

Updated December 1, 2017

# Tajikistan



Source: Map by Hannah Fischer, CRS.

## Political Background

**Government.** Tajikistan is a presidential republic. The executive branch wields significant influence over the legislative and judicial branches. Officially, the president is limited to two seven-year terms in office; however, President Emomali Rahmon has been reelected four times, most recently in 2013 with 84% of the vote. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) reported “significant shortcomings” and noted a lack of pluralism in the 2013 presidential and 2015 parliamentary elections. The government’s actions toward the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT), the country’s leading opposition party, are a source of international criticism. In late 2015, the Supreme Court of Tajikistan banned the party and prohibited its media activities in the country. Tajikistan’s government has described these actions as an attempt to eliminate extremism and terrorism in the country. The U.S. State Department, on the other hand, has characterized the government’s crackdown as “steps to eliminate political opposition.” In May 2016, Tajikistan adopted 41 constitutional amendments by referendum. Many of the amendments broadened President Rahmon’s powers and, according to some observers, further consolidated his control over the state.

**History.** The Tajiks are a Central Asian people who speak several Persian dialects. Historically, Tajiks have lived in an area spanning from Iran to western China. Tajikistan was ruled by Tsarist Russia and then the Soviet Union until the U.S.S.R. collapsed in early 1990. In 1992, a civil war broke out in Tajikistan pitting a loose coalition of nationalist, Islamic, and democratic groups against the central government, which was backed by Russia and Uzbekistan. Under a U.N.-brokered peace deal, the government retained control and hostilities ceased in 1997. Tajikistan remains a close Russian ally, and it receives Russian military and counternarcotics assistance.

**Human Rights.** In its 2016 Human Rights Report, the State Department describes Tajikistan as an “authoritarian state” with significant human rights problems. The report cites media censorship, religious intolerance, and the persecution of political opponents as issues of particular concern. Activists and human rights groups such as Amnesty International and Freedom House claim that the Tajik government violates its human rights obligations and commits “egregious” acts of torture and ill-treatment. In February 2016, Human Rights Watch and the Norwegian Helsinki Committee called on the United States and the E.U. to speak out against Tajikistan’s deteriorating human rights situation. The Tajik government, however, continues to use its powers to crack down on its political opponents, and recent Constitutional amendments give the state even greater authority to persecute dissidents. In June 2016, two IRPT leaders, Mahmatali Hayit and Saidumar Khusaini, were sentenced to life in prison, and in November 2016, insulting President Rahmon was made a criminal offense.

### Tajikistan at a Glance

**Land area:** 139,960 sq. km. (about the size of North Carolina)

**Geography:** Heavily mountainous, with abundant water resources and upstream control of two of Central Asia’s key river systems

**Population (2016):** 8.73 million

**GDP (2016):** \$6.95 billion, per capita GNI is \$3,500 at PPP

**Ethnicities (2010):** 84% Tajik, 14% Uzbek, other 2%

**Religions (2003):** Sunni Muslim 85%, Shia Muslim 5%, other 10%

**Political Leaders:** President Emomali RAHMON (head of state since 1992), Prime Minister Qohir RASULZODA (since November 2013)

*Data from World Bank*

## Economy

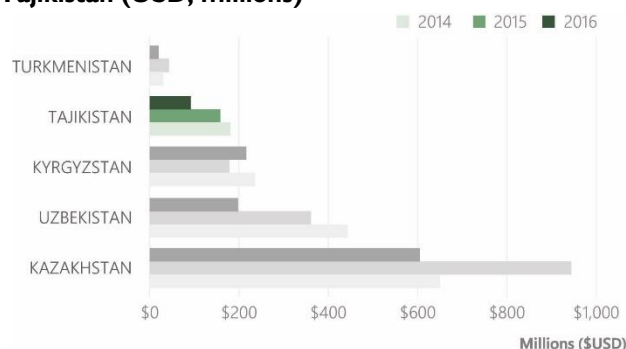
**Key Sectors.** Tajikistan is a poor, mountainous country with an economy dependent on metal and raw mineral exports and remittances from migrant workers. Tajikistan’s main natural resources include gold, silver, coal, and hydropower. Its coal deposits, if fully exploited, could reportedly satisfy domestic energy needs. In its 2017 economic report, The World Bank argued that Tajikistan must prioritize job creation in order to achieve its developmental objectives and reduce poverty.

**Hydropower.** Tajikistan produces a small fraction of the natural gas and oil produced by its hydrocarbon-rich neighbors Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. However, with 1,300 freshwater lakes and 28,500 kilometers of rivers, Tajikistan is positioned to become a regional leader in

hydropower. The government has sought to develop its substantial hydroelectricity potential, mainly by pursuing the Rogun dam project. If completed, Rogun would be the tallest hydropower plant in the world and has the potential to generate enough power to end Tajikistan's electricity rationing and turn the country into a net energy exporter. In 2016, Tajikistan contracted with Italian firm Salini Impregilo to construct the dam over a 13-year period for \$3.9 billion, and construction began in October 2016. The Rogun dam is a sensitive issue for its downstream neighbors. Uzbekistan, in particular, is worried about the dam reducing its water supplies for cotton irrigation. Uzbekistan also is concerned about the dam's potential environmental impact and seismically active location. The World Bank's 2014 feasibility studies appeared to give Tajikistan the green light to build Rogun, saying the dam could help to eliminate the country's winter energy shortages. However, Human Rights Watch reports the government is so far not living up to its commitments to provide sufficient compensation to the 42,000 people being resettled by Rogun.

**Trade.** In recent years, China has emerged as one of Tajikistan's most important trading partners. According to the Rahmon government, trade between Tajikistan and China reached more than \$200 million in the first three months of 2016, and "could be increased to \$3 billion [per year] by 2020." In 2015, Chinese foreign direct investment in Tajikistan totaled \$273 million, representing an increase of 160% over 2014 and 58% of country's foreign direct investment. China's growing importance can be attributed to a retrenchment of Tajikistan's traditional partners, such as Russia, whose direct investment dropped to a total of \$35 million in 2015 (a 22.6% drop since 2010). Russia, however, continues to play an important role in Tajikistan's economy, and a large portion of Tajikistan's GDP comes from personal remittances from migrant workers living in Russia (see Figure 1). Also, according to a 2016 Russian Central Bank announcement, the total amount of money transferred to Tajikistan in 2015 fell by almost 67%, from \$3.8 billion in 2014 to \$1.28 billion in 2015.

**Figure 1. Personal Remittances from Russia to Tajikistan (USD, millions)**



Source: Central Bank of Russia.

## U.S.-Tajikistan Relations

**Security Cooperation and Afghanistan.** The U.S. State Department, Drug Enforcement Administration, and Central Command (CENTCOM) provide material support and training to Tajik security forces. Between March and April 2017, for instance, U.S. forces conducted a joint

antiterrorism training exercise with their Tajik counterparts. Prior to U.S. involvement in Afghanistan, the Tajik government supported the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance. In the wake of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the Rahmon government allowed the United States to use the refueling services at Dushanbe Airport and to pass through the country's airspace.

**Drug Trafficking.** Tajikistan is a major thoroughfare for illicit drug trafficking. It has been estimated that more than 80% of Afghanistan's heroin exports to Russia and Europe pass through the country. The United States provides assistance, such as training and equipment, to enhance the country's counternarcotics efforts; however, there is no extradition treaty or formal mutual legal assistance agreement between the United States and Tajikistan. In the past five years, overall drug seizures, particularly of opiates, have been declining. According to the State Department, there is no adequate explanation for the drop, but some reports have indicated that Tajik government officials are connected with drug traffickers.

**Terrorism and Violent Extremism.** About 1,000 Tajiks have joined the Islamic State, along with other terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq, and Tajikistan's government is concerned about keeping track of returning fighters. The government also is worried about instability in Afghanistan spreading to its own territory. In 2015, Colonel Gulmurod Khalimov, who was a U.S.-trained commander of a special Tajik police unit, joined IS. He reportedly was killed in Mosul. In 2016, Tajik officials participated in several OSCE-organized workshops focusing on countering violent extremism (CVE), and the Tajik government developed a national CVE strategy. Yet, some civil society groups criticized the strategy. According to them, it likely will be used as a pretext to further repress political dissidents. Between 1992 and 1997, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)—which aims to establish a caliphate in the Fergana Valley region of Central Asia—used eastern Tajikistan as a base of operations to launch attacks into neighboring Uzbekistan. In the early 2000s, the IMU established a new base in Pakistan where it reportedly cooperates with other terrorist groups, such as the Haqqani network.

**U.S. Foreign Assistance.** The FY2018 U.S. foreign operations assistance request for Tajikistan is \$22 million, down from \$36.1 million in FY2016 (actual). The majority of funds requested for FY2018 are provided through the Economic Support and Development Fund account (\$13 million). Assistance is also provided through several other accounts, including Global Health Programs—USAID (\$4.3 million), International Military Education and Training (\$450,000), International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (\$2 million), and Nonproliferation, Antiterrorism, Demining and Related Programs (\$2.3 million).

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