

Chapter III

The Construction of the new hegemony

After the civil war and the national reconciliation process, the ruling coalition took several measures towards consolidating the government and healing the profound wounds left by the civil strife. Moreover, the gradual strengthening of the regime and its expansion to distant regions of the republic by means of arranging new and particularized deals with regional bosses was the key aim of Rakhmonov's administration. Crucial to the attainment of this goal was the implementation of the peace agreements. These served as a transitional program that was mainly based on the commitment to lock up the opposition within the government. However, the failure to establish and define the basic criteria of this commitment coupled with the enduring weaknesses of the Tajik state and economy resulted in the malfunction of the power-sharing reforms.

In this chapter I will analyze how the factors influencing the formation of political groups and parties during the transitional period have allowed the concentration of power in the figure of the president. Also, I will analyze how the constitutional amendments promoted by Rakhmonov have furthered his chances to expand his power and how this authoritarian shift has gradually excluded opposition members from main governmental positions, that is, the very members of the warring factions he was supposed to lock in within the government to achieve reconciliation. I will try to argue that a new type of "clan hegemony" (similar to that which prevailed under the Soviet administration) is consolidating in Tajikistan. In order to give a proper account of the way in which this clan hegemony is being constructed I will present the following analysis divided into five main areas: Political Evolution, Civil Society and Media; Party System and Electoral

Process; Constitutional Framework; Governance, Corruption and Poverty; and, International Arena.

In trying to support the idea of the consolidation of a 'new hegemony' I will also try to describe the type of authoritarianism that has emerged as well as the reasons for its emergence. The return of 'clan hegemony' involves the reappearance of several patterns of the political scenario that led to civil war, although it presents a subtle difference: opposition is strongly undermined and dispersed. Hence, the new levers of clan hegemony have left aside the heavy moorings of interclanic struggle and a partial safe haven for clan hegemony networks has been neatly developed within the new political institutions.

3.1 Concentrating power

As it has been pointed out, the outbreak of violence in early 1992 showed that there was no transitional pact to assure the continuation of the ruling elite. Since the late 1970s, the widespread social and political presence that other regional groups acquired under the shelter of what has been called unofficial second level autonomy, raised doubts as to the real governing capacity of the Leninabadis. It is clear that the clan hegemony that lasted in Tajikistan during the Soviet era was not the outcome of a historical interaction between different regional or ethnic groups as in other Central Asian countries. The fundamental difference is that in republics such as Kazakhstan or Kyrgyzstan the soviets empowered clans that were already dominant. The Soviet clanic structure in Tajikistan was artificial in that it had no traditional historical roots.

On the other hand, by the end of communist rule, countries such as Tajikistan, where the clan structure is the outcome of soviet distributive dynamics, faced quite different political circumstances. As we have already seen, the absence of a truly powerful regional group prompted an interclanic struggle between fairly equal rival factions around the state's assets administration. In the absence of Soviet support, Nabiev and his elite proved to be unable to control the whole of the territory, and therefore, unable to maintain their hold on power. However, the Leninabadi's incapacity to keep their dominant position was not entirely due to the fall of the Soviet Union. As it has been explained in previous chapters, a plethora of *sub rosa* organizations developed throughout Tajikistan from the 1970s onwards. These organizations developed large scale patron-client networks under the shelter of the Soviet administrative structure. As these underground networks developed, the position of the ruling elite was threatened and soon potential challengers developed similar social and political maneuvering capacity. Consequently, Leninabadis started yielding specific areas of local administration and negotiating an alliance with Kulyabis for the state's administration. Rapidly, Kulyab grew in power to administer large scale social networks. Power was strongly decentralized. By the time Tajikistan obtained its independence, a power vacuum had built up leading the two hegemonic candidates and several rival factions into a devastating confrontation.

Once Rakhmonov became acting president on the eve of the civil war, the principal aim of the Tajik government was to consolidate its power and dominance. Even during the social crackdown created by civil war, the inertia of inherited stagnant Soviet institutions gave the state and the citizenry a vague perception of social and political

cohesion. However, the fragmented national political situation made apparent that what was needed was to reestablish control over the pillars of state organization. This implied the need to create a new balance between the different social and regional groups of Tajikistan; perhaps a more natural balance of truly national scope. From this perspective and based on evidence presented earlier, it can be argued that the underlying factor that gave rise to civil confrontation in Tajikistan was that Soviets forced a national political balance that was artificial and that would succumb in the absence of Russian intermediation. A new balance was worked out only after the civil war giving rise to a transitional pact at the end of 1993. In this respect Collins has argued that as no transitional pact had been reached in Tajikistan by the end of the Soviet era, “any subsequent regime transition” was likely to become unstable.¹ I will challenge this view showing that Rakhmonov has steadily worked up through cooptation and intimidation a network of regional alliances and an informal setting that inaugurates a new era of clan hegemony in Tajikistan.

By 2000, Rakhmonov’s administration –‘elected in 1994 with the backing of the Russian government- adopted a strategy of concentrating power by co-opting certain leaders of the opposition, persecuting the disaffected ones, and by depicting the government as a guarantor of civilian peace. At the social level, Rakhmonov’s clan networks became increasingly active in villages and had, as Collins suggests, “usurped both the interest-aggregation role of parties and the role of the state in distributing resources, jobs, and social benefits”.² The Tajik regime has worked up new and particularized deals with regional factions that have strengthened the government’s

¹ Kathleen Collins, “Clans, Pacts, and Politics in Central Asia,” *Journal of Democracy* 13, no.3 (2002): 145.

² Collins, “Clans, Pacts, and Politics,” 148.

position. By amending the Constitution and allowing national referenda, the presidential figure has expanded its authority. Rakhmonov has utilized state-run media to portray himself as the only possible salvation from radical Islam and instability.

The grave structural problems that the Tajik state now faces are deeply rooted in the dynamic that resulted from the combination of the Soviet administrative structure and preexistent social structures. Since during the Soviet era the functioning of this combination was efficient and there were no scarcity conflicts, Tajiks are inclined to believe that a return to the Soviet era model will bring stability; thus, the return to clan hegemony and the concentration of power in hands of the executive are perceived as necessary. This situation has been favored by the existence of a weak opposition; the lack of precision when designing the power-sharing agreements signed between the government and the opposition;³ and, the authoritarian shift that Russia has effected and promoted throughout its former territories. Moreover, as it will be explained later on in this chapter, independence and peace have not fostered the strengthening of civil society or of democratic reform. So far, the only outcome that is apparent is the conformation of strong regional ruling elite. Kathleen Collins explains that since ‘cultural preconditions’ did not advance any democratic development, it seemed as though the ‘Leninist legacy’ had the effect of perpetuating something like the Soviet regime. This author suggests that in the Tajik political evolution one thing seemed certain: Democratic transition of any sort was not likely.⁴ By the same token, Thomas Carothers argues that it is necessary to

³ The failure of the state’s administration to secure the entire territory, the rise of regional ‘strong men’, food deficit, industrial collapse, energy dependence, and weak state institutions hindered the full implementation of the peace agreements and the power-sharing reform.

⁴ Collins, “Clans, Pacts, and Politics,” 148.

stop looking at these states as if they were in transition to democracy.⁵ I will not challenge these views. With the exception of Kirgizstan transitions in Central Asian states clearly entail anything but a transition to democracy. However what becomes apparent in those culturally disadvantaged nations is that their governments crush any incipient democratic outgrowth that presents itself. So, if it is true that culture is not conducive to democracy in those nations it is also true that there is a design on the part of their governments and institutions to foreclose the development of democracy at any rate. We need to explore what is it that Central Asian political leaders have instead of civic skills and what political values inform their goals and actions. Some of the answers to these questions may be found in what Collins identifies as *klannovayapolitika*.

Collins suggests that we need to reflect more thoroughly on the key role that clans play in shaping Central Asian politics. In Tajikistan clan conformation differed historically and traditionally from those in other Central Asia countries, in the way in which clans reacted and interacted at the fall of the soviets. This was because clan activity in Tajikistan was not tied by traditions. Therefore, the way in which they needed to interact with the objective of building the new hegemony was totally uncertain. The civil conflict showed that there was no national identity and that clans had, in some ways, the same level of strength by those days. Thus, it seems that emergent clanism –regional networks looking to establish themselves as an alternative by disputing the hegemony– was the principal cause of conflict, but nevertheless needed for state continuity and survival. However, when trying to consolidate the new hegemony to organize the matters of the state, the new elite finds itself immerse in the same dilemma that troubled the former elite: in order to ensure its position it has to impose its hegemony over the others

⁵ Thomas Carothers, “The End of the Transition Paradigm,” *Journal of Democracy* 13, no.1 (2002): 6-21.

by strengthening its own patron-client networks, incurring the risk of provoking widespread unrest and conflict. In order to give a proper account of the consolidation of the new hegemony process it is important to assess how the Tajik ruling elite and its patronage networks have penetrated existing political institutions, and how they have allocated economic resources between establishment and opposition groups. In the following sections I will attempt to answer these questions.

3.2 Political evolution, Civil Society and Media

As we have empirically discovered, until now, transition from communism to a non-communist political system does not imply that democracy is forthcoming. The convergent trajectories that Central Asian countries have taken into the path of authoritarianism showed that not all transitional processes are likely to evolve into Western oriented political establishments.

In the case of Central Asia, and specifically Tajikistan, this tendency towards authoritarianism is not a mere coincidence. The hopes that were raised at the fall of the Soviet Union about the political future of Tajikistan were very optimistic, and failed to understand that there are several elements concerning the political evolution of any given transitional country. As it has been explained earlier in this thesis, elements such as the internal dynamics of Tajikistan, the absence of a state formation process, the lack of a pre-Soviet statehood experience, the historic sociopolitical divide between the mountains and the plains, and the development of regional extended familial networks were the key elements of the pre-communist legacy. These elements, altogether with the key elements of the communist legacy (capricious border design; centrally planned production scheme;

intranational displacement of regional and ethnic identities; Soviet stagnant institutions; clan based access to the soviet distributive system), resulted in the hampering of the so expected political evolution of Tajikistan: transition towards the initial phases of democracy. Moreover, as Tajikistan lacked pre-communist party formation experience, there were no national-historical patterns for modeling political organizations away from the soviet authoritarian model.

Nevertheless, hopes for a democratic political development in Tajikistan were not entirely misplaced. The effervescence in the sociopolitical realm that developed since the late 1970s resulted in a climate of political activity and participation by the late 1980s. This Tajik underground political evolution was better characterized by the partial turnover of the historical ruling elite by the Kulyabis and the development of various regional networks beyond the reach of the central authorities. However, this sociopolitical activation, in a context of scarce resources, fostered social fragmentation and strengthened regionally based identities. These cleavages resulted in the creation of entities that were struggling for their own survival, beyond the sphere of national politics, rather than seeking some kind of accommodation within an unfamiliar post-soviet political system.

Under Soviet communist rule, the creation of organizations outside the control of the government was forbidden. So, civil society was largely underdeveloped in the USSR.⁶ Nevertheless, the formation of proto civil society organizations eventually but slowly developed during the Gorbachev era.⁷

⁶ During the Soviet and pre-Soviet eras a civil society did exist in the form of cultural and non-dissident activities. It could be argued that the network organizations that Kulyabis developed under the shelter of the Soviet structure (during the second level autonomy period) were the antecessors of those social

Tajikistan was one of those places where the 1980s Soviet openness became rapidly useful and resulted in the creation of political organizations and parties –regional and religiously based–. In a context of fragmentation, social unrest, political uncertainty and scarcity of resources, the emergence of several political organizations claiming different interests and values soon gave birth to a dangerous mix. Almost all Tajik political organizations which were involved in the civil war were born in this period and remain currently active.⁸ According to Dawisha and Parrot there are different types of transition, the nature of the transition from communism in Tajikistan was violent and precipitated.⁹ As it has been explained earlier, the nature of the transition mixed with the internal dynamics of Tajikistan impeded a peaceful political accommodation. At the same time, violent clashes between rival factions fighting over resources, the presence of an armed opposition, and the government’s struggle to keep its position and maintain the *status quo*, severely affected the formation of intermediary and alternative associations and parties during the first eight years of independent statehood.

Since the mid 1990s many international organizations became interested in the sociopolitical situation in Tajikistan. The first Western-styled Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs) that came into existence in this former Soviet republic relied on international donors that were initiating their own programs and funding to aid people displaced and affected by civil war. Afterwards, NGOs became increasingly active and

organizations that developed in the 1980s. However, it must be stated that those networks were mainly administrative and, in some cases, dealt with illegal issues such as drug smuggling.

⁷ Payam Foroughi, “Nations in Transit 2004: Tajikistan” (Jan. 2004 [cited Dec. 2005] Freedom House): available from <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/nispacee/unpan017051.pdf>

⁸ It is true that political organizations that predated the civil confrontation remain active in Tajikistan; but it is also true that their mobilizing capacity has been strongly diminished.

⁹ Bruce Parrot, “Perspectives on Postcommunist Democratization,” in *Conflict, Cleavage, and Change in Central Asia and the Caucasus*, eds. Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrot (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

since 1999 there have been international efforts to empower these organizations to promote democracy and election monitoring. Moreover, since their inception in Tajikistan these organizations have also tried to play a counterbalancing role between the expansive executive power and civil society; though the government has conspicuously hindered these efforts.¹⁰

Perhaps one of the most acute problems that international NGOs have addressed is the role of women in Tajik society. Although Tajikistani women are not proportionally represented in government, they have been successful in playing important roles in civil society.¹¹ The Constitution of Tajikistan guarantees the same rights to men and women, however, women still face many forms of social discrimination.¹²

According to a Nations in Transit (NIT) report, “certain minimum conditions such as the rule of law, political and economic stability, and a significant degree of social cohesion must be present for civil society to take root”.¹³ Regrettably, since in Tajikistan many uncivil patterns of behavior, such as insecurity and corruption, are pervasive these minimum conditions cannot be fully achieved. NIT’s report also suggests that often the motivation for registering a local NGO is to receive international funding rather than addressing the needs of the population.¹⁴ International efforts added to indigenous civil society formation efforts have developed various networks of NGOs throughout the Central Asian region. However, after the Georgian Rose Revolution of 2003 and the Ukrainian Orange Revolution of 2004 the Tajik government has become less tolerant of

¹⁰ Legislative amendments have stipulated that local NGOs have to report to a central department of the government about their activities and international contacts and funding.

¹¹ Payam Foroughi, “Tajikistan” (Jan. 2003 [cited Dec. 2005] Freedom House): available from <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/nispacee/unpan012479.pdf>

¹² Women trafficking and sexual and domestic violence are widespread forms of discrimination.

¹³ Foroughi, “Nations in Transit 2004: Tajikistan”.

¹⁴ Nations in Transit underlines that many local NGOs have discriminatory staff hiring practices and nepotism is the primary criterion for employment.

international presence in local NGOs. In April 14 2005, the Tajik Foreign Ministry announced that foreign diplomats and representatives of international organizations must provide prior notice of public contacts with Tajik citizens who are affiliated with political parties, NGOs and mass media outlets.¹⁵ Paradoxically, this hostile shift could be considered as evidence that Rakhmonov's administration perceives an increasing threat to its position from civil society organizations that are confronting the regime's vertical decision-making process.¹⁶

Prior to the Bolshevik Revolution, print media was virtually nonexistent in Central Asia. Print and broadcast media facilities were developed as a vital tool for the expansion of Soviet nationalism and rapidly became rooted as cultural and social forms of expression. However, Soviet media outlets were always owned and ran by the state and never reflected the opinions of opposition and dissidence. Nevertheless, the introduction of media facilities could be considered a positive element of the communist legacy.

In the intended construction and development of a strong civil society the role of the media is intrinsically related to any civic advance. Crackdown on media outlets and the banning of major opposition parties and newspapers has been a commonplace of post-communist Tajik national political dynamics. Despite legal registration of various political organizations, formal dissemination of opposition platforms through media is severely restricted.¹⁷ In the case of print media, there have been two Tajik 'springs' for

¹⁵ Nazar Nazarov, "Tajikistan: government resorts to repression and intimidation," *Eurasia Insight* (Apr. 29, 2005 [cited 18 Feb. 2006] EurasiaNet): available from <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav042905a.shtml>

¹⁶ It is important to take into account that not all civil organizations that had emerged after the civil war are precisely democratically oriented. Antidemocratic religious based groups have sprung throughout the region. Perhaps the most worrisome of all has been the underground Hizb-ut-Tahrir Al-Islami (Party of Islamic Liberation) banned almost everywhere. The rise of this new Islamist political organization will be addressed later in this research.

¹⁷ Foroughi, "Nations in Transit 2004: Tajikistan".

journalism. By the mid 1980s, *Glasnost* influenced and somehow forced media openness. Nevertheless, this trend was extinguished by the tightening of freedom of expression that the government promoted in 1993 in an effort to consolidate its power amid national conflict. After the signing of the peace agreements that formally ended the Tajik civil war, the power-sharing reform that was accorded allowed a member of the United Tajik Opposition (UTO) to be in charge of the Ministry of Communications. As a consequence, a slow but general trend toward the freedom of independent media was seemingly taking place. *Reporters sans Frontiers* (RSF, international watchdog for press freedom) had ranked Tajikistan in 2003 as the most tolerant of the former Central Asian Soviet Republics in regards to press freedom. However, from 2004 onwards, Tajikistan is reportedly facing a free speech showdown. Rakhmonov's administration has introduced regulations on press freedom to put pressure on 'disloyal' journalists and publishers.¹⁸ Reporters can be found guilty of 'defaming Rakhmonov's honor and dignity', a concept often broadly interpreted by Tajik courts, and sentenced to a up to five-year prison term.

In several occasions, Rakhmonov has spoken about the need to promote a greater degree of freedom in Tajikistan's 'information space'. It is remarkable that by mid-2005 there were no daily newspapers in Tajikistan. Taxation has long been a mechanism for controlling media and increasing their dependence on the government in Tajikistan. Given the difficult economic situation, taxation often becomes a huge burden that

¹⁸ For example, the Tajik parliament adopted legislation in November concerning 'information security'. Under the law, a media outlet can be held legally responsible for coverage deemed by authorities to pose a national security threat. "Tajikistan: government threatens to close outspoken papers," (Jan. 14, 2004 [cited 18 Feb. 2006] EurasiaNet): available from <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/rights/articles/eav011404.shtml>

prompts most media outlets to engage in some form of tax evasion.¹⁹ Ironically, this situation gives the government a powerful tool with which it can –under the threat of legal prosecution– influence independent media behavior. By the end of 2004 –in the wake of 2005 legislative elections– three independent and opposition newspapers were forced out of print.²⁰ Independent sources of information have been hit hard during the current Rakhmonov’s administration and each month there are fewer independent media outlets. The process of eliminating Tajikistan’s free press has been under way for some time now and it hardens in each period before electoral processes.

The concept of ‘information space’ that Rakhmonov has addressed also refers to the Internet service providers (ISPs) and International Telecommunications. Tajikistan was one of the last countries to connect to the World Wide Web in January 1999. As another of Rakhmonov’s moves to limit freedom of speech in this Central Asian nation, the Communications Ministry has pushed for the establishment of a new regulatory system that would effectively give the state control over Internet. Some independent Internet operators have declared that the state harbors desires to snoop into the cybernetic activities of private citizens and non-governmental organizations. Moreover, the country blocks some Internet sites like that of www.tajikistantimes.ru (a Paris-based Tajik Internet newspaper) since 2003.

According to Freedom House, citizens of Tajikistan cannot change their government democratically. Neither the presidential polls in 1994 and 1999 nor the

¹⁹ Olivia Alison, “Tajik government in no hurry to implement tax breaks for print media,” *Eurasia Insight* (Apr. 27, 2004 [cited 18 Feb. 2006] EurasiaNet): available from <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/rights/articles/eav042704.shtml>

²⁰ Ruzi Nav, Nerui Sukhan, and Najot. Antoine Blua, “Tajikistan concerns grow over media freedom,” (Ago. 29, 2004 [cited 18 Feb. 2006] EurasiaNet): available from: <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/rights/articles/pp082904.shtml>

parliamentary elections of 1995 and 2000 were free and fair.²¹ Electoral processes in Tajikistan have served as a mere façade for the continuation of the pre-independence political system structure, yet with new ruling elite: the Kulyab. Moreover, as no generational turnover has occurred, almost the totality of governmental posts is occupied by former soviet authorities. The post-communist selection of leaders has been strongly determined by regional origin; political affiliation with Rakhmonov's Peoples Democratic Party of Tajikistan (PDPT); and, active participation in the United Tajik Opposition (UTO) battlefield, although the concentrating power inertia of the current regime is gradually erasing former UTO members from the political scene.

There is sufficient evidence to argue that Rakhmonov's political strategy has relied on yielding non-strategic governmental posts to 'warlords' and members of the former opposition. Once Rakhmonov's former political opponent is politically accountable, the executive's extended powers begin to work –in order to consolidate his position– and obtain sufficient 'evidence' to accuse these bureaucrats of corruption and treason. This is the way in which the regime discards potential presidential –as well as member of the parliament– candidacies. Pre-election purges of government and elite cadres by means of trial, persecution, abduction or incarceration are common practices: jail and exile are the alternatives.²² Competitive elections that could benefit from a more transparent selection of leaders have been practically inexistent and are not envisioned in the short and medium term.

²¹ Freedom House is a non-profit, nonpartisan organization that promotes democracy and freedom around the world. Through a vast array of international programs and publications, Freedom House tries to advance the worldwide expansion of political and economic freedom. For further information <http://freedomhouse.org>

²² Few cases will be exposed later.

Other key element shaping the formation of civil society is the pace that post-communist economic change has taken. International participation during the peace and reconciliation processes was needed in several sociopolitical and economical questions. The settlement of the armed conflict caused great expectation of economic recovery and further liberalization. Nevertheless, economic liberalization has not met the international criteria and the expected levels in Tajikistan. Privatization has remained a discretionary process. Surprisingly, in the last three years the government has taken a few steps back in liberalizing extensive profitable sectors such as media and communications. Moreover Rakhmonov's regime has pushed for tighter measures that further governmental control over private enterprises.²³ Tajik influential individuals linked to the political and defense elites have been the winners of such a slow and fearful liberalizing process. The expectation of economic growth²⁴ and foreign direct investment, especially Russian and European, has improved the government's image. It is widely accepted that economic stability could give rise to a strong civil society and thus further the chances for democracy. However, given the authoritarian trends that have prevailed in Eurasia, economic stability could also strengthen the regime. In the case of Tajikistan, Russian investment is ensured as long as the current regime remains favorable to Moscow. Viewed through a wider spectrum, the regional authoritarian convergence in Central Asia seems to owe much to the political shift that Putin's Russia has undertaken.

If democracy is not forthcoming as this research suggests, it is worth pinning down what has come in its stead. According to Dawisha and Parrot, the political

²³ Again the Internet service providers sector is a proper example.

²⁴ Tajikistan has experienced steady economic growth since 1997, but experienced a slight drop in its growth rate to 8% in 2005 from 10.6% in 2004. The World Factbook, (Mar. 29, 2006 [cited 13 Apr. 2006] Central Intelligence Agency): available from <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ti.html>

evolution of a transitional country as Tajikistan can be better described by addressing issues as the type of political actors and associations that are politically prominent; public perception of political parties and their effectiveness; the chances for new elites to accumulate power; the relations established between labor and entrepreneurial groups and the government; the role and political impact of criminal organized groups; and, the level of public support within the country for democratization.²⁵ In this section I have analyzed the key elements influencing the formation of social and political organizations in Tajikistan. In the following part of the section the political evolution of these organizations will be described. In this way I hope to complete the descriptive elements suggested by Parrot and Dawisha and then proceed to find a more precise and operational label for Tajikistan's political regime.

Apart from Rakhmonov, the top bureaucrats appointed by him, and the PDPT, there are few prominent political actors or associations in Tajikistan's political life. The Tajik regime has promoted, by different ways, the consolidation of its ruling position. Recent Tajik history has showed that too little can be done without the constitution of a huge external central authority. Consequently, in the absence of the Soviet hegemonic authority, the Tajik government has worked to extend its power and reach by developing ties and alliances with different regional bosses and political opposition leaders. Perhaps the most important strategy undertaken by Rakhmonov has been the gradual eradication of political opponents. The executive has pushed –via public referenda– the legislative to elaborate and pass several amendments that further increase the powers of the president. The failure to construct a new hegemonic balance within the country was one of the

²⁵ Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrot, eds., *Conflict, Cleavage, and Change in Central Asia and the Caucasus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

major setbacks exhibited by the 1992 civil war. However, during the latter phases of the conflict and once the peace protocols were signed, the government pushed towards the reconstruction and consolidation of a ‘new’ balance. In order to align regional networks – for which clan is a misnomer– their leaders have been co-opted and their organizations have been provided with local non-strategic shares of power.

In Tajik political sphere, there is a thin line, established by the regime, between opposition political parties, criminal groups and religious political organizations. Hizb-ut-Tahrir Al-Islami²⁶ is a non-violent Islamic movement that has been depicted as a terrorist threat, a criminal group, and has been conspicuously tied with the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP). This movement represents the most prominent sociopolitical organization outside the legally-registered Tajik political framework. At the same time, Hizb’s rapid expansion demonstrates that a certain degree of civil unrest exists and denotes the ability of Central Asian Muslim societies to create social organizations that are not democratically oriented. Nearly any opposition group that has not accommodated to the current Tajik political scheme, in which opposition is strongly undermined, is classified by the establishment as a threat to national security. Said Abdullo Nuri, mainstream Islamic political leader and head of the IRP –former organizational base of the United Tajik Opposition– declared on September 2002 that Hizb-ut-Tahrir “was a threat to Tajikistan’s stability”.²⁷

²⁶ Hizb-ut-Tahrir, which began in 1953 under the leadership of a Palestinian named Taqiuddin an-Nabhani Filastyni, seeks to restore a unified religious government, called a caliphate, throughout Central Asia. Because it operates via semi-autonomous "cells" and because it rejects the legitimacy of secular governments, authorities tend to link the organization with violent revolutionary factions like the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). While Hizb-ut-Tahrir is not known to condone violence, it nonetheless is undermining the authority of Central Asian governments.

²⁷ Davron Vali, “Banned Islamic movement increasingly active in Tajikistan,” (May. 09, 2002 [cited 18 Feb. 2006] EurasiaNet): available from: <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav090502.shtml>

As there is no tradition of political parties in Tajikistan, these organizations are generally perceived as vehicles for the achievement of personal and factional goals. As it has been pointed out, competitive elections are far from being held in Tajikistan. Moreover, as ordinary citizens ignore the features of democratic political party systems they tend to underestimate the function of political parties. Evidence of this can be found on the Tajik electoral legislation of 2002 which allowed for the registration of 'religious and democratic' political parties. To this extent it seems that Western democratic values are relevant only to some parties and segments of the population.²⁸ Many Tajiks still identify political parties with the factions that fought during the civil war. This perception has a conditioning effect on citizens' attitudes towards the political party system: they do not see parties as the builders of peace but as the initiators of conflict. It seems reasonable to argue that this social proclivity to avoid contentious political situations, especially involving political parties, favors public acceptance of the need to promote and consolidate a central and hegemonic stable power that guarantees peace. This perception seems to underlie the government's efforts to consolidate its grip on power while negotiating with regional networks. However, after almost 10 years of peace, continued economic hardship has pushed the population to forget the 'peace guarantor' role of Rakhmonov's administration and start demanding effective poverty alleviation measures.

Notwithstanding the authoritarian process that is underway in Tajikistan, political parties have relative systemic importance. Either as vehicles for factional attempts to accumulate power or as a façade for the regime to maintain the status quo and to incorporate political opposition into the Tajik political mainstream, political parties play

²⁸ Actually, before the 2005 legislative elections the electoral legislation was amended and changed the wording. However, the change in social perception is not an easy task.

an important and functional role. However, as long as there is no real opposition and the creation of nation-wide political alternatives is not foreseeable in the immediate future, this relative importance of political parties tends to decrease.

Although the Soviet tradition left behind the backbone of labor unions, the political influence of labor organizations in the electoral processes is almost inexistent. However, there is another group that has been growing in political influence: the entrepreneurs. Tajik government has gradually liberalized the participation of 'private investments' in some economic areas. Access has been granted exclusively to members of the political and security bureaucracies or to their relatives. One could expect that the presence of many influential individuals from the ruling elite, as shareholders of major ISPs, may give rise to resistance to encroachment in that sector on the part of the Communications Ministry. It remains to be seen whether Rakhmonov's initiative to open the economy to the inner circle was a mistake or whether that initiative follows some kind of Central Asian authoritarian wisdom in view of which investing in the private sector is just another privilege conceded by the Sultan that can easily be withdrawn if it gets in the way of his designs.

Another important feature of the political evolution of Tajikistan is how the government has confronted organized crime and to what extent the political impact of these criminal organizations has affected citizens' perception towards Rakhmonov's regime. Historically, one of the most important governmental failures in Tajikistan has been the state's incapacity to exert full control over the territory.

Organized crime first developed under the Soviet structure and was mainly related to drug trafficking. This kind of illegal activity became widespread as legal productive

activities ceased to ensure survival. As Kathleen Collins explains, regional networks started playing the role the government was unable to fulfill.²⁹ In the wake of the civil war, many of these organizations, mainly located in Kulyab, were armed by Nabiev's government and became pro-governmental militias. Since then, it is widely known that organized criminal groups –headed by former militias warlords– have been long intertwined with government representatives. As a consequence, the public perception that government members are involved in organized crime has been ever-present and has been continuously exposed by the government itself whenever it attempts to fight corruption. However, several former bureaucrats prosecuted on corruption charges have argued that the government's accusations are often politically motivated.³⁰

According to the OSCE's election monitoring in Central Asia, the different Tajik electoral processes are 'flawed'. Nevertheless, this international organization has not found conclusive evidence that organized crime influences or finances candidates and/or parties.

Rakhmonov's administration tends to publicly depict itself as the only possible guarantor of peace, the only structure able to fight the terrorist threat, and the only possible solution for the insecurity problem. According to the official discourse, the fight against organized crime has been a fundamental aim when trying to bring peace to Tajikistan. All this has some public purchase since Tajikistan is the first step for the trafficking of opiates from Afghanistan to Europe. Tajikistan's southeastern mountainous

²⁹ In occasions, these criminal groups that mainly resulted from the non-incorporation of former UTO battle field combatants into the Tajik army transformed into networks, headed by the so called warlords, which provided services (i.e. food and security) that the government could not provide. Collins, "Clans, Pacts, and Politics,".

³⁰ Tajikistan 2005 Country Report, (2006 [cited 15 Feb. 2006] Freedom House): available from www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2005

region borders with Afghanistan which is the world's major producer of opium. However, the government's incapacity to secure that border from the inflows of both terrorist groups that seek refuge in the mountains and drug smugglers triggers a twofold social perception. On the one hand, the claim for a more expansive intervention on the part of the government ends up justifying precisely what Rakhmonov wishes to achieve. However, the more people demand intervention and the more the government intervenes without achieving much in the way of stopping terrorists and smugglers, the more the government's incapacity to deal with the problem becomes apparent. The latter effect is starting to create social unrest and could result in demonstrations against the government.³¹

Finally, when trying to outline the path of Tajik political evolution, Parrot suggests that it is important to take into account the public support for democratization. However, there is no survey data available on the level of support for democratization within the country. However, international journalists have documented the population's support for free speech and a free media as well as its demand for serious political alternatives with governing capacities.³² The lack of empirical data on the level of support for democratization has pushed promoters of democracy to argue that there is a possible path for democratization based on the belief that Persians are inclined to support democratic values.³³ Journalists' reports have affirmed that there is public support, no matter age and gender, for pluralism and openness. As younger citizens have been

³¹ Living in a dangerous social environment –with increasing rates of drug addiction– is, reportedly, fostering the growth of disaffection for Rakhmonov's regime.

³² There is a lack of opposition cadres perceived as capable of running the state's affairs.

³³ Muriel Atkin, "Thwarted democratization in Tajikistan," in *Conflict, Cleavage, and Change in Central Asia and the Caucasus*, eds. Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrot (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

exposed –by the media– to a certain degree of Western-democratic values and ideas, there is the hope that the next generation could possibly promote political and economic reform. Notwithstanding this possibility, the poor performance of post-communist economy has badly affected public attitudes towards democracy.

3.3 Constitutional Framework

In November 1994, Tajikistan adopted a new constitution that established a presidential system; transformed the Supreme Soviet into the Supreme Assembly (*Majlisi Oli*); recognized civil liberties and property rights; and provided for a judiciary. It is remarkable that the mechanism by which the constitution was adopted was a referendum³⁴ in which the ballots asked, simultaneously, to choose a president and to accept the constitution; even though the office of the president could not legally exist until and unless the constitution was ratified.³⁵ Nevertheless, the president's constitutional powers allowed him to act as chairman of the government and to appoint the prime minister, as well as other members of the government, which are consequently approved by Parliament.³⁶ This constitution was written and approved during wartime when a ban on political parties was in place.

According to the constitution, the *Majlisi Oli* is a bicameral Parliament composed of a lower house, the Assembly of Representatives, which acts on a permanent basis, and an upper house, the National Assembly, which is convened by the president at least twice

³⁴ The referendum was organized in the midst of the armed civil confrontation and was condemned by international observers for being fraudulent.

³⁵ Library of Congress, Country Studies ([cited 5 Mar. 2006]): available from [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+tj0060\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+tj0060))

³⁶ Mamadsho Ilolov and Mirodasen Khudoiyev, "Local Government in Tajikistan," in *Developing New Rules in the Old Environment*, eds. Igor Munteanu and Victor Popa (Budapest: Open Society Institute).

a year.³⁷ The lower house is elected on the basis of universal, direct and secret suffrage while the upper house is constituted in a different way. Three fourths of the members are elected indirectly through local council meetings. The rest are appointed by the president.

The Tajik constitution is mainly based on Western models. However, it has significant provisions that have helped to consolidate the figure of the President of the Republic. Originally, article 65 stated that the president was to be elected for a term of five years. This was modified by the 1999 CNR-organized referendum on the basis of which the term was extended to a seven year period with no possible reelection.³⁸ Any citizen who is age 35 to 65, fluent in the state language, and has been resident on the territory of Tajikistan, for at least the previous ten years, may be nominated as a candidate for the office of President. Any person that fulfills these criteria is able to become candidate if he or she collects the signature of, at least five percent of the voting

³⁷ “The creation of an upper house, the *Majlisi Melli*, was intended to address the perennial problem of regionalism in Tajikistan's politics by ensuring regional representation and reducing inter-regional tensions. Bicameralism – when a country's legislature consists of two 'chambers' – is typically but not exclusively a feature of federal polities, where the upper house affords representation to the federal units, as in the US Senate or the Russian Federal Council. The CNR did not recommend a federal system for Tajikistan. Yet its bicameralism might be seen as a quasi-federal compromise. It provides some mechanisms to give a voice in decision-making at the centre to the regions without granting them formal regional autonomy (except in the special case of Badakhshan, which already had a degree of constitutionally mandated autonomy). Although members of the *Majlisi Melli* are chosen on the basis of regional representation, the primary powers conferred on the upper house are over the justice system: to elect and recall judges and to approve the appointment and dismissal of leaders of the prosecutor's office. Therefore they lack the legislative powers to respond to concerns raised by their regional constituencies”. Rahmatillo Zoir and Scott Newton, “Constitutional and Legislative Reform,” in *Politics of compromise: The Tajikistan peace process*, eds. Kamoludin Abdullaev and Catherine Barnes. Online book available from <http://www.c-r.org/accord/tajik/accord10/constitute.shtml>

³⁸ On 30 June 1999 Tajikistan's parliament, the *Majlisi Oli*, debated and adopted the amendments to the constitution prepared by the CNR and formally proposed by the President. Twenty-eight out of 100 articles of the constitution were substantially revised, twenty-one of them completely. The main structural changes introduced were the creation of an upper house of Parliament representing the regions and the extension of the presidential term from five to seven years, with a one-term limit. Amended Article 28 provided the constitutional framework for parties based on religion for the first time. The logic, essence and contents of the proposed amendments are troubling from the perspective of democratic consolidation. Zoir and Newton, “Constitutional and Legislative Reform,”.

population. The amendment provisions have facilitated the shaping of the constitution following the wishes of the presidential figure.

Amended article 98 states that amendments to the Constitution are introduced through general referenda. A referendum is held if two-thirds of the people's deputies vote for it to be held. The proposals to amend are mainly introduced by the president. In this sense, it is important to take into account that the presidential party controls two-thirds of the Parliament, thus reinforcing the capacity of Rakhmonov to modify an article whenever it is necessary.

According to Freedom House, the 1994 constitution provides for a strong, directly elected executive who enjoys broad authority to appoint and dismiss officials. Moreover, the referendum tool has served to consolidate Rakhmonov's political hegemony. His already substantial powers were further enhanced by the June 2003 constitutional referendum in which voters approved, by an overwhelming 93 percent majority, a set of constitutional amendments that included the controversial presidential permission to serve two additional seven-year terms after the current one.³⁹ Consequently, Rakhmonov could remain in office until 2020.

It is possible to argue that the most significant aspect of the constitutional arrangement and its amendments is what they have failed to do. The constitution did not introduce any real structural reform or alter the highly centralized form of government, nor did the amendments require safeguards for transparency and accountability in the administration. The amendments and the constitution tremendously failed to enhance the

³⁹ Tajikistan 2005 Country Report, (2006 [cited 15 Feb. 2006] Freedom House): available from <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=47&nit=376&year=2005&display=democ>

protection of rights and the activity of political parties.⁴⁰ Notwithstanding that the constitution allows for individual freedoms, the government often violates the constitution by arbitrarily arresting and imprisoning ordinary citizens and by banning opposition voices. According to the OSCE, the lack of independence of the legislative, executive and judicial authorities has had a negative effect on the political and economical well being of the Tajik population.⁴¹

Current Tajik criminal code is an amended holdover from the Soviet era and contains many of the flaws inherited from that period.⁴² Since 2002, the Tajik government seems to be responding positively to Western criticism on human rights violations. In July 2003, Nations in Transit reported an unprecedented case. Nine high ranking officials from the Soghd province (former Leninabad) were convicted of torturing to force confessions from falsely accused suspects. Also responding to international pressure the Tajik government has convicted various journalist killers and hopes to commute death penalty cases to life imprisonment. Moreover, as the OSCE reports, the danger of wrongful imprisonment or death penalty of innocent citizens still remains high in Tajikistan.⁴³

Nevertheless, Nations in Transit affirms that there is greater freedom allowed today in Tajikistan when compared with neighboring countries such as Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. When asked about pluralism and freedom of speech in Tajikistan, IRP's Said Abdulloh Nuri commented,

⁴⁰ Zoir and Newton, "Constitutional and Legislative Reform,".

⁴¹ Foroughi, "Nations in Transit 2004: Tajikistan".

⁴² Foroughi, "Nations in Transit 2004: Tajikistan".

⁴³ Foroughi, "Nations in Transit 2004: Tajikistan".

Today, compared with our neighbors, we have left them far behind in the spheres of democratic reform, pluralism and multi-party system. However, if compared with some other states of the world, we actually have not made even the first step in the right direction. One of the shortcomings of our society is that the principle of the rule of law is not sufficiently present in many areas of life and political activities. There are serious problems with the economy, political life and the law and order system. Especially difficult is the economic situation, where, to my mind, the state has not done very much, especially in the sphere of poverty reduction. Basically, we have quite good laws, but the implementation of laws is on a low level. Among the most intricate problems is deeply rooted corruption, whose impact on the governance is quite negative.⁴⁴

3.4 Party System and Electoral Processes

Prior to 1991 there political parties were incipient. As a result of Gorbachev's liberalization various political parties and social organizations developed throughout the Soviet Union. One of the most remarkable advances in political party formation was the creation of an all-Union Islamic Renaissance Party which encompassed the interests, values and needs of the several Muslim populations that lived under the sway of the CPSU's politburo. The all-Union IRP flourished in places with Muslim majorities throughout Central Asia. However, after its initial expansion, it was rapidly banned almost everywhere and regarded as a possible major threat to the Soviet Union's stability.

The political effervescence 1980s was particularly concentrated in Tajikistan and generated an opportunity window to incorporate many different, including dissenting, voices into the socio-political arena. Therefore, Tajikistan came into existence, as an independent country, backed by a plethora of political organizations and an incipient plural party system. Nevertheless, as we have seen, political parties were not exactly political parties. Instead, these political organizations were mainly disaffected regional

⁴⁴ Zafar Abdullayev, "Constitutional referendum could unsettle Tajikistan," (Apr. 18, 2003 [cited 18 Feb. 2006] EurasiaNet): available from <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/recaps/articles/eav041803.shtml>

networks, –disguised as political parties– that were struggling for greater access to the state’s distributive system. As there was no political party creation pattern in which to rely, and given that the Tajik party system was born suddenly after the Union’s collapse, there was not too much to expect from political competition in Tajikistan. Nevertheless, by November 1994, in the midst of internal strife, the newly born convulsed republic was having ‘elections’. As a sign of the inertia of the late 1980s incipient pluralism; the recent internal division; and, the lack of a strong governmental apparatus, the electoral results still reflected a degree of pluralism: Rakhmonov received 58.3 percent while the opposition candidate 35.6.⁴⁵ However, by the 1999 election all pluralism had vanished: president Rakhmonov received 97 percent of the vote.⁴⁶ Electoral processes after the signing of peace have been flawed and strongly criticized by local and international observers. Zoir and Newton explain that the results of the 2000 parliamentary election revealed substantive procedural defects in the election law drafted by the CNR. These authors warn that as long as no real electoral reform is to be seen in the short term no genuine political contest is to take place in Tajikistan.⁴⁷

Currently the Tajik political arena is overwhelmingly dominated by the president’s party;⁴⁸ however, it is also populated by five other parties: the pro-government Communist and Socialist parties; and, the Islamic Renaissance Party, the Democratic Party and the Social Democratic Party. The legislative elections of February 2005 established an electoral threshold of 5 percent of the vote that only three of these

⁴⁵ Shirin Akiner, *Tajikistan Disintegration or Reconciliation?* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2001).

⁴⁶ As the government hampered every opposition attempt to promote their candidacies, opposition decided to boycott the electoral process and leave Rakhmonov alone in the presidential poll.

⁴⁷ Zoir and Newton, “Constitutional and Legislative Reform,”.

⁴⁸ The PDPT retained a great part of the Tajik Soviet nomenklatura.

political organizations achieved.⁴⁹ While the PDPT retained nearly 80 percent of the votes cast,⁵⁰ this party together with the Communist Party and the IRP are the only ones in Tajikistan that could be considered stable parties. According to Akiner, a vague sense of pluralism remains in Tajikistan and there is “still little sign of the popular ferment of ideas and debate” that existed in 1989-91. But it can be argued that this is only because the PDPT needs other parties to run against and massively defeat at every election. New parties are small and tend to have a very narrow social base and it would be surprising if they were able to gain a wider base given the government’s open and covert harassment of political dissenters, and the people’s fear of a return to violence.⁵¹

⁴⁹ See annex A. This annex shows the electoral distribution that resulted from both legislative elections 2000 and 2005. It works as evidence of the concentrating power process and the construction of the new ‘clanic’ hegemony by means of a façade democratic process with inexistent competitive elections.

⁵⁰ According to preliminary results produced by the Tajikistan’s Central Election Commission, the PDPT captured 80 percent of the vote. Only two other parties –Communist and Islamic Renaissance–cleared the percentage hurdle to win parliamentary seats under the proportional representation system. Zafar Abdullaev and Kambiz Arman, “Ruling party dominates Tajikistan’s parliamentary elections,” *Eurasia Insight* (Feb. 28, 2005 [cited 18 Feb. 2006] EurasiaNet): available from <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav022805b.shtml>

⁵¹ Akiner, *Tajikistan Disintegration*.

Tajikistan 2000 Legislative Election

Chamber	Assembly of Representatives	
Date of Election	February 27 and March 12, 2000	
Type of Electoral System	Mixed	
Number of Seats Available	63	
Length of Legislative Term	5 years	
	Number of Seats #	Percentage of Votes #
People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan (PDTP)	30	64.5%
Communist Party of Tajikistan (CPT)	13	20.6%
Islamic Rebirth Party (IRP)	2	7.5%
Independents	15	-
Vacant	3	-

Tajikistan 2005 Legislative Election

Chamber	Assembly of Representatives	
Date of Election	February 27 and March 13, 2005	
Type of Electoral System	Mixed	
Number of Seats Available	63	
Length of Legislative Term	5 years	
	Number of Seats #	Percentage of Votes #
People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan (PDTP)	52	74.2%
Communist Party of Tajikistan (CPT)	4	13.3%
Islamic Rebirth Party (IRP)	2	8.1%
Independents	5	-
Vacant	0	-

Sources: Political Handbook of the World 2000-02, Binghamton, NY: CSA Publications, 2003. Electionworld.org / Elections around the World, 10 December 2001; and Eurasia.org

Tajikistan 1994 Presidential Election

Election	Presidential	
Date of Election	November 6, 1994.	
Type of Electoral System	Majority	
Length of Term	5 years	
Candidates – Nominating Parties	Votes	Percentage of Votes #
Emomali Sharipovich Rakhmonov - (CPT - Communist Party of Tajikistan)	-	58.3%
Abdumalk Abdulajanov (PPUA - Party of Popular Unity and Accord)	-	35.0%

Tajikistan 1999 Presidential Election

Election	Presidential	
Date of Election	November 9, 1999.	
Type of Electoral System	Majority	
Length of Term	7 years	
Candidates – Nominating Parties	Votes	Percentage of Votes #
Emomali Sharipovich Rakhmonov - People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan (PDTP)	-	97.2%
Davlat Ismonov	-	2.1%

Sources: <http://www.binghamton.edu/cdp/era/elections/taj94pres.html> ; and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics_of_Tajikistan

Despite the government's authoritarian drive and the centralization of power, the opposition still manages to exist and to look for alternatives. A few months before the legislative elections of 2005 talks were organized in order to create an opposition bloc able to confront Rakhmonov's party at the election. The government rapidly reacted to this attempt and managed to dissuade the Democratic Party from joining the new political alliance. Consequently, as the whole of the opposition was not united, the bloc suffered from a lack of cohesion that hampered its effectiveness.⁵² Yet, the strategy of forming a broad alliance for the presidential election to be held in November 2006 is likely to remain attractive. However, this strategy must surmount several obstacles. In order to limit the freedom of speech the government has been pressing for regulations that severely undermine the politicians' capacity to criticize Rakhmonov. Prosecutions of political dissidents on charges such as defaming the honor of the president or treason to the nation negatively affect the development of political alternatives. Measures such as

⁵² Kambiz Arman, "Tajikistan: new opposition coalition suffers from lack of cohesion," *Eurasia Insight* (May. 24, 2004 [cited 18 Feb. 2006] EurasiaNet): available from <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav052404.shtml>

imprisonment of political opponents, obstructing the creation of parties by elevating registration fees, restricting political activities of ordinary citizens and imposing additional curbs on the media, are the principal elements of the regime's strategy to sideline and outlaw any potential rival and to consolidate and further expand its political control.⁵³ The conspicuous persecution of political figures in each pre electoral period provides sufficient evidence to suggest that further to the next election the president will intensify his efforts to neutralize his opponents, including the perceived enemies within the government.

The cases of Ghaffor Mirzoyev and Mahmudruzi Iskandarov leader of the Democratic Party provide support for the above claim. Mirzoyev –a former battlefield commander of the Popular Front who helped to install Rakhmonov in power– was first removed from his post as presidential guard commander, then appointed as head of the Drug Control Agency and finally arrested on charges of corruption.⁵⁴ After Mirzoyev's detention, Rakhmonov publicly declared that he wanted to involve younger people in his government in order to take the place of bureaucrats occupying positions that were given to them in retribution for participating in the civil war.⁵⁵ This was of course sheer rhetoric to make some sense out of the dismissal of one of his old allies. It is clear that Rakhmonov is likely to see with serious reservations any high-ranking bureaucrat supporting an opposition party. The power-sharing arrangements which were central to

⁵³ During 2003 the PDPT's political influence in the country's north substantially grew.

⁵⁴ After the dismissal of several civil war-born bureaucrats, it is evident that Rakhmonov is purging the administration. The Dushanbe-based media group Asia-Plus reported that with an increasing number of figures from the war now finding themselves removed from government posts, there are fears some may resort to violence and arms to force change. Bruce Pannier, "Tajikistan president dismisses government loyalists, opposition figures," *Eurasia Insight* (Jan. 31, 2004 [cited 18 Feb. 2006] EurasiaNet): available from <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/pp013104.shtml>

⁵⁵ This is, perhaps, the first public statement of the president's disengagement to the 1997 peace agreements. Tajikistan president dismisses government loyalists, opposition figures. Pannier, "Tajikistan president dismisses government loyalists,".

the peace agreement made appointments like that of Mirzoyev possible. The whole point of those arrangements was to open the government apparatus to people that were not subservient to Rakhmonov. It seems, however, that Rakhmonov is now powerful enough to disown his commitments to power-sharing and to cleanse his government from those he initially tried to appease. To this extent, the Mirzoyev affair clarifies how far Rakhmonov's is ready to go to, as Kambiz Arman suggests, choke off all avenues of opposition as the country prepares for the 2006 presidential election.⁵⁶ He cannot go that far without disclosing that, as Oliver Roy contends, "pluralism was accepted by the Tajik government only as a way to get out of the civil conflict".⁵⁷ In other words peace through power-sharing was only a means to Rakhmonov's greater end: that of absolute power.

Mahmudruzi Iskandarov was also a victim of Rakhmonov's efforts to clamp down on domestic political opponents. Iskandarov's party registration before the electoral authority for the February 2005 legislative polls was rejected on the grounds that its leader had criminal charges pending against him. Further to the denial of his registration, General Bobojon Bobokhonov, the Tajik Prosecutor announced that the leader of the Democratic Party, Mahmudruzi Iskandarov, had been detained in Moscow at the request of the Tajik government on alleged charges of subversive activities.⁵⁸ This was a preemptive ploy to cut short Iskandarov's ambitions to run for president by not even letting him run for a seat in Parliament. As that was all his detention in Russia was about, he was released a few days after the Tajik legislative election took place, without any

⁵⁶ Kambiz Arman, "Secret trial in Tajikistan appears connected to upcoming presidential election," *Eurasia Insight* (Feb. 21, 2006 [cited 10 Mar. 2006] EurasiaNet): available from <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/civilsociety/articles/eav022106.shtml>

⁵⁷ Foroughi, "Nations in Transit 2004: Tajikistan".

⁵⁸ Bruce Pannier, "Tajikistan: Doubts raised about fairness of upcoming election," *Eurasia Insight* (Jan. 17, 2005 [cited 18 Feb. 2006] EurasiaNet): available from <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/civilsociety/articles/pp011705.shtml>

explanation or apology from Russian officials.⁵⁹ From the day of his release, Iskandarov rallied for creating a new political alliance to promote change in Tajikistan. In several occasions he mentioned the ‘forthcoming Tajik Revolution’.⁶⁰ And shortly after he started rallying he went missing. Later, the Tajik Prosecutor General made Iskandarov’s whereabouts known. He was in Dushanbe facing the charge of power abuse.

Rakhmonov has also managed to exert full control over the Central Electoral Commission and has amended the electoral code only when international pressure has made it strictly necessary. The permission for international observers to closely monitor elections is still in process. The electoral code has not been amended to allow representatives of the different political parties at polling stations on the voting day. Also, the parties are not provided with the tabulation of vote results right after counting, they have had to wait to the later official results. These are complaints that different opposition parties have put forward, however, these have been consistently ignored. Parties have also been affected by the timing of elections and the timing of candidacies registration. The registration of candidacies period ends too close to the day of elections, so they claim this gives them little time to work on their political campaigns.⁶¹ It seems that all these failures contribute to political stagnation. Rakhmonov has suggested that “it is unfair to hold Tajikistan to Western European standards of democratic elections... I always stress the need to consider the mentality, traditions and culture of any ethnic

⁵⁹ Pannier, “Tajikistan: Doubts raised about fairness of upcoming election.”

⁶⁰ Kambiz Arman and Nazar Nazarov, “Tajik president seems to resist pressure for political liberalization,” *Eurasia Insight* (Apr. 19, 2005 [cited 18 Feb. 2006] EurasiaNet): available from <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/civilsociety/articles/eav041905.shtml>

⁶¹ It is interesting that while the OSCE still considers the Tajik electoral processes as flawed and with severe government interference, the CIS observers characterized the last legislative elections as ‘well organized’ and with irregularities that did not influence the general election results.

minority”.⁶² This is consistent with his idea that democratic change is a slow trial-and-error process.

The denial of registration to several new political parties, the obstruction of rightful political activities, and the imprisonment of opposition figures in 2004 contributed to generate an intimidating electoral atmosphere prior to the 2005 legislative elections; the same is expected to happen in 2006.⁶³ According to Kambiz Arman, the Tajik population was frustrated with the electoral results; however, the majority of the population was anxious to avoid another bout of upheaval.⁶⁴ It seems that the specter of conflict influenced the Tajik opposition to better ponder its post-electoral steps; knowing that a mistake could lead to a resumption of violence which has been overwhelmingly dreaded by the Tajik population.

In late May 2005, Rakhmonov declared that “the development of a mechanism of collaboration between the executive and legislative branches would ensure the ‘stepping up’ of political and economic reform”.⁶⁵ Given the legislative election results, it seems that this ‘mechanism of collaboration’ excludes the opposition and works in favor of the ‘stepping up’ of Rakhmonov’s 2006 presidential candidacy. Rakhmonov has not yet expressed his readiness to run for the 2006 elections; however, he has repeatedly manifested that if the national political context requires it he will accept the challenge. At the same time, the Russian ambassador to Tajikistan, Ramzan Abdulatipov, has,

⁶² Zafar Abdullaev and Kambiz Arman, “Ruling party dominates Tajikistan’s parliamentary elections,” *Eurasia Insight* (Feb. 28, 2005 [cited 18 Feb. 2006] EurasiaNet): available from <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav022805b.shtml>

⁶³ As a consequence Tajikistan’s rating for electoral processes worsens. According to the Nations in Transit 2005 report from 5,25 in 2003 to 6,00 in 2005.

⁶⁴ “Tajiks worry election row could erode civic accord,” (Mar. 03, 2005 [cited 18 Feb. 2006] EurasiaNet): available from <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/civilsociety/articles/eav030305.shtml>

⁶⁵ Arman and Nazarov, “Tajik president seems to resist pressure for political liberalization,”

unsurprisingly, expressed that no one but Rakhmonov is able to perform as president.⁶⁶ Rakhmonov has come full circle, crippling his contenders well before they even come close to challenge to his candidacy, showing the international community how little the peace agreement meant to him and how well it has served his purposes. To this extent it is difficult to see why he would be prepared to give up another term if there is nothing and no one able to stop him from helping himself to it.

3.5 Governance, Corruption and Poverty

Governance, corruption and poverty are three important correlated variables that determine the nature of Tajikistan's transitional path. Governance, democratization and transparency are required criteria when trying to stop corruption and alleviating penury. To address these issues is essential in the process of implementing several other reforms that are badly needed. As it has been pointed out, civil society organizations have pressured the ruling elite to foster local democratic governance.

Several levels of national and local 'democratic' government are enshrined in Tajik law. However, owing to the highly focused and personalized nature of power, citizens are not able to choose their local and regional leaders freely and democratically. However, the *mahalla*⁶⁷, a basic pre-Soviet Central Asian social institution that persisted under the structure of communism, has always played an important role in local decision-making. Despite its importance, both governments (communist and the current one) have intentionally ignored it. Instead, the current constitutional arrangement recognizes the

⁶⁶ "Russia's Tajikistan ambassador: no alternative to Rakhmonov," *Interfax* (Jan. 24, 2006 [cited 20 Mar. 2006] AllBusiness): available from <http://www.allbusiness.com/periodicals/article/857198-1.html>

⁶⁷ Neighborhood: community council.

jamoat –an administrative category inherited from the Soviet period– as the smallest local form of governance.⁶⁸ *Jamoat* chiefs are not democratically selected –although the Constitution does not establish their election by means of community vote – nor is the administration unit which they rule democratically structured. Rakhmonov’s leadership appointing policy does not reach as far as designing these local chiefs. However, he appoints *khukumat* chiefs –the heads of local executive authority at the city, district or regional level– which subsequently appoint lower level authorities.

There are three types of administrative territorial units in current Tajikistan. The first tier is occupied by almost 400 *jamoats* that are the equivalent to the French municipality or the United States county. The second tier, which has no Western counterpart, is controlled by nearly 80 city and raion *khukumats*. These *khukumats*, which are appointed by the president, have strong influence over the district councils where three fourths of the upper chamber members are chosen.⁶⁹ The third level is the equivalent of the federal department or state and is divided into 4 higher level *khukumats* that control Dushanbe, the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (GBAR), and the northern Soghd (former Leninabad) and southern Kathlon (which united Kulyab and Qurgontteppa raions) oblasts.

Civil society efforts that promote democracy are pushing for the empowerment of the *mahalla* which they tend to see as a potential vehicle for horizontal democratization. As the *jamoat-khukumat* structure has proven inefficient to solve socioeconomic problems, organizations such as the Aga Khan Foundation have financed and induced the

⁶⁸ People have historically claimed to be misrepresented by this administrative entity which, according to the complaints, is being held responsible for too large a constituency. Tajikistan 2005 Country Report.

⁶⁹ The other fourth is directly appointed by the president.

mahalla networks to engage in a wide variety of development projects.⁷⁰ A Freedom House survey showed that notwithstanding the attained level of local civil society engagement, Tajikistan has a long way to go toward empowering communities and promoting pluralism. The Freedom House country report 2005 on transitional states rated the local democratic governance of Tajikistan at 5.75 in a scale of 1 to 7 being 7 the worst.⁷¹

At the national governance level there is less hope for democratic reform. Throughout this dissertation sufficient evidence has been presented to support the argument that Tajikistan is seemingly converging into the regional authoritarian trend. Given the nature of the Tajik political establishment, and in the midst of a centralization of power process, the boundaries between state and society are blurred.⁷² According to Akiner, branches of government are “devoid of genuine authority” while the real power lies within the executive branch and the informal patronage networks that surround it.⁷³

It has become evident that the government is now unwilling to fulfill the quotas established in the peace accords. The accomplishment of many promises made in the past by Rakhmonov’s regime is not only being slow but has taken the opposite direction. The Tajik regime is not only removing opposition members from office but is fully dedicated to extinguish the threat that political opponents represent. Furthermore, Tajik government has looked forward to persecute leaders in exile. In consequence, it has dealt with Russia

⁷⁰ Tajikistan 2005 Country Report.

⁷¹ Kyrgyzstan also rated 5.75; Uzbekistan, 6.25; Bulgaria, 3.50; and, Poland, 2.00. Data available from <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=46&year=2005>

⁷² Foroughi, “Nations in Transit 2004: Tajikistan”.

⁷³ Akiner, *Tajikistan Disintegration*.

‘discreet accords’ that have implied the arrest and extradition –abduction and kidnapping, in occasions– of the regime’s dissidents.⁷⁴

A central pragmatic element in the construction of the new hegemony that will consolidate Rakhmonov and his networks is the creation and maintenance of a solid coercion power such as the army and the security forces. According to the Nations in Transit 2003 report, the security services were poor, ill equipped and unprofessional.⁷⁵ However, it seems that Rakhmonov has opted for the non-professionalization of the state’s security forces and for relying in the militia and armed forces of the Ministries of Interior and Defense; the heads of these offices are former Popular Front militias’ leaders who are reputedly known for being involved in criminal activity. Nevertheless, by November 2004 Tajiks began taking over guard duties from Russians on the Tajik-Afghan border.⁷⁶ According to Freedom House, dealing with Russia could potentially launch Tajikistan as a regional economic power but can also entrench existing political forces, which –as has been pointed out earlier– may use the opportunity to refuse political reforms.⁷⁷

After almost 15 years since independence, despite few pockets of opposition, the president still enjoys popularity among the citizenry. However, penury and corruption are elements that can reverse Rakhmonov’s alleged popularity. This assumption is being gradually reinforced by an increasingly significant income disparity, high level of unemployment, organized crime, drug and human trafficking, arms smuggling,

⁷⁴ Foroughi, “Nations in Transit 2004: Tajikistan”.

⁷⁵ Payam Foroughi, “Tajikistan”.

⁷⁶ Many Russian advisers reputedly pointed out that Tajikistan’s security forces were not in shape to control the border. However, the taking over took place and an agreement was signed to guarantee that Russian troops will remain stationed in Tajikistan, though away from the border, for many years. As Russia was retreating from Tajikistan and the United State was increasing its presence on Central Asia, the Russians strategically pushed the Tajik government to allow the creation of a Russian army base in Tajik territory.

⁷⁷ Tajikistan 2005 Country Report.

widespread corruption, bribe taking, and a political climate of lawlessness and warlordism where the winners of the civil war –that are often linked to crime and corruption– remain in senior governmental offices.

Corruption in Tajikistan is widespread and virtually everything can be obtained by paying a few bribes. The roots of corruption as a social practice date back to the Soviet period. However, corruption has been strengthened by the lax rule of law following the fall of communism and the increase in arms smuggling and drug trafficking. In the last decade, while Tajikistan was struggling to recover from severe socioeconomic hardship and the consequences of the civil war, organized crime has flourished carving out huge underground spheres of influence. At the same time, as security services have been linked to a wide variety of illicit activities, common citizen suspicion of Rakhmonov's involvement in such activities has increased.⁷⁸

Drug trafficking has become a major security issue in Tajikistan and Central Asia. From 2002 onwards an increasing number of Tajik citizens became involved in different stages of drug production and delivery. Of even greater concern to local authorities, the number of Tajiks using hard drugs, such as opium and heroin, appears to be exploding. According to Muriel Atkin, it is easier and cheaper to get a dose of heroine than marijuana.⁷⁹ Tajikistan special geographical situation has made it the most popular route for afghan opiates trafficking towards Europe. According to the Drug Fact Sheet Series, the first seizure of heroine in Tajikistan was in 1996. Between 1991 and 2001 the seizures

⁷⁸ Konstantin Parshin, "Tajik, Russian officials suggest Tajikistan is developing into drug production center," *Eurasia Insight* (Jul. 08, 2001 [cited 18 Feb. 2006] EurasiaNet): available from <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav080701.shtml>

⁷⁹ Atkin, "Thwarted democratization in Tajikistan," in *Conflict, Cleavage, and Change in Central Asia*.

of raw opium increased from 1.9 kg to 3,664. In 2003 more than 4 tons of heroine were seized.⁸⁰

According to Russia's Interior Ministry, one kg of opium in Faizabad, Afghanistan costs US\$50, in Khorog, Tajikistan US\$200, in Osh, Kyrgyzstan US\$1,000-1,500, in Almaty, Kazakhstan up to US\$5000, and in Moscow the price reaches US\$10,000. One kg of heroine in the Tajik-Afghan border is around US\$7,000 to 10,000. After its delivery to London or New York, the price has exceeded the dazzling amount of US\$200,000. With these prices in mind, the overall retail cost of the entire 1999 opium harvest could have amounted to US\$100 billion. The Interior Ministry also affirms that the amount of narcotics seized by international efforts of different law enforcement agencies is around 5 to 10 percent of the total production.⁸¹ As this brief description shows, the collapse of the Tajik economy and increasing poverty –the average wage of US\$25 a month–gives sufficient incentive to many Tajiks to get involved in this lucrative activity. In 2000, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan signed the Treaty on Concerted Action in Combating Terrorism, Political and Religious Extremism, Transnational Organized Crime and Other Threats to the Stability and Security of the Signatory Parties.⁸²

However, corruption is not only linked to organized crime. Favoritism has played an important role in the privatization processes. As with the example of the Internet Service Providers, much of Tajik privatization has benefited political figures who had

⁸⁰ Anjelika Mamytova and Jacob Townsend, "Country Factsheets, Eurasian Narcotics: Tajikistan 2004," *The Drug Fact Sheet Series* (2004 [cited 12 Apr. 2006] Silk Road Studies Program): available from http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/inside/research/narcotics_crime/FactSheet/2004/Tajikistan.pdf

⁸¹ Opium Poppy Cultivation in Afghanistan, 1994-2001, United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP), *Afghanistan: Annual Opium Poppy Survey 2001* ([cited 25 Feb. 2006]): available from <http://www.mapinc.org/drugnews/v0/n1942/a07.html>

⁸² ¿ TCACTPRETOCOTSSSP? As functional as its acronym.

been awarded lucrative state holdings at bottom prices.⁸³ Despite these flaws privatization of larger state holdings may eventually get underway.⁸⁴

Despite some optimism, in recent years the international donor community in Tajikistan has expressed dissatisfaction with the government's pace in promoting democratization and fighting corruption. Since 2001, repeated pledges of financial assistance to Tajikistan have been held up by international donors because of insufficient economic and political reforms, the perceived weak management of government structures, and allegations of corruption. Furthermore, experts believe that of the \$900 million pledged by the international community in May 2003 for various socioeconomic development projects in Tajikistan over a four year period, only a fraction will actually materialize. This is thought to be mainly due to the international community's displeasure with the Rakhmonov government for not having implemented sufficient economic and political reforms, as well as other pressing crises of the world overshadowing the humanitarian concerns of tiny Tajikistan.⁸⁵

In a televised speech in January 2004, president Rakhmonov emphasized that his government's top priorities will be working toward food and energy self-sufficiency, overcoming the country's "communication isolation," speeding up economic and land reforms, and "resolutely" fighting corruption and organized crime.⁸⁶ In November, the president stated that his government should pay more attention to alleviating poverty, promoting the market economy (including the expansion of private ownership), and

⁸³ Foroughi, "Nations in Transit 2004: Tajikistan".

⁸⁴ The Heritage Foundation's 2006 Index of Economic Freedom ranked Tajikistan 137th as "Mostly Unfree" out of the 157 nations surveyed. 2006 Index of Economic Freedom, (Jan. 2006 [cited 12 Apr. 2006] The Heritage Foundation): available from <http://www.heritage.org/research/features/index/countries.cfm>

⁸⁵ Foroughi, "Nations in Transit 2004: Tajikistan".

⁸⁶ Foroughi, "Nations in Transit 2004: Tajikistan".

ensuring transparency in government activities, including the upcoming elections. The associated double-digit economic growth rates—averaging 9.5 percent for the past five years (2000–2004), according to the EIU—have been due to prudent government macroeconomic policies and higher commodity export prices for cotton and aluminum.⁸⁷

The problem may very well be one of institutional or state culture. According to Transparency International, factors such as business transparency, press freedom, and public and cultural pressure, all acting together, can work as effective checks against corruption. The Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index 2005 considered Tajikistan as corrupt as Angola, Congo, Somalia, and Sudan.⁸⁸

3.6 International Arena

Tajikistan lies in a chronically volatile region. To the east, in the contiguous Chinese region of Xinjiang, ethnic discontent is fanned by Islamic extremism and drug trafficking. To the south Pakistan and Afghanistan are potential sources of regional instability. Up to the north, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan are crossing through the same painful consequences of post-Soviet transition as Tajikistan.⁸⁹ The main external players in Tajikistan are Russia, Uzbekistan and Iran. However, Western and Chinese involvement became greater in the recent years.⁹⁰ As the region could potentially become a heaven for terrorists,

⁸⁷ Foroughi, “Nations in Transit 2004: Tajikistan”.

⁸⁸ Tajikistan was the last of the Central Asian nations. Turkmenistan was not rated. Transparency International Corruption Perception Index, (2005 [cited 10 Jan. 2006] Transparency International): available from http://www.transparency.de/uploads/media/05-10-05_CPI_2005_PressKITFinal.pdf

⁸⁹ Shirin Akiner, *Tajikistan Disintegration*, 79.

⁹⁰ China seems to be nurturing its ties with Tajikistan in order to limit Xinjiang separatism. Nevertheless, it is difficult to envisage a significant Chinese presence in Tajikistan in the foreseeable future. However, by mid-2004, China heralded the opening of its first road link between Tajikistan and the Chinese province of Xinjiang. Akiner, *Tajikistan Disintegration*.

international interest in Central Asian stability is strongly related to Western (mainly US) and Russian national security.

It is important to understand the strategic value of Central Asia in terms of the current US-Russian geopolitical relation. However, it is necessary not to overestimate Russian capabilities to exercise control over the region. US presence in the area has considerably increased since the attacks of September 11, 2001. Right after these attacks, it did not turn out to be difficult for the United States to establish specific alliances in the area. Nevertheless, in the last years the agendas of the Central Asian republics have been modified. The intrusion of the major Western power in the post-Soviet space has caused mistrust between some Russian politicians who dream about the recovery of those territories that once were a Russian-Soviet bastion. Moreover, with the strengthening of the United Russia party in the Duma and with the concentration of power in the hands of the Russian executive, the Kremlin has chosen to initiate the attempt of recapturing its geopolitical influence over Central Asia. The Kremlin's expansive agenda directly contravenes current North American interests in the region.⁹¹

Ilan Berman⁹², in *The New Battleground: Central Asia and the Caucasus*, suggests that there are at least three elements that determine current relations between Moscow and Washington concerning the former Soviet republics of Central Asia.⁹³ Firstly, the new strategic emphasis that United States has put on the area as a crucial point for its 'global war' against terrorism has resulted in the installation of military bases across the region. Secondly, economic Russian priorities have raised the stakes for the

⁹¹ It is necessary to take into account that Central Asia has always been seen by Russians as their natural sphere of influence.

⁹² Vice President for Policy at the American Foreign Policy Council in Washington, DC.

⁹³ Ilan Berman, "The New Battleground: Central Asia and the Caucasus," *The Washington Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (2004): 59.

Kremlin to look for energy resources among the weak economies of Central Asia. And last but not least is the authoritarian trend that Putin's government has exhibited and the resurgence of the neo-imperialist Kremlin's agenda.

This American continued presence in a Russian protected area, under the pretext of the struggle against terrorism, has generated a situation without precedents in the area. Even when Americans have promised not to remain in Central Asia beyond the stabilization of Afghanistan, Russian policy makers are afraid of an indefinite US-presence in their former space. Therefore, Russians have made efforts to reinforce and establish alliances within the region with the objective of counterbalancing American presence and promoting Moscow's interests: United States pressures for the political and economic reforms that could consolidate democracy; while Russians support the consolidation of the current authoritarian pro-Moscow regimes.

In October 2003, the Ivanov's doctrine was postulated. The doctrine's main argument was that the principal threats to Russian security were the expansion of any military block or alliance in detriment of Russian Federation security; and, the introduction of foreign troops (without CIS and UN approval) in the territories adjacent to Russia.⁹⁴ The diplomatic consequence of such assertions has been the tightening of diplomatic relations with the ex-republics of Central Asia and the starting of the construction of military Russian bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan with the objective of resisting the American presence. To that effect, Russia has used all available diplomatic means at its reach, including the OCS (Organization for the Cooperation of Shanghai).⁹⁵ The outcome of the international struggle to exert power over Central Asia

⁹⁴ Ilan Berman, "The New Battleground: Central Asia and the Caucasus," 64.

⁹⁵ Ilan Berman, "The New Battleground: Central Asia and the Caucasus," 64.

has brought this region to the forefront of the international agenda in Asia. At the same time, the inclusion of new actors such as the US and NATO has brought Russia out of the geopolitical lethargy where it was submerged after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. According to Berman, the American move to Central Asia forced Russia to evaluate mid and long term alternatives: to have success in the creation of a common space across the CIS; or to attend the gradual erosion of its geopolitical influence over Central Asia. Russian government does not consider the second as a viable option. Therefore, as United States has furthered its involvement in Central Asia, Russia has taken what considers as the necessary steps for counterbalancing American military presence.⁹⁶ Berman argues that regional priorities of both powers are incompatible in the long term.

For the Kremlin, remaining the dominant player in the post-Soviet space is not simply a matter of political prestige; this role has increasingly become an economic necessity. For the White House, meanwhile, the continued independence of the fragile regional republics, not to mention their pro-Western political orientation, remains critical to the long-term success of the global war against terrorism.⁹⁷

The tacit confrontation strategies played by these two powers in Central Asia are not only going to condition the political evolution of the regional states, but are also going to test the limits and reaches of the agreements and alliances established by Moscow and Washington. As the evidence shows, the American military presence in the region is strongly influenced by geostrategic interests and elusive hopes for advancing democracy throughout the region. American presence involves economic cooperation. However, the economic aid is conditioned to the efforts made by the different regimes to promote transparency and democratic reforms. Berman's assumption reinforces the idea that

⁹⁶ Ilan Berman, "The New Battleground: Central Asia and the Caucasus," 67.

⁹⁷ Ilan Berman, "The New Battleground: Central Asia and the Caucasus," 67

Russian and American interests over the pace of transition in Central Asia are confronted. However, the appeal of strategic cooperation with the United States seems to be fading.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Of late, Russia has worked diligently to restore its geopolitical position in Tajikistan. Helping to force a reevaluation of Dushanbe's diplomatic calculus was Tajikistan's approximately \$300-million debt to Russia. Kambiz Arman, "Russia and Tajikistan: friends again," *Eurasia Insight* (Oct. 28, 2004 [cited 18 Feb. 2006] EurasiaNet): available from <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav102804.shtml>