

Chapter I

Tajikistan overview: a general perspective

As a consequence of a series of unfortunate events that began with the *coup d'état* against Mikhail Gorbachev on August 1991, Tajikistan, the poorest of the Soviet republics, declared its independence from the Soviet Union on September 9th 1991. The Tajik Supreme Soviet was the first of the Central Asian authorities to promulgate independence from Moscow. Following the Tajik example, other Central Asian republics declared their independence before the end of that year.¹

An overview presenting basic information about the history, culture, society, economy and government of the country will be offered in this chapter in order to support the arguments and ideas that will be developed in the following chapters. Information presented in this section will also help to identify the general elements of the Tajik society that thwart the development of a stable political community that could lead to a democratic transition.

1.1 Population and Geographical characteristics

Geography is a determinant factor in the development of any society or state. There are two central aspects to Tajikistan's geographic situation. First, its complete isolation from oceanic influence has limited this and other republics from Central Asia from the intense political, commercial and economic processes that have deeply impressed human history

¹ Although Kyrgyzstan declared its independence on August 31 it was not implemented until late December 1991.

since the eighteen-century.² Second: its topography. The physical relief of the country, apart from creating a wonderful mountainous landscape, represents a natural barrier that has historically imposed almost insurmountable constraints to the political and economic development of the different regions.³



² Gavin Hambly, *Asia Central*. (México D.F.: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1986), 3.

³ Shirin Akiner, *Tajikistan Disintegration or Reconciliation?* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2001), 5.

Tajikistan encompasses a territory of 143,100 sq. km of which only 6 percent is suitable for agriculture. It has a population of approximately 7 million.⁴ Tajikistan's population is far from homogeneous, there are plenty of subdivisions; the Tajiks,⁵ however, constitute the largest group forming about 70 percent of the total population. According to Shirin Akiner, Tajiks are, by physiology, culture and language, part of the Western Iranian family; by religion they are Sunni Muslims, mainly from the Hanafi School.⁶ Nevertheless, Modern Tajik society is a multinational entity where more than fourteen different national groups interact: Tajiks are 65%, Uzbeks 25%⁷, Kyrgyz 3.5%, and Russians 3.5%, and other minorities such as Afghans and Germans. This multinational presence –ethnic diversity– was bolstered during the Soviet era, but long before that period there were peoples of different origins living in this area.⁸

⁴ The World Factbook. Rank Order Population, (Mar. 29, 2006 [cited 11 Apr. 2006] Central Intelligence Agency): available from <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/rankorder/2119rank.html>

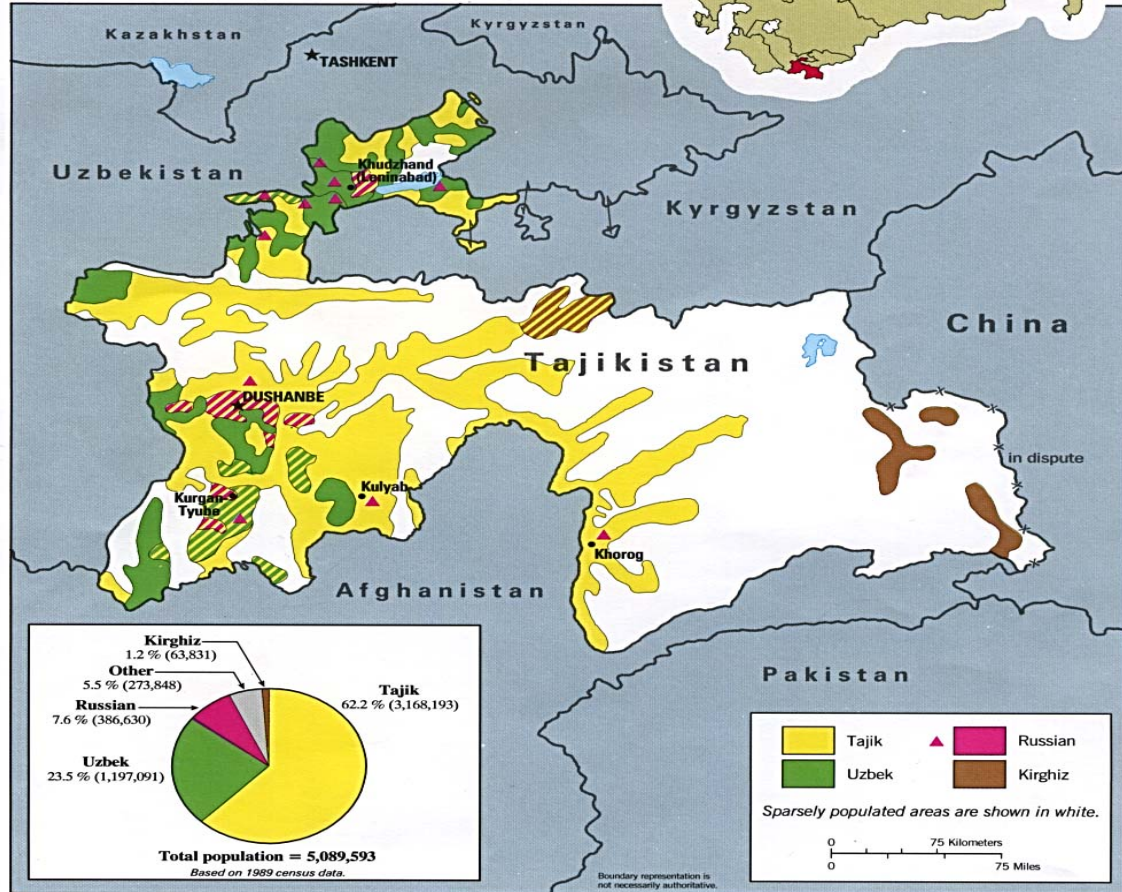
⁵ The origin of the term *tajik* is obscure. The most popular explanation is that it is derived from *toj* (crown) hence the use of this symbol on the national flag. In the medieval period it was used in the general sense of 'Persian' (as opposed to 'Turk'). In Russian usage of the sixteenth century and later, it meant **trader or merchant**. It also has to be taken into account that the term Tajik was promoted by a ruso-centric approach to Central Asian groups and that it includes groups such as Pamirs that are not Tajiks. Akiner, *Tajikistan Disintegration*, 6.

⁶ The Hanafi is a school of religious law within Sunni Islam. It is considered to be the school most open to modern ideas. Hanafi, (Mar. 25, 2006 [cited 27 Mar. 2006] Wikipedia): available from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hanafi>

⁷ The Uzbeks, today some 25 percent of the total population constitute the largest block of non-Iranian peoples.

⁸ Akiner, *Tajikistan Disintegration*, 7.

Major Ethnic Groups in Tajikistan



Historically there have been two main areas of Tajik settlement: on the plains and in the mountains.⁹ This has been a fundamental divide in Tajik politics, culture and economy.¹⁰ Tajikistan has four natural zones. The largest, least populated and highest in altitude, is Gorno-Badakhshan, which is located in the eastern part of the country occupying almost the half of Tajikistan's total territory (63,700 sq. km.). It is mainly populated by Pamiris and borders China and Afghanistan. The second zone, sizing approximately 28,700 sq.

⁹ Twenty-eight ranges slice the country into a patchwork of isolated areas of habitation. These close but distant areas were almost completely isolated from each other until the Soviet era.

¹⁰ This fundamental geographical divide has been the major obstacle for national consolidation.

km. is divided into administrative units which come under the jurisdiction of the central government. It has two sub-zones: Karategin and Hissar. Both have been continuously subjected to intense seismic activity. This area contains the region of republican subordination where Dushanbe, the capital, lies. The third zone, of approximately 24,000 sq. km. and corresponding to the Kathlon province, lies to the southwest between the Hissar Range and the Amu Darya river. It borders Afghanistan to the east and Uzbekistan to the west. Qurghonteppa to the west and Kulyab¹¹ to the east are this zone's two sub-zones. The fourth zone has historically been the most developed area of Tajikistan; it lies to the north of the Turkistan Range, it encloses approximately 26,100 sq. km and corresponds to the Soghd (former Leninabad)¹² province. Social and economic development has been based on the exploitation of abundant mineral resources, including hydrocarbons; and on the existence of a good arable land.

Tajikistan's four regions differ in topography, economic development, culture, and –in certain cases– in terms of religion, ethnicity and language. These differences play a critical role in internal politics and were crucial in determining loyalties during the civil war. Perhaps the most distinct region ethnically is Gorno-Badakhshan, located southeast of Dushanbe. Set in the Pamir mountain range, the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast is the least developed economically. The majority of its inhabitants are Ismaili Shiites, whereas most other Tajiks are Sunnis. Pamiris speak at least six different dialects of eastern Iranian origin, which are distinct from Tajik. The Garm valley, northeast of Dushanbe, is a mainly agricultural, mountainous region whose population is known for being among the most religious in Tajikistan. The Soghd and Hissar oblasts to the north

¹¹ The Kulyab valley has historically represented the divide between the mountains and the plains.

¹² During the Soviet times the Soghd province was known as Leninabad. Its capital city is Khujand.

and to the west of Dushanbe are the most economically developed regions and have significant Uzbek communities. Khujand, the capital of Soghd-Leninabad oblast, was traditionally the source of communist party elites. To the south are the former Kulyab and Qurghonteppa oblasts, now joined together to form the Khatlon oblast. The current government is dominated by people either from Kulyab, a region of mixed topography and economy, or of Kulyabi origins. Qurghonteppa, previously desert land, was irrigated for growing cotton and other crops in the 1940s and 1950s. The area was populated mostly through Stalin's policy of forced migration, under which a significant portion of Qurghonteppa's population was transplanted from Garm and Gorno Badakhshan.¹³

Tajikistan is home to the Pamiris, a unique high mountain complex located in the heart of Asia. The eastern region of Tajikistan is often referred to as the Pamir Knot, as it is the Central hub from which the five great ranges of Asia extend: the Himalaya, extending southeast; the Karakoram, extending southeast; the Hindu Kush, extending southwest; the Tian Shan, extending northeast; and the Kunlun Shan, extending east.¹⁴

As it has been pointed out, the nature of Tajik territory –isolated valleys surrounded by vertiginous mountains– has favored the development of “tight knit communities with strong local identities.”¹⁵ Nevertheless, the region was not entirely cut off from outside influence. According to Akiner, the territory now known as Tajikistan – as well as the other Central Asian republics– was for centuries the core of the ‘trans-Eurasian’ trade routes. The constant movement of goods and merchants, and the frequent

¹³ Marie Struthers, “Tajikistan, Leninabad: Crackdown in the North,” *Human Rights Watch Europe and Central Asia Division* 10, no. 2 (Apr. 1998 [cited 5 May. 2005] Human Rights Watch Organization): available from <http://www.hrw.org/reports98/tajikistan/>

¹⁴ Gregory Gleason, “Why Russia is in Tajikistan,” *Comparative Strategy* 20, (2001): 78.

¹⁵ Akiner, *Tajikistan Disintegration*, 8.

influxes of migrants brought together the diffusion of news and ideas.¹⁶ Elements such as these produced very complex societies whose horizons extended far beyond their immediate frontiers.¹⁷ As a landlocked region Central Asia never received the direct influence of the Western mercantile countries. At the same time, by being part of the Trans-Eurasian route its main foreign cultural and political influence came from China, Russia, Middle East, the Caucasus and the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, it is clear that the geographic situation of Central Asia determined the influences that received, being those of Western orientation such as democracy and free market the least influential.

There are several thousand Tajiks outside Tajikistan. The biggest of these groups (estimated two million) lives in northern Afghanistan.¹⁸ There are also small groups in Iran, China and Pakistan. Inside Tajikistan, the most populous group with a clearly defined identity is the Kulyabi. It must be stated that the term 'Tajik' is an umbrella designation for a plethora of groups with different origins, histories and nationalities. Besides the large non-Iranian Uzbek population, there are also sizeable settlements of Kyrgyz, Kazakhs, Turkmen, Russians, Germans, and Arabs.¹⁹

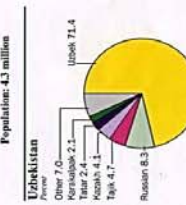
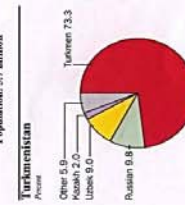
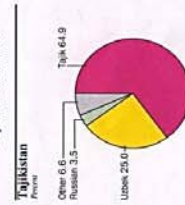
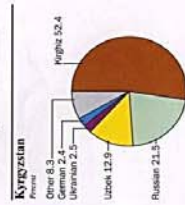
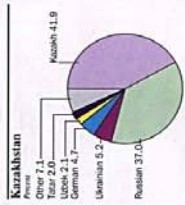
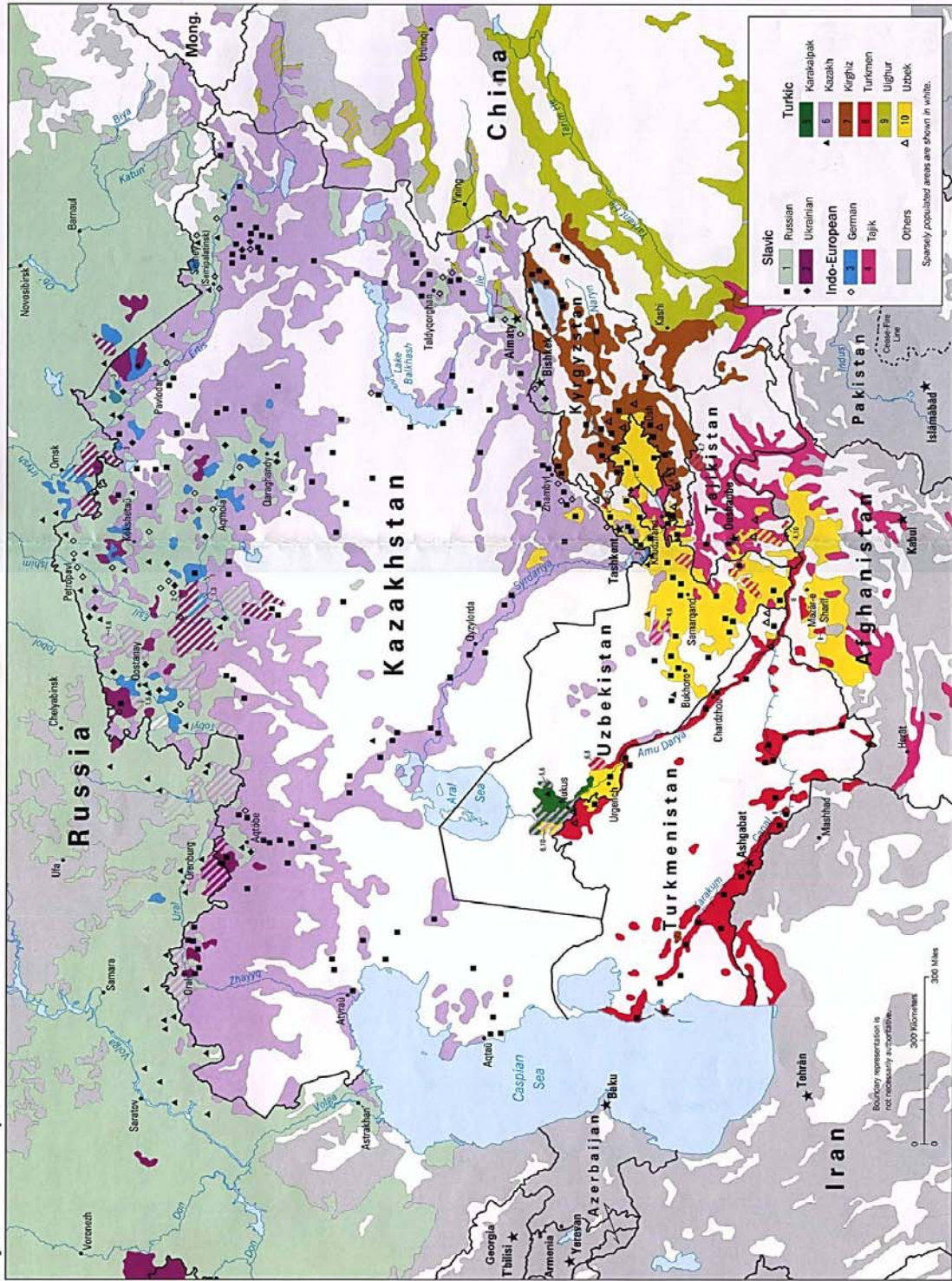
¹⁶ Akiner, *Tajikistan Disintegration*, 8.

¹⁷ Nowadays, the modern descendants of Tajik plain-dwellers are divided between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

¹⁸ In Afghanistan, the term 'tajik' is used to designate all Persian speakers.

¹⁹ Russian, Germans and Arabs rapidly fled the country as it was falling into conflict.

Major Ethnic Groups in Central Asia



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729792 9.80

The creation of these tight knit communities with strong local identities bolstered the development of regional loyalties, thus, impeding the creation of a common national identity. This situation has been exacerbated by the existence of regional networks (clans). Clarifying the concept of ‘clan’ in Tajikistan is necessary before continuing. The regional clans of Tajikistan are different from those in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan in that the former are not strictly defined by descent.²⁰ For Rubin, a ‘clan’ is a unit of social action whose solidarity is based on kinship or a kinship-like form of solidarity. Tajiks have no such clans in the strict sense. They have, however, developed various sorts of lineages which are strictly local. They are not part of any larger tribal structure like the Kazakh *hordes*²¹ or the Afghan *ulus*.²² These lineages have perpetuated and strengthened through the organization of *kolkhozes*²³ and their subdivisions during the Soviet era. Present Tajik clans are mainly a result of administration units created by the Soviet rule.²⁴ For Rubin, the relation between the influence of the Soviet administrative structure and the preconditions of the social structure tied the knot of the Soviet Central Asian clans:

Central Asia kinship links strengthened the ties among members of the Soviet administrative units and between the members and leaders of such units. Such ties promoted solidarity in the face of pressures from above or outside (rulers or competitors). They were key to the leaders of these units who used their positions to

²⁰ Barnett R. Rubin, “Russian Hegemony and State Breakdown in the Periphery. Causes and Consequences of the Civil War in Tajikistan,” in *Post Soviet Political Order. Conflict and State Building*, eds. Barnett R. Rubin and Jack Snyder (London: Routledge, 1998), 147.

²¹ Kazakh traditional society was organized in what was known as ‘Zhuz’ which is a type of clan in which members share a common origin. Ana Irene Contreras, *Kazajstán: evaluación de riesgos y posibilidades de la democracia*. (Santa Catarina Martir, Cholula, Puebla: Universidad de las Americas, Puebla, 2004), 31. Undergraduate final paper.

²² The *ulus* were dynasties within the Afghan horde structure inherited from the Mongolian organization.

²³ A ‘*kolkhoz*’ was a form of collective farming in the Soviet Union that existed along with state farms (*sovkhos*). *Kolkhozes*, (Apr. 1, 2006 [cited 2 Apr. 2006] Wikipedia): available from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kolkhozes>

²⁴ It is true that the Tajik clans were different in that they were not strictly kin-based, but in many ways, concerning political participation –access to power- they functioned as their Turkic counterparts.

construct parallel power networks by redistributing benefits to clients in a patronage system. Such patronage using the assets of the Soviet state and economy “tied the knot” of the Soviet Central Asian clans.²⁵

When talking about clans and their participation in politics in the case of Tajikistan, it is important to take into account that this clanic activity vigorously incremented as a consequence of the situation of extreme hardship that followed the Soviet collapse. This hard situation accentuated the competition for resources and resulted in identities organized around the administrative units through which resources were, historically, allocated; thus favoring the creation of regional solidarity that was exercised primarily by means of regional clans.

According to Kathleen Collins, despite the centrality of clans to social, economic, and political life in Central Asia, students of regime transition have generally ignored them. This author argues that clan structure plays a critical role in this part of the world and suggests that those who focus only on formal institutions are missing much of the story.²⁶ Collins affirms that despite the history of suppression, clans remain a salient everyday reality.

A clan is an informal social institution in which actual or notional kinship based on blood or marriage forms the central bond among members. Clans are identity networks consisting of an extensive web of horizontal and vertical kin-based relations. Clans have their roots in a culture of kin-based norms and trust that makes rational sense, particularly amid the semi-modern economies of Central Asia. Far from being irrational relics of a bygone age, the informal ties and networks of clan life reduce the high transaction costs of making deals in an environment where impersonal institutions are weak or absent and stable expectations are hard to form. Clans in fact serve as an alternative to formal market institutions and official bureaucracies.²⁷

²⁵ Rubin, “Russian Hegemony and State Breakdown,” 147.

²⁶ Kathleen Collins, “Clans, Pacts and Politics in Central Asia,” *Journal of Democracy* 13, no.3 (2002): 141.

²⁷ Collins, “Clans, Pacts and Politics,” 142.

Based on the case of Afghanistan, Collins argues that politics in a clan-based society is largely about the dealings that go on within and between the clans as they compete for state resources. For her,

[I]f clans are the central actors, rationally pursuing the interests of their members, then the weakly institutionalized state will become an arena within which these informal social networks (rather than formal political or social organizations) jostle, contend, and combine in pursuit of their respective interests... The upshot is a regime that might best be called *clan hegemony*.²⁸

Regarding the functionality of clans Collins points out that ‘clan governance’ should not be confused with ethnic, clientelist, regional, or Mafioso politics. By the above argumentation it seems that Collins is not taking into account the basic differences – explained earlier – that distinguish the Tajik case from the rest of the Central Asian cases. In her article,²⁹ Collins assumes that all Central Asian dwellers were initially herdspeople, she pays no attention to the fundamental divide between Turkic semi-nomadic tribes and Iranian sedentary groups.³⁰ Even in times of convergence this divide establishes a fundamental perspective on the approach to the different political systems that emerged after independence. Collins seems reluctant to accept an ‘instrumentalist’ approach that would claim that the emergence of clan-based politics in Tajikistan is a mere result of the Soviet administration and its decay; rather than a natural evolution of pre-Russian nomadic kin-based groups. In the case of Tajikistan after independence, there is a suitable explanation for the continuation of the clanic unity given by Rubin that establishes that “[i]n situations of insecurity, such as those created by the collapse of an

²⁸ Collins, “Clans, Pacts and Politics,” 143.

²⁹ As of the time when this research was done Collins had presented the article “Clans, Pacts and Politics in Central Asia” and she was working on her wider opus *The Logic of Clan Politics in Central Asia: Its Impact on Regime Transition* which was published by the Cambridge University Press in early 2006. In both oeuvres she, as many others, avoids analyzing in a deep manner the case of Tajikistan.

³⁰ It is true that the analysis of Central Asian social relations cannot only be based on this ethnocentric divide but it will serve to a better understanding not to leave it aside.

imperial hegemon, people fall back on whatever forms of solidarity are available culturally or politically”.³¹ This was the case of Tajikistan.

Collins also argues that “[l]ocalism can help maintain clan ties, but clans are not fundamentally regional entities, and two or more may well coexist within the same geographical area.”³² This is true for Tajikistan, for example, the Leninabadi clan is not a higher level of organization of the smaller clans of Leninabad.³³ The Tajik clans, however, as they have not a strictly kin-based form of recruitment,³⁴ are strongly determined by local ties as it is demonstrated by the solidarity groups or parallel power networks that organized around the administrative and economic assets of the Soviet state. Collins argues that clans should not be confused with ‘Mafioso politics’ but the cadres of familism, nepotism, corruption, and thievery around the distribution of resources in Tajikistan are evidence to the contrary.

The communist intelligentsia of Tajikistan that dominated government during the Soviet era largely came from the modernized pro-Uzbek Leninabad Oblast; especially from the city of Khujand. This was and remains a principal element of the Tajik political conformation due to two reasons. Firstly, because the origin of the Tajik political elite from a mainly Uzbek dominated area emphasizes the regional character of the Tajik political dynamics. Secondly, because the Leninabad Oblast connects Tajikistan to the Fergana valley, a mostly Uzbek populated area and a pivotal point for the international dynamics of this region. It has been argued that Tajikistan is, probably, the most artificial construct of the Soviet era. The arbitrary design of the frontiers of the Central Asian

³¹ Rubin, “Russian Hegemony and State Breakdown,” 145.

³² Collins, “Clans, Pacts and Politics,” 143.

³³ Rubin, “Russian Hegemony and State Breakdown,” 147.

³⁴ It is important to notice that there is no comprehensive account of how clan loyalties are constructed.

republics in the 1920s had a melting effect on the area by annexing to the republics parts which have never shared the same ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Such are the cases of the union of Khujand (Soviet Leninabad) to Tajikistan and the inclusion of Samarqand and Bukhara, historic Tajik cultural centers, to the Uzbek SSR; and many others.³⁵

Thus, the Fergana valley –heart of the historic Uzbek Khanate of Khokand– was divided between three different republics; Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Fergana is, perhaps, the most influential area for the stability of the region as it embraces diverse populations from the different countries in a region about 170 km wide and 300 km long.³⁶ The valley has been historically considered as a great center of Central Asian Islam, and after the breakup of the Soviet Union it has been related to the growth of extremist religious groups.³⁷ Fergana is the most densely populated area of the entire Central Asia region; according to Kenneth Weisbrode, there are approximately 10 million people living in the valley. Nearly 75 percent are Uzbeks, around 20 percent Kyrgyz and the rest Tajiks.³⁸ Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have to deal with significant populations outside their home territory, as well as large concentrations of Uzbeks within.³⁹ Many analysts such as Anna Zelkina, Weisbrode and others have agreed in remarking Fergana’s pivotal nature in the future politics of the region; and, thus, have consistently argued that the valley provides plenty of potential for regional destabilization as it has been a historically disputed area, a religious cauldron, and a focal point for groups that oppose

³⁵ These were common Soviet practices. See for example the delimitation of Armenia and Azerbaijan.

³⁶ Kenneth Weisbrode, *Central Eurasia - Prize or Quicksand? : Contending Views of Instability in Karabakh, Ferghana and Afghanistan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) 45.

³⁷ Mohammad-Reza Djalili et Thierry Kellner, *Geopolitique de la Nouvelle Asie Centrale* (Genève: Presses Universitaires de France, 2003).

³⁸ It is remarkable for the interests of the Tajik government and international development institutions that around 75 percent of Tajikistan’s arable land and approximately 65 percent of its industrial production come from this valley. Weisbrode, *Central Eurasia - Prize or Quicksand?*, 47.

³⁹ Weisbrode, *Central Eurasia - Prize or Quicksand?*, 51.

the existing regimes. The strong differences of size and power between the states have produced a geopolitical imbalance so severe that has raised fears in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan about the viability and continuity of their existence.

Weisbrode affirms that due to the religious activism of Fergana and its “proximity to much of the human and ideological spillover from conflicts in Tajikistan and Afghanistan, [the valley] was rapidly identified as the chief regional hotspot.”⁴⁰ This perception was cultivated by the constant violent incursions of groups from Tajikistan into Kyrgyz and Uzbek villages and *viceversa* during the early years of independence and the following Tajik conflict. The exclusion of the Uzbeks from Khujand (Leninabad) from the reconciliation agreement that ended the Tajik civil confrontation is also an element that causes unrest in the area. Consequently, according to Weisbrode, the relevance of Fergana to regional stability and security comes from its association with wider concerns such as the spread of Islamic militancy mainly Wahhabi; the transnational proliferation of narcotics trade and; the management of the ecological disaster that resulted from the poorly regulated Soviet heavy industries.

Viewed through a wider international prism the importance of Fergana becomes clear due to the elements stated before. Central Asia, with much of its future stability depending on the Fergana developments, is a strategic geopolitical enclave that attracts, as it did in the 19th century,⁴¹ the main international powers. From China’s fear of Xinjiang’s secession, through Uzbek’s expansionist intentions, Afghanistan’s instability and drug trafficking, Russia’s moral protectorate, Iran’s political ambivalence, up to the United States newly acquired bipolar confrontation with China, and the momentarily

⁴⁰ Weisbrode, *Central Eurasia - Prize or Quicksand?*, 48.

⁴¹ John Mackinder’s geographic heartland theory considers the core of Eurasia as a pivotal area in international affairs. For further information refer to <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mackinder>

passive presence of India and Pakistan, it is clear that tension from a variety of fronts is building up in Central Asia.

1.2 Pre-modern History

The Central Asian region has always been a *carrefour* of civilizations. Several hundred years before the creation of modern states, many forces were struggling for the control of this area. From the Eastern Iranian Dynasties that occupied the present lands of Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Afghanistan, to the subsequent arrival of Turkic nomadic tribes coming from the west and their relationship with Arabs invading from the Middle East, Mongols arriving from northeast, and Slavs pushing southwards from Russia and Siberia, Central Asia has known many different and distant conquerors throughout its history.

As we have seen, the different groups that are encapsulated into the term 'Tajiks'⁴² are part of the Central Asian branch of the Western Iranian Family.⁴³ The study of the ethnogenesis of the Tajik nation has led historians to think that the origins of the political community do not begin in the twentieth century and are often traced back into

⁴² The assumption of a collective, identifying name is one of the most important attributes of a viable ethnic community. Usage of the word 'Tajik' as an ethnonym was not registered before the second quarter of the 11th century. It has been generally accepted among scholars that the term was initially used in Mawarannahr (located in present Uzbekistan was a bastion of the Samanid Empire) to refer to the Arabs (it was probably derived from the Arab *Tai* tribal name). Afterwards, it became a collective name for both Arabs and local converts to Islam (predominantly Iranians), and only much later was this term transformed into the ethnonym of an entity among Central Asian Iranians. A number of Tajik experts adhere to a different theory which implies that the word 'Tajik' originated from the Persian 'Taj' (meaning 'crown') and that as early as the eighth century, Iranians of Mawarannahr, especially in the mountainous areas, called themselves Tajiks, that is, the 'Crown Headed'. By calling themselves as such, these Iranians emphasized their supposed superiority over all other local peoples. Kirill Nourzhanov, "The Politics of History in Tajikistan: Reinventing the Samanids," *Harvard Asia Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (Winter 2001 [cited 5 Nov. 2004]): available from <http://www.asiaquarterly.com/content/view/92/40/>

⁴³ Pamiris, as has been explained, are not part of the Western Iranian Family. It is noteworthy that the several groups that were summed into the Soviet construct of the TSSR never shared a sense of a common origin (Tajiks) even though they were all of Persian origins.

the early times of the Samanid Empire (875-999 AD).⁴⁴ The Samanids⁴⁵ were the last of a series of Iranian dynasties that ruled the southern fringe of Central Asia –from the southern plains of Kazakhstan to the Hindu Kush and from the Pamirs to northern Iran– between the 6th and 10th centuries and were overthrown by the Turkic Karakhanids that dominated the area between the 10th and 12th centuries.

By the early times of the Samanid Empire, the strong presence and domination of Iranian elites over Central Asia was decaying. Samanid rule coincided with the Arab conquest of Iran and the inroads of Arabic culture into Bactria and Transoxiana (former names for the regions of this area). As Daniel C. Diller explains, during the 7th century, the Arabs invaded Central Asia after the conquest of Iran. The Arab invasion permeated far deeper into the structure of Iranian civilization than any other before or since. It provided the country's culture with a new religion and a new script; it influenced its language and revolutionized its art.⁴⁶ The Arab invasion coincided with the exhaustion of the Iranian dynasty favoring the fall of Zoroastrianism⁴⁷ to Islam which soon became the dominant religion of the Iranian culture.

Peoples of Indo-Iranian origin have been a milestone heritage of Central Asia. It is important to clarify that those from Iranian origin inhabiting some parts of the southern tier of Central Asia were not nomads from the steppes. Turkic language-speaking nomads of the northern steppes moved from time to time (Turkic waves) into the southern tier of

⁴⁴ Was founded by Ismail Samani. Akiner, *Tajikistan Disintegration*.

⁴⁵ Samanids were known by their cultural, artistic, and intellectual life. This is considered a heritage of the Tajik nation.

⁴⁶ ([cited 5 Jan. 2005]): available from <http://www.salamiran.org/CT/history.html>

⁴⁷ Zoroastrianism is a faith that later became a religion, founded by Zarathustra –translated into Greek as Zoroaster- a pre-Persian poet and prophet that expanded his teaching between the early Iranian peoples of The Greater Khorasan a landmark of the Iranian culture. Some of the mythomoteur parables of Zoroastrianism were borrowed by Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The rise of Islam as a religion replacing Zoroastrianism is, perhaps, one of the greatest events in world history.

Central Asia, settling among the ancient sedentary peoples, largely Iranian in origin, who practiced intensive agriculture with irrigation.⁴⁸ The northern tier of Central Asia, on the other hand, remained basically Turkic from the 6th century onwards, when the Turkic culture became predominant in the area and was not touched by the Arab Islamic conquest of the eighth century.⁴⁹ The inroads of Arabs into this southern tier brought the new Islamic religion to the Persian-speaking population and also to some Turks, but in many instances, as Ertürk argues, they held to some of their ancestral shamanic beliefs; for them the influence of Islam was, in general, proportional to the distance of Asian Turks from the Islamic heartland.⁵⁰

The final pushes of the Turkic waves coming from the northern tier, fostered by the Islamization of the Persian population of the south, brought to an end the exhausted Samanid rule leaving its place to the Turkic Karakhanids that were, mainly, allowed into the Samanid structure as slave soldiers. The remnants of the Samanid Empire underwent a difficult destiny: they became a non-important element of the strategic game for control between the powers of the region. After a series of Turkic and Turco-Mongol invasions and rulers they settled in strategic positions in southern Transoxiana's mountainous regions, creating small but semi-independent principalities that had little contact with the larger states on the plains.⁵¹ By the early nineteenth century there were two main regional powers on the plains: the Emirate of Bukhara in the west and the Khanate of Kokand in the Ferghana valley.⁵²

⁴⁸ Korkut A. Ertürk, ed., *Rethinking Central Asia* (London: Ithaca Press, 1999).

⁴⁹ Ertürk, ed., *Rethinking Central Asia*.

⁵⁰ Ertürk, ed., *Rethinking Central Asia*.

⁵¹ Akiner, *Tajikistan Disintegration*, 10.

⁵² Neither Kokand nor Bukhara was able to establish more than a nominal hold in these mountainous principalities.

Samarqand and Bukhara were the principal cities on the plains of Persian influence developing many cultural, intellectual and artistic ties with their Iranian background and the surrounding principalities, cities and states. Other part of the Persian population remained in the mountains living in a mainly isolated context due to geographical barriers. The situation of the location of these Iranian populations coincides extraordinarily with the dual division that contemporary Tajikistan faces: the plains and the mountains.

According to Nourzhanov, in the case of Tajikistan it would be more appropriate to focus on the emergence of the ethnic community: the *ethnie*. Nourzhanov refers to the characterization made by Anthony Smith of an *ethnie* as “a social group ‘whose members share a sense of common origins, claim a common and distinctive history and destiny, posses one or more distinctive characteristics, and feel a sense of collective uniqueness and solidarity.’”⁵³ Based on these elements, Nourzhanov argues that the Tajik problem of collective cultural individuality put in historical perspective is twofold: a) their distinctness from non-Iranian peoples of Central Asia and; b) their dissociation with the peoples of Khorasan and Iran proper.⁵⁴ This dissociation poses greater problems when trying to define the concept of Tajik because there are no pre-soviet founded bases for defining Tajiks as a group. Nevertheless, the struggle of Iranian peoples against the Turkic world, reflected in the existence of a collective *mythomoteur* of the Greater Iran, served as a pivotal point for defining Central Asian Iranian identity.⁵⁵

⁵³ Nourzhanov, “The Politics of History in Tajikistan,” available from <http://www.asiaquarterly.com/content/view/92/40/>

⁵⁴ Nourzhanov, “The Politics of History in Tajikistan,”

⁵⁵ Nourzhanov, “The Politics of History in Tajikistan,”

In a historical perspective, however, it is difficult to single out a distinct Tajik ethnies in the 10th or 11th centuries that corresponds to the actual group. Notwithstanding, the Samanid era can be regarded as the most important historical landmark in the process of the ethnogenesis of the Tajiks. It produced, as Nourzhanov affirms, “an encoded fund of myths, memories, values and symbols... which showed remarkable resilience in the face of countless invasions and eventually formed the backbone of the ‘Tajik Soviet nation’”.⁵⁶ Thus, the creation of Tajikistan is seen as the re-embodiment, in symbolic form, of its mighty precursor: the Samanid state.

It is necessary to assert that the direct association of modern-day Tajiks with the indigenous Aryan population of Central Asia was not part of the Soviet historical approach; it resulted from the intention to form a new system of historical beliefs. In some extreme cases, as explained by Nourzhanov, this new set of beliefs has considered any addition to the pristine Zoroastrian heritage of the Aryans –including Islam– as a threat to the ethnic specificity of the Tajik nation.

However, the main source of grievances and misfortunes of the Tajik people was identified with the pernicious activities of a readily recognizable 'other'. For Masov, the history of Central Asia has been "the struggle of sedentary population against nomads, of the Iranian-speaking people who had achieved a high level of cultural development against boorish and ignorant Turco-Mongol tribes ... [The latter] flooded the greater part of Central Asia, pushing the indigenous population south and into the mountain gorges." Turks in all guises—the Qarakhanids, the Chingizids, the Manghyts, Uzbek Bolsheviks—were proclaimed the culprits behind the Tajiks' plight. The Russian conquerors of the 19th century and Soviet leaders of the 20th century were denounced not so much for their own destructive policies, as for being auxiliary instruments in advancing the agenda of Turkicization in Central Asia.⁵⁷

A new element in regional politics was the arrival of the Russians. In the mid-nineteenth century Tsarist forces invaded Kokand, taking Tashkent in 1865 and Khujand in 1866,

⁵⁶ Nourzhanov, “The Politics of History in Tajikistan,”

⁵⁷ Nourzhanov, “The Politics of History in Tajikistan,”

and then Bukhara. Although the Bukharan Emirate –which had authority over the central and southern zones of Tajikistan– retained nominal autonomy, Russian sovereignty over areas that had already been conquered was confirmed by treaty in 1868.⁵⁸ Both, Bukhara and Kokand, were absorbed into the Russian Empire within a new Tsarist administrative entity –the Governor General of Turkistan– toward the end of the century. It is remarkable that there is no history of protracted conflict between the peoples of these different regions and no pre-Soviet tradition of inter-communal animosity.⁵⁹

In Chapter II, a revision of the History of Tajikistan from the arrival of the Tsarist forces to the fall of the Soviet Union will be presented. This revision will emphasize the main elements of the Tajik political development during that time.

1.3 Education

As there is no pre-Russian national statehood experience, there was not any kind of modern educational system through the lands that later became Tajikistan. Cities like Samarqand or Bukhara were renowned centers of artistic, scientific and human development, but the knowledge produced there was not the result of a clearly structured educational system. The rise of the Czarist power throughout Central Asia did not favor the development of wider educational systems. Soon after the Soviet social policy created Tajik ASSR⁶⁰ the need to map the historical and cultural legacy of the nation emerged.

⁵⁸ The Emirate of Bukhara was fully integrated into the USSR in the 1920s.

⁵⁹ Kamoludin Abdullaev and Catherine Barnes, *Politics of Compromise: The Tajikistan Peace Process* (Online Version 2001 [cited 25 Feb. 2005]): available from <http://www.c-r.org/accord/series.shtml>

⁶⁰ In 1924 The Tajik Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was formed as part of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic.

This social policy created a modern education system in Tajikistan where nothing comparable had existed before.⁶¹

By the beginnings of the decade of 1920s, almost no Tajik had received formal education.⁶² It was not until 1929, after the unification of Khujand with the rest of Tajikistan, that national political, educational, and cultural institutions were established with the objective of promoting literacy and creating a national communist intelligentsia that would provide for native leadership.⁶³ In the first years the senior government and Communist Party posts were filled by Russians as well as Tajiks.⁶⁴ However, the embryos of the first generation of the Soviet Tajik cultural and political elite were executed in the purges of 1937-8. Consequently, in the following decade senior governmental posts were occupied by Russians; and Tajiks were excluded from almost every strategic post in the Communist Party. Nevertheless, a strong Tajik presence remained within the structure of the Party. According to Edward Allworth, in Tajikistan, the Stalinist purges were not entirely felt.⁶⁵ The process of creating an educated elite or national intelligentsia resulted in the creation of strong regional elites. Leninabadis (mostly from the city itself: Leninabad-Khujand) rapidly took advantage over other regional elites –due to various reasons such as their higher level of education– holding the most senior posts in government and Party for some five decades.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Country Studies: available from <http://www.country-studies.com/tajikistan/education.html>

⁶² According to a Soviet census, in 1926 the literacy rate was 4 percent for Tajik men and 0.1 percent for Tajik women. Country Studies: available from <http://www.country-studies.com/tajikistan/education.html>. The efficiency of the Soviet educational system can be analyzed by contrasting this data with that obtained after the fall of the Soviet Union: 99.6 for men and 99.1 for women. CIA Factbook: available from <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ti.html>

⁶³ Akiner, *Tajikistan Disintegration*, 17.

⁶⁴ Mostly from prominent Garmis and Pamiris. Akiner, *Tajikistan Disintegration*, 18.

⁶⁵ Edward Allworth, ed., *Central Asia. 130 Years of Russian Dominance, A Historical Overview* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994).

⁶⁶ Akiner, *Tajikistan Disintegration*, 19.

During the late 1930s, the Soviet government began expanding the network of state run schools. Over the ensuing decades, however, the Soviet education system prevailed along ideological guidelines and various forms of censorship that enforced unrealistic treatment of the relationships between Russian and non-Russians in Central Asia. In the earliest grades of the education structure, children received from teachers and textbooks a sanitized version of the Russian role in the Central Asian history and culture.⁶⁷ Throughout the nearly seven decades of Soviet rule the schoolchildren of Dushanbe and other parts of the region were subjected to a Russocentric version of Central Asian history.⁶⁸ As elsewhere in the Soviet Union, the system was divided into schools for primary, middle (or secondary), and higher education. Middle schools were differentiated as either general or specialized.⁶⁹

By the late Soviet era, education in Tajikistan also suffered from infrastructure problems. School buildings were in poor repair. The quality of technical training available in Tajikistan fell far below the standard for the Soviet Union as a whole.⁷⁰ Graduates often were far less prepared for technical jobs than their counterparts elsewhere in the union. Although Tajikistan's population was nearly two-thirds rural, in 1990 only thirty-eight of eighty-five technical schools were located in the countryside, and fifteen of those were in serious disrepair.⁷¹ By the late 1980s, Tajikistan had twenty institutions of higher education. Despite the ample number of such institutions, the proportion of students receiving a higher education (115 per 10,000 inhabitants) was

⁶⁷ For example, in history class, children were indoctrinated with the idea that the conquering Russian armies must be considered as their liberators. Allworth, ed., *Central Asia. 130 Years of Russian Dominance*.

⁶⁸ Allworth, ed., *Central Asia. 130 Years of Russian Dominance*.

⁶⁹ Country Studies: available from <http://www.country-studies.com/tajikistan/education.html>

⁷⁰ Country Studies: available from <http://www.country-studies.com/tajikistan/education.html>

⁷¹ Country Studies: available from <http://www.country-studies.com/tajikistan/education.html>

slightly below the average for the Soviet republics in the late 1980s. In scientific and technical fields, Tajikistan ranked near the bottom among Soviet republics in the proportion of residents receiving advanced degrees. During the Soviet era, Russian, rather than Tajik, was the preferred medium of instruction in several fields of higher education.⁷²

The result of the educational campaign initiated by the Bolsheviks in the late 1920s is twofold: a) it promoted the development of national elites that served the creation of native cadres; and b) it propelled the creation of a national conscience. Education has contributed to shape the Tajik national identity. Education, in this sense, has promoted citizens' public activity and political participation. The development of national elites mixed with the attempt to create a national conscience resulted in the emergence of regional identities bolstered by the specific geographic situation of Tajikistan. These regional elites developed into regional social networks based on patronage and access to power, the so called 'clans'.

Nowadays, the impact of poverty exacerbates the context of widespread social vulnerability in which the number of children who dropout from school is increasingly higher. The education system is suffering as a result of the exodus of large numbers of teachers in search of better paid work. The number of children living and working on the streets is also increasing followed by the rate of juvenile crimes. General, free and compulsory education for all children is guaranteed by the article 41 of the Constitution of the Republic of Tajikistan. Nevertheless, due to the precarious situation of many families, education has become a luxury beyond the reach of many owing to the hidden costs of schooling today and also to the need for children to contribute to family expenses

⁷² Country Studies: available from <http://www.country-studies.com/tajikistan/education.html>

as soon as possible.⁷³ The lack of a coherent health education has resulted in an increment of the rates of sexually transmitted diseases.⁷⁴ The lack of resources and education has caused the resurgence of health problems that had long been absent from Tajikistan: Typhoid and Malaria remain the major threats.

There is enough evidence to support the argument that Soviet social policy, by means of education programs, tried to erase from the Tajik memory crucial elements such as language, religion and pre-Soviet historical identity.⁷⁵ These policies strongly influenced the ways in which Tajiks reacted after independence. Interregional animosities and the incapacity to conform an all-including political community may be evidence supporting this assertion. Notwithstanding the Soviet true intentions, it has to be acknowledged that its educational program did help to increase the standards of living of the Tajik population as well as the literacy rates.

Finally, as a result of the fall of the Soviet Union and the civil war, the educational system suffered severe destruction and financial problems that evidenced the need for a reform. Initial steps toward educational reform are strongly related with media freedom and access to information, which distinguish modern societies.

1.4 Religion

The majority of the Tajik population is Sunni Muslim and belongs to the Western Iranian Family. It is worth noting that meanwhile by physiology, culture and to some extent

⁷³ Akiner, *Tajikistan Disintegration*.

⁷⁴ Knowledge about HIV/AIDS transmission is low among government policy makers as well as the general population.

⁷⁵ Educational efforts to separate the Tajik language from its Iranian cousin were remarkable evidence of this attempt. Allworth, ed., *Central Asia. 130 Years of Russian Dominance*.

language, Tajiks are closer to Iranians, however, there is only 5 percent of Shi'a Muslims in this Central Asian country as opposed to the 90 percent of Shiites in Iran.⁷⁶

As has been explained, Islam was brought to Central Asia by the Arabs in the seventh century and rapidly took over Zoroastrianism and other rites becoming, in a relative short period, an identity element throughout the region. Nevertheless, religion—in this case, Islam—has never played such an important role in shaping identity and in politics as has done in other Muslim countries. However, there is a widely generalized assumption that in traditional societies, such as Tajikistan, religion plays an important political role.⁷⁷ This assumption has been backed by the 1990s developments that led to a conflict that was portrayed as a confrontation between religious and antireligious groups: Tajik civil war.⁷⁸ After seven decades of Soviet antireligious policies the organizational capacity of political religious groups was strongly undermined. However, these groups still exist and are struggling for a more proactive political participation.

Notwithstanding Soviet policies, Tajikistan, as well as the other Central Asian republics, remained attached to their Islamic identity. Islam has always been a fundamental element of the Tajik private social life and became important in the public sphere soon after independence. Compared to other former Soviet republics, in Tajikistan Islam has had a determinant role in the conformation of the political geography of the post-Soviet state. The rise to power in 1992 (for a few months) of a Muslim-led

⁷⁶ The great majority of Shiites in Tajikistan lives in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region and is mainly Ismaili. Ismailism is a branch of Islam, the second largest Shi'a community after the twelvers—that are dominant in Iran. Though there are several sub-groupings within the Ismailis, the term generally refers to followers of His Highness the Aga Khan. This is the only Shi'a community with a continuing line of Imam. Ismailism, (Mar. 25, 2006 [cited 30 Mar. 2006] Wikipedia): available from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ismailism>

⁷⁷ Isabel Castro, *Kirguistán: el descenso gradual hacia el autoritarismo* (Santa Catarina Martir, Cholula, Puebla: Universidad de las Americas, Puebla, 2004), 35. Undergraduate final paper.

⁷⁸ Far from being a religious crusade, there are several variables that explain the breakup of the conflict that will be analyzed further in this research paper.

opposition was interpreted by the neighboring countries as a systemic threat that could possibly overthrow other Central Asian regimes. These fears have proven empty till now.

The religious institutions of the different organized religions in the Soviet Union were subject to decades of repression, restrictions and antireligious policies imposed by the Soviet government on all religious activities.⁷⁹ Concerning Islam and the particular case of Central Asia the arrival of the Bolsheviks represented the beginning of a radical program of separation between the State and religion. These policies translated into the eradication of the Shari'a, the confiscation of religious endowed lands, and the progressive proscription of three of the five pillar practices of Islam: the payment of *Zakat*, the *Hajj* to Mecca, and fasting during *Ramadan*.⁸⁰ The radicalization of the antireligious policies soon resulted in discontent and unrest. The *Basmachi* revolt, which began in 1918 with *Mujahidins* fighting to resist the establishment of Soviet rule and the consequent exclusion of the Muslim population from power, is a relevant example of this discontent.

Stalin's radicalized policies directly attacked the Muslim religious officialdom by dispersing it through relocation, exile, imprisonment, persistent persecution and assassination. Depending on the international context and on short term interests the policies of the Soviet Union toward Islam varied. This was particularly demonstrable by the shift on antireligious policies during the Second World War that led to the creation of the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan (SADUM), located in Tashkent with the 'Mufti' as its head. According to Ghoncheh Tazmini, with the creation of the Spiritual Directorate the official Muslim was co-opted by –and took its

⁷⁹ Ghoncheh Tazmini, "The Islamic Revival in Central Asia: A Potent Force or Misconception," *Central Asian Survey* 20, no. 1 (2001): 64.

⁸⁰ Tazmini, "The Islamic Revival in Central Asia Tazmini," 64.

cues from– the communist leadership.⁸¹ Tazmini argues, citing Oliver Roy, that the Muftiate was essentially designed “to undermine and even attempt to destroy popular Islam, particularly the connection between national and religious identities, and to create a token, regulated, officially appointed clergy in order to manage the few remaining religious institutions.”⁸² However, despite all the Soviet efforts to eradicate the foundations of Islam, this faith has proven difficult to crush.

There was underground religious activity outside the Muftiate. Illegal religious activity was organized within the so called ‘Parallel Islam’ which, according to Zelkina, functioned through a network of underground schools, mosques and structures of mainly Sufi orders.⁸³ She explains that by the early 1980s the Islamic religious activity increased as a result of a gradual liberalization shift toward religion. Since the late 1970s several *mullahs* and religious thinkers began promoting the need to restore Islam in its original purity. The first communes of ‘Pure Islam’ emerged in Uzbekistan in the villages around Tashkent and later spread to the Fergana valley. In 1978 this ‘Pure Islam’ communes were formed in Tajikistan as a spillover from the Uzbek Islamic revival. In Tajikistan, however, these communes were more similar to an underground political party and network of unofficial mosques and schools.⁸⁴

As an inevitable outcome of the liberalization trend that was characterized by *Perestroika* (*Перестройка*) and *Glasnost* (*Гласность*)⁸⁵ policies, Islam gradually

⁸¹ Tazmini, “The Islamic Revival in Central Asia Tazmini,” 65.

⁸² Oliver Roy, “Islam in Tajikistan,” *Open Society in Central Eurasia Occasional Paper Series*, no. 1, (July 1996) Cited in Tazmini, “The Islamic Revival in Central Asia,” 65.

⁸³ Anna Zelkina, “Islam and Security in the New States of Central Asia: How Genuine is the Islamic Threat?,” *Religion, State & Society* 27, no. 4 (September 1999): 357.

⁸⁴ Zelkina, “Islam and Security in the New States of Central Asia,” 357.

⁸⁵ Reconstruction and Openness, respectively.

revived.⁸⁶ As Zelkina argues, these policies represented an ideal opportunity to legalize the religious practices of the ‘Parallel Islam’. She affirms that the largely secularized urban intelligentsia turned out to Islam in a national-heritage fashion rather than pushed by religious preferences. Mehrdad Haghayeghi describes two phases in the application of these reform policies. According to this author, the first phase lasted from 1985 to 1988 when severe purges and anti-corruption campaigns were led by Gorbachev in an attempt to gain higher control over the region. The second phase corresponds to the 1988-1991 period when due to *Glasnost* Moscow was forced to withdraw its anti-Islamic policy.⁸⁷ A process of Islamic revival and enlightenment rapidly took place. This process, according to Tazmini, was organically intertwined with nationalist sentiments and the notion of national revival was knotted with Islam. Concerning this, Zelkina adds that by the fall of the Soviet Union the Islam of Central Asia was functioning at three distinct levels: a) Official Islam, otherwise known as Soviet Islam controlled by the Mufti; b) Traditional Islam, organized around unofficial clergy; and c) Reformist Islam, which since the 1970s became a separate ideology and can be seen as one of the initial expressions of the polarization of Islam in Central Asia.⁸⁸

Zelkina explains that the revival and polarization of Islam in Central Asia took place at various levels. On the political level she describes the following forms: 1) The emergence of the secular political parties that incorporated Islam in their agendas; 2) An appeal to Islam as the source of legitimation by local governments; 3) Attempts by

⁸⁶ Folk Islam also played an important role in the survival of Islam among the urban population. One form of this popular Islam is Sufism. Often described as Islamic mysticism and practiced by individuals in a variety of ways. Library of the Congress, Country Studies: available from <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/tjtoc.html>

⁸⁷ Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics in Central Asia* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995).

⁸⁸ Zelkina, “Islam and Security in the New States of Central Asia,” 358.

official Islam to become an independent religious and political form; and 4) The emergence of politically active Islamic groups and parties within unofficial Islam and reformist Islam.⁸⁹

On the other hand, as Zelkina suggests, if we accept the statement made by Yaqob Ro'i⁹⁰ that "...fundamentalism is by definition a reaction to secularism or secularization"⁹¹ it becomes clear that the resurgence of Islam in the former Soviet lands was an understandable reaction to decades of oppression suffered under Soviet rule. In order to understand why Islam has not played a crucial role in national politics it is important to take into account that during the Soviet era, Islam was largely de-intellectualized, surviving mainly in its ritual and traditional forms. The prolonged isolation, bolstered by the Soviet ban on religions, from the sources of knowledge led to an almost universal ignorance about the basic tenets of the Muslim practice. As such, as it has been pointed out, it is important to establish that the Islamic revival in Tajikistan and in the other former Soviet republics is principally bound upon the search for a national identity and cultural heritage. For example,

[I]dentification with Islam as an integral part of life is shared by urban and rural, old and young, and educated and uneducated Tajiks. The role that the faith plays in the lives of individuals varies considerably, however. For some Tajiks, Islam is more important as an intrinsic part of their cultural heritage than as a religion in the usual sense, and some Tajiks are not religious at all.⁹²

⁸⁹ Zelkina, "Islam and Security in the New States of Central Asia," 359.

⁹⁰ History professor for The Cummings Center for Russian and Eastern European Studies of the Tel Aviv university.

⁹¹ Yaqob Ro'i, "The Secularization of Islam and the USSR's Muslim Areas", in *Muslim Eurasia: Conflicting Legacies* (Frank Cass, London, 1995) cited in Zelkina, "Islam and Security in the New States of Central Asia," 357.

⁹² Library of Congress, Country Studies: available from [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+tj0037\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+tj0037)) ([cited 7 Mar. 2005])

This religious awareness does not necessarily translate into radical political behavior as has been widely assumed. Tazmini argues that many people have neglected the diversity of this faith espousing its politicized version as the absolute form. The various differences in Islamic adherence reflect the absence of true religious solidarity in the region and coincide with the asseveration made by Richard Rose about the discrepancies that Muslims have about the essence of their religion.⁹³ The Islamic bond in Central Asia and in particular in Tajikistan has been highly exaggerated whilst sectarian, tribal, ethnic, linguistic, regional and national differences have been underestimated. Religion is only one identity among many, starting with the family, extending to clan and regional loyalties and to the new states.⁹⁴ As Tazmini suggests, a radical Islamic movement requires a high degree of national unity and support for succeeding in seizing power.

Since the fall of the Soviet Union a tendency to refer to any form of Muslim public religious activity in Central Asia as a manifestation of religious fundamentalism has emerged. In reality, as Zelkina argues, the Islamic revival in Central Asia has two different aspects: social and political. The first is the return to Islam as a way of life and an important component of the people's identity. The second is the rise of political Islam. Generally labeled as 'fundamentalism' political Islam encompasses a wide variety of tendencies. The so called *Wahhabi* fundamentalism is only one form of political Islam. The *Wahhabi* movement appeals to Islam as a political force capable of bringing the Muslim world out of the state of internal declination. While the ultimate goal of political Islam is to establish an Islamic State, different groups approach this task differently.

⁹³ Richard Rose, "How Muslims view Democracy: Evidence from Central Asia," *Journal of Democracy* 13, no.4 (2002):103.

⁹⁴ Rose, "How Muslims view Democracy," 106.

Some see the way through education; others through democratic and political competition means; while others appeal to violence as the most efficient form of political struggle.⁹⁵

Tazmini summarizes the relation of the socio political revival of Islam very clearly:

It is evident that the largely secular elites of the region are in a sticky situation. On the one hand, they have developed Islamic credentials in order to reinforce their legitimacy, but on the other, they have no intention of allowing Islamic activism to challenge their position. As a result, as Martha Brill Olcott has pointed out, these regimes have come to recognize that in practice the Islamic revival has taken two forms, one they can live with and one which they reject entirely.⁹⁶

When analyzing the religious characteristics of Tajikistan and the entire region it is important to realize that Islam can be used as a vehicle of discontent and protest against the newly camouflaged regimes. As it has been stated above, if Islamic movements are denied the right to participate in politics, the region may become vulnerable to extremist militancy as, according to Tazmini, Islam offers an attractive ideology for an oppressed populace.⁹⁷ Mostly, when analysts talk about the Islamic threat in Central Asia, they use the Tajik civil war as an example to back their claims. The civil conflict that followed the fall of the Soviet Union has been depicted as a religious issue, but it is important to establish that, contrary to many authors, the Tajik civil war was not a conflict between the Soviet and Islam, even though it looked like it. Although widely presented as an Islamist takeover, the rise to power of an Islamic-led opposition had many stimuli other than religious ones and hence should be interpreted against both religious and secular

⁹⁵ Zelkina, "Islam and Security in the New States of Central Asia," 359.

⁹⁶ Tazmini, "The Islamic Revival in Central Asia Tazmini," 65.

⁹⁷ Tazmini, "The Islamic Revival in Central Asia Tazmini," 66.

backgrounds.⁹⁸ Throughout the following chapters of this research important evidence will be presented to support this claim.

In the early years of independence, the developments of the Tajik Islamic officialdom took almost the same path as that taken by the religious institutions of its neighboring republics. The national governments of Tajikistan and Kazakhstan resolved to separate their national religion officials from the authority of the Uzbek Muftiate; thus, not recognizing the Uzbek predominance in religious affairs. By 1990 Kazi Akbar Turajonzade was elected as the Mufti of Tajikistan. Contrary to the widely accepted Islamic belief that the matters of God should have predominance over those of men, the Muftiate was divided between political competing projects and interests of the new states. This is evidence of how other identities, such as the national one, are stronger than the religious one, thus highlighting the real effects that decades of Soviet policies had in weakening the Islamic identity across the region.

Nevertheless, the case of Tajikistan has proven wrong the 1980s Soviet assertion that “the urbanized industrial labor force and the educated population had little to do with a ‘remnant of a bygone era’ such as Islam.”⁹⁹ Even when Islam is not yet politically strong in this republic, its prevalence and continued practice even in the aftermath of independence also disproves the ‘weak’ correlation, found by Richard Rose, between religion and political attitudes in Central Asia. He suggested that for Central Asian countries, as well as for former European communist countries, increases in education, urbanization and income will lead to an increase in religious indifference. This is, as he found, the case of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, but not that of Tajikistan; a country in

⁹⁸ Zelkina, “Islam and Security in the New States of Central Asia.”

⁹⁹ Library of Congress, Country Studies: available from [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+tj0037\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+tj0037)) ([cited 7 Mar. 2005])

which, even though conditions have gradually but slowly improved, social groups, especially the younger ones, are not being indifferent to the substance of the Islamic doctrine.¹⁰⁰

For in the case of Tajikistan, even though the Islamic faith is reemerging its impact will be assuredly affected by the prevailing secularism of the ruling elite whose major challenge, according to Zelkina, is to look for assistance in solving their severe problems of development rather than looking for a religious-led solution.¹⁰¹ It is noteworthy that Islam, as has been stated, is an element of identity but not ‘the’ element. Islam has failed to unify the Tajik nation.¹⁰² Religion is not that transcendental for to play a major role when talking about the obstacles for conforming a political community. Nevertheless, it plays an important role when defining regional identities which strongly determine the nature of the Tajik political system. The religious factor has nothing to do with the impediment of uniting under the same political pact people from the Uzbek dominated north and the rest of the country.

The Islamic threat in Tajikistan is not as has been portrayed by international media. What we testified in the post-Soviet years was more a conflict between regional elites over the state’s assets and the reallocation of scarce resources rather than the ignition of an Islamic Wahhabi revolution emanating from the soils of Tajikistan. There is no evidence to suggest that the events occurred in Tajikistan will have a spillover effect over the neighboring countries in the short and mid terms due to various distinct elements in each case. This confirms that the widely held assumption that Islam is likely to be a

¹⁰⁰ Rose, “How Muslims view Democracy,” 106.

¹⁰¹ Mohiaddin, Mesbahi, ed, *Central Asia and the World* (New York: Council of Foreign Relations Press, 1994). Cited in Tazmini, “The Islamic Revival in Central Asia Tazmini,” 70.

¹⁰² A very ambiguous concept conceived in the early years of independence when politicians and intellectuals were trying to create the foundational bases for a coherent state community.

potent force in shaping the future of the Central Asian republics is not entirely accurate.¹⁰³ Tazmini assures that “[i]n fact there is enough evidence to suggest that these republics will not fall under the sway of an Islamic-led opposition and that a unified Muslim state across the whole of Central Asia will not materialize.”¹⁰⁴

Nevertheless, the possible rise to prominence of Islamic groups depends on various factors such as the domestic situation of the republic and the general stability of the region. The rise of present-day Islam has confirmed that it has an important role as a cultural force and as a shaper of national identity, however. It has also showed that it could be used as a mobilizing ideological framework for social and economical reasons.¹⁰⁵ Life after Soviet era has made clear that Islam survived as a cultural-religious phenomenon.

Finally, it is important to take into account that the issue of religion in Tajikistan cannot be studied separately. In order to give a fuller account it needs to be analyzed through a wider regional prism as it was attempted in this section.

1.5 Economy

A chasm cannot be crossed in two steps.
– Vaclav Klaus¹⁰⁶

In the last years of the old system, Tajikistan, following a wave unleashed by the *Glasnost* policy, slowly began to implement a timid set of policies thus initiating a transitional period from the traditional Soviet central planning to a market oriented

¹⁰³ Tazmini, “The Islamic Revival in Central Asia Tazmini,” 63.

¹⁰⁴ Tazmini, “The Islamic Revival in Central Asia Tazmini,” 63.

¹⁰⁵ Zelkina, “Islam and Security in the New States of Central Asia,”.

¹⁰⁶ Vaclav Klaus is the honorary chairman of the Civic Democratic Party of the Czech Republic and current president to this country.

economy.¹⁰⁷ The promulgation of the Law on Deregulation and Privatization of Property in February 1991 and the creation of a commercial bank, the ‘Tajik-bank-business’ were fundamental steps toward reform. However, this initial and tenuous process of transition met strong resistance among the elite due to strategic considerations such as maintaining control over economic and technological power. After independence, the liberalization trend of the initial reform stage found sharp opposition due to the price increases that followed price liberalization, and to the consequences of the strong output decline as subsidies from Moscow were cut.

Tajikistan’s initial transition stage was soon interrupted by a large civil conflict that lasted, officially, from 1992 to 1997. The signing of the peace accord reenacted the process of economic reform. However, the steps taken in the early 1990s were sufficient evidence to consider Tajikistan as a pioneer reformer in the region. Nevertheless, all these efforts and reforms were reversed by the civil war.¹⁰⁸ According to Akiner, all the sectors of the economy were devastated, and output shrank tremendously while hyperinflation reached almost 2,000 percent by mid 1993.¹⁰⁹ Crisis set in. Once the armed phased of the conflict was over, international organizations began launching programs to provide technical assistance and to start reconstructing the ravaged Tajik infrastructure. By 1996 a new privatization program was initiated with the assistance of the World Bank, followed by the emission of the initial loan to improve various facilities. Since

¹⁰⁷ Early in 1991 privatization of some enterprises was legalized. Library of Congress, Country Studies: available from [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+tj0054\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+tj0054))

¹⁰⁸ After the civil war, Tajikistan’s Gross Domestic Product GDP stood at 40 percent of the 1991 level. Poverty stills endemic; annual per capita income for 2004 was estimated at US\$280, ranking the last of the former Soviet republics and 191 of a 208 study, just above the poorest African nations. Data from the World Bank Group Atlas Method, update in mid 2004.

¹⁰⁹ Akiner, *Tajikistan Disintegration*, 60.

then, Tajikistan became an important beneficiary of humanitarian aid and project finance.¹¹⁰

The countries that emerged from the implosion of the former Soviet Union were soon labeled as ‘Transition countries’ and were rapidly confronted with the need to overcome authoritarian regimes and centrally planned economies, both legacies of the communist ideology. Tajikistan was the poorest of these countries.

As the early results of the distinct ‘transitional’ countries varied, analysts as Holger C. Wolf¹¹¹ became aware of the need to differentiate the various processes of transition. More than 20 countries began the transition from planned to free market economies at nearly the same time but, as Wolf suggests, they started from different initial conditions, followed different strategies, and moved at a different speed. Consequently, a division was established between the ‘radical reformers’ mostly those from Eastern Europe and the Baltics; the ‘gradual reformers’ containing the Visegrad countries¹¹², Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan; and the ‘laggard’, a group mostly populated by the former Soviet republics.

[W]ith the exception of Russia and the Baltics, the FSU [Former Soviet Union] states that became sovereign nations after the dissolution of in (*sic*) 1991 faced a double task: (i) developing an administrative capacity so as to function as a sovereign nation state; and (ii) creating national economies out of a highly integrated all Union plan based economy and converting it into a market based one. Hence, it was clear in the beginning that transition in the FSU would be more problematic.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Akiner, *Tajikistan Disintegration*, 60.

¹¹¹ Holger C. Wolf, “Transition Strategies: choices and outcomes,” *Princeton Studies in International Finance*, no. 85, (June 1999).

¹¹² The Visegrad Group reflects the efforts of the countries of the Central European region to work together in a number of fields of common interest within all-European integration. The Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia have always been part of one civilization sharing cultural and intellectual values and common roots of religious traditions which they wish to preserve and further strengthen. For further information visit: <http://www.visegradgroup.org/main.asp>

¹¹³ Cevdet Denizer, *Stabilization, Adjustment and Growth Prospects in Transition Economies* (Macroeconomics and Growth Division Policy Research Department The World Bank, 1997).

Tajikistan belongs to the third group of the typology given by Wolf: the laggards. These are countries that failed in dismantling the old order and presented a strong weakness and immaturity of their basic market institutions resulting into serious impediments to business activity, the development of small and medium size enterprises, and hindered the inflow of foreign investments.¹¹⁴ In some cases, such as that which is subject to this research, many trade transactions have had a non market character being conducted on a barter basis, i.e. this was the case in 1995, during the reconstruction period, due to the shortage of fresh Russian rubbles.

Year	1985	1990	1995	2000	2002
GDP per capita (PPP-dollar)	1 710	1 880	780	800	980

Source: http://globalis.gvu.unu.edu/indicator_detail.cfm?IndicatorID=19&Country=TJ

It has been pointed out that the process of economic transition has been uneven. According to Peter Murrel, there is a set of preconditions that if analyzed can explain the differences in the stages of reform in each country. He argues that it is necessary to take into account the total population; the location in terms of distance from the center of Europe, Vienna as the center; level of development; political status at the start of transition; and, whether reforms have been affected by war. Wolf refines those preconditions in the following terms.

These five variables are (1) the initial industrial share, proxying for the obsolescence shock, (2) the reported growth rates of the net material product...and the inflation rate in 1989 proxying for the inherited degree of economic instability, (3) the distance from Vienna and from the nearest market economy, proxying for potential

¹¹⁴ Marek Dabrowsky and Radzislava Gortat, *Political and Economic Institutions, Growth and Poverty – Experience of Transition Countries* (United Nations Development Programme. Human Development Report Office, 2002).

association effects arising from the proximity to EU and, thus, gravity effects on trade and FDI flows, (4) the starting year of central planning, proxying for “memory effects” of operating under market conditions, and (5) the population share of the largest ethnic group, proxying for potential ethnic conflict.¹¹⁵

It is important to acknowledge that there were two types of Soviet republics, those that were created or delimited during the 1920s and those that had pre-Soviet statehood experience, such as the Baltics. The republics that enjoyed previously a liberal political order were more likely to liberalize and reform more efficiently and faster. Moreover, Murrell and others are suggesting the key importance of starting conditions for the successful or unsuccessful course of reforms. In addition to this, Dabrowsky introduces a subtle suggestion by highlighting that at the economic level, all the republics -the most successful reformers and the laggards- began from the same point. Thus, questioning the starting condition hypothesis, highlighting the effectiveness of some political moves undertaken toward reform; and, assuming the importance of initial political conditions. Both authors suggest that there might be a different perception of what independence was. Countries such as the Baltics felt liberated and were strongly interested in joining European Union membership; while countries of the former union, such as Tajikistan felt suddenly and accidentally unprotected. The farther a country is from the EU (Vienna), the smaller its aggregate payoffs to reform.¹¹⁶

Tajikistan was the only Central Asian republic in which the political activism and social enthusiasm at the end of the Soviet Union could have led to reform and liberalization. This ‘opportunity window’, as referred by Wolf, was rapidly closed by the social and political disturbances that followed independence. The Tajik political energy directed toward political reform that would have resulted in economic advance was

¹¹⁵ Wolf, “Transition Strategies,” 13.

¹¹⁶ Wolf, “Transition Strategies,” 1.

wasted in regional power-sharing conflicts between the so-called clans. However, as Akiner has pointed out, the end of the conflict brought back in the agenda the so eluded need for economic and political reform and liberalization¹¹⁷. This ignited, by 1995 -nearly five years after the initial reformers-, a complicated and slow process of implementation of political and economic policies aimed at fighting inflation, liberalizing domestic prices (a socially painful process), privatizing, and institution building, which, ironically, helped to preserve significant remnants of the command economy and to create new distortions.¹¹⁸

Of the three dimensions of liberalization, the freeing of internal markets has proceeded farthest, largely reflecting the ending of centralized planning, centralized distribution and price control over the state enterprises. Freedom of private sector has advanced the least, this being the aspect of reform where laggard reformers seem particularly slothful. The opening of foreign trade has been very fast compared to historical experience.¹¹⁹

Tajikistan, as well as the other Central Asian countries, has to build reliable institutions that are able to cope with the overwhelming costs of transition. As Dabrowsky suggests for the entire region, progress in this sphere has enormous importance for the course of economic reforms and their social effects. The authors referred in this section agree to a considerable extent that sooner or later all the former Soviet republics -even the laggards- are going to implement reform. Nevertheless, it is not only a matter of time. Transition requires a systemic change that is not taking place in Tajikistan. Independence has not fostered the growth of a civil society able to dismantle, by democratic means, the structures inherited from the Soviet era and that came through the breakdown phase

¹¹⁷ Denizer establishes that there are three variable to measure economic liberalization in transition economies: liberalization of internal markets, foreign trade and private sector participation. Denizer, *Stabilization, Adjustment and Growth*, 4.

¹¹⁸ Marek Dabrowsky and Radzislava Gortat, *Political and Economic Institutions*.

¹¹⁹ Peter Murrel, "How Far Has the Transition Progressed?," *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 10, no. 2 (Spring 1996): 31.

almost intact, but with another face. The structure remained while the regional origin of the leaders changed.

Transition can be viewed from different perspectives, through different lens, however, it has to be analyzed focusing on a wide institutional process that comprehends social, political, cultural and international variables. Based on Murrel's assumptions, it is possible to suggest that Tajikistan's main economic troubles, such as recession, inflation, unemployment and the delayed recovery from breakdown are, as he suggests, "simply the result of less reform before the fall of communism, later advent of postcommunism, greater repercussions from state fissure and greater distances from dynamic markets."¹²⁰ Murrel also depicts a more pessimistic scenario in which the former Soviet republics are conditionally impeded to engage into the 'evolutionary processes', the result, he suspects, will be slow improvement and possibly social and political chaos.

¹²⁰ Murrel seems to be suggesting that the Central Asian countries are following the path of Eastern Europe, though with a substantial slower progress on the reform path. Murrel, "How Far Has the Transition Progressed?," 42.