

TAJIKISTAN: NEW STABILITY THREATS AND HOW TO AVOID THEM

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Today, life in Tajikistan, an independent country and an entity of international relations which has left the stage of civil confrontation behind, has changed in all its aspects. Indeed, no stage of human society's development is free from potentially conflicting factors. If tapped in the right

way, the contradictions may even help the country to advance. Even though the domestic conflict was settled peacefully, the problems associated with the current political processes are still lingering; they should be successfully addressed on time, otherwise they may develop into stability threats. Poverty of a considerable part of the republic's population is one such problem, although today its level is much lower than the 82 percent registered in 1997.

It is much easier to involve poor people in criminal activities or treason; they can fall prey to the manipulations of rich criminal or terrorist groups, since it is easy to tempt them with even small sums of money. In the final analysis, this could turn into a destabilizing factor in any society. This is especially true of Tajikistan which, for geopolitical, regional, ethnic, and religious reasons, attracts all sorts of forces trying to put pressure on it. The problem is obviously of great political importance. Poverty is conducive to corruption in all echelons of power; it breeds criminal groups, which are inclined to divide zones of influence, and intensifies drug trafficking. All this may finally destroy the country's statehood.

Tajikistan's leaders are doing their best to raise the standard of living; they are employing the medium-term Strategy for Reducing Poverty, which envisages:

- First, achieving social justice by establishing social equality among the different population groups.
- Second, the state will manage demographic processes by introducing family planning and improving the quality indices of the local population. Much will be done to improve the people's economic activity and to make women active entities of social life.
- Third, labor resources should be distributed and redistributed more reasonably.
- Fourth, ecological problems call for attention, while the republic's national riches should be used more sparingly.
- Fifth, migration policies need better organization: in the near future, the accelerating migration processes could assume mass proportions. If regulated and managed correctly they will help the country to cope with unemployment and raise the nation's standard of living.
- Sixth, the republic needs more jobs and better management of all available vacancies through vacancy fairs.
- Seventh, the local jamaats, as well as banks (as far as granting credits is concerned), should improve their performance, and NGOs should step up their efforts to implement small-scale projects, etc.
- Eighth, the taxation system should be streamlined, since the country lives on tax returns.

Since 1996, the decline in agriculture and industry has been slowing down, yet it is too early to say that all the social and economic problems have been resolved. No stability can be achieved in this context; the Hizb ut-Tahrir party is another threat to the country's stability: it aims at replacing the state with an Islamic Caliphate ruled by a Caliph. To achieve this, the party program has divided the process into three stages: the first stage presupposes brainwashing; at the second stage people should be prepared for a revolution; and at the third, a state coup is expected in order to achieve absolute power across the world.¹ Taqaiuddin Nabaqhani (1909-1979), who lived in Palestine, was one of the party leaders. It was set up in 1952 and immediately attracted Nabaqhani's followers from Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan. Its leaders expected to reach their final goals in 13 years; after failing to do this they settled on 30 years.

¹ See: Kh. Musozoda, "Z-in khilofat bui ihtilof oiad," *Chumhuriat*, 29 July, 2000, p. 3.

It should be said that during the ten years of its activity in Central Asia the party failed to score impressive political victories because it rejects compromises. Radicalism was the main cause of its failures. It was because of its radicalism that in 1984 its leaders were brought to court on criminal charges. Since that time, its supporters in the Arab and Central Asian countries have become outlawed.

Its activity in Tajikistan is threatening the country's stability; in fact, in any country that has just emerged from a civil war there are always people dissatisfied with its outcome; there is any number of people living below the poverty line who can be tempted by even the smallest sums of money. In a country where educational organizations are underperforming and where political and legal education leaves much to be desired, the youth cannot correctly assess the social and political situation and find its bearings in it; the level of political awareness of a large part of the country's population allows the radical forces to entice young men away. There are also social outcasts among the members of Hizb ut-Tahrir and other illegal organizations.

In Tajikistan, this party is especially active among the young people in Khujand, Hissar, and Zafarabad.² Its influence mainly comes from Uzbekistan, while its popularity in the north of Tajikistan is explained by the proximity of the Ferghana Valley, the base of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU).

An analysis of publications of this pan-Islamic party has revealed the fact that it does not limit itself to any specific territory, but is striving to set up a worldwide caliphate. It rejects compromises and negotiations with other parties and movements³—this is why it is dangerous. Indeed, a party ready to compromise may readjust its program aims (depending on the specific features of its development stage). Hizb ut-Tahrir is too radical to establish any links with other parties.

The Islamic extremists exploit the local people's religious feelings, freedom of conscience, and the state structures' inexperience in dealing with religious organizations to change the constitutional order by any means, including violence.⁴ This is why radical ideas travel freely in Central Asia, yet the party acts differently in different countries because of their specifics and, first and foremost, the authorities' attitude toward religion. For example, after the series of blasts organized by the IMU in Tashkent, the movement was outlawed and had to go underground or join Hizb ut-Tahrir. Political experience the world over has demonstrated that pressure is not the best or most infallible policy. According to Sh. Akiner, "it is not enough to accuse the Hizb ut-Tahrir members of extremism. It is important to grasp their arguments in order to respond to them in the best way possible. This is the responsibility of all thinking people, and it especially poses a challenge to the Council, and to the members and leaders of the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (IRPT). This is not an easy task, yet it is the best method for creating a stronger integrated society."⁵

In our country, however, there were other factors that helped Hizb ut-Tahrir promote its ideas. Many of IRPT's radical leaders were convinced that by signing the General Agreement on Peace and National Harmony, the party leaders betrayed their ideals by cooperating with the secular regime.

The IRPT has admitted that it was partly to blame for the Hizb ut-Tahrir's growing influence in Tajikistan. "In the past few years, Hizb ut-Tahrir has become very active since many of the Muslims became disillusioned with our party. They expected their life to improve as soon as our party took power, but ... nothing happened and we are following the course of concessions. They concluded that since the IRPT could not foster any change, they did not need it."⁶

² See: *Tajikistan: khrupkiy mir*. ICG Interview with U. Faizulloev, first deputy chairman of the Sogd Region branch of the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan, Khujand, 6 December, 2001.

³ See: O. Moldaliev, "Islamic Extremism in Central Asia," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 5, 2000, pp. 34-37.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵ Sh. Akiner, "Ekstremizm: globalniy fenomen," *Religiozniy ekstremizm v Tsentral'noy Azii*, Dushanbe, 2002, p. 20.

⁶ *Tajikistan: khrupkiy mir*. ICG Report, No. 30, Azia Osh-Brussels, 24 December, 2001, p. 11.

The above suggests that the IRPT, an influential and very much respected party, lost some of its followers in Tajikistan and that political parties are an all-important force which keeps society together, stems the dissemination of radical ideas, and prevents brainwashing. Political parties should become more efficient and closer-knitted organizations for protecting society against an onslaught of alien radical structures.

According to Report No. 4 “ICG-Asia” of 1 March, 2001, “Hizb ut-Tahrir rejected violence as a method of struggle and switched to propaganda by distributing leaflets. Its members are organized into independent groups; their ties with the leaders are limited; money and information are distributed through the mahallia mosques and other places where the party’s supporters congregate.”⁷

According to the media, this has already caused a split in the party’s Central Asian network. There is a group of members convinced that leaflets are not effective and that regimes cannot be toppled by propaganda, so they are calling for active struggle and violence. There is information that two groups—Aqramiyya and Hizb-an-nusra—detached themselves from Hizb ut-Tahrir. The former was set up in 1996 by Aqram Yuldoshev, former Hizb ut-Tahrir member; his followers are convinced that the ways and methods of struggle used in the Arab countries do not work in Central Asia. They argue that an Islamic organization should strive to capture power on the national rather than local level.⁸ Hizb-an-nusra, set up by those who believed that armed struggle alone could topple the Karimov regime, appeared in 1999 in Tashkent.

This shows that there were differences among the Hizb ut-Tahrir members, on the one hand, and that the “imported” methods of struggle were successfully adapted to the local conditions, on the other. In principle, these methods do not threaten any one political area—when adjusted to its conditions, however, they acquire viability and become dangerous. From this it follows that Hizb ut-Tahrir threatens the stability of all Central Asian countries. Tajikistan, therefore, should concentrate on eliminating poverty, improving the social and economic conditions, upgrading performance of the educational establishments and the structures of political socialization, and coordinating activities of all political parties and public organizations without encroaching on political pluralism. We should pay more attention to the jamaats to help them develop into civil society structures able to maintain stability in the provinces. The state should step up the activity of the law enforcement structures (the ministries of the interior and national security among others) to effectively protect the country against new threats. People should be taught to raise their political awareness and political culture.

The very fact that Tajikistan borders on Afghanistan and Uzbekistan is a source of threat. The problem is of a dual nature: “The border is an arena of permanent political battles and a source of potential conflicts.”⁹ The Afghan border will remain unstable while instability inside the country lasts, whereas the threats it emanates are of a sociopolitical, economic, and psychological nature.

The sociopolitical threat is generated by the armed groups seeking new targets to continue fighting; the border is frequently violated by drug traffickers (drugs being so far the only source of money for the illegal armed units operating in Afghanistan).

The economic threat is created by the ruined economy of Tajikistan’s neighbor, while the landscape and the terrain allow local people to cross the border into Tajikistan and carry away large quantities of foodstuffs, thus negatively affecting the economic situation along the border and in Tajikistan as a whole.

The dissemination of extremist ideology negatively affects the psychological climate in our country along with certain so-called borrowed values which could undermine our society’s moral foundations.

⁷ *Tajikistan: khrupkiy mir*. ICG Report, No. 30, Azia Osh-Brussels, 24 December, 2001, p. 11.

⁸ See: *Ruz nav*, 30 October, 2003, p. 1.

⁹ R. Merton, “Sotsial’naia struktura i ekonomia,” in: *Sotsiologia prestupnosti*, Moscow, 1966, p. 12.

S. Zokhidov has the following to say about the social and psychological makeup of the Tajiks living on the River Panj, along which the border with Afghanistan runs: “They are mainly conformists with elements of deviational behavior.”¹⁰ Conformist-deviational behavior is one of the prerequisites for this society’s continued existence: each of the individuals and the social group as a whole can be transferred from this alternative group to another only if they are involved in public activities. This duality is explained by their life on the border, where both sides have an influence on them.

Uzbekistan is the source of psychological threat: Hizb ut-Tahrir is fairly influential there. This could turn out to be the greatest threat since all psychological attacks are aimed at the individual as the key entity of political relations. Psychological threats can undermine the state’s ideological stability; this may lead to complete disintegration of society. To avoid this, the local state structures and border guards should do everything to create and develop political culture along with stable ideological convictions and behavioral patterns of the local population.

Societies plagued with social and economic problems are especially vulnerable—manipulation of public conscience becomes even easier than usual. This suggests that we should pay particular attention to stability on the state borders and their security: any armed conflict on the state borders has many aspects, primarily military and political, which negatively affect the relations between neighbors in the political and military sphere.

Drug trafficking is another problem; the common border with Afghanistan, one of the world centers of drug production, has made our republic a corridor through which drugs are exported.

Matthew Kahane, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) representative in Tajikistan, estimates that about 30 to 50 percent of our economy is generated by drug trafficking. The U.N. has already identified six routes by which drugs are exported from Afghanistan. Two of them cross Tajikistan: one starts in Kunduz, in the north of Afghanistan, passes through the Khatlon Region, and continues on to the CIS and West European countries; another starts in Badakhshan in Afghanistan, crosses the Gorno-Badakhshan Region of Tajikistan, and continues on through Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Russia to reach Europe.

This incessant traffic causes skirmishes and exchanges of fire between the border guards and drug carriers; common people, many of them very poor, fall easy prey to drug couriers, whose aim is to sell their cargo as soon as possible; many of those who live along the border have already become hostages of drug traffickers and taken across the border to Afghanistan. On top of this, some of the drugs are sold locally, which threatens public health and public order.

This forced Tajikistan to adopt a National Program for Fighting Illicit Drug Trafficking; and a Drug Control Agency was set up under the president. The country is obviously prepared to actively cooperate with international organizations and countries fighting this evil.

The very term “illicit drug trafficking” speaks of the criminal nature of this activity; it is closely connected with the crime scene in general. An increase in crime could undermine the country’s and government’s image at home and abroad. Indeed, the rising wave of crime says that the government, to which the nation delegates its rights to be protected, fails to do this; the same applies to the political system as a whole. We should obviously step up our efforts to prevent drugs from Afghanistan from reaching our country; we should improve the law enforcement structures’ performance and their cooperation. This applies to the ministries of the interior and national security, the Border Guard Service, and the Drug Control Agency. They should obviously work better to stem drug trafficking and crime in general. Social services should upgrade their performance in education, propaganda, and agitation among the ordinary people, etc.

¹⁰ S. Zokhidov, *Vliianie pogranichnykh konfliktov na gosudarstvo i sistemu iego bezopasnosti (na primere tadzhiksko-afghanskoy granitsy)*. Avtoreferat na soiskanie uchenoi stepeni kandidata politicheskikh nauk, Dushanbe, 2003, p. 13.

We have already written that today the country's socioeconomic situation is a threat to the country's stability. This creates other threats: the proliferation of radical movements; illicit drug trafficking, a rise in crime, etc. In view of this we should:

- Strengthen the political system of our country, which has lived through many hardships. Earlier, immunity to all sorts of threats prevented many unwelcome developments—today, in view of potential new threats, the system should activate many of its elements to act together and in full coordination.
 - Address and resolve the socioeconomic problems as soon as possible.
 - See to it that educational institutions work hard to create stable ideological convictions based on the common human values in all people, the youth especially.
 - Make more energetic efforts to develop a high political culture among the people to help them sort things out in the midst of ideological pluralism and stepped-up extremist activities.
 - Pay more attention to guarding the state borders with Afghanistan and Uzbekistan; take more effective measures to combat drugs, and the illegal circulation of arms, radical and extremist literature, and radical ideas.
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