little progress, there was a breakthrough, beginning the third and final stage, as outlined by McAuliffe. Rahmonov and Nuri met on 10-11 December in Khos Deh in northern Afghanistan. The meeting resulted in the two leaders drafting an agreement that outlined the steps of a peace process. Two weeks later, the agreement was formalized and signed in Moscow alongside an agreement that distinguished the functions and powers of the Commission on National Reconciliation that would manage the implementation of the peace accord. After that, the process moved quickly, and the issues were announced resolved upon the signing of the General Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and National Accord in Tajikistan by Nuri and Rahmonov on the 27th of June in 1997.⁵⁹

The peace agreement guaranteed 30 percent of power to the opposition, monitored national elections, and the involvement of the IRPT in the government. Tajikistan became the only state in the region to allow an Islamic party to operate within the constitutional framework.⁶⁰

Post Civil-War

False Hopes in the Voting Booth

The peace process brought about in 1997 was initiated with high hopes of peace for Tajikistan after five years of conflict. Unfortunately this was not the case. In the months that followed violence continued and the implementation lagged. The IRPT, however, showed a clear change after the 1997 agreement to a moderate, reforming platform. The Party adopted an anti-terrorist agenda and Nuri preached that Islamic movements in Central Asia cannot function on the basis of armed conflict, instead calling for a political structure that can further the cause of Islam.⁶¹

In mid-1999, a series of reforms were created by the Rahmonov-led government: the ban on opposition political parties was lifted, and a constitutional referendum was created that called for a seven-year presidential term and a two-house Supreme Assembly.⁶² In November of 1999, presidential elections resulted in a renewed term for President Emomali Rahmonov. This election however, received harsh critiques from the local population, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations, such as Human Rights Watch, which reported that opposition presidential candidates were excluded from the ballot, political activities were restricted and media was censored in order to guarantee Rahmonov's election.⁶³ The opposition parties had called for an electoral boycott, and refused to believe the reports that 96.9%, of the 2.85 million Tajiks who voted, were in favor of Rahmonov. IRPT leader Nuri, committed to nonviolence, agreed to respect the outcome of the election and set focus on ensuring fair parliamentary elections scheduled for early 2000.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ McAuliffe. Page 4

⁶⁰ Yilmaz. Page 140.

⁶¹ Saud. "Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan Over the Years: Past, Present and the Future".

⁶² Nichol. Page 28.

⁶³ Human Rights Watch. "Presidential Elections in Tajikistan a Farce".

⁶⁴ Nichol. Page 28.

The parliamentary elections, as outlined in the agreement, would be held in 2000. The United Nations and OSCE would prepare and monitor the electoral process. On 28th February 2000, the Joint Electoral Observation Mission issued a statement that Tajikistan had successfully held its first multi-party election without violence. However, it also noted that the election did not meet minimum standards; there was a lack of transparency during voter registration, printing of ballots, tabulation, announcements, and the publication of results.⁶⁵ The outcome of this election, seated the People's Democratic Party (Rahmonov's Party) in fifteen seats, the Communist Party in five seats and the IRP in two seats.⁶⁶ Although the rigging of elections was apparent, the IRPT remained non-violent and steered its focus towards building a wide social base, bringing Islamic values to the population.⁶⁷

From 2002-2003, the IRPT's influence did indeed grow, expanding to territories it had not previously harnessed in support, for example with the Ismaili population. The IRPT began to act as a platform for all Muslims of Tajikistan. The IRPT mainly targeted youth, particularly in higher education institutions, the unemployed, and those in the Muslim clergy. In addition, the IRPT gained support from Iran for activities in the Gorno-Badakshan region, enabling IRPT committee members to study abroad at Iranian Islamic colleges. The IRPT media sources gave immense attention to youth, discussing how to 'bring up the youth in the spirit of Islam'.⁶⁸ In addition, many publications addressed topics including the national problem of drug addiction, the rise of violent Islamic groups such as Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HTI), and the mission to divert youth from the Tahriris, amongst others. The youth served as the IRPT's main recruiting rank. The IRPT's campaigns regarding drug trafficking and additional problems also enabled relations with police authorities and willingness to work with the government to face these issues that plagued the population. Between 2002 and 2003, the IRPT worked hard to revamp their internal leadership and organizing members. They sought to recruit highly trained staff, whom passed an exam to enter the ranks of the IRPT, and let go incompetent employees. Regular conferences were held over these years to establish organisation for the country's parliamentary elections and to brainstorm ways in which to gain power in peaceful ways. The IRPT sought to gain a significant number of seats in the parliament in order to modify constitutional amendments that impact the role of religion and religious institutions to further their position against the ruling party.⁶⁹

Terrorism committed by Islamic extremist groups in the early 2000s also plagued the IRPT, requiring them to attempt to save their reputation and cement their commitment to nonviolent tactics as agreed upon in 1997. The IRPT criticized the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States, and strongly condemned the violent activities of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), which was once an ally of the IRPT.⁷⁰ In 2003, with the increasing attention on the HTI in Tajikistan, the government launched massive campaigns against Muslims of various affiliations. Examples of tactics used include, unregistered mosques being considered illegal places, and imams having to be appointed. This was thought to be due to a fear of growing support for the

⁶⁵ United Nations Mission of Observers in Tajikistan. "General Agreement and Expansion of UNMOT".

⁶⁶ Buyers. Page 29.

⁶⁷ Sriram, Wermester. Page 286.

⁶⁸ Naumkin. Page 250.

⁶⁹ Ibid. Page 250-251.

⁷⁰ Saud. "Islamic Renaissance Party Over the Years: Past, Present and the Future".

traditionally anti-government parties, and because of international pressure (most notably to please CIS partners and the United States by repressing Islamic representation and power).⁷¹ With a crackdown on Islamic groups, justified by countering the violent group HTI, Nuri warned the government about the grievances this could cause. Nuri was explicit in his statements to the public in order to separate the reputation of the IRPT and the HTI, condemning HTI's activities as illegal and harmful.⁷² The Party at this point was reported to have a membership of forty thousand, with sixty-four grassroots organizations across the nation.⁷³

With elections planned for 2005 and 2006, and with the IRPT being a popular party, Rahmonov created a referendum in June 2003 that would enable him to serve for an additional two terms (each of which is seven years). During this time, he did not hesitate to suggest that the IRPT had ties to terrorist groups, such as Al-Qaeda, even though there were no well-founded signs of activism by terrorist Islamic movements in the country.⁷⁴

When the 2005 parliamentary elections and 2006 presidential elections were held, unsurprisingly, Rahmonov's party took the majority of seats in parliament, and Rahmonov was elected for his third term with a reported 79% of the vote.⁷⁵ The IRPT gained only two seats in parliament.⁷⁶ Once again, opposition parties and international organizations, such as the OSCE, deemed the electoral process non-democratic by international standards for democratic elections for its oppression of media and freedom of opposition parties to campaign.⁷⁷

The flawed elections are a continued struggle in Tajikistan, with President Rahmonov unwilling to relinquish his power. Paired with the elections, Rahmonov placed increasing pressure on opposition groups throughout the late 2000s through a series of reforms that restrict the religion in the public sphere.

The Rise of Secularism

Throughout the latter 2000s, the IRPT was faced with internal changes, as well as increased repression from the State. Increased secular ideologies developed both within the party and within the government, resulting in new dynamics between the two groups.

Unexpected Changes Within the Party

In August of 2006, Said Abdullo Nuri died of cancer and was replaced by Muhiddin Kabiri, a nomination made by Nuri himself. This shift was instrumental, for Kabiri was known to be much less religious in his positions compared to Nuri.

Kabiri had not been involved in the civil war and had no background in Islamic education. Kabir sought to strengthen the political ideology of the party and to decrease Muslim influence as a

⁷¹ Naumkin. Page 253.

⁷² Ibid. Page 255.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Abdullaev. "Peace Five Years After the Signing of the Tajik Peace Agreement?"

⁷⁵ Article 19. Page 3.

⁷⁶ OSCE. ODIHR.GAL/66/06. Page 3.

⁷⁷ Article 19. Page 3.

measure to appeal to a greater audience. While Kabiri pushed to strengthen the party as a political institution instead of a Muslim one, he attracted a diverse young audience but also received harsh criticism from the elders in the group. This created a division of thought within the party, although they remained unified. There was now the more conservative, religious section comprised of the older members, and a more moderate, secular section of newly recruited young people.⁷⁸

The State: Growing Repression

After the death of Nuri, the State also signaled several changes in the way that it would treat the IRPT. The earliest signs of which are reflected in President Rahmonov's personal actions. While Nuri was sick, the President had friendly visits with him, discussing politics with seemingly mutual respect. After he died, however, Rahmonov refused Nuri's family request to have him buried next to his mentor Hindustani or to be buried at his home. Rahmonov forced Nuri to be buried in a public cemetery. In addition, the government placed restrictions on the media related to Nuri's death; restricting access to publications announcing his death and the funeral in the two main cities of Dushanbe and Khujand. No reports, pictures or biographies about Nuri were to be produced by national television or radio sources. This change in Rahmonov's attitude towards the IRPT is thought to be because he thought that he no longer had to present himself as a moderate. Nuri had been a long-respected leader; to repress him would have caused immense backlash. Now that there was no intense, long-term following of the leader, Rahmonov saw an opportunity to discredit the Party that had become his main political opponent.⁷⁹

For the following years, the government would attempt to diminish religious organizations, and in particular Muslim groups, including the IRPT, through various restrictive reforms. Some of the most significant restrictions include:

- The 2007 decree that forbids women from wearing hijab in educational institutions and from dressing in provocative clothing.⁸⁰
- The 2007 Law on Observing National Traditions and Rituals which places restrictions on how individuals can conduct private celebrations (including monetary restrictions)⁸¹
- The requirement for religious activities to be registered; a process that includes groups to provide a significant amount of personal data, and annual reports on all activities of the religious groups.⁸²
- In 2008, restrictions also arose for non-governmental organizations and media sources, calling on them to register with the state, with possible prison sentences for those who do not comply.⁸³
- In 2009, proselytism was banned, and religious groups had to have official approval to invite foreigners into the country or to attend religious meetings outside the country.⁸⁴

⁷⁸ Sodiqov. "Kabiri Reelected as Islamic Revival Party Leader in Tajikistan".

⁷⁹ Hushek. "Tajikistan: Kabiri Leads Islamic Party After Nuri's Death".

⁸⁰ Thibault. Page 4.

⁸¹ USCIRF. "Tajikistan". 2012. Page 1.

⁸² Ibid. .

⁸³ Human Rights Watch. "Tajikistan: Events of 2007".

- In 2009, a new law required all religious communities to take the interests of the state, state security, and national values into consideration. The law requires review of all religious literature published in the state, the government participation in appointment of clergy, government certification of religious educators, and places limits on religious gatherings and ceremony spaces. Lastly, this law prohibits clergy and staff of religious organizations from being appointed or elected to the bodies of state authority.⁸⁵
- Between 2006-2009 multiple groups were banned, including the Salafi school of Sunni Islam, the Tabligh Jamaat, the Hizb-ut-Tahrir and the Jehovah's Witnesses, amongst others.⁸⁶

These years were also plagued by extreme winters, particularly in 2007-2008, when the regime was unable to provide basic services to the population. The winter contributed to the already-lacking access and price of electricity, quality of water, unemployment and labor migration, corruption, and worsening educational standards. The energy infrastructure failed to supply the population, and the population became increasingly disenchanting with the government. In 2009, the economy slowed down, only strengthening these sentiments. It is reported that at this point thirty percent of migrant workers returned home, sixty percent of Tajiks who needed medical care had to treat themselves, forty percent reported being unable to afford enough food, and seventy percent reporting that they rarely eat meat. This growing distaste of the government, due to their lack of ability to provide for the population, is thought to have been known by authorities and contributed to the reasoning for the crackdown on religion and Islam in particular.⁸⁷

The IRPT remained non-violent in their response to these laws and hardships. Kabiri denounced the government's actions, stating that, "As the religious extremists use religious values as a cover, the secular extremists use secular values".⁸⁸ With the government banning the headscarf, Kabiri remarked "We live in democratic, secular state, and it is the right of citizens themselves what type of clothing to wear or not".⁸⁹ The IRPT took this opportunity to identify and develop its reputation and campaign for equal human rights for all Tajik citizens. Under Kabiri, the Party's responses took form in boycotting elections, attempting to separate themselves in the public eye from extremist groups such as the IMU and HTI, and increased contact with foreign countries to further promote democratic political development.⁹⁰ It seemed that the Party directed all of its efforts towards trying to assure free and fair parliamentary elections in 2010.

Even when faced with harsh repression, the group remained non-violent and operated within the State's requirements. Kabiri had a well-planned agenda to be a loud critical voice but in a constructive manner, not a threatening one. To become a divisive voice would allow the government to ostracize the party and its' democratic goals. According to Kabiri, the 2010

⁸⁴ USCIRF. "Tajikistan" 2013 Annual Report. Page 3.

⁸⁵ Roudik. "Tajikistan: New Law on Religious Organizations".

⁸⁶ USCIRF. "Tajikistan" 2013 Annual Report.

⁸⁷ American Foreign Policy Council. "Tajikistan". Page 6.

⁸⁸ Mannonov. "In Tajikistan, religious extremism can be gradually replaced by secular extremism," says IRPT leader".

⁸⁹ Ibid,

⁹⁰ Jacobson. "Tajikistan: Kabiri's IRPT Takes a 'Time Out'".

elections would grant the IRPT no less than 20-25% of the votes.⁹¹ At this stage, the IRPT claimed to be the only party in the country that had both women's and youth subcommittees. Their success in elections, though, would only happen if the elections were truly democratic, which is why the IRPT put its energy into creating legislative changes.⁹²

The IRPT collaborated with others in efforts as well, including the establishment of a Working Group in 2008 to draft amendments to election laws. The group was comprised of leaders from eight political parties, the Center for Strategic Studies under the Office of the President, and the National Association of Political Scientists of Tajikistan. The amendments that resulted from the group were put in front of parliament for signing. While it was supported by the Communist Party, which held three seats, and the two IRPT representatives, it was not signed by the forty-eight other deputies that supported Rahmonov's regime.⁹³

The parliamentary elections were held in February of 2010. The IRPT's efforts to change legislation to create fair elections had failed. The government had made none of the OSCE or international organizations' recommended changes to the election process.⁹⁴ In conclusion, the People's Democratic Party, led by Rahmonov, won 71% of the vote and 55 seats, the IRPT won 8.2% of the vote with two seats, and the Communist Party, Agrarian Party and the Party of Economic Reforms each gained two seats in the parliament. Following this announcement, the IRPT and the Social Democratic Party (which did not gain any seats) planned to institute proceedings against the results.⁹⁵ After this election, government initiatives to undermine the IRPT would only increase.⁹⁶

Violent Relapse

On 19 September 2010, a military convoy was deployed to the Kamarob gorge to track down a group of fugitives who had escaped prison in late August. The convoy was attacked, and twenty-six government soldiers were shot and killed. Immediately, Tajikistan found itself in the international limelight. The government quickly responded with an information blackout and threatened independent press and journalists with criminal charges if they published anything besides the State's official line.⁹⁷

The attack is thought to have been carried out by a violent Islamic group that was comprised of previous civil-war fighters, angered by the government reforms on religion. Since 19 September, residents of the region (Rasht valley) claim that thousands of troops entered the area. This resulted in the men of these areas picking up arms in order to defend their families and villages.⁹⁸ The government, however, reports that the fighting that was going on in this region was against international terrorists, not local Tajiks. The national media channels similarly reported that

⁹¹ Bowyer. Page 15.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Mamadazimov, Kuvatova. Page 24.

⁹⁴ Parshin. "Tajikistan: Parliamentary Elections".

⁹⁵ Jeggle. Page 4.

⁹⁶ Salimov. "Tajikistan's Islamic Resistance Party Struggles to Survive".

⁹⁷ Heathershaw, Roche. Page 1.

⁹⁸ Ibid. Page 12.

Rasht was peaceful, but rumors continued to spread of killings and rapes by state soldiers, and houses being bombed. This division in reporting and lack of information angered both sides.⁹⁹

The IRPT and other political parties had no apparent connection to these groups violently fighting the government. The violence perpetrated by the civilians was under the authority of local commanders in Rasht acting autonomously against the government. The issues did not end once the local leaders were killed. In the following months, the military strategy has been paired with a campaign against ‘unofficial’ Islam. This allowed for the justification of new restrictive policies against Islamic education and moderate Muslims, including the IRPT.

The Rahmonov-led demonization of the IRPT and repression only continued. During this time Muslims faced very specific scrutiny. Tajik officials began to monitor mosques and their adherents, restrictions on religious dress were enforced, the age and amount of hajj participants were limited, and clandestine control of the selection and retention of imams and the content of their sermons were common practice. Additional laws were enforced, such as the banning of teachers from wearing bears in public.¹⁰⁰

By November, the IRPT’s mosque was no longer able to invite citizens, as it had been shut down by the government. However, Kabiri would still not support the violent factions that existed in the Rasht valley. In addition, the IRPT’s women’s mosque was mysteriously burned down. The Party was known to lobby for greater integration of women into Islamic society, unlike in their surroundings, where the government restricted women to attend prayer in mosques. A day before the mosque was burned down, the building had been raided by security forces, who confiscated literature, audio and video materials and computers.¹⁰¹

In May 2010, the Tajik Interior Ministry initiated ‘Operation Madrassah’, during which police raided the site of unregistered private Qur’an lessons. In 2010, at least fifty-nine people were put in prison with terms of three to eight years, and at least thirty-three others were fined. The government closed many unregistered mosques and prayer rooms and ordered the demolition of three unregistered mosques in Dushanbe.¹⁰² It was reported that, for the most part, non-Muslim religions (except Jehovah’s Witnesses) were able to worship without interruption.¹⁰³ By early 2011, the government-run media sources began to attack the IRPT, attempting to demonize the party and the leaders.¹⁰⁴ The IRPT still remained non-violent, increasing their relations with western governments in order to report on the repression of the Tajik government.¹⁰⁵

The year 2011 was also marked by another set of codified restrictions. Now, individuals and groups could face large fines for religion-related offenses, a maximum two-year prison term for organizers and participants of unapproved gatherings, meetings, demonstrations, religious meetings etc. was introduced, and those who were charged with the “organization of a religious extremist study group and participation in it without regard to the place of study” could be

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ USCIRF. “Tajikistan”. 2012. Page 1.

¹⁰¹ Heathershaw, Roche. Page 17.

¹⁰² USCIRF. “Tajikistan”. 2012. Page 1.

¹⁰³ U.S. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. “Tajikistan”.

¹⁰⁴ Salimov. “Tajikistan’s Islamic Resistance Party Struggles to Survive”.

¹⁰⁵ Heathershaw, Roche. Page 17.

charged with eight to twelve-year prison terms.¹⁰⁶ A controversial parental law was also established. This law requires that both parents provide written permission for a child to receive approved religious instruction. The law, in practice, bans all religious activity by children, except in approved religious education; this law restricts mosque attendance, participation in funerals, children's religious dress and even limits parents' choice of names for their child. Police are known to have stopped children from entering mosques under the title of this law.¹⁰⁷

These religious and extremist laws justified government's initiatives to strike down the IRPT, and as we see in the 2015 events, the government has largely gotten away with it.

An Uncertain Future

The harsh tactics used to reduce the influence of the IRPT through the lens of religious and extremist laws continued until the 2015 elections, with cases of members being arrested and tortured, regional headquarters being demolished and representatives being beaten up and one representative being murdered in 2012.¹⁰⁸ In preparation for the parliamentary elections, the government-controlled media sources increased their demonization of the IRPT, claiming that IRPT members had been convicted of child rape, and videos were broadcast on national channels that had been created to show IRPT members engaged in sexual activities.¹⁰⁹

In the March 2015 parliamentary elections, the IRPT failed to receive the minimum support to gain two seats in parliament. The election was once again deemed unfair by international election observers. Following the elections, the IRPT began to file complaints of pressure and persecution to the Ministry of Interior, asking to investigate the persecution of members. The Ministry of Interior did not reply to this request, so the IRPT wrote an open letter to the President of Tajikistan.¹¹⁰ After the parliamentary elections that the OSCE had claimed 'failed to provide a level playing field for candidates', and which resulted in the exclusion of the IRPT from the legislature, the government made extreme decisions to disassemble the party once and for all.

In August 2015, the Justice Ministry issued an order that forced the IRPT to permanently close down operations across the country due to the failure to meet membership quotas. In addition, this charge claimed that forty-five members of the party were responsible for a wide arrange of crimes, including illegal storage of firearms, deadly assault and corruption.¹¹¹

The final strike occurred in early September 2015, when the Deputy Defense Minister, Abukhalim Nazarzoda, ordered an armed group to launch an attack on a police outpost. More than two dozen died during the attack and the government was quick to deem it an attempted coup.¹¹² Even more, the government seized the opportunity to blame this on the IRPT, claiming it to be ideologically related to the Islamic State. However, the IRPT, and Nazarzoda himself, deny his membership; it is against Tajik law for military personnel to be involved in political

¹⁰⁶ USCIRF. "Tajikistan". 2012. Page 1.

¹⁰⁷ USCIRF. "Tajikistan" 2013 Annual Report. Page 3.

¹⁰⁸ Thibault. "The Islamic Renaissance Party's downfall and its consequences for Tajikistan's stability".

¹⁰⁹ Freedomhouse. "Freedom in the World: Tajikistan 2015"

¹¹⁰ Global Freedom of Expression. "The Case of the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan".

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Michel. "Trouble in Tajikistan".

activity.¹¹³ The authorities, however, carried on with this opportunity, and many IRPT members were arrested after the event. In response, Kabiri stated that, “the general’s mutiny was skillfully used by Tajik authorities to reach their long goal at last, which is to depict us as radicals and extremists”.¹¹⁴

On 29 September 2015, the High Court classified the IRPT as a terrorist group, with the government alleging that the party, that had 40,000 supporters, was planning a coup. As a result, all of the Party’s materials, including their official website and newspaper were to be closed.¹¹⁵

The trial that lead up to this ban discussed that the IRPT had violated Article 4 of the Law on Political Parties, which states that political parties cannot be involved in terrorism-related activities, violent overthrow of the regime, establish armed groups or propaganda of hatred on the basis of race, ethnicity, nationality or religion. When the Supreme Court was investigating this, they only considered information provided by the Prosecutor General. The court examined various insufficient evidence regarding the party’s involvement in terrorist activities; such as a 2010 murder charge against a representative of the party, who was never found guilty, and the ruling that the IRPT newspaper disseminated information aimed at inciting religious hatred since 2010, but no official charges had been made against the newspaper prior to this conversation.¹¹⁶

Since their ban, many IRPT members and leaders have gone into exile. Thirteen leaders, who did not leave the country, were arrested in September 2015 awaiting their trial in February 2016. All thirteen members, as well as their defence lawyer, Buzurgmehr Yorov, have been detained.¹¹⁷

The Association of Human Rights in Central Asia (AHRCA) has received information regarding the thirteen who have been arrested and remain in pretrial detention, as well as those who have already been handed prison terms, those who have been banned from travel and those who remain at large:

The defendants in the upcoming February 2016 trial include:

Saidumar Husayni (born 1961), first deputy chair of the IRPT, member of the political council and presidium of the party, previous MP and holds a PhD in philosophy.

Muhammadali Hajit (born 1957), deputy chair of the IRPT, member of the political council and presidium of the party, former officer of the military intelligence service of the Soviet Union, holder of the Soviet Red Star order.

Abdukahhori Davlat (born 1975), member of the political council and presidium of the IRPT, head of the department of external relations of the IRPT.

Rahmatulloi Radzhab (born 1958), member of the highest political council of the IRPT, chair of the IRPT department for district branches and head of the election department.

¹¹³ Global Freedom of Expression. “The Case of the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan”.

¹¹⁴ Kocak. Page 1.

¹¹⁵ Global Freedom of Expression. “The Case of the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan”.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Michel. “Trouble in Tajikistan”.

Zubajdulloi Rozik (born 1946), member of the political council and presidium of the IRPT, head of the religious committee of the IRPT, previous member of the committee for national reconciliation, former imam in the Pyandzhskij district, Muslim scholar.

Hikmatullo Sajfullozoda (born 1950), member of the political council and presidium of the IRPT, chief editor of the IRPT publication “Nazhot”, former press secretary of the IRPT, former member of the Central Election Committee, journalist and political scientist.

Kijomiddin Avazov (born 1973), member of the political council and presidium of the IRPT, head of the IRPT branch in Dushanbe, previous chair of the party department for youth and sports, previous party functionary and expert on the Arabic language.

Zarafo Rahmoni (1972), member of the political council and presidium of the IRPT, lawyer and journalist. Rahmoni has four children, and she has serious health problems, suffering from heart and kidney pain, nervous exhaustion and severe depression. Throughout the investigation, Rahmoni’s sisters nor representatives from the Red Cross have been allowed to visit her in pretrial detention. Rahmoni’s relatives are allowed to pass on medicine and food to her once a week. On 20 January 2016, her oldest and youngest son were able to meet her for the first time since her arrest.

Muhammadsharif Nabiyeu, member of the highest political council of the IRPT and head of the IRPT branch in the city of Kulyab.

Abdusamad Gayratov (born 1962), member of the highest political council of the IRPT

Sattar Karimov (born 1959), member of the highest political council of the IRPT.

Vohidon Kosidinov (born 1969), member of the highest political council of the IRPT, head of the elections department of the party, previous deputy chair of the party, previous head of the party organization in the city of Isfara.

Multiple IRPT members have already been sentenced:

Hasan Rahimov, head of the IRPT in the Farhor district was sentenced to nine years in prison by the Supreme Court of Tajikistan on 27 November 2015. The court ruled him guilty of calling for terrorist activities, establishing an extremist organization, unlawfully possessing weapons and inciting national and religious hatred.

The following have also already been tried and sentenced to prison terms: **Zinidin Yusupov** (ten years in prison), **Asomiddin Abdurahmonov** (ten years in prison), **Tavakkal Boboev** (eighteen years in prison), **Rustam Emomov** (seventeen years in prison), **Umarsho Davlatov** (fifteen years in prison), **Mahmadali Islomov** (five years in prison), and **Zavkibekov Rakhmonov** (four years in prison).

The following IRPT members have had their passports confiscated and prohibited from traveling: Abbos Radjabov, Mirzo Cool Toshmatov, Sherali Saidov, Nodir Abdulloeva, Saidmahmud Saidov, and Oisha Bobochonova.

There are a number of members who have also been declared still at large: Muhiddin Kabiri, Nazar Sayidibrohimi, Karim Shohonami, Afzali Kamariddin, Khayrinisso Saidov, Ilhom Ekubov, Nematullo Amonbekov, Gulbarga Sayfova, Sharofat Sharofiddinova and more.

The AHRCA has also received information regarding the arrest of ninety-three IRPT representatives, but the information has yet to be entirely validated due to government intimidation on information sharing.¹¹⁸

It is reported that soon after the arrests, there was property of party members confiscated, relatives of party members pressured (including children), relatives arrested, and many were dismissed from their jobs on the basis of unofficial orders by the Tajik authorities. The trials are deemed “classified” and will therefore be held behind closed doors; this means that procedural violations will not be disclosed to the public.¹¹⁹

As noted, Kabiri remains on the wanted list. In March, predicting a crackdown, Kabiri left Tajikistan to wait in self-imposed exile in Turkey.¹²⁰ In December 2015, Kabiri attended a conference on Islam in Iran, where he was warmly welcomed by officials. Officials in Tehran have been quiet about the ordeal, but the Tajikistan government has warned that their welcoming of Kabiri will severely damage their relations.¹²¹

Relations between the IRPT and the Rahmonov regime have a long and wavering history. The future of the Party and of the State is uncertain at this point, as many predict that the harsh repression will only result in more backlash against the state. In the meantime, the international community must recognize the nature and history of these events and call for the Tajik government to adhere to international law in their actions.

Conclusions and Recommendations An International Human Rights Perspective

The repression enforced by the Rahmonov regime should be addressed by the international community on the basis of violating international law. Global leaders need to recognize the nature of the events in Tajikistan as a warning sign for further instability in the state and region, and deploy both long-term and short-term solutions and practices for relations with the state.

Violation of Civil and Political Rights

The actions taken by the Rahmonov regime violate not only the rights guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but also the International Covenant on Civil and

¹¹⁸ Association for Human Rights in Central Asia. “Trial against 13 members of the Islamic Renaissance Party begins in Tajikistan”.

¹¹⁹ Ibid..

¹²⁰ Mashrab. “Iran’s Overtures to Tajik Opposition Exposes Deep-Seated Grievances”.

¹²¹ Eurasianet.org. “Tajikistan: Iran Gives Warm Welcome to Exiled Opposition Leader”.

Political Rights (ICCPR). Signed on 16 December 1966, and put into force on 23 March 1976, the ICCPR enforces the right to enjoy civil and political freedom, as well as freedom from fear. Rahmonov has silenced the voices of opposition, leading to the denial of rights outlined in the ICCPR preamble, and in Articles 1, 14, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 25, and 26. The relevant sections read as follows:

“**[Preamble]** Recognizing that, in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the ideal of free human beings enjoying civil and political freedom and freedom from fear and want can only be achieved if conditions are created whereby everyone may enjoy his civil and political rights;

[Article 1] All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status;

[Article 14] All persons shall be equal before the courts and tribunals. In the determination of any criminal charge against him, or of his rights and obligations in a suit at law, everyone shall be entitled to a fair and public hearing by a competent, independent and impartial tribunal established by law;

[Article 18] Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion;

[Article 19] Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference, [2] Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice;

[Article 20] [2] Any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law;

[Article 21] The right of peaceful assembly shall be recognized;

[Article 22] Everyone shall have the right to freedom of association with others;

[Article 25] Every citizen shall have the right and opportunity [to]... (a) take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives; (b) to vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors;

[Article 26] All persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law. In this respect, the law shall prohibit any discrimination and guarantee to all persons equal and effective protection against discrimination on any ground such as...political or other opinion...”¹²²

¹²² United Nations General Assembly, “International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights”.

A clear denial of these rights calls for the protection of the IRPT as a political party, as well as other marginalized groups in the state. Since the revival of government repression in the mid-2000s, it seems that the restrictions and authoritarian nature of the regime are only growing. While the enforcement of the ICCPR and the Universal Human Rights is a long-term project in Tajikistan that will involve the rebuilding of an entire political system, short-term actions also need to be considered in response to this time-sensitive issue.

Given the geographical location of Tajikistan and rise of ISIS in the region, the pivotal role of the country is in the interest of all. It is commonly thought that general government repression leads to greater grievances, which can often result in violence, particularly in the presence of a violent propaganda-driven movement that seeks to expand its ideology and recruit supporters, such as ISIS. We can even see traces of this equation for violence and terrorism in Tajikistan's own history with the outbreak of the Civil War.

International actors need to be weary of Rahmonov's regime and their practices when providing any financial, political or strategic aid to the state. For example, the United States has announced a \$50 million increase to its Counterterrorism Partnership Fund for 2016. This is the first year in which a portion of these funds will be allocated to Central Asia, with the 2016 budget for the region amounting to \$20 million, the majority of which would be spent in Tajikistan. In response to the outlawing of the IRPT, the United States merely 'expressed concern'.¹²³ It appears that no other response has been issued and that the weak concern was largely ignored by all actors. For this precise reason and for other similar initiatives, the international community needs to be aware and well informed of the state, the political parties, social movements and the government to which millions of US dollars are about to be allocated, a government in clear violation of international human rights law. Information and data gathering need to be stepped up, as it can be a valuable instrument when foreign actors meet to make decisions regarding their aid to this volatile state and region.

Other immediate responses to the current political repression in Tajikistan involve providing assistance to individuals who are targeted by the state. This includes granting the status of political refugees to members and leaders of groups, such as the IRPT, who wish to leave their country. The 1951 UN Refugee Convention defines a political refugee as someone who "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country."¹²⁴

As articles in *The Diplomat* and the European Liberties Platform explain, as of August 2016, Tajik refugees have faced a crisis in Europe, and specifically in Poland. Many refugees and asylum seekers from Tajikistan have fled to Poland only to be denied entry. *Human Rights Without Frontiers* recommends that the European Union recognize those fleeing the dictatorial regime of Tajikistan as political refugees who deserve asylum.¹²⁵

¹²³ Kucera. "Pentagon Proposes \$50 Million Program to Help Tajikistan Fight Terrorists".

¹²⁴ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. "Refugees".

¹²⁵ The quiet Tajik refugee crisis (11 August 2016). See <http://bit.ly/2cnRhEu>

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