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Tajikistan's Peace Process: The Role of Track 2 Diplomacy and Lessons for Afghanistan

By Parviz Mullojanov



A helicopter brings supplies to Russian border guards during the Tajik civil war on August 1, 1996. (Photo by AP)

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Summary

- Tajikistan's 1997 peace agreement was a remarkable achievement that ended the country's bloody civil war after military stalemate. While Tajikistan has remained stable, the majority of conflict-generating factors that triggered violence and the civil war remain unresolved, and localized violence has broken out on numerous occasions.
- The effectiveness and sustainability of the peace process were undermined by the failure to ensure effective and just power-sharing mechanisms. External actors focused on ending violence in the shorter term and fulfilling their own geopolitical agendas. Without effective implementation, the government treated the agreement as a short-term political concession.
- While track 2 dialogue played an expanded role in reaching the agreement, the dialogue did not last long in postwar Tajikistan.
- Tajikistan's peace process highlights shortcomings in Afghanistan's recent peace process and offers lessons for any future efforts to engage in negotiations, including the value of external actors using their resources to bring all sides to the table and the importance of establishing a clear basis for peace negotiations and national reconciliation.



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Making Peace Possible

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ABOUT THE REPORT

This report assesses the peace process that ended the Tajik civil war in the late 1990s and highlights aspects of the Tajik experience to aid in understanding the failures of Afghanistan's 2018–21 peace process. It includes perspectives from interviews with stakeholders in Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Europe. The report was commissioned by the Afghanistan and Central Asia programs at the United States Institute of Peace.

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The views expressed in this report are those of the author alone. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Institute of Peace. An online edition of this and related reports can be found on our website (www.usip.org), together with additional information on the subject.

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Emomali Rahmon, shown here during a visit to Beijing in on April 25, 2019, was installed as head of Tajikistan's parliament in 1992 and later as head of state. He remains president of Tajikistan today. (Photo by Greg Baker/Pool Photo via AP)

Introduction

The peace process that ended the Tajik civil war in the late 1990s successfully combined both official and civic channels of communication and negotiation from its start. These channels, despite challenges, were effectively organized and professionally managed. Civic channels were opened at the peak of confrontation, when political repression and atrocities against civilians were taking place and prospects for national reconciliation seemed remote. These channels proved effective even before official peace talks began, and they helped lead to a peace agreement in 1997 that ended the country's bloody civil war. However, the initial success in reaching a ceasefire and preliminary agreement, which ended the civil war and allowed refugees to repatriate, was not maintained. The peace agreement failed to lay the foundations for a just and inclusive peace and a well-balanced power-sharing system, although the country has remained relatively stable.

This report explores how these different processes, in particular the Inter-Tajik Dialogue of the early 1990s, helped bring a devastating civil war to an end. The aim of this study is to investigate what can be learned from the Tajik peace process and what lessons the Tajik experience with power-sharing arrangements, reconciliation, reintegration, and demobilization can offer to the architects of future peace processes.

The research for this project began with desk research on the Tajik civil war, the official peace process, the Inter-Tajik Dialogue, and the postconflict situation. This material was supplemented by firsthand knowledge of these events and processes. In summer 2020, the author conducted

interviews with academic colleagues, political experts, historians, economists, and researchers based in Tajikistan and Russia and at UN agencies to verify details and findings.

The primary method of data collection was a series of in-depth, semistructured interviews with key figures in Tajikistan's peace process and political opposition. Due to the sensitivity surrounding the topic, individual interviews offered the safest space within which respondents could express themselves freely. The COVID-19 pandemic made it impossible to travel to Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Europe to conduct interviews. Remote interviews were briefly considered; however, within Tajikistan, respondents refused to speak over the phone or via online communications media about politically sensitive topics. Therefore, it was decided to put together an interview team that was already in Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and mainland Europe with the necessary connections and research experience.

In summer and fall 2020, the research team interviewed 15 men and 6 women involved in the Tajikistan peace process, including key members of the Inter-Tajik Dialogue, and 9 men previously part of the United Tajik Opposition (UTO) who are in exile in Europe. The team also interviewed six Afghans involved in the Tajik peace process, including ex-president Ashraf Ghani, former presidential candidate and high-level politician Abdullah Abdullah, ethnic Uzbek former army commander and vice president Abdul Rashid Dostum, former president Burhanuddin Rabbani, and two colleagues of Ahmad Shah Massoud, an Afghan politician and military commander who was assassinated by the Taliban in 2001.

During the writing of this report, the peace process in Afghanistan collapsed, and the Taliban retook the country with limited opposition, which led to renewed questions about how the Tajik peace process, despite its later problems, managed to quell hostilities so successfully. Did the strategies and actions of external actors in Tajikistan differ significantly from those in Afghanistan? Did actors in one country adopt longer-term perspectives toward the peace process than actors in the other? Was space afforded to different parties in different ways? Was the extent and impact of track 2 diplomacy a significant factor in the two peace processes' different outcomes? The initial analysis was revisited with these questions in mind to see where, in the future, a new Afghan peace process might harness these lessons.

This report is divided into five main sections. The first section briefly sketches the background of the Tajik peace process. The second section assesses that process up to the 1997 signing of the peace accord between the government and the alliance of nationalist and Islamist forces that had formed the UTO. It looks at the factors responsible for that success, including the influence of external actors, the contribution of the Inter-Tajik Dialogue, and the role of women. What happened in Tajikistan in terms of those factors is compared with what unfolded in Afghanistan in 2018–21. The third section examines the postconflict period through 2008. It begins by summarizing the main provisions of the 1997 agreement and then looks at how they were—or were not—implemented in the first two of three phases of the Tajik peace process: the transition in 1997–2001 from violence to peace, during which shortcomings of the agreement began to impede its implementation, and a period lasting until 2008 that was marked by the government's centralization of power.¹ The report's fourth section explores the shortcomings of the peace agreement and peace process. The fifth and final section spotlights the most salient, successful features of the Tajik experience to aid in understanding failures in Afghanistan's peace process and to identify lessons for future peace processes.

Background of the Tajik Peace Process

In the years approaching the collapse of the Soviet Union, Tajikistan witnessed an outpouring of nationalist and interethnic tension that saw the emergence of the first real opposition to the Communist Party, the Rastokhez movement. It was quickly discredited but regrouped to create the Democratic Party of Tajikistan and, in the absence of weak secular opposition, allied itself with the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) in a marriage of anti-Communist and anti-government convenience. Amid the collapse of the Soviet Union, Tajikistan declared its independence on September 9, 1991. In the presidential elections that followed, regional voter patterns revealed deep splits between the central districts (now the Districts of Republican Subordination and Badakhshan Mountainous Region, also known as the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region or GBAO) and Sughd and Kulob (now a district in Khatlon Region). Political turbulence in early 1992 paralyzed government infrastructure, forcing the formation of the National Confidence Government in April 1992. Although this government was inclusive on paper, in reality, opposition figures were sidelined. In May 1992, the government and opposition began to clash violently, resulting in casualties and the official start of the civil war. There has not been a broad consensus on how to define the Tajik civil war, as scholars cannot agree on whether it was an interregional struggle between different regions and ethnic clans, an ideological conflict between Islam and Communism and/or secularism, or a geopolitical war. It is perhaps best understood as a multifaceted conflict influenced by a variety of socioeconomic, ethnic, and geopolitical factors.²

The Russian Federation's shift to support the Tajik government in October 1992 changed the dynamics of the conflict in favor of pro-government forces and allowed the Kulobi clan to cement control of the government and install Emomali Rahmon as parliamentary speaker and then head of state (he remains president today). Divides based on ethnic identity deepened, and military clashes escalated into a full-blown humanitarian catastrophe. Hundreds of thousands of refugees fled into Afghanistan and neighboring former Soviet republics to escape repression, sexual violence, and ethnic cleansing. These atrocities, primarily aimed at civilians, also mobilized a new wave of opposition volunteers. In Afghanistan, two new entities emerged: the UTO and the Islamic Movement of Tajikistan. The IRPT played a leading role in both due to its ability to bring in funding and thereby wield decision-making power. The UTO recruited and trained thousands of new fighters, penetrating border areas of Tajikistan to distribute arms and launch guerrilla attacks on government forces. Most of this UTO violence occurred immediately preceding the official peace negotiations that began in 1994 and was intended to strengthen the group's negotiating position. By 1996, the UTO had made significant advances, but its lack of heavy weapons meant it was unable to take lowland territories, and the conflict became mired in a stalemate.

This stalemate accelerated the peace process; international actors intensified peacebuilding efforts and managed to bring both sides to the table. The peace agreement between the UTO and the Tajik government was signed on June 27, 1997, ending five years of devastating war.

Early Success: Reaching the 1997 Peace Agreement

In the early 2000s, the Tajik reconciliation process was widely considered a success story. Today, views are more ambivalent: the process is seen as both enabling negotiations that led to a peace agreement and brought the civil war to a close, and also providing a pathway to centralized and autocratic rule. Unlike Afghanistan, where the Taliban began an insurgency shortly after being ousted from power in 2001, Tajikistan has not relapsed into civil war; however, it has not used its years of peace to build effective institutions that can improve the lives of its citizens and more justly address potential causes of renewed civil conflict. This section of the report examines the course of the peace process up to the conclusion of the peace negotiations, highlights the chief reasons for that initial success, and looks at similarities and differences in Afghanistan's process.

THE INFLUENCE OF EXTERNAL ACTORS

Russia was instrumental in launching Tajikistan's peace talks, exerting considerable pressure on the Tajik government—which Moscow supported—to come to the table. Alarmed by the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan, Russia was concerned that if the Taliban gained power before a peace agreement was reached, the Tajik government would be unable to resist a Taliban-backed UTO. Therefore, Russia threatened to withhold its support to the Tajik government unless it engaged in talks.

Similar pressure was put on the UTO by Afghan actors. Following the Taliban takeover of Kabul in September 1996, Ahmad Shah Massoud, leader of the ousted Northern Alliance forces, asked the Russians for military support. The condition Russia demanded for this support was the expulsion of all Tajik opposition fighters from Afghan territory. Accordingly, Massoud presented the UTO with an ultimatum: leave Afghan territory and solve its problems with the government of Tajikistan or risk having its military supplies and financial support cut off. In the second half of 1996, the Russian and Afghan governments established a 25-kilometer-wide "secure" zone along the Tajik-Afghan border that prevented UTO units from crossing. Russian and Afghan forces even conducted joint operations to prevent opposition fighters crossing the border. The UTO's loss of its safe haven and the consequent disruption of its supply lines proved to be a turning point in the conflict, preventing it from seizing Tajikistan's capital, Dushanbe, and the surrounding districts. Moscow and Massoud had effectively changed the military facts on the ground in a way that forced the UTO to the negotiating table.

During the negotiations, Russia actively defended the interests of the Tajik government—an act unaddressed (and uncorrected) by other external stakeholders—while pressing both sides to come to agreement. One research respondent recalled that, shortly before the signing ceremony, the opposition refused to sign the agreement because it did not reflect UTO interests. Russian foreign minister Yevgeny Primakov threatened to use the Russian air force to bombard opposition camps inside Afghanistan and also questioned the security of the UTO delegation itself if the deal went unsigned.³ It was signed hours later.



MAP 1. TAJIKISTAN'S ADMINISTRATIVE REGIONS

Adapted from artwork by Rainer Lesniewski/Shutterstock

Iran supplied ammunition and training to the UTO and hosted the family members of the UTO's leadership. Iran also had influence over Massoud in Afghanistan. It was able to leverage these relationships effectively to repeatedly bring the opposition to the negotiating table.

Early in the war, Uzbekistan had been the main external actor, but that role was gradually taken over by Russia. Tashkent had limited involvement in the peace process, although it did try to include a group of pro-Uzbek field commanders and politicians (officially referred to as the "Third Force") in the peace talks. Acting on instructions from Tashkent, the Third Force organized two uprisings—one in January 1996 and the other in August 1997—to press for its inclusion in official negotiations, a demand that the Tajik government vehemently opposed. While the Third Force was defeated by government forces in these two instances, these disruptions delayed the peace process. In 1999, the Third Force invaded northern Tajikistan from Uzbekistan but was again defeated, this time by both government and UTO troops.

All influential external state actors were motivated not by humanitarian concerns but by geopolitical interests. The rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the resulting risks of wider regional destabilization encouraged external stakeholders to unite in efforts to end the Tajik civil war as quickly as possible. Some respondents interviewed for this report perceived this rush to conclude the peace deal as having led to a "glossing over" of humanitarian issues and as partly

responsible for implementation gaps in key provisions of the agreement. For example, negotiators disregarded issues related to transitional justice; human rights violations against women, internally displaced persons, and refugees; the challenge of psychosocial rehabilitation; and women's potential role in the implementation of a peace deal. Civic and community groups that actively participated in local- and district-level peacebuilding were marginalized. Although problems related to the economic reintegration of opposition fighters, returnees, and refugees were discussed, their resolution was, ultimately, not elaborated in detail. Once the deal was signed, these issues were broadly ignored by external stakeholders.

The vulnerability of the UTO to pressure from impatient external actors was exacerbated by the fact that UTO negotiators underestimated the need to conduct a thorough analysis of all provisions of the peace agreement. As a result, they did not insist on implementation mechanisms being spelled out in detail. The opposition also underestimated the importance of exercising real control over the administrative apparatus. Even in districts fully controlled by the UTO at the end of the war, formal local government, law enforcement, and administrative structures remained under government control.

The UTO also blundered by agreeing, during the negotiations, to limit its criticism of government policy. UTO leader Said Abdullo Nuri stopped the proposed move of the UTO radio station from Afghanistan to Dushanbe and instructed opposition activists and pro-UTO journalists to not criticize the government. This led to a gradual loss of influence on public opinion.

REFLECTIONS ON EXTERNAL ACTORS IN AFGHANISTAN AND TAJIKISTAN

In both Tajikistan and Afghanistan, external actors pursued a similar goal of launching peaceful dialogue with the Islamic opposition to separate its moderate part from the radical one. In Tajikistan, the peace talks finally led to the disintegration of the UTO, which was torn apart by disagreements and infighting between its constituent groups. In Afghanistan, the peace talks—and more particularly, the fact that the United States did not include the Afghan government in its negotiations with the Taliban—emboldened the Taliban. These divergent outcomes reflect the different approaches taken by external actors.

Russia refused to deal with the UTO until the very end of the process (although Iran and Afghanistan had closer contact), limiting its role to mediation and enforcing agreements. While this was not impartial mediation (as Russia backed the Tajik government), peace negotiations involved only local actors. They also excluded other potential spoilers from the process (such as Third Force commanders supported by Tashkent). Therefore, external mediators managed to bring to the negotiating table the main opposing sides (the Tajik government and the UTO), which predetermined the success of the peace process.

In Afghanistan in 2018–21, the United States engaged directly with the Taliban for a long period rather than in concert with the Afghan government, thus sidelining it. Some senior officials excluded from that process began their own (informal) negotiations with the Taliban on trade-offs, security guarantees, and a share in the future power system, opening a second line of diplomacy completely at odds with the US-led approach. The United States did not commit to maintaining a troop presence in Afghanistan following a peace deal nor to a political settlement

between different groups in Afghanistan, as evident in the Doha Agreement, which eroded trust between the United States and the Afghan government, emboldened the Taliban, and undermined negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban.⁴

Another difference in approach concerned the strategies used to enforce agreements. In Tajikistan, Russia successfully forced Massoud to cut off military and financial aid to the opposition. The subsequent drastic shortage of supplies forced the UTO to the negotiating table and then to make major concessions. In Afghanistan, external actors failed to close the Afghanistan-Pakistan border and cut off military supplies to the Taliban. Pakistan's continued political, military, and financial support sustained the Taliban, eroded possibilities for finding compromise and common ground, and negated peace efforts led by the United States and other countries.

These differences are also evident in state-building and law-enforcement strategies. In Tajikistan, Russia, applying lessons learned from the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, concentrated its efforts on establishing fully fledged armed and police forces capable of conducting military-level operations and therefore able to take on UTO units in open fighting. This strategy meant that, with the exception of the air force, the Tajik armed forces were supported on the grounds that they adhered to Russian military standards and requirements, including equipment (tanks, artillery, weapons, etc.). The Tajik forces also received permanent air cover and full military support from the Russian 201st Motorized Rifle Division. In Afghanistan, by contrast, observers suggested that the Afghan National Army played more a of supplementary role to US and NATO troops as opposed to acting as an independent fighting entity. Observers also claimed that the Afghan army lacked heavy military equipment, tanks, and artillery, a deficiency which, after the removal of air cover by international forces, led to the swift collapse of national forces against the resurgent Taliban. As a point of comparison, the pro-communist government of Mohammad Najibullah in Kabul had significant numbers of combat aircraft, helicopters, and artillery, which arguably helped it to remain in power for three years after the Soviet troop withdrawal in 1989.

THE COMBINATION OF TRACK 1 AND 2 APPROACHES

All respondents, whether from the government or the opposition, Tajik or Afghan, stressed the influence of the track 2 Inter-Tajik Dialogue on the formal peace negotiations. In 1993, at a time when it was widely believed that a political settlement was impossible given the level of violence, the fact that a productive track 2 dialogue could take place was an important barometer of the potential for high-level dialogue.

The Inter-Tajik Dialogue stemmed from the Dartmouth Conference, an unofficial, nongovernmental channel of communication established between the leadership of the United States and the Soviet Union following the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. The Dartmouth Conference Regional Conflicts Task Force (established in 1981) decided to draw on its experience and launched the Inter-Tajik Dialogue in 1993 to explore whether a group could be formed from within the civil conflict to design a peace process for Tajikistan. Participant selection followed two strict guidelines. First, participants had to be independent members of the intelligentsia and represent the nongovernmental sector. Because they were not government officials, they were unrestricted by official diplomatic language and were able to engage in open and free discussion. Second, participants had to have access to decision-makers in their respective countries to ensure that

the results of discussions, proposals, and suggestions could reach and influence the top political level. Participants were briefed by their corresponding state officials before each meeting, and the results of each meeting were passed on to the respective decision-makers through reporting, analytical memos, and other methods.

The first meeting of the Inter-Tajik Dialogue was convened in Moscow in March 1993 and brought together 15 participants from each side. Most of these initial members went on to create a core group that remained intact throughout the process. Although the majority of opposition participants were living in exile in Moscow, they were considered to be legitimate representatives of the opposition by the UTO leadership. Participants included members of community-level civic grassroots organizations as well as regional- and national-level professionals from the nongovernmental sphere and civil society, including women's organizations. Some meetings were attended by top-level politicians, most of them from the opposition.

The Inter-Tajik Dialogue meetings followed a procedure and approach developed through the Dartmouth Conference. The group met three times a year, primarily in Moscow, which was considered the most convenient location by both sides. On average, each meeting lasted three days. Moderators from the United States and Russia played a key role in facilitating dialogue, allowing for the free exchange of opinions while mitigating tensions and confrontation and not interfering in the substance of the discussion.

Dialogue participants themselves identified the working agenda for each meeting. The second day was usually devoted to discussing each of the identified issues to seek out appropriate solutions. By the end of the second day, several dialogue participants—the “editing group”—would prepare a draft memorandum of understanding summarizing the main results of the discussion and the most important suggestions and recommendations. On the next day, during the final sessions, participants finalized and approved the memorandum of understanding. These memoranda were widely disseminated among interested stakeholders and shared with mass media.

Track 1 initiatives in Tajikistan started in 1994, but the actual breakthrough in negotiations did not occur until two years later. At least 20 to 30 percent of the official negotiation teams consisted of people affiliated with the Inter-Tajik Dialogue, ensuring a thematic coherence and continuity between the two tracks. This unofficial channel of communication between the opposition and the government existed throughout the entire peace process, serving as a testing ground for different ideas and approaches proposed by the conflicting sides once formal talks began. The Inter-Tajik Dialogue held seven rounds of meetings before official peace talks started, and it allowed for ongoing communication when official peace negotiations stalled and parties sought to save face. As an unofficial channel, it did not commit parties to formal agreements, allowing for creativity.

Respondents saw the Inter-Tajik Dialogue as helping to pave the road to the peace treaty, achieving key successes without which an agreement might not have been reached. It served as a deliberation platform to generate and test ideas, as well as to invite feedback between tracks 1 and 2. Those ideas and that feedback addressed issues such as the inclusion of all political groups and factions in the peace talks (unsuccessful, in terms of being adopted in the official negotiations, as discussed later in this report), the creation of the National Reconciliation Commission and the allocation of quotas in state structures (successful), return and resettlement of refugees, demobilization and amnesty, and forgiveness and reconciliation (partially successful).

However, the Inter-Tajik Dialogue had no decision-making power, which left it unable to contest or correct the lack of transparency that surrounded the official negotiations. Looking back on the negotiations two decades later, respondents from the nongovernmental sector, including civic actors, those from different political parties, and gender activists, complained that their groups' interests had not been properly reflected in the agreement. This neglectful attitude was ominous, foreshadowing a future in which the government would not seek to explore the potential ability of track 2 initiatives and civil society to influence the peace process positively by bringing direct voices from the community and grassroots level to the table.

To be successful, track 2 diplomacy must be (1) sustained, (2) closely linked to track 1 processes, and (3) integrated into official decision-making processes.⁵ Over a long period, the same core group of participants from different sides must come together regularly, enabling an atmosphere of trust to develop and gradually expand beyond the inner dialogue circle and the negotiating room. Participants in track 2 processes must have access to decision-makers on their different sides to allow the results of track 2 discussions to filter upward and decision-makers to be held to account.

In the case of Tajikistan, the track 2 approach met criteria (1) and (2). It retained participants over an almost decade-long process. It was able to use the mediation and oversight mechanisms of the Dartmouth Conference, enjoyed support from the United States and Russia, and had direct access to Yevgeny Primakov, one of the main designers and “enforcers” of the Tajik peace process. However, the track 2 approach did not meet criterion (3) as it was not properly integrated into official decision-making.

Afghanistan has witnessed numerous track 2 peace initiatives in the past 20 years. These include efforts led by the Regional Peace Institute, the Hanns Seidel Foundation, the Heart of Asia Society, the Center for Conflict and Humanitarian Studies in Doha, and the Center on International Cooperation at New York University. However, there have been clear shortcomings in terms of the sustainability of and representation within these initiatives, which have been criticized for exhibiting short-term and donor-oriented perspectives rather than seeking to establish a genuinely Afghan civil society forum based on shared objectives. Undoubtedly, approaches to track 2 diplomacy have been fragmentary with minimal links between donors and Afghan stakeholders. No initiative seems to have enjoyed close links to track 1. And no senior international political figure (such as Primakov) who can exert influence at the track 1 level has been linked to track 2 processes, meaning that any gains made in the different track 2 fora were unable to feed into official negotiations.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN

At the track 3 (community) level, the peacebuilding role played by women in Tajikistan cannot be overstated. On the front lines, leaders of community women's groups played a valuable mediation role, establishing contacts between the government, Russian forces, and opposition field commanders. During the war, women leaders—particularly in GBAO in eastern Tajikistan—participated in negotiations between the central government, Russian border guards, and UTO field commanders. Women respondents attributed delays in military action in GBAO in 1993 and 1994–95 to those peacebuilding and negotiating activities. Women also engaged in efforts to reduce intercommunal violence and human rights abuses, receiving support from international

Participants in track 2 processes must have access to decision-makers on their different sides to allow the results of track 2 discussions to filter upward and decision-makers to be held to account.

agencies for their efforts to prevent violence against returning refugees.

At the track 2 level, every round of the Inter-Tajik Dialogue involved women. Typically, 15–20 percent of participants were women, but in some rounds, the figure reached as high as 30 percent. Nonetheless, the mechanism remained dominated by men.

Despite their successes in the field and their significant presence in the Inter-Tajik Dialogue, women were mostly absent from the formal, track 1 peace negotiations. According to the interviews, it is unclear whether their absence was the result of a deliberate policy of exclusion or simply reflected the pervasive influence of patriarchal norms. While women are often viewed as authoritative leaders at the grassroots level in Tajikistan, they have historically been poorly represented at the national political level. Indeed, women faced a triple barrier in the form of Tajikistan’s socially conservative and patriarchal norms, the Islamic nature of the opposition, and the dominance of militarized masculinities. Politics and the military were, and continue to be, seen as primarily male spaces. Respondents also suggested that because the international community was most interested in a speedy resolution of the civil war rather than a representative one, women’s voices were not promoted at the track 1 level.

Women were specifically targeted by conflict factions during the war. Forced marriages and human trafficking—mainly of young girls—became more acceptable.⁶ Rape and sexual violence were widespread and used as weapons, but the subject remains taboo today; the number of survivors is unknown, and these crimes have not been investigated.⁷ The civil war has had a deep impact on gender relations, widening the gender gap in all spheres of life: economic, political, cultural, and family.⁸ The exclusion of women meant that the needs of women and those for whom they spoke were not reflected in the final peace agreement and remain widely unaddressed.

It has been suggested that the nascent state of civil society in the 1990s in Tajikistan, along with capacity and finance gaps, might have played a part in the lack of visibility of women at higher levels of negotiation and that the situation would be different today. Both opposition and government male respondents believed that the peacebuilding potential of women activists had not been properly used at the track 1 level. Respondents felt that women would have been less encumbered than men by each side’s self-imposed “political rules” and would have shown greater willingness to compromise. Following the peace agreement, only two women were appointed to the 26-member National Reconciliation Commission. Women were also involved in some sub-commissions, but these seem to have only been temporary placements.

Civil society in the late 2010s in Afghanistan was far more advanced than that of Tajikistan in the 1990s, with the former having some 2,400 civil society organizations (CSOs), compared to just 400 Tajik CSOs.⁹ Women also played a far more prominent role in social life as a result of the proliferation of CSOs and community-based groups, both formal and informal, and large-scale foreign investment in civil society.¹⁰ This investment, however, did not result in greater representation of women in official peace processes. Some respondents speculated that this might be due to Afghanistan’s gender norms being equally (if not more strongly) as conservative as those in Tajikistan. Others suggested that a lack of coordination among the track 2 Afghan peace processes

had also played a part in women's underrepresentation, since notable examples of women-led peacebuilding at the local level in Afghanistan could be found before the Taliban retook power.

Implementation Issues, 1997–2008

The peace agreement that ended the Tajik civil war was based on a set of documents signed and approved over the course of three years of negotiations. These documents outlined the key military and political provisions of the peace accords and the schedule for the national reconciliation process. The agreement envisaged the integration of UTO forces into the state's security forces in four consecutive stages:

1. Gathering of all UTO units, registration, medical checks, and disarmament.
2. The UTO to publicly announce the disbanding of its military structures and their integration into the Tajik army.
3. The creation of a Joint Attestation Commission for certification of reintegrated UTO units.
4. Complete integration of the UTO into Tajik army detachments by July 1, 1998. The Joint Attestation Commission to be responsible for reforming Tajik army structures through attestation of personnel and disbanding of all militia groups created by local governments during the conflict.

The agreement also envisaged a wider range of steps toward political liberalization, including legalization of opposition political parties (including those established by former members of the UTO) and the allocation of a 30 percent quota for UTO representatives in governance structures of the Republic of Tajikistan. A provision was introduced into the constitution allowing for the existence of political organizations with a religious character. In return, the UTO was supposed to disband its military structures and announce its resolve to use exclusively peaceful means in its political activities. The agreement defined the following sequence of actions:

1. The president of the Republic of Tajikistan and the National Reconciliation Committee to adopt the Mutual Amnesty Act. This action to be followed by the adoption of the Amnesty Law by the Parliament of Tajikistan.
2. A Central Committee for Elections and Referenda to be established, with 25 percent of its membership to consist of UTO representatives.
3. Structural governmental reform to include UTO representatives in official bodies. It was envisaged that, after the disbanding of UTO military units, the government would lift its ban on the activities of political organizations linked to the UTO.

The main coordinating body responsible for the practical implementation of the peace accords was to be the National Reconciliation Commission (NRC), which was intended to start its activities after the signing of the protocols and to complete its functions after a new parliament was elected.

While acknowledging the limitations of a process that was an effort to resolve the military stalemate rather than to usher in a more just and inclusive society, respondents saw this agreement as a positive phenomenon overall and one from which constructive lessons can be drawn. The longer-term implications of the peace accords were viewed less favorably.

The first phase of the postconflict period witnessed the conclusion of the peace agreement and a transition away from violence; the second phase saw the implementation of the agreement and centralization of power; and the third phase (not covered in this report) encompassed the dismantling of the opposition, including the banning and expulsion of the IRPT in 2015.

Unsurprisingly, respondents had different assessments of the postconflict period. Opposition and critically minded respondents described the postwar reconciliation process as a failure that has led to the establishment of a de facto one-party system and an authoritarian regime. They stated that the peace treaty had been viewed by the government as an externally enforced, shorter-term political concession necessary for retaining power in the longer term. Many of them believed that the course of events over the last two decades was the inevitable result of the specifics of the national reconciliation process and the gaps in the peace treaty.

Pro-government representatives were much less critical. In their opinion, the reconciliation process laid a solid foundation for a strong government that has promoted stability. National-level interests—as defined by the authorities—were prioritized over all other aspects of economic, political, and public life. The need to address these interests was presented as an implicit justification for the restrictions the government has imposed on rights and freedoms.

Revision of the peace agreement and a transition to a new, postconflict model of governance continued for 18 years, during which the opposition's role in government was gradually whittled away.

PHASE I: TRANSITION FROM VIOLENCE TO PEACE, 1997–2001

The NRC was entrusted with overseeing implementation of the peace agreement. It had 26 members (13 governmental, 13 UTO). Importantly, the agreement specified that the chairman should be a representative of the opposition; this was UTO leader Said Abdullo Nuri. The deputy chairman was Abdulmajid Dostiev, deputy speaker of the parliament. The NRC had four subcommittees: military, political, judicial, and refugees. Each subcommittee included three government and three UTO members.

In 1997, with the assistance of the NRC, the opposition prepared and presented a list of more than 6,000 UTO fighters for registration, amnesty, and integration into the Tajik army. The government was obliged to grant amnesty to all opposition fighters on that list; there were no transitional justice mechanisms or investigations into human rights violations and war crimes (an omission that was condemned by human rights activists). Both sides accepted the obligation to “forgive” the other side, deciding not to submit the question of atrocities to external actors. External actors were more concerned with the immediate cessation of violence and the signing of the agreement than with the long-term impact of its provisions.

The NRC proposed significant legislative changes to establish a durable legal basis for national reconciliation. The NRC drew up and submitted to parliament a draft law on political parties and bills on mass media, social unions, and elections. This draft legislation allowed for the lifting of the ban on the activities of opposition political parties, movements, and media. The

NRC proposed that the government change the constitution to allow religious parties and organizations to be active in Tajikistan. The parliament approved the new draft of the constitution during a special session on July 30, 1999. Soon afterward, the UTO announced the disbanding of all its military detachments, and the IRPT declared its intention to be registered as a legal, constitutional party and participate in elections and parliamentary activities.

One of the main pillars of the peace accords was power sharing. Initially, the opposition pushed for a 50 percent quota of representatives in government. Ultimately, it accepted 30 percent. The opposition initially insisted on gaining control of at least one of the defense and law enforcement ministries; however, under pressure from Russia, it ultimately agreed on controlling the newly established Ministry of Emergency, which was responsible for preparing for and managing natural disasters and similar emergencies. UTO nominees were also appointed to head the Customs Committee, the State Committee on Oil and Gas, and the state-owned gas company Tajikgas, as well as some local administrations. Several prominent opposition field commanders received senior ranks and positions in the Tajik army; approximately 2,500 opposition fighters were integrated into law enforcement bodies and the military.

In 1998–2001, the integrated opposition detachments played a decisive role in suppressing military uprisings and revolts by various regional warlords dissatisfied with the peace accords. The detachments' operational success was seen as a success story for reintegration, but it seems to have strengthened the government's determination to get rid of effective forces made up of former opposition fighters. Over time, the units were disbanded, and their soldiers were posted to different garrisons and assimilated into other army structures.

PHASE II: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AGREEMENT AND CENTRALIZATION OF POWER, 2001–08

During the civil war and the initial postconflict period, the Tajik political landscape had several centers of influence: the ruling Kulobi clan (with its Dangara and Farkhor factions); pro-government factions and clans in Sughd in northern Tajikistan; and the opposition, headed by the UTO (including the IRPT). The peace deal was based on informal agreements and compromises between the Kulobi clan and regional factions. The central government allowed regional elites to maintain control of local resources in exchange for accepting the domination of the Kulobi clan. Due to this political heterogeneity, Emomali Rahmon's government initially had to acknowledge the positions of other "centers of influence" in political decision-making. From 2005, it undertook an administrative centralization process designed to phase out the network of independent warlords across the country; in so doing, it eliminated its main political rivals and alternative centers of influence.

Early evidence of this policy of centralization was the legal waiving of the 30 percent quota. According to the peace agreement, the quota was to remain in place only until parliamentary and presidential elections were held (November 6, 1999, and February 27, 2000, respectively). Rahmon won the presidential election with 97.6 percent of the vote; in parliamentary elections, the ruling party won 36 seats and the IRPT only 2. According to respondents, these elections were "pre-agreed" processes, meaning their results were accepted by the opposition. The UTO, however, underestimated the government's resolve to dismantle the quota and reduce opposition officials in almost all government institutions. This unofficial purge was not sudden and

sweeping—had it been, the civil war might have quickly reignited—but instead happened over time. The most notable casualties of the purge were Mirzo Ziyoev, the minister of emergency, who was dismissed in 2006, and Zaid Saidov, the minister of industry, who was removed from office in 2007. Ziyoev was shot dead in mysterious circumstances during a government military operation in Gharm in 2009; Saidov was arrested and prosecuted after he attempted to form an opposition party in 2013.¹¹ By 2008, internal clan tensions and the network of independent field commanders had been eliminated. The government established strict control nationwide, prioritizing security and severely restricting space for civil society.

Despite demonstrating relatively inefficient management skills in dealing with economic and social challenges, the Tajik authorities were, during this period, more successful in managing conflict through “authoritarian conflict management” (ACM).¹² ACM aims to prevent, de-escalate, or terminate violent conflict within a state through the hegemonic control of public discourse, space for mobilization, and economic resources, frequently through bargains with opposition and regional elites to maintain power.¹³ From 2000 through 2004, the Tajik regime concluded pacts with opposition members and remnants of the warlords’ network through backroom agreements that involved the government sharing economic resources in exchange for loyalty and support.

The Tajik government gradually moved into a new phase of consolidation, uprooting any potential resistance, removing spaces for public mobilization, and controlling all opportunities for wealth creation. Former field commanders and other influential figures were required to show their loyalty and adhere to a pact designed and proposed by the authorities; opposition respondents noted that those who failed this test of loyalty were immediately accused of anti-government activities, prosecuted, or “destroyed.” The government dismantled independent media to ensure control over public discourse and cement its official interpretation of the history of the civil war. ACM partly explains why the unrest during this phase (such as clashes with warlords near Dushanbe in 2001 and in Gharm in 2001 and 2008) did not threaten the government’s hold on power and how stability and loyalty were ensured despite a weakening economy.

Shortcomings of the Peace Agreement and Peace Process

The ability of the Tajik government to tighten its grip on power (rather than usher in a more just and inclusive society as envisaged in the peace agreement) is explained not only by ACM but also by shortcomings of the peace process and agreement. Chief among these faults were ill-defined mechanisms for implementing the agreement, a lack of inclusivity, and corruption.

POORLY DEFINED IMPLEMENTATION MECHANISMS AND MONITORING

Respondents underscored the peace agreement’s exclusive focus on ending immediate violence and the civil war, with primacy placed on a permanent ceasefire and refugee repatriation. The agreement was overly general, both in terms of language and intended implementation.

Many respondents felt that neither of the parties nor the external stakeholders at the table had thought carefully about the practical implementation of the agreement. The negotiation teams therefore entrusted the NRC and its subcommissions with developing a concrete approach and an implementation mechanism but gave little guidance.

Respondents, particularly from the opposition, pointed to the time-bound nature of the 30 per cent quota as a major mistake. The peace treaty clearly stated that, after the 2000 parliamentary elections, the government was not obliged to maintain the quota. By 2005, the UTO had lost almost all the political advantage it had gained during the conflict and the peace process. Some UTO activists, former field commanders, and fighters remained in ministries and official government bodies beyond 2005. By 2009, however, almost all major field commanders had been either dismissed from their posts or arrested, with their subordinates dismissed or detained shortly after.

One example of the problems created by the agreement's lack of specificity was the provision concerning the general amnesty for all opposition fighters. The treaty did not specify a mechanism for granting amnesty, instead leaving it to the Tajik state prosecutor's office to define the procedure. However, the state prosecutor's office refused to issue a general amnesty and instead developed a mechanism of so-called individual amnesty, meaning that each registered member of the UTO was supposed to visit the state prosecutor's office in person and officially confess to any crimes committed. The confession would then be investigated by law enforcement officers before the issuance of an individual certification of amnesty. Such a long, uncertain, complicated, and potentially biased procedure hampered the amnesty process considerably.

According to respondents, the government integrated approximately 2,500 opposition fighters into the army. The UTO had submitted a list of 6,000 fighters, but informal estimates suggest there were upward of 10,000. The majority of them refused to register due to a lack of trust; this was an understandable sentiment, opposition respondents pointed out, given that many fighters who did register were later imprisoned or forced into exile. The first integrated opposition unit was the 25th Battalion, which remained an example of successful integration for many years. Further progress in economic and military reintegration of Tajik returnees and UTO fighters was significantly hampered by the poorly defined mechanisms in the peace agreement, as well as by corruption. The initial plan envisaged the creation of a network of special reintegration centers for former UTO fighters to provide them with vocational training, job orientation, and even start-up funds so they could launch their own businesses. One respondent provided an unconfirmed example of the use of international funding in Gharm. Reportedly, \$700,000 allocated for a center for the reintegration of former fighters simply disappeared. Other respondents pointed to the large sums of money allocated for infrastructure repair and the minimal work actually done to restore roads and bridges.

The wider rehabilitation of former UTO fighters failed as the overwhelming majority opted not to go through the onerous amnesty process. Many others were imprisoned or fled the country. Indeed, by the end of 2001, four years after the treaty had been signed, a very low number of UTO fighters, mainly direct subordinates and bodyguards of opposition leaders, had managed to get amnesty certificates. The majority of former opposition units were distributed between various law enforcement, military, and border detachments scattered across the country. Over the following three to four years, these integrated detachments were purged—former

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opposition fighters were dismissed and replaced by new conscripts loyal to the government. Opposition representatives who agreed to cut off relations with the UTO or their former comrades were allowed to stay in their posts. This purge proved extremely effective in removing opposition representatives in army and border-security structures, thereby cementing government control.

Most nongovernment respondents believed that the treaty neglected issues of structural violence, which they believed were the real impediments to building a sustainable and just peace. Three reasons were cited for this neglect. First, from 2000 through 2004, a considerable number of complaints from former UTO officials about rights violations, postconflict integration and rehabilitation failures, and illegal arrests and detentions were allegedly disregarded by the United Nations Mission of Observers in Tajikistan, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and other international agencies and stakeholders. Second, Russian support for the Tajik government's agenda went unchallenged. Third, systems of patronage on both sides persisted.

The opposition had been satisfied with the 30 percent quota; however, there was no discussion of regionalism, nepotism, unjust access to resources, and other issues that undermined the effect of the quota. The opposition gradually acquiesced to the domination of the ruling political faction in administrative structures, undermining the possibility of establishing an inclusive social order after the accords were signed. The imbalanced character of the local political system—dominated by the inhabitants of one region—remained unchanged. The only difference from the prewar period was that the domination of the Leninobodi/Khujandi elite from northern Tajikistan was replaced by that of the Kulobi clan from the south. The peace accords simply confirmed the new status quo on an official level and, in so doing, legitimized the domination of this new elite for the longer term, replacing elites but not elitism.

EXCLUSIVITY

The official Tajik peace process was exclusive; from the beginning, participation was limited to a narrow circle of institutions, actors, and influence groups. The buy-in of local communities was not sought, and the views of local communities were disregarded.

According to some respondents, local communities were expected to fall in line with decisions made by their particular faction or clan. For the government, the agreement primarily reflected the interests of the leading Kulobi clan. This clan was divided into several political factions that vied with one another for power and resources (the most influential of which was the faction from Dangara District). To this day, the power-sharing structure continues to favor the Kulobi clan and excludes others.

For the opposition, individuals with family ties to or history in Vakhyo (now the *jamoat*, or municipality, of Tavildara in Sangvor District) occupied the most important positions in UTO military and political structures. Said Abdullo Nuri, for instance, was born in Vakhyo. Members of the Vakhyo clan were the primary beneficiaries of the 30 percent quota at the expense of other regional constituencies. The resulting disputes within the opposition led to splits after the signing

of the peace accords. Communities that sided with the UTO in GBAO and parts of Gharm were excluded from the peace process and remain bitter today. Pamiri and certain Gharmi communities feel that they suffered more during the war than other groups but have received nothing in return. Pamiris see themselves as having been denied access to, and positions within, central government bodies. Gharm has remained marginalized since the civil war, with limited access to national administrative and economic resources. Lack of buy-in to the peace process at the grass roots in Gharm was arguably at the heart of the instability in the region from 2008 to 2011. According to local respondents, levels of investment remain depressed in GBAO and Gharm, leaving them the poorest areas of the country. Government policy has stifled organized political opposition and left the regions marginalized and mistrustful of central government. Although the regions are not in a strong enough position to challenge the government, this repression has brought with it different longer-term risks to peace and stability.

PERCEPTIONS OF CORRUPTION WITHIN THE OPPOSITION

Opposition leaders were given the opportunity to open their own businesses and purchase local enterprises. For example, Said Abdullo Nuri and Akbar Turajonzoda (another UTO leader) owned several cotton factories and trading companies in the early 2000s. Former UTO field commanders were allowed to control the economic assets of their territories, such as the Nazar-Ailoq coal mine in Gharm.

However, many opposition appointments to government positions within the 30 percent opposition quota were perceived to have been made through backroom deals and bargaining between respective leaders. Perceptions of corruption were so strong that Said Abdullo Nuri and the UTO leadership were repeatedly accused of buying and selling positions. One particularly controversial example was the appointment of the head of Kofarnihon District (now Vahdat District). Kofarnihon was considered a main opposition stronghold; however, it was awarded to a businessman who shortly after moved over to the government side. Mullo Abdurahim, an opposition leader who was provided with a position in the Tajik customs service, was accused of having sold the post of his deputy to two different people.

As suggested earlier in the report, the government also promoted corruption among the UTO by buying opposition figures and ensuring loyalty from an array of different actors across Tajikistan. Corruption was linked not only to political appointments and business, but also criminal activity, such as narcotics trafficking controlled by various field commanders. During the civil war, local criminal groups took advantage of the chaos to mobilize human and material resources to traffic narcotics from neighboring Afghanistan. Respondents suggested that, in many cases, these groups did so under the aegis of both opposition and pro-government field commanders and warlords. Internal power-sharing agreements are rumored to have involved secret bargaining over control of the shadow economy and criminal resources and assets.

Corruption was, therefore, endemic. As a problem ingrained since before the Soviet era, corruption among government entities was, perhaps, simply accepted by the public as fact. For the UTO, however, a reputation for being corrupt and nepotistic that it could not dispel undermined its standing among other opposition figures and the general public.

MARGINALIZATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY

While the official peace process was exclusive, nongovernmental actors worked hard to create a more inclusive process at the local level. After the peace agreement was signed, the Inter-Tajik Dialogue moved from Moscow to Tajikistan with the aim of involving the wider public in postconflict processes. It aimed to consolidate the peace process and facilitate Tajikistan's democratic development, widening the scale and scope of confidence-building processes by moving to the district and community level.

This ambition was shared by a number of national civil society organizations (representative of both conflict parties) that, in 1999–2012, led dialogue processes across Tajikistan on topics related to the civil war and social cohesion. These included the relationship between secular and religious communities, the prevention of religious radicalization, reforms to religious education, and other issues with conflict potential in different regions. Women peacebuilders were also active in preventing community- and district-level violence and in helping with the reintegration of returned refugees and demobilized fighters. For instance, respondents highlighted the role of women in Gharm, where local men had been forced to flee Tajikistan, leaving women to take on important economic, social, and political roles, including bringing parties together for dialogue. In GBAO, Pamiri women's groups received institutional and financial support from the Aga Khan Foundation to promote peace and prosperity in their communities (women in Ismaili communities such as the Pamiri have traditionally been more socially and civically active than women in other areas in Tajikistan).

In the short term, these dialogue efforts and other community development interventions with a strong dialogue component (e.g., those supported by the United Nations Development Programme, Mercy Corps, the Kettering Foundation, and the Aga Khan Foundation) had a considerable impact in building confidence and preventing violence at the local level. However, in the longer term, these results proved unsustainable. Their initial promise could not be realized due to an uncondusive political and economic environment characterized by inequitable political structures and funding constraints. When the project cycles of donors (primarily, the Swiss and German governments) came to an end from 2008 onward, these dialogue initiatives petered out, with state and local authorities unwilling to finance them. Furthermore, the government appears to have grown fearful of the influence of a strong civil society and began to suppress and severely restrict the operating space for nongovernmental organizations, as well as for academic institutions and independent media.

Comparisons with Afghanistan and Lessons for Future Peace Processes

There are two clear successes from the Tajik peace process that could be viewed as missed opportunities in the later years of the Afghan peace process. The first is that track 2 dialogue enhanced the scope and potential of track 1 negotiations. The Inter-Tajik Dialogue, which involved nonofficial actors, substituted for and then supplemented formal track 1 peace talks in a way that

created space for compromise and developed creative potential solutions to disagreements between entrenched elites. Among the key reasons cited for its relative success were that it possessed a coherent structure and that it maintained the same organizational umbrella and retained a core participant group and pool of moderators over a 10-year period. The second success was the recognition of leverage available to external actors because of the military stalemate and the use of this leverage to push through a settlement and bolster regional stability (although the sustainability of a longer-term equitable peace agreement was undermined by their pushing too hard). Indeed, looking at Afghanistan today, when diplomatic relations or peace talks with the Taliban seem an impossibility, track 2 peace processes might offer a new forum for dialogue.

When comparing the Tajik and Afghan processes, however, two key questions emerge: Why has the Tajik peace survived for more than two decades despite its apparently unjust character? And why did the Afghan peacebuilding process fail despite the significant effort invested in it by the international community? At least three answers present themselves.

First, international stakeholders' goals and approaches differed considerably from one country to the other. In Tajikistan, Russia's long-term goal was to secure its military presence in the country for the coming decades; no withdrawal was envisaged or planned by Moscow. Russia skillfully combined military cohesion, economic pressure, intelligence, and diplomacy to bring both sides to the negotiating table. Russia avoided direct participation in the peace talks and assumed the role of principal mediator and facilitator of the peace process while consistently backing the government. It placed the government's interests at the heart of peace talks and promoted them in all phases of the peace process despite its supposed impartial stance, and it was not challenged by other international actors, who wanted to see an end to violence. For the United States in Afghanistan, against a backdrop of growing opposition within the United States to armed intervention abroad, the goal was to create favorable conditions for complete military and political withdrawal from Afghanistan as quickly as possible, regardless of cost. This pursuit eventually led to the abandonment of the interests of its main allies in Afghanistan, both the government and various anti-Taliban groups. Pursuit of the goal plunged political and peace processes into chaos, promoting contradictions and disarray between various local political parties, factions, and ethnic groups.

Second, in Tajikistan, the opposing sides lost any illusion of victory during the civil war itself. By the middle of the 1990s, both the Tajik government and the UTO understood the impossibility of complete military victory over their opponents. In 1996, the military situation in Tajikistan resembled a "mutually hurting stalemate," in which both sides were suffering from their confrontation and were ready to seize a "moment of ripeness" for mediation and the negotiation of a political settlement.¹⁴ Therefore, there was a clear basis for peace negotiations. In Afghanistan, the opposite was the case. As peace talks evolved, the Taliban leadership continued to believe that ultimate political and military victory was achievable in the wake of an eventual withdrawal of US and international forces and did not engage seriously with the Afghan government. Consequently, the situation in Afghanistan never became sufficiently ripe for successful mediation. Additionally, US diplomacy failed to convince Pakistan to stop supporting the Taliban, which made them even less inclined to consider a peaceful solution.

Third, in Tajikistan, by the end of 1996, a clear foundation for national reconciliation was created through the 30 percent opposition quota in government, which had been developed through track 2 dialogue and accepted at the track 1 level. According to an opposition respondent, “the proposed power-sharing formula was not as fair to us as it should have been, but we were optimistic about the future.” In Afghanistan, no such foundation was created. Various explanations have been proffered for this lack of a foundation, from the sidelining of the Afghan government from US-led peace talks with the Taliban, to nationalistic and divisive ethnic politics, to underhand government deals with the Taliban to defang the Northern Alliance. Interethnic tensions and feelings of mutual distrust and suspicion (between different groups and factions in Afghanistan, and also between these groups and the United States) reached a peak in 2020 following the Doha peace talks and commitments by the US presidential candidates to withdraw troops. In such an uncertain atmosphere, after the US withdrawal, the Taliban faced almost no resistance from a paralyzed Afghan government, army, and police.

It is important not to exaggerate the results of the Tajik peace process and consider it a success story. Some respondents referred to Tajikistan as being in a state of “frozen confrontation” rather than being at peace, despite over two decades of relative stability. Although direct violence was stopped through the peace agreement, risks of instability remain today. Political stability has been maintained through ACM and factors favorable to the government, such as the geopolitical situation and large-scale migration out of Tajikistan. ACM and migration are not sustainable, however. The Tajik peace process failed to modify the power-sharing system, as it did not explicitly delineate a long-term arrangement and lacked adequate implementation mechanisms. The peace accords merely created favorable conditions for the legitimization of the long-term domination of a new elite. Clearly, the achievement of a working peace does not necessarily lay the groundwork for good governance. Tajik civil society and the public at large have little or no influence over the government’s activities and decision-making processes. As a result, all decisions are made in the interest of the ruling elite, with scant concern shown for public opinion and societal interests.

The postconflict experience demonstrates a direct correlation between structural violence and political stability. During the first and second phases of the postconflict period, the government pursued a policy of bargaining and making trade-offs with political opposition forces and regional elites, but at the expense of local communities. As a result, from 2001 through 2008, only a few outbreaks of violence between armed groups occurred; the sides preferred to resolve their disagreements through internal consultations and backroom arrangements. Indeed, the lack of clarity about the integration of opposition fighters into government forces was able to be exploited by a government reluctant to share power. The situation rapidly changed beginning in 2005, when government policy shifted toward revising previous power-sharing agreements and increasing pressure on the opposition and civil society. Central political factions and business elites related to and affiliated with leading political factions started large-scale economic expansion into the regions, taking control of available economic resources and ousting local elites. That process has continued ever since, with the result that today, the ruling, central political elite has brought the most profitable sectors of the Tajik economy under its near-total control, disadvantaging local small business and depriving representatives of other

regional groups of access to economic and financial resources. This expansion into former UTO strongholds has led to a series of large-scale armed incidents, latent and open tension, public protests, and confrontations. From 2008 until today, the indicators of structural violence have continually increased, and there has been a corresponding rise in social resentment and a revitalization of past grievances of opposition groups. The struggle for power and resources in Tajikistan is not over. The current power-sharing system satisfies neither many political actors nor the general population, and the government seems unprepared or unwilling to conduct comprehensive structural reforms to alleviate the situation. Indeed, limited civic space, economic stagnation, a drop in living standards, religious radicalization, and large-scale emigration are fueling tensions across society.

There is a clear need to reengage track 2 dialogue processes in the country to allow space for civil society in Tajikistan to address socioeconomic problems that have conflict-generating potential. The Inter-Tajik Dialogue, it should be noted, began during a peak in interethnic violence and human rights violations during the civil war; and while the Inter-Tajik Dialogue cannot be seen as an unalloyed success, it broadened avenues for official negotiations and brought new voices to the table. These track 2 processes must not exclude women and representatives of less visible or vulnerable groups from meaningful participation, or structural drivers of conflict will remain unaddressed.

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Notes

1. The third phase of the Tajik peace—the period from 2009 to 2015 when the government tightened its grip on society, politics, and the economy—is beyond the scope of this analysis.
2. For more detailed analysis of the origins and course of the civil war, see Isabella Jean and Parviz Mullojanov, “Cumulative Impact Case Study: Conflict and Peacebuilding in Tajikistan,” Reflecting on Peace Practice Project, CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, 2008, www.cdacollaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Conflict-and-Peacebuilding-in-Tajikistan.pdf; Tim Epkenhans, *The Origins of the Civil War in Tajikistan: Nationalism, Islamism, and Violent Conflict in Post-Soviet Space* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016); Olivier Roy, “The Civil War in Tajikistan: Causes and Implications,” United States Institute of Peace, 1993; and Jesse Driscoll, *Warlords and Coalition Politics in Post-Soviet States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
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4. The text of the Doha Agreement is available at www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/02.29.20-US-Afghanistan-Joint-Declaration.pdf.
5. See, for example, Heidi Burgess and Guy Burgess, *Conducting Track II Peacemaking*, Peacemaker’s Toolkit (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2010); and James Voorhees, *Dialogue Sustained: The Multilevel Peace Process and the Dartmouth Conference* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2002).
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