



Tajikistan: Recent Developments and U.S. Interests

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Summary

Tajikistan is a significant country in Central Asia by virtue of its geographic location bordering China and Afghanistan and its ample water and other resources, but it faces ethnic and clan schisms, deep poverty, poor governance, and other severe challenges. Tajikistan was one of the poorest of the new states that gained independence at the end of 1991 after the break-up of the former Soviet Union. The new country was soon plunged into a devastating civil conflict between competing regional and other interests that lasted until a peace settlement in 1997. Former state farm chairman Imomaliy Rahmon rose to power during this period and was reelected president after the peace settlement as part of a power-sharing arrangement. He was reelected in 2006. His rule has been increasingly authoritarian and has been marked by ongoing human rights abuses, according to many observers.

The civil war had further set back economic development in the country. The economy recovered to its Soviet-era level by the early 2000s, and GDP had expanded several times by the late 2000s, despite setbacks associated with the global economic downturn. Poverty remains widespread, however, and the infrastructure for healthcare, education, transportation, and energy faces steep developmental needs, according to some observers. The country continues to face problems of political integration, perhaps evidenced in part by recent violence in eastern Tajikistan. The country also faces substantial threats from terrorism and narcotics trafficking from Afghanistan.

The United States has been Tajikistan's largest bilateral donor, budgeting \$988.57 million of aid for Tajikistan (FREEDOM Support Act and agency budgets) over the period from fiscal year 1992 through fiscal year 2010, mainly for food and other humanitarian needs. Budgeted assistance for FY2011 was \$44.48 million, and estimated assistance for FY2012 was \$45.02 million. The Administration requested \$37.41 million in foreign assistance for Tajikistan in FY2013 (these FY2011-FY2013 figures exclude most Defense and Energy Department programs).

After the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States, Tajikistan seemed to be willing to cooperate with the United States, but hesitated to do so without permission from Moscow. However, Tajikistan had long supported the Afghan Northern Alliance's combat against the Taliban. Perhaps after gauging Russia's views, Tajikistan soon offered use of Tajik airspace to U.S. forces, and some coalition forces began to transit through Tajik airspace and airfields. U.S., French, and British personnel have used the Dushanbe airport for refueling, and there are some French troops and some aircraft based at Dushanbe. During a January 2009 visit, the then-Commander of the U.S. Central Command reached agreement with President Rahmon on the land transit of goods such as construction materials to support military operations of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. While most land transport along this Northern Distribution Network traverses Uzbekistan to final destinations in Afghanistan, Tajikistan serves as an alternative route for a small percentage of supplies. In March 2012, the land transit of ISAF material out of Afghanistan through Tajikistan began.

Contents

Background.....	1
Political Developments.....	2
The 2010 Attacks.....	4
The 2012 Instability in Mountainous Badakhshan.....	5
Human Rights.....	6
Economic Issues.....	8
Foreign Policy and Defense.....	10
U.S.-Tajik Relations.....	12
Overview of U.S. Support for Tajikistan.....	12
Cooperation on Counter-Terrorism and Counter-Narcotics.....	13

Contacts

Author Contact Information.....	15
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Background

Tajikistan is a significant country in Central Asia by virtue of its geographic location bordering China and Afghanistan and its ample water resources, but it faces ethnic and clan schisms, deep poverty, poor governance, and other severe challenges. Tajikistan was one of the poorest of the new states that gained independence at the end of 1991 after the break-up of the former Soviet Union.

The new country was soon plunged into a devastating civil conflict between competing regional and other interests. In September 1992, a loose coalition of nationalist, Islamic, and democratic parties and groups tried to take over. Kulyabi and Khojenti regional elites, assisted by Uzbekistan and Russia, launched a successful counteroffensive that by the end of 1992 had resulted in 20,000-40,000 casualties and up to 800,000 refugees or displaced persons. In 1993, the Commonwealth of Independent States (a Russian-led grouping of Soviet successor states) authorized “peacekeeping” in Tajikistan, consisting of Russian and token Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Uzbek troops. After the two sides agreed to a cease-fire, the U.N. Security Council established a small U.N. Mission of Observers in Tajikistan (UNMOT) in December 1994. In June 1997, Tajik President Emomali Rahmon and then-rebel leader Sayed Abdullo Nuri signed a *comprehensive peace agreement*. Benchmarks of the peace process were largely met, and UNMOT pulled out in May 2000, but Russian troops have remained.

The civil war further set back economic development in the country. The economy recovered to its Soviet-era level by the early 2000s, and GDP expanded several times by the late 2000s, despite setbacks associated with the global economic downturn. Poverty remains widespread, however, and the infrastructure for healthcare, education, transportation, and energy faces steep developmental needs, according to some observers (see also below, “Economic Issues”).¹ The country continues to face problems of political integration, perhaps evidenced in part by recent violence in central and eastern Tajikistan (see below, “

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Basic Facts

Area and Population: Land area is 55,800 sq. mi., slightly smaller than Wisconsin. Population is 7.77 million (*The World Factbook*, mid-2012 est.). The Mountainous Badakhshan (also termed Gorno-Badakhshan) Autonomous Region in eastern Tajikistan has a population of about 250,000.

Ethnicity: 79.9% of the population is Tajik, 15.3% Uzbek, 1.1% Russian, 1.1% Kyrgyz (2000 Census). Clan and regional identities include the Khojenti, Kulyabi, Garmi, and Pamiri groups.

Gross Domestic Product: \$16.43 billion; per capita GDP is about \$2,100 (*The World Factbook*, 2011 est., purchasing power parity).

Political Leaders: President: Emomali Rahmon; Prime Minister: Oqil Oqilov; Speaker of the National Assembly (upper chamber): Mahmadsaid Ubaydulloyev; Speaker of the Assembly of Representatives (lower chamber): Shukurjon Zuhurov; Foreign Minister: Hamrokhon Zarifi; Defense Minister: Col. Gen. Sherali Khayrulloev.

Biography: Rahmon was born in 1952 and trained as an economist. In 1988, he became a state farm director in Kulyab region. His rise to power was boosted by his links to the paramilitary leader and ex-convict Sangak Safarov. He became chair of the Kulyab regional government in late 1992, and weeks later was elected chair of the Supreme Soviet and proclaimed head of state. He was popularly elected president in 1994 and reelected in 1999 and 2006.

¹ “Central Asia: Decay and Decline,” International Crisis Group, February 2, 2011.

increasing the power of the legislature, and for reducing the presidential term from seven to five years. The movement appeared to be a virtual, Internet-based group, and its seeming leader pledged to soon hold a founding congress as required to register the group.

The 2010 Attacks” and “The 2012 Instability in Mountainous Badakhshan”). In May 2012, the Justice Ministry turned down the registration of the National Movement of Tajikistan as a new political party. The group had called for reducing presidential powers and increasing the power of the legislature, and for reducing the presidential term from seven to five years. The movement appeared to be a virtual, Internet-based group, and its seeming leader pledged to soon hold a founding congress as required to register the group. Tajikistan also faces substantial threats from terrorism and narcotics trafficking from Afghanistan.

Political Developments

Since the end of the civil war in 1997, President Emomali Rahmon has steadily increased his authoritarian rule and marginalized the opposition. He has slowly moved to increase his territorial control by arresting and eliminating local warlords. A legislative electoral law was approved in late 1999 calling for a lower chamber, the Assembly of Representatives (Majlisi Oli), to consist of 63 members (22 elected by party list and 41 in single-member districts), and an upper legislative chamber, the National Assembly (Majlisi Milli), to consist of 34 members representing regional interests (25 selected by indirect voting by local council assemblies, eight appointed by Rahmon, and one reserved for the former president). Another referendum on changes to the constitution was held in June 2003. Opposition critics correctly predicted that one of the changes—limiting a president to two seven-year terms—would permit Rahmon to claim two more terms in office under the “new” amendment.

There are eight registered parties. The People’s Democratic Party is the ruling party, led by President Rahmon. Pro-government parties include the Agrarian Party, Democratic Party, Economic Reform Party, and Socialist Party. The three registered opposition parties are the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP), the Social Democratic Party, and the Communist Party. The latter sometimes allies itself with the People’s Democratic Party.

After a problematic 2005 legislative election, which the OSCE judged as not free and fair, the OSCE and opposition parties proposed changes to the law on legislative elections. A few were implemented through administrative means, such as a ban on a member of a family voting for other family members. Other proposed changes included placing opposition representatives on electoral commissions, banning officials from servicing on electoral commissions, permitting non-partisan monitors to observe elections, lowering the threshold of party list votes necessary for a party to gain legislative seats, eliminating a requirement that candidates possess higher education, and reducing or eliminating a sizeable election deposit, which some parties claimed deterred prospective candidates from running. Many of these reforms were introduced in the legislature but were blocked by the ruling People’s Democratic Party. Some opposition parties also have complained that it is difficult to campaign during the winter when legislative elections are held.

Five candidates ran in the presidential election in Tajikistan held on November 6, 2006, including incumbent President Rahmon. All four “challengers” praised Rahmon and campaigned little. Rahmon officially received 79.3% of 2.88 million votes with a nearly 91% turnout. According to OSCE observers, the race was slightly improved over the 1999 presidential election but still

lacked “genuine choice and meaningful pluralism,” including because of the dearth of meaningful debate by the candidates, improbable turnout figures in some precincts, use of administrative resources, and non-transparent vote-counting.² A presidential election is scheduled for November 2013.

Elections to the Assembly of Representatives were held on February 28, 2010. Only the People’s Democratic Party could afford to register 22 candidates for the 22 party list seats, so the total number of party list candidates was 73. For the constituency races, 153 candidates registered, including 83 sponsored by parties and 70 who nominated themselves. Turnout on election day was reportedly 3.2 million (87.1%), and the People’s Democratic Party won 54 seats (up from 52 in 2005), the Agrarian Party won 2 seats, the Economic Reform Party won 2 seats, the Communist Party won 2 seats, the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) won 2 seats, and an independent candidate won one seat.

An OSCE monitoring mission viewed the campaign and voting as “fail[ing] to meet many key OSCE commitments.” The monitors raised concerns about the prevalence of officials and members of the People’s Democratic Party of Tajikistan on electoral commissions, the high electoral deposit (relative to average incomes), electoral commissions organizing and presiding over “meetings with the voters,” and the requirement that candidates possess a higher education. The monitors praised the sizeable field of parties and candidates providing voters with different political programs, but stated that this positive feature of the election was vitiated by credible and verified reports of local authorities and police violating campaign regulations to the disadvantage of opposition parties and by the lack of diverse viewpoints in broadcast media. There were “serious irregularities” in many polling stations observed “which undermined the integrity of the elections,” including a high incidence of proxy voting (voting for someone else) in about one-half of the polling stations. Other irregularities involved voting without identification documents, multiple voting, casting pre-marked ballots, and some cases of ballot-box stuffing. Vote-counting also was assessed negatively in many of the polling stations visited.³ Observers from the U.S. Embassy were in agreement with the OSCE monitors, stating that “the vote was beset by procedural irregularities and fraud.”⁴

President Rahmon increasingly has used rhetoric associated with Hanafi Sunni Islam and Tajik nationalism to define his rule. This rhetoric has alienated ethnic and religious minorities, including ethnic Uzbeks and ethnic Pamiris in Mountainous Badakhshan who practice Ismaili Shiism (see below). In July 2009, President Rahmon proposed banning the use of Russian as “the language of interethnic communication” to strengthen the use of Tajik. Some observers suggested that the proposal would most impact ethnic Uzbeks, who are much more numerous than ethnic Russians.

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² OSCE, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, *Final Report on the 6 November 2006 Presidential Election in Tajikistan*, April 18, 2007.

³ OSCE, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Election Observation Mission, Republic of Tajikistan, Parliamentary Elections, 28 February 2010, *Needs Assessment Mission Report*, December 4, 2009, *Interim Report No. 1*, February 8, 2010; *Interim Report No. 2*, February 22, 2010; *OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report*, July 6, 2010.

⁴ U.S. Embassy in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, *U.S. Embassy Election Observers Note Widespread Fraud and Irregularities in Parliamentary and Local Races*, March 2, 2010.

increasing the power of the legislature, and for reducing the presidential term from seven to five years. The movement appeared to be a virtual, Internet-based group, and its seeming leader pledged to soon hold a founding congress as required to register the group.

The 2010 Attacks

In late August 2010, over two dozen individuals sentenced as terrorists escaped from prison in Dushanbe and launched attacks as they travelled to various regions of the country. Many of these individuals had been opposition fighters during the Tajik civil war and had been arrested in eastern Tajikistan during a government sweep in 2009. In early September 2010, a suicide car bombing resulted in over two dozen deaths or injuries among police in the northern city of Khujand. An obscure terrorist group, Jamaat Ansarullah, supposedly related to the IMU, claimed responsibility. Some escapees and their allies, allegedly including IMU terrorists, attacked a military convoy in the Rasht Valley (formerly known as Karotegin) in central Tajikistan on September 19, 2010, reportedly resulting in dozens of deaths and injuries to government forces. The government alleged that Abdullo Rakhimov, alias Mullo Abdullo, was among the attackers. Abdullo had been a former Tajik opposition paramilitary leader who spurned the peace settlement and spent time in Afghanistan and Pakistan, where he allegedly maintained links with al Qaeda and the Taliban, and who may have returned surreptitiously to Tajikistan in 2009. The attack contributed to concerns among many observers that Tajikistan was becoming more unstable. However, the government claimed in early 2011 that it had stabilized the situation in the valley. In early January 2011, the Tajik Interior (police) Ministry reported that its forces had killed former Tajik opposition fighter Alovuddin Davlatov, alias Ali Bedak, the alleged leader of one major insurgent group. In April 2011, the Interior Ministry reported that it had killed Abdullo. In December 2011, several dozen alleged IMU members said to be involved in the suicide car bombing in Khujand received prison sentences ranging from 8 years to life. Several defendants had reported that they had been tortured to agree to false charges. According to some observers, underlying causes of the violence may be related to the failure of the Rahmon government to share power and economic benefits with minority groups and clans, and more immediate causes may be related to the increasing repressiveness and exclusiveness of the government and the ability of disaffected populations to obtain countervailing armed support from relatives and others abroad.⁵

The terrorist incidents in mid-2010 appeared to heighten views of the Tajik government that the IRP harbored extremists. The party was ordered in August 2010 to cease holding Friday prayers at its large headquarters compound (a 2009 religion law banned prayers in unregistered sites), the headquarters was raided by the police in mid-October 2010, a mysterious fire destroyed part of the compound in late October 2010 that had been used by women for Friday prayers. The government also requested that parents recall children studying at Islamic religious institutions abroad, detained or harassed many bearded men, banned the wearing of the hijab by shopkeepers, ordered imams to only use approved sermons, and reportedly closed several mosques that it claimed had not been legally registered. In early March 2012, a Russian website and magazine

⁵ Lola Olimova and Nargis Hamrabaeva, "Tajik Authorities Struggle to Quell Militants," *Report News: Central Asia*, Institute for War and Peace Reporting, October 4, 2010; Umida Hashimova, "The Islamist Insurgency in Tajikistan," *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, October 12, 2010; Tilav Rasulzoda and Parvina Khamidova, "New Militant Force in Tajikistan?" *Report News: Central Asia*, Institute for War and Peace Reporting, October 21, 2010; *CEDR*, January 12, 2011, Doc. No. CEP-950136.

alleged that President Rahmon had held a secret meeting with his security services to direct them to move against former UTO fighters and others who opposed him, including the IRP.

The 2012 Instability in Mountainous Badakhshan

On July 21, 2012, a national security official, General Abdullo Nazarov, was killed near the city of Khorog, the capital of the Mountainous Badakhshan Autonomous Region in eastern Tajikistan. According to some reports, the region is a major transit point for drugs and other goods trafficked from Afghanistan and for weapons and money smuggled to terrorist groups in Afghanistan. The government responded by launching security operations to force the local “criminal group” to surrender. The government asserted that the “criminals” were led by Tolib Ayembekov, a former UTO fighter who was the head of an Interior Ministry border guard troops unit in the Ishkohim District (Khorog is in this district), bordering Afghanistan. The government also alleged that the “criminals” had ties with organized crime groups throughout the world, and were linked to members of the IMU, who were infiltrating from Afghanistan to support the “criminals.”⁶ Ayembekov denied that he was responsible for Nazarov’s death. Over 3,000 security personnel entered Khorog on July 24, and subsequent fighting resulted in 17 casualties among the security personnel and 30 among the alleged “criminals,” according to the government. Forty-one surviving “criminals” were arrested. Although the government officially acknowledged only one civilian casualty, some observers reported that dozens of civilians had been killed or injured. Among the forces deployed to the region were extra border guards who sealed the Tajik-Afghan border to prevent the Tajik “criminals” from escaping across the border or receiving assistance from groups in Afghanistan. Some information about the fighting leaked out of the region despite the “accidental” severing of Internet and cell phone connections to the region. The government declared a unilateral ceasefire the next day. On July 26, 2012, the U.S. Embassy raised concerns about reports of civilian casualties and urged the government not to suppress media reporting in the region. In early August 2012, Ayembekov pledged fealty to the Rahmon government and readiness to prove his innocence in a court of law.

The ceasefire was broken by the government early on August 22, when security forces attacked the home of a popular former UTO fighter, the invalid Imomnazar Imomnazarov, and killed him. His death led some protesters to attack the administration building in Khorog a few hours later, and police allegedly fired at them, injuring three. A large memorial service for Imomnazarov was held the next day in Khorog. A ceasefire agreement was reached between the government and local officials and prominent citizens later that evening. In accordance with the agreement, some security personnel subsequently were withdrawn from the city.

Some observers have questioned the Tajik government’s official explanations of events in Khorog. One local commentator has argued that General Nazarov was acting at the behest of a group in the Tajik security service to seize control over lucrative smuggling operations or otherwise was involved in extorting money.⁷ A think tank in Dushanbe asserted that the Tajik government deployed security forces in the region after Ayembekov threatened to enlist up to 1,000 terrorists massed across the border in Afghanistan to help him if the government moved to arrest him.⁸ Several accounts have suggested by many residents of Khorog had taken up arms on

⁶ *CEDR*, August 8, 2012, Doc. No. CEP-950127.

⁷ *CEDR*, August 25, 2012, Doc. No. CEP-950018; Sébastien Peyrouse, “Battle on Top of the World: Rising Tensions in Tajikistan’s Pamir Region,” *On Wider Europe*, German Marshall Fund, August 2012.

⁸ *Interfax*, August 3, 2012.

July 24 in opposition against the deployment of security forces. Accusations that Ayembekov was a “criminal” must be squared with the fact that Khorog is the location of the regional Border Guard Training Center, where the International Organization for Migration has used State Department funding to carry out training for Tajik and Afghan border guards, including on-site at regional border posts. Seeming to refer to this situation, Assistant Secretary Blake in August 2012 stated that the United States supports Tajik government efforts in the region “to address some of the corrupt activities of their own border guards and others who are helping to facilitate some of this [narcotics] trade.”⁹

Other observers have speculated that at least part of the reason for the government actions in Mountainous Badakhshan may have been to secure the loyalty of regional officials in the run-up to presidential elections planned in 2013. During the deployment of security forces to the region, the regional IRP head was detained and later found dead, a regional IRP office was sacked, and another IRP official was detained and transferred to Dushanbe. Before he was killed, Imomnazarov speculated that Nazarov had falsely reported to his superiors that the UTO fighters were planning to launch a coup against Rahmon, and that this was the main cause of the government security actions.

Human Rights

Assessing Tajikistan’s human rights record in 2011, Human Rights Watch, a non-governmental organization, the human rights situation in Tajikistan remained poor. The government persisted with enforcing a repressive law on religion and introduced new legislation further restricting religious expression. Authorities continued to restrict freedom of the media, including by harassing and arresting journalists. The judiciary remained neither independent nor effective.¹⁰

According to the State Department’s latest *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, the most significant human rights problems in 2011 included torture and abuse of detainees and other persons by security forces, harassment of journalists, and repression of faith groups. Other problems included arbitrary arrest, denial of the right to a fair trial, and trafficking in persons. Corruption, nepotism, and regional hiring bias were pervasive at all levels of government, and high-level officials engaged in corrupt practices with impunity.

Arbitrary arrests were common. Some detainees claimed that authorities falsified charges or inflated minor problems to make politically motivated arrests. Some security personnel reportedly continued to use beatings or other forms of coercion to extract confessions. At least two individuals died during the year while in government custody. Security personnel committed abuses with impunity from prosecution. Organized crime groups, including drug traffickers, maintained high-level connections with officials and security agencies, thus avoiding prosecution.

The executive branch exerted pressure on prosecutors and judges. Nearly all defendants were found guilty. Some police and judicial officials regularly accepted bribes in exchange for leniency. Political opponents reportedly were selectively prosecuted. There was no reliable estimate of the number of political prisoners. During the latter half of the year, more than 4,300

⁹ U.S. Department of State, *On-the-Record Briefing With International Media*, Robert O. Blake, Jr., Assistant Secretary, Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, Almaty, Kazakhstan, August 15, 2012.

¹⁰ *World Report 2012*, Human Rights Watch, January 22, 2012.

people were released from prison on amnesty, and an additional 5,000 people received reductions in their sentences.

The government restricted freedom of speech and press. Independent media were active and some published political commentary and investigatory material critical of the government. Journalists avoided criticism of the president, however, since insulting him was a felony punishable by up to five years in prison. There was a dramatic increase in the use of defamation lawsuits aimed at muffling independent journalists and media outlets. Most television and radio stations that broadcast nationwide were state-owned, although some independent stations were able to broadcast locally. Some international media were permitted to operate freely. The government controlled all major printing presses, the supply of newsprint, and most broadcasting transmission facilities. The government increasingly monitored and restricting the use of the Internet.¹¹ In May 2012, slander and insult were removed from the criminal code, making them misdemeanors subject to fines.

In its March 2012 report, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), an advisory body, assessed religious rights as further deteriorating in Tajikistan, and for the first time recommended that the country be designated a Country of Particular Concern (CPC), which could lead to U.S. sanctions. USCIRF called for the U.S. government to step up engagement with Tajikistan on religious freedom issues. The State Department may follow this recommendation to designate Tajikistan as a CPC later in the year. The agency's July 2012 *International Religious Freedom Report* concurred with USCIRF that religious rights had further deteriorated in Tajikistan during 2011. During this period, new laws and penalties had been implemented, including prohibiting the participation of children in public religious services and activities and increasing fines for teaching religion without a permit and for producing, distributing, importing, or exporting unapproved religious literature. In December 2011, the government temporarily suspended the activities of a mosque near Dushanbe where former UTO official Akbar Turajonzoda and his brothers were Imams, using as a pretext that the mosque had observed rituals associated with the Shi'a day of Ashura. The action marked continuing repressive actions against former UTO members and perhaps rising sectarianism.¹²

Restrictions on religious freedom appeared to tighten in 2012. In June 2012, the Tajik legislature approved changes to administrative law that required students wanting to attend foreign religious schools to get permission from the government, that banned proselytism at homes and schools, and that forbade unauthorized ties with foreign religious organizations. In August 2012, media reported that Tajikistan's Committee on Religious Affairs, a government agency, had launched the installation of surveillance cameras in mosques, and that 40% of mosques already had been equipped with the cameras. One Committee official stated that the cameras were being installed in order to prevent fires or other "safety" problems at the mosques, while another admitted that the cameras were for monitoring sermons and preventing minors from attending services.

On human trafficking, Tajikistan was downgraded from "Tier 2" to the "Tier 2 Watch List" in 2007 through 2009, a ranking that reflected growing concern that the country was faltering in its efforts to combat trafficking. In 2010, it was upgraded slightly to "Tier 2," a status it retained in 2011, because the country was making significant efforts ... [to] comply with the minimum

¹¹ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2011*, May 24, 2012.

¹² U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, *Annual Report*, March 2012; U.S. Department of State, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2011*, July 30, 2012.

standards for the elimination of trafficking.” In 2011, the State Department states, “the government continued to make progress in reducing the use of forced labor in the annual cotton harvest.” The government also convicted more traffickers in 2011 than previously. However, the country was deemed to retain a “Tier 2” ranking because it did not use its embassies in other countries to identify Tajik victims of trafficking or devote funds for domestic shelters for trafficking victims.¹³

On July 20, 2010, cotton from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan was added to a U.S. Department of Labor list that requires U.S. government contractors to certify that they have made a good faith effort to determine whether forced or indentured child labor was used to produce the cotton.¹⁴

Economic Issues

Tajikistan’s economic decline reversed in 1997 as the peace accords that ended the civil war took hold. The Tajik government’s National Development Strategy for 2006-2015 focuses on ending the country’s transport and communications isolation and enhancing energy and food security.¹⁵ The global economic downturn in 2008-2009 depressed prices for Tajik commodity exports (mainly aluminum and cotton) and reduced worker remittances from Russia and Kazakhstan, which host most of Tajikistan’s migrant workers. The Tajik currency, the somoni, lost much of its value relative to stronger currencies, which increased the costs of imported food and other goods. The Tajik government reported that its worker remittances plunged by almost 30% in 2009. The Tajik economy began to improve in 2010 as world commodity prices increased and improving economies in Russia and Kazakhstan resulted in an uptick in worker remittances by Tajik migrant workers.

GDP grew about 7.2% in 2011 and consumer price inflation was 9.3%, according to estimates by the *Economist Intelligence Unit* (EIU), a private organization. Growth in 2011 was boosted by increased agricultural production, construction, and remittances. The EIU estimates that the global economic slowdown in 2012 will reduce Tajik exports and remittances, thus reducing GDP growth to 4.5%. Some observers assert that a sizeable part of Tajikistan’s economy (somewhat reflected in official GDP) is reliant on drug trafficking or otherwise is not reflected in official GDP.¹⁶

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has raised concerns about rising budget deficits, and has called for reducing expenditures over the next few years. The IMF has urged reforms to encourage private sector development and investment as well as to permit the government to better address social problems. Specific reforms include enhancing property rights over agricultural land, building agricultural infrastructure, improving electric power transmission and

¹³ U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report 2012*, June 19, 2012 (covers developments in 2011).

¹⁴ U.S. Department of Labor. Bureau of International Labor Affairs. Office of Child Labor, Forced Labor, and Human Trafficking. *The Department of Labor’s List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor*, September 30, 2011; Executive Order 13126, *Prohibition of Acquisition of Products Produced by Forced or Indentured Child Labor*, at <http://www.dol.gov/ILAB/regs/eo13126/main.htm>.

¹⁵ State Committee on Investment and State Property Management of the Republic of Tajikistan, *National Development Strategy of the Republic of Tajikistan for the Period to 2015*, August 2006, at <http://www.gki.tj/en/documents/33/>.

¹⁶ David Trilling, “Tajikistan: On Afghanistan’s Heroin Highway, Corruption Fuels Addiction and HIV,” *EurasiaNet*, April 9, 2012; Jafar Olimov, *Informal Economy in Tajikistan*, U.N. Development Program, 2007.

distribution, conducting energy audits at major enterprises, reducing the cost of doing business, strengthening the regulation of banks, setting up bank deposit insurance, and developing a securities market.¹⁷

Tajikistan has depended heavily on foreign loans and aid to cover its budget and trade deficits. Tajikistan's foreign debt was \$2.1 billion at the beginning of 2012, with the largest share owed to China's Exim Bank, according to the Tajik Finance Ministry. Most small enterprises had been privatized by 2000, but land and major enterprises remain state-owned. Tajikistan's aluminum smelter in Tursunzade, one of the world's largest, accounts for three-fourths of Tajikistan's exports. Cotton and hydro-electricity have been other exports. The agricultural sector employs 70% of the labor force. One million or more Tajiks—up to 50% of the labor force—are labor migrants, and 40-50% of more of the remaining population lives in poverty. Almost one-fourth of households in Tajikistan receive some remittances from migrant workers.¹⁸ These remittances reportedly account for almost one-half of Tajikistan's GDP, making the country first in the world in terms of such dependency.¹⁹ The U.N. Development Program (UNDP) has reported that poverty and frequent electricity and gas cutoffs have contributed to the elimination of 70-80% of the forest cover in Tajikistan since it gained independence.²⁰

Construction of high-rise buildings and other structures, including the reportedly largest library in Central Asia, has increased in Dushanbe, despite the danger of building high-rises in the earthquake-prone region. Reportedly, these buildings do not incorporate advanced anti-damping systems. At the same time, water and other infrastructure in the city continues to deteriorate, according to some reports.

The construction of the Roghun dam on the Vakhsh River—which would nearly double Tajikistan's electricity production—is a centerpiece of the country's economic development strategy. The government envisages that the hydroelectric power generation will provide for domestic needs—ending wintertime shortages—as well as serve as a source of export earnings. Uzbekistan has opposed the building of the dam, with its planned large reservoir, on the grounds that the project may endanger its agricultural production and otherwise alter the environment. At Tajikistan's request, the World Bank in early 2010 launched an analysis of the economic and environmental impact of the dam.²¹ The somewhat delayed analysis may be released in late 2012. During the World Bank analysis, Tajikistan agreed to defer constructing the dam (although Uzbek and other observers allege that construction has continued). Some observers have stated that by deferring construction, President Rahmon has condemned the country to a longer period without adequate electricity in the winter and has increased discontent with his rule. The goal of the international community is for Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to negotiate a mutually acceptable

¹⁷ International Monetary Fund, *Republic of Tajikistan: Sixth Review Under the Three-Year Arrangement Under the Extended Credit Facility*, April 24, 2012.

¹⁸ CIA, *The World Factbook*, at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook>;

¹⁹ *CEDR*, August 24, 2012, Doc. No. CEP-950062.

²⁰ UNDP, *Tajikistan: Accelerating Progress Toward the MDGs by Improving Access to Energy*, 2010; UNDP, *Sustainable Energy for All: Tajikistan Rapid Assessment and Gap Analysis*, 2012; "Tajikistan: Energy Shortage Accelerates Deforestation," *Eurasianet*, December 8, 2011

²¹ The World Bank, "World Bank Update on the Status of the Rogun Assessment Studies," *News and Events*, December 15, 2011, at <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/ECAEXT/0,,contentMDK:23071412~menuPK:2246556~pagePK:2865106~piPK:2865128~theSitePK:258599,00.html>.

solution, possibly involving a water-for-gas trade, similar to the Soviet-era regional water-sharing arrangement.²²

Perhaps considering that negotiations were not possible or desirable, Uzbekistan began in February 2010 to restrict railway and road transport to and from Tajikistan, apparently to pressure Tajikistan not to build the dam. Reportedly, thousands of railcars and trucks faced delays, including those carrying construction materials bound for Afghanistan to support ISAF, materials for building the Roghun dam, materials from Iran for completing the Sangtuda-2 hydro-electric power plant on the Vakhsh River (President Rahmon announced in April 2012 that the plant would become fully operational later in the year), fuel and seeds for Tajik farmers, flour, and materials for road construction in Tajikistan. Uzbekistan also boosted tariffs on railcars and trucks crossing into Tajikistan, restricted gas supplies to Tajikistan, and restricted Turkmen electricity supplies to Tajikistan. In May 2011, media reported that Iran had shipped equipment through China and Afghanistan for Sangtuda-2 to get around transit delays imposed by Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan rejected Tajik assertions that shipping delays were political and claimed that they were caused by increased ISAF rail traffic to Afghanistan, a backup of railcars headed to Turkmenistan, and track repairs.

A bridge support on a railway spur from Termez, Uzbekistan to southern Tajikistan—one of three such rail lines connecting the two countries—allegedly was damaged by a bomb in November 2011, backing up food and fuel shipments. In early 2012, Uzbekistan boosted the tariffs on rail transport to Tajikistan. These transit problems and a Uzbek cutoff of gas supplies for a time in April 2012 led Tajik Foreign Ministry officials to declare a humanitarian crisis in the country. Tajikistan has repeatedly appealed to the OSCE, the U.N. Secretary-General, USCENTCOM, and others that Uzbekistan continues to delay rail transit to and from Tajikistan.²³

Foreign Policy and Defense

In April 2008, President Rahmon stated that Tajikistan was ready to “further expand relations of cooperation with countries of the West and the East, as well as those of the Islamic world, from the point of view of our open-door foreign policy.” He pledged that Tajikistan would “expand constructive collaboration with the United States, the European Union and other countries of the [anti-terrorist] coalition not only in this important field, but will also pay more attention to expanding beneficial economic cooperation.” In November 2007, Rahmon explained that Tajikistan’s “open door” foreign policy—“cooperation with any entity of international relations which has good intentions and aims towards our country”—might not please certain unnamed “powerful countries,” but that the policy prevented Tajikistan from becoming a “puppet.” He has warned that Tajikistan faces a global environment where “the rivalry between different countries for international markets, resources of raw materials, fuel and energy reserves, and other natural wealth” is growing, and where arms races are intensifying. He has called instead for “beneficial

²² Alexander Sodiqov, “The Rogun Dam Controversy: Is Compromise Possible?” *CACI Analyst*, May 2, 2012; Stephen Weil, “Tit-for-Tat: The Evolution of Non-Cooperation over the Rogun Dam,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, February 1, 2012, at <http://csis.org/blog/tit-tat-evolution-non-cooperation-over-rogun-dam>.

²³ Konstantin Parshin, “Tajikistan: Repercussions of Tajik-Uzbek Feud May Be Felt All the Way to Afghanistan,” *Eurasianet*, April 1, 2010; Konrad Mathesius, “Boxcar Diplomacy Puts Tajik Businesses at Tashkent’s Mercy,” *Eurasianet*, August 6, 2010; *CEDR*, November 18, 2010, Doc. No. CEP-950138; November 19, 2010, Doc. No. CEP-950234 and Doc. No. CEP950214; December 30, 2010, Doc. No. CEP-950116; March 30, 2011, Doc. No. CEP-950190; May 10, 2011, Doc. No. CEP-964198.

international cooperation to reduce and prevent new global threats and dangers, [such as] terrorism, extremism, drugs production and trafficking, [and] organized transnational crime.”²⁴

Tajikistan is interested in the political and human rights of approximately seven million ethnic Tajiks residing in Afghanistan (25% of the population) and over one million in Uzbekistan (4%). Tajikistan has hosted about 5,000 refugees from Afghanistan, mainly ethnic Tajiks, but reportedly is somewhat concerned that a greater influx could exacerbate Islamic fundamentalism in the country. Tajikistan’s relations with Uzbekistan have been problematic, including disagreements about water-sharing, Uzbek gas supplies, and environmental pollution (see above).

President Rahmon has proclaimed that Russia is Tajikistan’s closest “strategic partner.” Tajikistan is heavily dependent on remittances from guest workers in Russia (see above). Bilateral relations were roiled in late 2011, however, after Tajikistan sentenced a Russian pilot to 8.5 years in prison for violating Tajik airspace. In response, Russia imposed “sanitary” restrictions on Tajik food imports, cancelled the work permits of several dozen Tajik guest workers and deported them, and threatened to stop granting work permits. Tajikistan quickly capitulated and freed the Russian pilot. Economic ties with China and Iran have grown. Tajikistan has established some trade links with Afghanistan. At the fifth Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA) Summit in Dushanbe in March 2012, the leaders of Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Iran agreed to cooperate to build rail, electrical power, and water pipeline links.

The Tajik armed forces consist of about 8,800 ground, air force-air defense, and mobile (rapid reaction) troops.²⁵ There also are about 3,800 troops in the Interior Ministry, 1,200 in the National Guard, and 2,500 in the Emergencies Ministry. The term of service is two years. The ground forces possess 37 tanks, 46 armored vehicles, and more than 43 artillery and air defense weapons. The air force possesses 16 attack or transport helicopters and a few transport aircraft (these forces are dwarfed by Russian forces based in the country; see below). The armed forces are underfunded and fractured by regional clan loyalties that compromise their effectiveness. According to Defense Minister Sherali Khayrulloev, a mobile (rapid reaction) force recently was created as a third branch of the armed forces from subunits of the other branches as “a quality enhancement of combat readiness and [to ensure] a swift reaction to a change in the situation in the country and region.”²⁶

Tajikistan is a member of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO; other members include Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan). In 2001, CSTO members approved the creation of regional rapid-deployment military forces that include a Tajik battalion. Tajikistan also belongs to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO; an economic and security organization led by China and Russia that also includes Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan). Tajikistan joined NATO’s Partnership for Peace in February 2002.

A 10-year (with options for renewal) Tajik-Russian basing agreement was signed in October 2004 that provides for Russia’s former 201st Motorized Rifle Division to be based at three garrisons and to have access to three training grounds. Tajikistan also transferred ownership of the Okno

²⁴ CEDR, November 16, 2007, Doc. No. CEP-950361; April 25, 2008, Doc. No. CEP-950185; September 8, 2007, Doc. No. CEP-950171. These foreign policy themes were most recently reiterated in President Rahmon’s state of the nation address to the legislature in April 2012. CEDR, April 21, 2012, Doc. No. CEP-950049.

²⁵ *The Military Balance*, February 1, 2012.

²⁶ CEDR, June 14, 2009, Doc. No. CEP-549001.

space tracking base (near the town of Nurek) to Russia. In exchange, Russia cancelled a \$242 million debt. Russia's approximately 5,500 contract troops in Tajikistan (many or most of whom are ethnic Tajik noncommissioned officers and soldiers) constitute its second-largest military presence abroad, after the Black Sea Fleet in Ukraine. Besides these troops, Russia has positioned 54 tanks, 300 infantry fighting vehicles and armored personnel carriers, 100 self-propelled howitzers and missile launchers, and nine aircraft and helicopters in the country.²⁷ Tajikistan assumed control from Russia over guarding its borders in June 2005, although several hundred Russian border guard advisors remained (see below). In November 2006, Tajikistan and Russia signed an agreement to hold joint military training operations. Many Tajik officers receive training at Russian military schools. In October 2009, visiting President Rahmon reportedly urged President Medvedev to pay rent on Russia's base facilities in Tajikistan. Russia reportedly is interested in obtaining access to Tajikistan's Ayni airfield, near Dushanbe (modernized with Indian assistance), but President Rahmon allegedly has requested that Russia pay rent or provide equivalent military assistance.

At a meeting in Dushanbe in September 2011, then-President Medvedev announced that he and Rahmon had made progress in reaching agreement on extending the basing agreement for another 49 years, and that an accord would be signed in 2012. Some media reported that Tajikistan was calling for up to \$300 million in annual rent payments, while Russia continued to reject making any significant rent payments. Also at the meeting, the two presidents agreed that the number of Russian border advisors reportedly would be reduced from 350 to 200, but that Russia would continue to provide officer training, air transportation, and equipment for Tajik border guards. President Rahmon met with newly inaugurated President Putin in Moscow on the sidelines of a CIS summit in mid-May 2012, and the two leaders agreed to continue the apparently contentious discussions on extending the basing agreement. In talks in Dushanbe in mid-August 2012, the Tajik side allegedly had reduced its request for rent payments to \$25 million but also had demanded that the basing agreement only be extended to 2016. At a press conference, the Russian defense emissary denied that rent issues had ever been a part of the negotiations.

Besides the Russian military base, India reportedly has a small forward operations airbase at Farkhar.²⁸

U.S.-Tajik Relations

Overview of U.S. Support for Tajikistan

State Department officials served as observers at the U.N.-sponsored intra-Tajikistan peace talks and pledged rebuilding aid, an example of U.S. diplomatic efforts to head off or ease ethnic and civil tensions in the Eurasian states. The United States also supported the presence of U.N. military observers in Tajikistan during the 1992-1997 civil war.

According to the Obama Administration, Tajikistan is "a critical partner to military stabilization efforts" in Afghanistan and the region. U.S. support for border security, counter-narcotics,

²⁷ *The Military Balance*.

²⁸ *The Military Balance*.

democratization, healthcare, education, and economic growth is “key to improving Tajikistan’s role as a bulwark against regional threats.”²⁹

In February 2010, the United States and Tajikistan launched annual bilateral consultations to enhance cooperation on economic, security, and other issues. The third round of annual bilateral consultations was held in Washington D.C. on May 17-18, 2012. According to the Tajik Foreign Ministry, the first day focused on security and strengthening of borders as well as economic cooperation and attraction of investments. The United States reportedly pledged further support for Tajikistan’s accession to the World Trade Organization. On the second day, the sides reportedly discussed cooperation in education, cultural exchange, and human rights, and water resources and environmental protection.³⁰

During her October 22, 2011, visit to Tajikistan, Secretary Clinton stated that she “thanked the president [Rahmon] for the critical role Tajikistan has played in the international community’s efforts to bring security and peace to Afghanistan,” terming Tajikistan a “strong partner” in such efforts. She also praised some progress by Tajikistan in responding to human trafficking. She reported that discussions with the president and foreign minister included Tajik security concerns, particularly along the Tajik-Afghan border, and cooperation in combating drug trafficking. The two sides discussed the U.S. “New Silk Road Vision” to turn Afghanistan into a regional transportation, trade, and energy hub linked to Central Asia. She warned the president that restrictions on religious freedom could contribute to rising religious discontent, and called for freedom of the press to be respected.³¹

The United States has been the major humanitarian and developmental aid donor to facilitate implementation of the Tajik peace accord and for resettlement of displaced persons. Over the period FY1992-FY2010, the United States budgeted \$988.57 million of aid for Tajikistan (FREEDOM Support Act and agency budgets), mainly for food and other humanitarian needs. The United States also facilitated the delivery of privately donated commodities. Budgeted assistance for FY2011 was \$44.48 million, and estimated assistance for FY2012 was \$45.02 million. The Administration requested \$37.41 million in foreign assistance for Tajikistan in FY2013 (FY2011-FY2013 figures include Assistance for Europe, Eurasia and Central Asia, Food for Peace, Foreign Military Financing, Global Health and Child Survival, International Military Education and Training, and Nonproliferation, Antiterrorism, Demining and Related Programs funding).

Cooperation on Counter-Terrorism and Counter-Narcotics

After the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States, Tajikistan seemed to be willing to cooperate with the United States, but hesitated to do so without permission from Moscow. However, Tajikistan had long supported the Afghan Northern Alliance’s combat against the Taliban, so it was predisposed to welcome U.S.-led backing for the Northern Alliance. Perhaps after gauging Russia’s views, the Tajik Defense Ministry on September 25, 2001, offered use of Tajik airspace to U.S. forces, and some coalition forces began to transit through Tajik

²⁹ The White House, *Congressional Budget Justification for Foreign Operations, FY2010*, May 12, 2009.

³⁰ *CEDR*, May 19, 2012, Doc. No. CEP-950041.

³¹ U.S. Department of State, *Remarks With Foreign Minister Hamrokhon Zarifi After Their Meeting*, Hillary Rodham Clinton, Secretary of State, Dushanbe, Tajikistan, October 22, 2011.

airspace and airfields. U.S., French, and British personnel have used the Dushanbe airport for refueling (in 2012, media reported that there are 100 French troops and some aircraft based in Tajikistan), but the airport's limited capacity precludes wider coalition use.

During a January 2009 visit, the then-Commander of the U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM), General David Petraeus, reached agreement with President Rahmon on the land transit of goods such as construction materials to support military operations of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan.³² While most land transport along this Northern Distribution Network (NDN) traverses Uzbekistan to final destinations in Afghanistan, Tajikistan serves as an alternative route for a small percentage of supplies. Tajikistan has agreed to accept the transit of equipment and materials from Afghanistan, and in March 2012, the first such U.S. military cargoes were trucked across the "Friendship Bridge" to Tajikistan. The trucks reportedly traveled to Kyrgyzstan, where the cargoes were loaded on rail cars that transited Kazakhstan and Russia to the port of Riga and hence were shipped to the United States.

In March 2012, the USCENTCOM Commander, General James Mattis, visited Dushanbe, where he reportedly thanked the president for supporting the NDN and for providing economic support for Afghanistan. He reportedly stressed that Tajikistan as a buffer state preventing the spread of terrorism and drug trafficking into the rest of Central Asia, and pledged continued technical assistance to the border guards and other security forces. In February and May 2012, the U.S. Transportation Command (USTRANSCOM) Commander, General William Fraser, traveled to Tajikistan, and on the May trip visited the Nizhniy Panj Border Crossing Point on the Tajikistan border with Afghanistan in order to assess the status of NDN transit. At the NATO Summit in Chicago in May 2012, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta hosted a roundtable with Central Asian foreign ministers that reportedly involved discussions of the transit of ISAF material out of Afghanistan.

The United States has provided \$179.9 million in "peace and security" assistance to Tajikistan in FY1992-FY2010, about 18% of U.S. assistance to the country. This aid has been administered by the Defense, State, and Energy Departments, and has included Comprehensive Threat Reduction aid, Foreign Military Financing (FMF), International Military Education and Training (IMET), Non-proliferation, Anti-Terrorism, De-mining, and Related Programs (NADR), Partnership for Peace aid, counter-narcotics aid, and transnational crime aid.

The State Department has warned that terrorists and others are able to exploit Tajikistan's 870-mile border with Afghanistan to enter the country in part because Tajik border guards and police are stretched thin and lack the capabilities needed to police the border, despite receiving bilateral and multilateral assistance. In 2011, Tajikistan's military and law enforcement community made some progress in remedying these problems.³³

U.S. Special Forces reportedly have an agreement that they may pursue terrorists crossing the border from Afghanistan into Tajikistan. In September 2010, U.S. Special Forces also reportedly provided tactical support to Tajik security forces that were combating militants in the Rasht valley (see above, "The 2010 Attacks").

³² U.S. Embassy in Tajikistan, *Press Release: U.S. Centcom Commander Visits Tajikistan*, January 17, 2009; *Press Briefing by General David Petraeus, Commander, US Central Command*, January 17, 2009.

³³ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2011*, July 31, 2012.

The State Department has reported that about 15% of opium and 20% of heroin from Afghanistan transits Tajikistan to Russia, China, and Europe. It warns that “the drug trade is a serious threat to stability and good governance in Tajikistan, and a terrorist financing concern,” and that “drug trafficking has reinforced serious corruption throughout all levels of the Tajik government.” Although Tajik police and border guards confiscate more drug shipments than those in other Central Asian countries, a falloff in opium and heroin seizures in 2011 indicates that the security and law enforcement community “are still reluctant or unable to arrest and prosecute high level drug smugglers.” The United States funds a counter-narcotics office in the U.S. Embassy in Tajikistan. The Drug Enforcement Agency also has an office in Dushanbe. The Defense Department’s Office of Defense Cooperation manages USCENTCOM’s counter-narcotics program in Tajikistan. The embassy’s border and law enforcement working group coordinates the agency programs to train and equip police and other security-related personnel and to renovate border outposts. The State Department provides financial support to Tajikistan’s Drug Control Agency (DCA), and continues to fund a drug liaison office of the DCA in the town of Taloqan, northern Afghanistan, to detect, investigate, interdict and report on the illegal movement of narcotics into the Mountainous Badakhshan region of Tajikistan. The U.S. is renovating and providing teaching support to the Ministry of Internal Affairs Academy. In FY2011, U.S. assistance was used to complete construction of two border guard facilities along the Tajik-Afghan border in Tajikistan’s Shurobod district, a popular crossing point for drug smugglers. U.S. assistance also was used to train 70 Tajik and 90 Afghan border guards at the Khorog Border Guard Training Center and to construct a border outpost along the Tajik-Chinese border.³⁴ In early 2012, President Rahmon launched a new anti-corruption effort targeting law enforcement and other officials who were colluding with drug traffickers.

Tajikistan has hosted annual “Regional Cooperation” exercises, sponsored by USCENTCOM, to focus on strengthening security cooperation among Central Asian countries. The most recent exercise took place in June 2012.³⁵

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³⁴ U.S. Department of State, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, Volume I: Drug and Chemical Control*, March 2012; *Press Release: U.S. Embassy Sponsors Joint Training of Tajik and Afghan Border Guards*, February 21, 2012.

³⁵ Roger McDermott, “Regional Cooperation 2012 and US Security Assistance Efforts in Central Asia,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, June 28, 2012.