CHAPTER TWO

Socio-Political Milieu of Tajikistan
2.1 Geographical Description

Tajikistan lies in the heart of central Asia and is bordered on the east by China, on the North and West by Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, and in the South by Afghanistan. Far from seas and oceans, Tajikistan is an alpine country, with more than half the country above 3,000 meters from the sea level. Tajikistan has a total area of 143,100 square kilometers, most of its population lives in valleys, which constitutes only 7% of countries territory. Geographically Tajikistan can be divided roughly into four parts: north, east, center and southwest. Like other Central Asian countries, Tajikistan has a dry climate with little rainfall. The climate of Tajikistan is sharply continental, ranging from a low of -20°C in January to a high of 30°C in July, depending on altitude. The republic has a dense river network, the largest courses being those of the Syr Dar’ya and the Amu Dar’ya, together with their tributaries, notably the vaksh and the Kafirigan. Other rivers include the Zaravshan (Zarafshan), which runs through the central

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1 The northern part includes the Zaravshan and Syr Dar’ya River basins and consists of semi-desert land and foothills. The east is alpine country, with the highest mountain ranges in Central Asia, the Pamirs and Tian Shan. This is the biggest yet least populated region of the country. Central Tajikistan stretches from the alpine border with Uzbekistan in the west. The fourth, southwestern region includes the vaksh and Panj river basins, and is crossed by relatively low mountain ranges Encyclopedia of modern Asia, Vol 05. Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data. USA, 2002. p 394

2 The average temperature in January in Khojand (lowland) is -9°C. In July the average is 27.4°C. In the southern lowlands the temperature variation is somewhat more extreme. Precipitation is low in the valleys, in the range of 150-250 mm per year. In mountains areas winter temperature can fall below -45°C, the average January temperature in Murgab, in the mountains of south-east Gorno Badakhshan, is -19.6°C. Levels of rainfall are very low in mountain regions and seldom exceed 60-80 mm per year. The higher peaks are covered with snow year-round Encyclopedia of modern Asia, p 394
Map of the Republic of Tajikistan
part of the republic. Most of the rivers drain into the Aral Sea Basin. This topographic and climatic variation has given Tajikistan an extremely varied plant life, with more than 5,000 kinds of flowers alone. Animal life too is rich and varied. Tajikistan is severely limited in agricultural land as 65% is not used for any form of agriculture, and plowed fields account for only 0.6 percent of Tajikistan total area. Cotton growing is the leading branch of Tajik agriculture. Other important branches are cattle rising and the growing of fruits, grains and vegetables. Wheat and barley are the predominant grains, and rice cultivation has been expanded. Horticulture has been significant in Tajikistan since ancient times. The soil of the republic is mostly gray poor in organic humus but rich in mineral nutrients. In un-irrigated areas, there are dark gray steppe soils and brown mountain loess. The republic is rich in mineral deposits, including iron, lead, zinc, antimony, mercury, gold, tin and tungsten. The major mineral fuel is coal. There are also considerable deposits of petroleum and natural gas.

Although a few of the small streams running down from the Pamirs empty into Lake Karakul, which has no outlet The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol 28, Chicago, 1992, P 1076.

Generally, grasses, bushes and a variety of shrubs predominate The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, p 1076.

The great lizard, Jerboa, gopher are typical inhabitants of the desert region. In wooded areas, deer and tigers are still sometimes seen. In the mountains, the brown bear is found at the lower levels, and the goat and the golden eagle frequent higher altitudes The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, p 1076.

Encyclopedia of Modern Asia, p 396.

Apricots, pears, apples, plums, quinces, cherries, pomegranates, figs and nuts are all grown The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, p 1077.

About two-third of the surface is covered by sand, shingle, scree, bare rock, and permanent snow and ice New Encyclopaedia Britannica, p 1076.

Tajikistan’s natural wealth also includes medicinal mineral springs and non-metals include common salt, carbonates, fluorite, lime, quartz, sand, abetters and precious and semiprecious stones. New Encyclopaedia Britannica, p 1076. See also Shirin Akmeier, Islamic People of the Soviet Union, Kegan Paul International, London, 1983, P 305.
2.2 Historical Background

The origin of the word "Tajik" is disputed. Most scholars of the Tajik language currently believe that the word "Tajik" is derived from *toj* (crown), while as to some scholars the word was originally the name of an Arab tribe (*Taj* or *Tazik*) that invaded central Asia, bringing Islam to the region in the seventh and eighth centuries.¹⁰ Unlike other large ethnic groups that now inhabit the area, Tajiks are Iranian-speaking people, not Turkic. They represent the development of one of the early layers of central Asian civilization, predating the advent of the Turks. The history of Tajikistan is particularly connected up with that of Uzbekistan for the two areas are not only contiguous, but have often been governed by the same rulers and subject to the same invasions, with Tajikistan providing access to the plains of Transoxiana for generations of conquerors from the South and the East.¹¹ The area of present day Tajikistan has always been attractive to foreign powers because of its strategic location and its resources. Cyrus the Great (585-529 BCE), ruler of the Achaemenid Persians subjugated this region in the sixth century BCE and incorporated it into the Persian empire, Alexandra of Macedon conquered it around 328 BCE. The Seleucids, heirs to Alexander's empire continued to rule here, but the Saka, nomadic invaders from the eastern steppes, overran the region around 130 BCE, followed by the Kushans, also from eastern steppes, in the mid first century BCE. In transition, during the seventh and eighth centuries, CE, Arab armies brought Islam to the Tajik populated urban centers of Central Asia; at the end of the ninth century, Arab rule began to

¹⁰ In medieval Tajiki-Farsi literature and historical chronicles the word "Tajik" was used in the general sense of "Persian" as the opposite of "Turk". In Russian usage of the sixteenth century and latter, "Tajik" was applied to the urban populace of central Asia, distinct from the ruling Uzbek nomads currently the term "Tajik" applies to the people of the central Asian Trans-caspian who are Europeans of Pamir-Ferghanian type. *Encyclopedia of Modern Asia*, pp 404-405

¹¹ Islamic Peoples of the Soviet Union*, p.302. The Tajiks are descendants of the group known as Aryans, who were mentioned in the Avesta the Zoroastrian Scripture. The Iranians settled in the transriver region of central Asia 2500 years ago or even earlier, and it was probably here that the Zoroastrian religion came into being.
disintegrate, and the Samanid dynasty (864-999 CE), with its capital in the city of Bukhara, replaced it. The sixteenth century marked important changes in Tajik history. First the Safavid dynasty in present day Iran (1501-1722/1736 C.E) declared Shi’ism its state religion and thereby cut all ties with the Tajiks, who remained Sunni Muslims. Second, Turkic Uzbek nomads led by Shaybani Khan (Mongol Ruler) overran Central Asia establishing the Khanate of Bukhara in the region inhabited by Tajiks. The geographic and political profile of today’s Central Asian states including Tajikistan was defined by superpowers at the end of the nineteenth century. Great Britain, after having subdued the Indian subcontinent, stopped near the Hindu Kush Mountains, a few kilometers from the Amu Darya River. Russia occupied the right bank of the Amu Darya River and made the emirate of Bukhara, a Russian protectorate in 1869. During the next several years, the other Central Asian states fell to Russia and most of the Tajik regions were under Russian rule by 1876. Thus from this time onward, Tajiks have lived in different sociopolitical and economic settings, as their original lands were divided into different polities. In 1918, Bolsheviks established control over northern Tajikistan, which was incorporated into the Turkistan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) but did not conquer other territories, owing to opposition to Soviet rule led by the Basmachis (local guerrilla fighters) and foreign interventionists. Soviet control was not established in the remote south-east of Tajikistan until 1925. In 1924 the Tajik (ASSR) was established as a part of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR). In the year

12 Modern Tajik historiography traces the origins of Tajik statehood to the Samanid state, when Tajik culture was home to some of the finest scholars and poets of the Muslim world. *Encyclopedia of Modern Asia*, pp 399-400

13 Tajiks, in the Bukharan emirate (a Vassal of Russia), continued to live as they had for centuries. In the Pamir Mountains as well, there was no change. By contrast, northern Tajikistan having been annexed by Russia to constitute part of the Turkistan Government Generalship, experienced rapid modernization. *Encyclopedia of Modern Asia*, p 400
1929, the Tajik ASSR became a full union Republic of the USSR (the Tajik SSR). And from then until 1991, was firmly controlled by Moscow. In August 1991, Tajikistan’s Communist president, Kakhar M. Makhkamov, backed the leaders of the coup in Moscow, when the hard-line coup failed, Makhkamov resigned; his successor outlawed the communist party and declared Tajikistan’s independence.

2.3 Demographic Diversity

According to (2001) census, the last relatively reliable data available, the total population of Tajikistan was 6.3 million. Tajikistan is inhabited by the people of many ethnic groups, apart from dominant Tajik population.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Population %age</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tajik</td>
<td>62.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uzbek</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>07.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tatars</td>
<td>01.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>05.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14 The Tajik (SSR) was slightly enlarged by the addition of the Khojand Okrug (district) from the Uzbek SSR. Europa World Year Book. Vol.02. 1996. p 2945
17 Europa World Year Book. Other ethnic groups include Kyrgyz, Ukrainians, Germans, Turkmen and Koreans
The population of these ethnic groups is spread in three different regions. The central territory stretches from the capital city, Dushanbe south to Afghanistan and west to the border with Uzbekistan. It is populated mainly by Tajiks, but is also home to Uzbek and other minorities. The second region is the northern oblast (province) of Leninabad or Khojand. Here Uzbek-speaking people are in the majority. They are more in common with their northern neighbors in Tashkent (Uzbekistan) than with the Tajiks to the south. The third region is eastern Gorno-Badakhshan. Several linguistically diverse groups, who reside in this region of the country, speak Iranian dialects.

2.4 Culture

Even though the Tajiks were of Aryan-Iranian descent, they welcomed the process of acculturation and absorption of other cultural influences. Luckily, the country was situated along the Grand Silk route through which once passed a hoard of caravans with distinct men, material and ideas. Tajik and other Turkic dominated areas of Central Asia, therefore, presented a rich cultural mix. However, Persian-speaking mountain dwellers remained more purely "Tajik", than their urban counterparts who simultaneously adapted themselves to the Turkic and other influences. Tajiks have no tribes, but like other settled Central Asians, they are strongly identified with their region, which formed the basis for clan like ties based on patron-client relations. About one-third of the population continues to live in the rural qishlaqs (traditional human settlements). Such a

A dasturkhon welcomes visitors to Tajikistan
settlement usually consists of 200 to 700 single family houses built along the banks of a river or an irrigation ditch. In contrary, Settlements in newly developed areas have a more urban aspect. Tajik culture places a great deal of emphasis on music, especially the shashmaqam system, which is normally played on a dutar. The hafiz (singer) of the shashmaqam is held in great esteem in all formal gatherings. Similarly, Tajiks respect their learned figures of the past, like Ibn-i Sina, Rudaki, and Firdausi. Following this tradition, they also treat their elderly, whom they refer to as muysaped (white haired), with great respect. It should be added that esteem for the aged is not due to a particular social standing, but for the experience that they have accumulated over their lifetime. Food plays a central role in the lives of the Tajiks, both within the home and outside. Within the home, food brings all the family members together. It also provides the subject for conversation at the table. Outside the house, tea is enjoyed in a chaikhana (teahouse). The chaikhana is the place where men of all ages gather and discuss issues which are important in their lives. The Tajiks also enjoy a game which they have borrowed from their Turkish neighbours. The game is called buzkashi (dragging the goat), which is played on horseback by very strong opponents, involves the remains (carcass) of a goat. It is worth while to mention here that, the Tajiks had been especially conservative throughout the Soviet regime, doing their best to resist cultural transformation and to preserve their traditions as pure and untouched as they could.

Traditionally, the qishlaq is surrounded by a mud fence. Many houses flat roofs, and every household has an orchard or vineyard. *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, p 1076

The most experienced cook is the one who can prepare the best Ash (rhymns with Macintosh). The dish, made with rice, carrots, and meat is cooked over open fire for close to five hours. *Tajikistan an overview*- Irah Bashiri htm

*Tajikistan an overview*- Irah Bashiri htm
Socio-Political Milieu of Tajikistan

Linguistic Map of Tajikistan

Copyright, Iraj Bashiri, 1997
The people of Tajikistan speak Tajiki, a Western Iranian language very close to Farsi and Dari language of Iran and Afghanistan, respectively. Tajiks of Gorno Badakhshan region speak Eastern Iranian language. There are also few thousand yogiuobi speakers living in the central part of the country. The minority groups spoke their own languages like Wakhi, shughni, Roshani, Khufi, Yazgulami, Ishkashimi, and Bartang. Since independence, the official language of Tajikistan is Tajiki (also referred to as Tajik). Before 1924, it was written in Arabic letters. In 1929, a Latin alphabet was devised and used instead of the Arabic. In the 1940's, Latin was replaced by Cyrillic, which continues to be used as Tajikistan’s official script today. After independence an attempt was made to revive the Arabic script. But mounting social, political, and economic problems have prevented the change from being realized.

Russian, which before independence was the official language, is now the language of inter-ethnic communication. It is also used in international affairs, as well as in government and business. The selection of the Tajik language over Russian ensures a linkage of Tajikistan to its pre-Soviet past, and suggests a decision by the government to embrace its pre-Soviet linguistic heritage. Just after independence Tajiks have revived their literary past by once again

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24 Encyclopedia of Modern Asia. p 395  Tajiki language served as a lingua franca in Central Asia between tenth to sixteenth centuries
26 Tajikistan an overview- Irah Bashiri htm
27 Although the language law establishes Tajik as the official language, the text of the law includes the word ‘Persian’ in parenthesis next to the word Tajik. Historically, Tajik and Persian have been viewed as the same language. However, today the Persian language uses Arabic script while Tajik has changed to Cyrillic. This change was a direct result of the Tajik republics incorporation into the Soviet Union. This could open the door to a future change in the Tajik alphabet from Cyrillic to Arabic script. It is worth mentioning here that, all of the works of the Tajik renaissances are originally in the Arabic script Texas International law Journal, vol 38, No.317. pp.366-67
2.6 Religion

Most Tajiks are Muslims and in this respect, they not only resemble with other Central Asian Muslims, but most of the Muslims in the Middle East and South Asia. Before, Islam first took root in seventh century CE, this area already has been exposed to other religions; Shamanism, Hellenism, Zoroashrianism, Manichaeanism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Christianity. The seventh century witnessed one of the most significant changes with the coming of Islam in the region. Since then, Islam had a great impact all over the region and was and continues to be traditional religion of the great majority of the indigenous people of Central Asia including Tajikistan. In fact, it has permeated various aspect of the people’s mode of life and psychology. Ceremonies connected with life cycles, festivals and pilgrimages are synonymous with Islamic beliefs and practices. Islam has even left its stamp of influence on the patterns of dresses, literature and philosophy. So much so that an adage widely current in Central Asia, adequately encapsulates the situation – “You cannot be an Uzbek, or a Tajik or a

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28 The Resurgence of Central Asia, Islam or Nationalism. p 172
32 Peoples of Central Asia. p 118
33 The Handbook of Central Asia. p 119
34 The Handbook of Central Asia. p 120
35 The Handbook of Central Asia. pp 202-03
Kazakh, if you are not a Muslim."

The majority of the Tajik population today, with the exception of the Ismaili community concentrated in Gorno-Badakshan region are followers of Sunni Islam, mainly of Hanafi School (officially 85%). The Ismailis, a heterodox group which divided off from Shiism, today account for about 10 percent of the total Muslims population of the Tajikistan. The history of the Ismailis in Tajikistan may be traced back to the time of the Persian philosopher and poet, Nasir-i-Khusraw (born in 1004 CE), who became a devout Ismaili in Egypt. Forced to flee persecution, he settled in Badakshan, in the valleys of the Pamir Mountains. Besides this, there are also representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church and also small Jewish community.

2.7 Family

The family used to be regarded as one of the most stable elements in Tajik society. Traditionally, Tajik family is an extended family. It is composed of several generations living in one household, and is more extensive than the simple nuclear family. Traditionally, the extended family consisted of an elder male head, his wife, his married and unmarried sons, his unmarried daughters, and the children of his sons. Despite the radical changes introduced by

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37 The subdivision of the Shi'ism into various branches came about due to the controversy surrounding the choice of imam. The Ismailis recognized only seven, and unlike twelve Shi'as regard Ismail ibn-Jafer as the seventh imam. The descendants of the imam who in 1834 succeeded in obtaining the noble title of Agha Khan (great sovereign) from the shah of Persia are recognized as the spiritual leaders of the Ismailis. Giampaolor R. Ciprisani. The Hand Book of Central Asia. London, I B Tauris Publishers. 2000, pp 202-203

38 Europa World Year Book. Vol 02. 1996. p 2945

39 Civil Society in the Muslim World (Contemporary Perspectives). p 162
Sovietization the family continues to exist in a not-too greatly changed form. However, since independence there has been a loosening of family bonds owing to pressures of new economic demands. As, the transition period is affecting men and women in very different and often contradictory ways. Men have been forced to weaken their bonds to their original families through becoming migrant workers and increasing members are forming second families in their places of work. The women they have left back at home as well as the many widows are being forced to take on new roles as heads of household. They have increased responsibilities accompanying their increased poverty. The breakdown of the traditional way of life is allowing them greater freedom of movement and chances of decision-making in some cases but this is counterbalanced by a clinging to the security of old ways.

Although Tajik society is often described as patriarchal (authority vested in elder males), patrilineal (inheritance through the male line) and patrilocal (bride moves to husband’s house hold), many matri-aspects exist. Women are not “weaker” sex among the Tajik. but play an important role. Only a few decisions are made without female advice. Like men, women contributed adequately to the family and culture organization in Tajik society. Village women rarely wore the burqa or chaddar, because it was an indicator of their disassociation from the village life. However, their urban counterparts put on the chaddar or veil. Since 1925, the Communist Party and state authorities mounted a large scale campaign aimed at the ‘emancipation of Muslim women’ who were encouraged to abandon the customary veils and to come out of their traditional

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40 Peoples of Central Asia. p 150
44 Muslim Peoples. p 741

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seclusion. However, in the post-independence period, societies in Central Asia including Tajikistan have been affected by certain, 're-traditionalization', which is evident in such domains as the use of public space and the regulations concerning women. Now there is an increasing expectation that women wear traditional clothing in public. This is the case even in major cities such as Dushanbe. As such, the observance of the Islamic dress code, hijab (veil) for women has again come to the forefront. Public places like, parks earlier regarded as favoured place, are now looked down upon as European styles of leisure, and girls are being increasingly discouraged to spend time in parks. Moreover, education for girls is no longer seen as a guarantee for economic security and marriage is preferred to education, resulting in early marriages and polygamy as they were prevalent in the pre-soviet Central Asian societies.

2.8 Economy

When the Soviet Union was dissolved in 1991, Tajikistan was the poorest and least economically developed of the Republics. The country experienced many dislocations, which are common to all the states struggling to make the transition from central planning to market economies. The civil war resulted in severe

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Civil Society in the Muslim World (Contemporary Perspectives), p 162

In order to understand the economy of the republics of the former Soviet Union, it is necessary to understand how centrally controlled economies work and how a centrally controlled economy is changed into a market economy. In simple terms, the Communist Manifesto gave birth to a number of economies in Central Asia all of which were controlled by the state. The articles of the Manifesto asked for a total central control of all aspects of life. In other words, all the people's assets were taken from them and placed under the supervision of the State. This included the factories, plants, and natural resources, as well as human resources. Privatization is the reverse of centralization. It requires a centrally controlled state that wishes to become a modern independent state to decentralize its agriculture, industry, businesses, and housing. It requires that the
damage to homes, hospitals and schools and to transportation, communication, agricultural and industrial infrastructure, the loss of thousands of lives and the flight of thousands of well-educated specialists. As a result of the mass emigration, virtually all-skilled specialists have left the country. In terms of net material product, the total value of all final output of goods and 'productive' services, the national economy shrank by almost 70 percent between 1990 and 1995. During the same period, inflation raged at rates sometimes in excess of 1000 percent per annum. The emergence of small, prosperous elite has been overshadowed by the rapid expansion of poverty at the other end of the economic scale. According to the World Bank Poverty Assessment (June 2000), 83 percent of the nation lives under the national poverty line. The unemployment rate is believed to be close to 50 percent in the country's major cities. The situation is no better in rural areas. Decline in the agricultural growth due to the structural problem inherent to Tajikistan's agricultural sector is a decayed irrigation system that leaves some of the country's arable lands with virtually no water. Aqueducts and irrigation canals that once brought water from the country's main waterways have long since collapsed, and there is officially no money to repair them. On the other hand, the major cause for the industrial decline is the shortage in energy supplies. It is noteworthy that Tajikistan had got

individual be given the right to buy and sell property. Means of transportation, production, and communication should be placed in the hands of the people. Similarly, the state should decentralize its banks, allow foreign investment to help develop its resources, and become a party to local and international efforts in running a meaningful and profitable market economy.

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49 The average monthly income is less than US $ 7 and the Gross National Income (GNI) per capita is US$170 (the low-income countries is US$ 420) R R Sharma, "State Building in Tajikistan: Problems and Prospects", *Dialogue*, Vol 03, No 4, 2002, P 113

50 *Dialogue*, Vol 03, No 4, P 114 At the same time, because of poor farming practices and the lack of seed, fertilizer and tools, yields have dropped by about 40 percent since 1991
largest water resources among all the central Asian countries. Like the other republics of the former Soviet Union, Tajikistan began privatizing its state holdings in 1992. The process, however, was interrupted in the same year by the outbreak of civil war and was not resumed in a meaningful way until the signing of the peace accord of 1997; although, in 1994, the Council of Ministers of Tajikistan issued a decree on the privatization of state properties. During 1999, there was a steep rise in privatization. As a result, over 80 percent of residential houses, 4,507 state enterprises, 350 stock companies, and 1,223 enterprises were privatized. Additionally, 1,866 ventures gained the right to own property.

Between 1995 and 1997, Tajikistan was scheduled to reform its legal infrastructure and its agricultural sector, as well as privatize its small-scale enterprises. The privatization of large-scale enterprises and the establishment of banking, credit and taxation systems were to follow. By the year 2000, Tajikistan was to be able to modernize its economy, create an efficient infrastructure, and implement large scale socio-economic programs. None of that has happened; not, at least, according to the plan. As, Tajikistan has created its own rules of Privatization, rather than selling its holdings to farmers, the government insists on maintaining possession of all agricultural land. In this connection, government enacted a law in 1995 known as 'land code', according which farmers can rent plots on a lifetime basis and can pass it on to their children.

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1 Domestic electricity production in 1995 was only 87 percent of that of 1994 and 82 percent of 1990. Domestic production of natural gas declined by 50 percent in 1995, and the gas supplies normally imported from Uzbekistan were interrupted several times as prices climbed up rapidly. *Dialogue*. Vol 03. No 4. p 114

2 *Tajikistan an overview*- Irah Bashiri.htm

2001, only 261,800 farms were in the private sector. The majority of Tajikistan's farmland remains within the government-controlled *kolkhoz* (collective farm) and *sovkhоз* (state farm) system.

### 2.9 Education

Tajik education in pre-Soviet times was predominantly in the hands of the *ishans* (religious figures) who headed the *maktab* and *madrasahs* in the major cities of the region. The mosque mostly subsidized that education, which concentrated on the study of the *Qur'an* and *hadith*. During the Soviet era, too, education was free. The type of education Tajiks received, however, was different. Rather than on the *Qur'an* and the *hadith*, it was centered on Western methodology and scientific subjects. Between 1992 and 1997, Tajik education was decimated. The war destroyed almost all the schools and scattered most teachers who either joined the war or left the country. However, at present, continuing the tradition established by the Soviets, the republic continues to enjoy a high literacy rate of 98 percent. Further, in February 1992, the Central Asian states including Tajikistan called for teaching of Persian and Arabic, in public school. Their respective education ministries published literature in these languages to encourage their reintroduction in the Central Asian region.

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54 *Tajikistan an overview* - Irah Bashiri [htm]

2.10 Political Turmoil: 1992-1997

Central Asian societies do not have a history of democratic popular participation in politics. Popular sovereignty was not even an issue in the Khanates, where leadership was hereditary. Khans claimed their throne and asserted legitimacy on the basis of their lineage. This remained true for the 20th century experience of the region including Tajikistan, for not even the Soviet system with its doctrinaire rule allowed popular sovereignty to become a political reality. Soviet style democracy made a mockery of citizens' rights and free political participation. Consequently, pre-Soviet and Soviet experiences left a legacy of authoritarian culture. That is why, after independence the refusal of the Tajik Communist government to allow space for other political parties to compete for power, set off a wave of civil unrest starting in the spring of 1992.

Even after its independence in September 1991, Tajikistan inherited a government from the Soviet period. Elected in 1990, it reflected the traditional predominance of the pro-Moscow conservatives who were mostly clan-leaders from northern Khojand. Tajikistan as a Soviet republic was traditionally ruled by men from the Leninabad region, the northernmost and economically best developed area. The region managed to establish their control proportionately on all major legislative and executive positions in this highland Central Asian country. The arrangement vanished with the Soviet system as Tajikistan became independent. Shortly after independence the new president of the republic, Kadriddin Aslonov, who had replaced Kakhar M. Makhkamov the former First Secretary of the Tajik Communist Party (CPT), allowed the registration of opposition parties. However, this flourishing of democracy was short-lived.

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The World Today. February. 1996. p 43

National Herald, New Delhi. 18th September. 1997
which came to an abrupt end. The Communist majority in the Supreme Soviet demanded Aslonav's resignation, rescinded the ban on the communist party, and declared Nabiyev (pro-Communist) president. This was quickly followed by demonstrations by the opposition in protest at the clampdown on democracy. The situation was worsened by Nabiyev's removal of the head of the Minister of the interior in 1992; this profile was occupied by a person from Pamir region. His dismissal only heightened tensions between the regions.

The seeds of civil war were sown in May 1992 when President Rakhman Nabiyev, in view of the demonstrations organized by various opposition parties formed the Islamic-democratic opposition, set up the Government of National Reconciliation which gave the 'Islamic Democratic Opposition' one third of the seats. The reconciliation agreement was however, rejected in Nabiyev's home town of Khojand and in the Kulyab region in the south. On September 7, 1992 president Nabiyev was forced to resign. In October 1992 pro Nabiyev forces reconquered Dushanbe, but were driven out within two days. The Kulyabis (Communists) entrenched in their province, undertook an offensive toward Dushanbe beginning in September 1992, with the covert support of Russian troops. After months of fighting and massacres of civilians, on 11 December a pro-Rakhmanov (communist leader) army, equipped with tanks, stormed the capital. A week later it was in control. The opposition coalition was driven out of Dushanbe and fled to Afghanistan. The victorious Kulyabi's chose Imamali

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62 *The Soviet Legacy in Central Asia*, p 126
63 The opposition parties established a new government in Dushanbe, but Communist continued to control the regional governments of Khojand and Kulyab. *The Economies of Central Asia*, p 101.
64 *Encyclopedia of Modern Asia*, p 404.
65 *New Strait Times*, Kuala Lumpur, 22 December, 1992
Rakhmanov as President, his government included some Leninabadis (Khojandis), however, Kulyabi established their monopoly in the State. Nevertheless in 1993, a process of negotiations brought together the Kulyabis, supported by Moscow, and Gharmis, supported by Tehran, under United Nations auspices. In June 1997, a peace settlement established a coalition government, headed by Rakhmanov, with one-third of cabinet appointments allocated to the Gharmis. The settlement ended the civil war. In this civil war, more than 650,000 people fled their homes, often across the border into Afghanistan or Uzbekistan, and an estimated 40-50,000 people died during the period of turmoil.

2.11 Political Structure

The present political structure of Tajikistan is based on the current constitution of the Republic which was adopted on 6 November 1994 after a nationwide referendum. It replaced the Soviet constitution that had been in vogue since 1978 and had been amended after independence. According to this constitution, Tajikistan is an independent, democratic, unified and secular state with separate executive, legislative and judicial powers. Parliament (Majlisi Oli) is the supreme legislative body, of the region. Amendments to the constitution, adopted in a general referendum on 26 September 1999 authorized direct presidential elections for a seven-year term instead of a maximum of two five year terms. The amendments also replaced the national unicameral parliament with a bicameral one. In March 2000, the Majilisi Oli has been divided in to two chambers: the

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66 Encyclopedia of Modern Asia. p-404

Majlisi Namoyandagon (Assembly of Representatives, or lower Chamber) and Majlisi Melli (National Assembly, which acts as the upper chamber or senate). According to the constitution the prime minister's post is nominal, because the President is the head of the both state and government. As the high administrator, the President has exclusive authority to appoint heads (chairpersons) of veloyats (provinces), nohiyas (regions), and cities thus providing a strong vertical chain for the exercise of executive power. The President controls religious affairs and enjoys exclusive power to nominate Judges and control the courts. The council of Ministers consists of the Chairman (Prime Minister), the First Deputy Chairman, Deputy Chairman, Ministers and Chairmen of state committees. The council of Ministers is responsible for implementation of laws and decrees of the Supreme Assembly and decrees and orders of the President. The local representative authority in regions, towns and districts is the assembly of people's deputies. Assemblies are elected for a five-year term. The Supreme Assembly may dissolve local representative bodies, if their actions do not conform to the constitution and the law. The judiciary is independent and protects the rights and freedom of the individual, the interests of the state, organizations and institutions, and legality and justice. Judicial power is implemented by the constitutional court, the Supreme Court, the Court Gorno Badakshan Autonomous Region, and courts of regions, the city of Dushanbe, towns and districts. For administrative purpose the country is divided into three regions.

The Majlisi Namoyandagon members are directly elected, while the members of the Majlisi Melli are indirectly elected, for a five-year term. Encyclopaedia of Modern Asia, p 402

Encyclopaedia of Modern Asia, p 403

The term of judges is five years and the creation of emergency courts is not permitted. Europa World Year Book Vol 02, p 2954

Europa World Year Book, Vol-02, p 3075. The capitals of these provinces are Khojand, Kulyab, and Khorogh respectively. The capital city Dushanbe has a separate status, called Stalinabad between (1926-1961)
**Administrative Regions**

**Table 2**

- Leninabad, in the north
- Khatlon (Formally two regions of the Kulyab and Kurgan Tyabe) in the south
- Autonomous region of Gorno-Badkhshan

**Political Parties**

With regard to the structure of political parties, in the early 1990s Tajikistan saw the formations of political organization determined to end one-party rule (Communist Party) in the republic. Although they had different platforms, they unanimously uphold and advocate the concept of popular sovereignty, civil liberties, and nationalism as well as the desire of the country’s Muslim majority for religious freedom. The Democratic Party of Tajikistan (DPT), Rastokhez (resurrection), the Islamic Rebirth Party (IRP), and Lali Badakhshan (ruby of Badakhshan) played an important role in the reconstruction of political scenario of Tajikistan.72

The Democratic Party of Tajikistan was founded on the basis of a number of informal movements in the republic and was formed in August 1990, as a result of February 1990 crackdown on all major informal movements. Its leadership included many Pamiris, as well as other intellectuals from Dushanbe. It also

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attracted some Islamic religious leaders. The major aim of the Democratic Party was the collapse of the Communist Party, the establishment of secular democratic governments, independence of religious-cultural structures in society, and the development of Tajikistan's national-cultural traditions.

Another important party, the Rastokhez Party strongly secular and nationalist in its programme, is dominated by Pamiri leadership. Many of its members belong to the writers union or to the cultural and technical intelligentsia. It was formed on 14 September 1989. With the aim to revive the Tajik identity, culture and language to develop Tajikistan's national cultural traditions, and to attain freedom of religion. The campaign of the Rastokhez Party began primarily with cultural demands in late 1989 to February 1990. These demands focused on adoption of Tajik as the state language, return to the traditional Arabic-Persian alphabet, revival of the Islamic cultural heritage and pressurizing the Uzbek government to grant greater cultural autonomy to Tajiks living in their republic, besides other related socio-economic demands.

The third major party which emerged in the Tajik political process was the Islamic Revival Party (IRP), also known as Islamic Rebirth Party. This party came into being at the time of the Islamic Revolution of Iran. Many branches of the party were also formed in other Central Asian republics, and until 1990 their activities were secret. The Islamic Revival Party held its founding congress in June 1990 in Astrakhan (Russia), and in 1991 its branches were registered in Tajikistan. The stated goals of the party, open to all Muslims in the Soviet Union, were to enable them to live in accordance with the requirements of the Qur'an and Islamic law, to advance equal rights for all nationalities and to espouse

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74 The demands also include the replacement of city and street names with their pre-Soviet appellations or with new tiles from Tajik history, *Central Asian Survey*, Vol 16, No 4, p 615.
humanist goals, as the leader of Islamic Revival party states, "the aim of our organization is the Islamization of the Tajik society and politics in terms of real Islam. For this purpose, the party will engage only in constitutional methods of achieving its programme. It rejects extremism and terrorism, and the Islamic Revival Party seeks cooperation with like-minded political groups." Thus, the Islamic Revival Party openly declares its adherence to Islam as an important political force.

The fourth party, which emerged in the Tajik political scene, has been the Lali Badakhshan Movement. This party became a part of the opposition coalition in early 1992. It advocated greater autonomy for the Gorno-Badakhshan autonomous region and to defend the rights of Pamiri population, which is distinct in terms of both language and religion (Ismaili) from the Tajiks.

There are also other smaller groups and parties which have been created in Tajikistan after the collapse of the Former Soviet Union, but they have not had any significant influence. One of them is the Great Aviamman or Aryana-i-Bozorg (previously called Cyrus the Great). This group was formed by the educated class as well as ordinary people in September 1991. Members of this organization consider only those movements in Central Asia which aim to create a greater Turkmenistan. Its programme consists in the creation of united government in the lands where Persian speaking people live.

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75 Central Asian Survey. Vol 16. No. 4. pp 615-616
76 Interview with Mohammad Hummatzade. 6 December 1994. CF. Central Asian Survey. Vol 16. No. 4. p 616
2.12 Foreign Influences and Interests

Like other Central Asian Republics, in Tajikistan neighbouring foreign powers have their own interests'. Russian involvement in Tajikistan was at first partly motivated by concern for the “abandoned brethren” of the imperial nationality. During the period of opposition rule in Dushanbe of the 388,000 Russian Slavs counted in Tajikistan in 1989, at least 3000000 have emigrated. Besides this, since 1993, Russian presence in Tajikistan arises out of post-imperial security considerations. The mainstream view of Russian interest in Tajikistan articulated by President Yeltsin is implicitly based on the reality that the Soviet successor states, including Russia, are not fully demarcated separate states capable of autonomous self-defense. Russia, for instance, has no defensible security borders to the south except the old Soviet ones. In the President Yeltin's view, therefore, the Tajikistan-Afghanistan border is “in-effect, Russia’s”. Military access to Tajikistan in order to defend that border is thus seen as vital for Russia, supposedly threatened by terrorism and the trade in drugs and arms. This view leads to an alliance with a Tajikistan’s garrison state supported by Russian troops. This is seen in Moscow as the least risky way to assure defense of the Russian border. At the same time, those in Russia with more explicit neo-imperialist agendas, however, viewed the presence of Russians troops as a welcome opportunity to reassert Russian hegemony over central Asia. Since Tajikistan is Russia’s last foothold in Central Asia for many Russian decision-makers it is psychologically satisfying to maintain Moscow’s presence in Tajikistan as long as possible. As all other former Soviet republics in Central Asia...

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7 Some nationalist leaders threatened the Russians of Dushanbe, warning them they would be hostages for the behavior of Russian troops. Russian settled in Tajikistan very recently, and they have no historic roots or feeling of belonging there. Post-Soviet Political order, p 154

8 Post-Soviet Political order, pp 154-155. Tajikistan, near the Wakhan corridor, had remained strategically a precious place with borders of China, Pakistan, India and Afghanistan touching the CIS borders. Russia never wished to slip this place out of hand. The unstable situation in Tajikistan provided such an opportunity

9 Post-Soviet Political order, p 155
and the Caucasus have drifted away from Moscow except Tajikistan. In the opinion of Gregory Gleason, to Russia contemporary Tajikistan’s “strategic significance is out of proportion to its sizes, the size of its population, or the size of its economy.”

From geographical point of view, Tajikistan seems very remote from Iranian territory. In spite of physical distance, Iran is very sensitive to all the matters that occur in Tajikistan, in view of the cultural, historic and above all linguistic affinities between the two countries. This sensitivity is not only felt by the Iranian state, but also by the major population of the country. This emotional attachment is combined with ideological considerations on the part of Islamic regime. That is why the recapture of Tajikistan by neo-communists and the return of Russian influence was not regarded with much pleasure in Tehran. Consequently, on 23rd December 1992, Iran abandoned its habitual reserve about the internal situation of Central Asian countries to denounce foreign intervention in Tajikistan. Tehran press even openly accused Russia and Uzbekistan of supporting the Communists. Although it had not played a leading role in the rise of the Tajik Islamist movements, Iran felt their failure as a setback. Infact, Iran’s policy on Tajikistan takes into account other imperatives. From a political point of view Iran does not wish to jeopardize its relations with Russia in any way by taking too high profile in Tajik affairs. Owing to the reason that, Tehran intends to maintain privileged links with Russia, which is one of its most important suppliers of arms and military materials. The fact is that Iran’s relationship
with Tajikistan has been beneficial for the Tajiks. Most of the exchanges between the two republics have been based on historical, cultural and linguistic affinity.85

In Tajikistan the Afghan war was always looked upon as a vexation, because of the long boundary between the two neighbours. Moreover, a large number of Tajiks live in Afghanistan and have relatives in Tajikistan. Since the fall of Najibullah’s regime in Afghanistan, relations between Tajikistan and Afghanistan have also remained complicated.86 From Mid-1992, Afghan mujahideen tried to foment a jihad against the Communist rulers of Tajikistan, local mujahideen guerilla-commanders in Northern Afghanistan provided a consistent flow of weapons to opposition parties in Tajikistan. Even though Afghanistan was devastated by war and absorbed with its own domestic problems, it managed to support Tajikistan’s Islamic resistance to the best of its abilities.87 The first consequence of the Tajik conflict for Afghanistan was undoubtedly the influx of refugees. Unlike its neighbours, Afghanistan is not really seeking regional expansion. Its involvement in the Tajik conflict was essentially an extension of its own civil war.88

Uzbekistan, almost next door neighbour to Tajikistan is keenly aware that there were at least two million Tajiks living on its territory, and 1.4 million Uzbek in Tajikistan, was alarmed by the Tajik situation. Islam Karimov (President) alerted the United Nations to the bloody events in Tajikistan. Conscious of the risk of


Central Asian Survey, vol 20, No 01, pp 80-81

"Tajikistan the Trials of Independence. P 121 It is clear from the statement of Abdul Malik, Taliban want Central Asia to remain independent. They stand for Islam but every people have the right to decide on its path independently.

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contagion for his own republic destabilization, at the beginning of the war, Uzbekistan essentially had the same policy as Russia toward the conflict-to support the Kulyabis and crush the opposition. The Uzbekistan government greatly feared on “Islamic Spillover” and the stirring of nationalism among Tajiks in Uzbekistan, both could have dire consequences for Uzbekistan’s domestic political situation. However since mid-1994, the Uzbek government’s position has changed; it no longer fears a spillover from Islamists or Tajik nationalists. One main reason for the change-after three years of brutal policies against the Uzbek opposition, the Uzbek government is now very much in change of the political scene in that country. There is no danger to the stability of Uzbekistan from the Tajik conflict. As a sign of his newfound confidence, Karimov even met with Tajik Islamic opposition leader Turajonzoda in April 1995. Although, only two years earlier, Turajonzoda was considered a “traitor and a threat to Uzbekistan”. Although Tajikistan no longer poses any significant security challenge for Uzbekistan, the fluid nature of Tajik politics and uncertainties regarding future developments in Tajikistan will continue to allow Uzbekistan to act as a major power-broker in that country.

After the collapse of Soviet Union, the US policy on Central Asia focused mainly on nuclear security, orchestrating the transfer of nuclear weapons from Kazakhstan to Russia and securing the nuclear material remaining on Kazakh territory, once that pressing issue was addressed, the US broader geo-strategic or security concerns in the region became less clear, and policy drifted towards a focus on energy interests and, consequently, the Caspian States. The lack of


The War in Tajikistan Three Years On, Special Report 13, United States Institute of Peace, November 1995, pp 8-9

active US involvement in negotiating the Tajik civil war in the early-to-mid-1990s, revealed Washington's willingness to let Russia deal with instability in the non-energy states of Central Asia. In the mid-1990s, intense US efforts went into support for its energy interests in Kazakhstan's oil and gas sector, and began to take more action in support of its security goals in the region. However, the 9/11 attacks in the United States transformed the subtle shifts in US policy into an all-consuming war on terror that drove a greatly expanded involvement in Central Asia. The most striking prong of the new approach was the stationing of US military forces in the region. Shortly after 9/11, the US government initiated talks with all five Central Asian states to enlist their co-operation in the war on terror, and specifically in the mission in Afghanistan. Tajikistan responded positively when the US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld visited Dushanbe by offering three of its air fields, namely, Kulyab, Khojend and Kurgan-Tyabe. Frustrated by the lack of Russian investment in his country, Tajik President Rakhmnov skillfully used the war on terror to greater aid from US and international financial institutions. However, unlike Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan has not allowed stationing of US troops on its territory, due to the poor quality of its bases and general security concerns. Further, the Tajiks are believed to have consulted Russia on offering bases to United States.

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93 India and Central Asia. Advancing the Common Interest. p 46.
96 Asia Annual 2002. p 212
97 India and Central Asia. Advancing the Common Interest. p 47
To sum up, the republic of Tajikistan is geographically a divided territory, which possesses considerable natural resources, and is an alpine country. Although the idea of a Tajik nation-state was a twentieth-century conception, historically speaking, there was no name as Tajikistan in ancient and medieval world. Hence, it simply defined a specified portion of land occupied by the peoples of Persian speaking language. They represented the development of one of the early layers of Central Asian civilization, predating the advent of the Turks. The area of present day Tajikistan has always been attractive to foreign powers because of its strategic location and its resources. They were ruled over by the aliens like the Achemenids, Greeks, Kushans, Arabs, Mongols and Russian etc. Even though, the Tajiks were of Aryan-Iranian descent, they welcomed the process of acculturation and absorption of other cultural influences. Tajikistan is a multi-ethnic country, but majority of its population are followers of Islam a traditional religion of the indigenous people. Tajiks are divided in to many tribes, but like other settled Central Asians, they are strongly identified with their region, which formed the basis for clan like ties based on patron-client relations. Traditionally, Tajik family is an extended family. It is composed of several generations living in one household. Although, Tajik society is often described as patriarchal. Women are not “weaker” sex among the Tajik and she plays an important role. As far as the economy is concerned, under the Soviet Union the Tajik economy was not allowed to develop independently. With the declaration of independence Tajikistan began to conduct its own economic policy, stressing a gradual transition to a market economy. However, transition from a centralized planned economy to a market economy has proven to be very difficult. The recession in its economy, first of all, owes to the destruction of economic ties with the republics of the former Soviet Union, followed by civil war, and natural disasters have all conspired against success. The agrarian and industrial complex, which essentially determines the socio-economic situation in Tajikistan, was in the most complicated position. The bulk of the population is discontented with economic
situation, which existed in Tajikistan. In education sector, however, continuing the tradition established by the Soviets, the republic continues to enjoy a high literacy rate of 98 percent.

When the Soviet Union collapsed, Tajikistan was the only former soviet Muslim republic in which Communist party immediately lost power. Although during the presidential elections of November 1991, the former head of the Communist party, Rahman Nabiey, was elected President, his victory however exacerbated political factionalism. Two coalitions fought each other, with different regional identities and ideological alignments. One camp was led by an opposition coalition of Islamic groups and new born secular democratic movements against old Soviet elites. In this civil war one-tenth of the total population of the country fled their homes, and an estimated fifty thousand people lost their lives. Finally, talks sponsored by the United Nations in 1994-97 led to peace and the incorporation of the United Tajik Opposition (UTO) into the government. Tajik constitution, adopted in 1994, declared the country to be independent, democratic, unified and secular state with separate executive, legislative and political power, and it’s President as the head of both state and government. In the early 1990s Tajikistan saw the formation of political organization. Although they had different platforms, they jointly advocate the concept of popular sovereignty, civil liberties, and nationalism as well as the desire of Muslim majority for religious freedom. So far foreign powers are concerned, the geopolitical interests of various countries, namely, Russia, Iran, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan etc, and last but not least America are interwoven in Tajikistan in different ways and in different places. In the final analysis, the post-independence era continued but did not change the scenario to the extent as was expected. The future of Tajikistan is based not only how the government broadens its political bases and improves its economy of the country but also on how it manages to balance foreign powers, especially Russian and Uzbek involvement in its domestic affairs.