



COUNTRY IN PERSPECTIVE

TAJIKISTAN



*Landscape of Tajikistan
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COUNTRY IN PERSPECTIVE | TAJIKISTAN



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*Badakhshan Landscape, Tajikistan
Flickr / Timon91*

Chapter 1 | Tajikistan in Perspective

Geography

Introduction

Tajikistan became an independent state in 1991, which was the end of the Soviet era. Created as an autonomous republic within Uzbekistan in 1924, Tajikistan was designated a separate republic in 1929. It was not recognized as an independent state until after the dissolution of the Communist Bloc in 1991.¹

Tajikistan is slightly smaller than the state of Wisconsin. It shares borders with Afghanistan for 1,357 km (143 mi), China for 477 km (296 mi), Kyrgyzstan for 984 km (612 mi), and Uzbekistan for 1,312 km (815 mi).^{2, 3}

Tajikistan and its neighbors, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, are landlocked, but they share transportation routes that were established by Moscow to meet the needs of the former USSR. Currently, less than half of Tajikistan's freight is delivered by rail and the rest is delivered by trucks.⁴ The prospect of conflict in Central Asia is heightened by disputes over natural resources, as well as the ambitions of Russia, Iran, Turkey, and China in the region.⁵

Geographic Divisions and Topographic Features

High Plateaus

More than 93% of Tajikistan's total area is mountains, over half of which rise above 3,000 m (9,843 ft). The two major mountain ranges are the Pamir Mountains in the southeast and the Alay Mountain Range in the north. Known as "The Roof of the World," the Pamir Mountains occupy the entire eastern portion of the country.⁶ The elevation is partially responsible for the dryness of the region; much of the area is high desert and humidity can measure below 10%. Numerous peaks in the Pamir Mountains rise above 7,000 m (22,966 ft).⁷ Despite the extremes in elevation and temperature, the Pamirs are home to a diverse range of wildlife. Marmot, ibex, snow leopard, hare, Marco Polo sheep, brown bears, and wolves live in the area. Seismic activity in the region causes frequent earthquakes and landslides, damaging an already-poor infrastructure that injures and kill people when it collapses during seismic events.^{8, 9, 10}



*Fann Mountains
Flickr / Christophe Chenevier*

The Fann Mountains are located in the lower northwestern portion of the country; they are part of the Alay Mountain Range, which is an offshoot of the Pamir Mountains. The highest peak is Chimtarga (5,489 m/18,009 ft), which is one of many peaks in the region that rise above 5,000 m (16,404 ft).¹¹ Limestone scree and glaciers cover this area, which used to be a popular destination for Soviet outdoor enthusiasts.¹² Alpine lakes are plentiful in the area, and the infrastructure is primitive. Only one road crosses the mountain range to the capital city Dushanbe.^{13, 14, 15, 16, 17}

Lowlands

The Fergana Valley is the most populated region in Central Asia. Most of Tajikistan's population lives in this valley, which was divided between Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan in the 1920s by Russian administrators in Moscow.^{18, 19} The Fergana Valley reaches its lowest elevation at just 320 m (1,049 ft) above sea level. It stretches between two mountain ranges in the northern part of Tajikistan, from Uzbekistan in the west to Kyrgyzstan in the east. Arable land makes up less than 1% of the total land area.²⁰ More than 90% of the region's water resources are concentrated in the mountains of Tajikistan and neighboring Kyrgyzstan.²¹ The Kofarnihon and Vakhsh Valleys lie in the southwestern part of the country.²²



Fergana Valley
Flickr / Around the World in unknown Days

Cotton, fruit, and raw silk production are crucial to the economic security of the valley region. The Syr Darya River and Kairakum Reservoir are key water sources that support crop irrigation and power hydroelectric stations.²³ Lush vegetation relies on readily available water sources that in turn sustain vigorous wildlife populations. The entire 25,000 sq km (9,653 sq mi) valley spreads through three countries—Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan—which contributes to the ethnic diversity of the area. Cultural differences and regional poverty destabilize the region, and the threat of violent outbreaks looms in the background.^{24, 25, 26}

Climate

Tajikistan has a continental climate with extremes of temperature related to changes in altitude.²⁷ The Fergana Valley and other lowland valleys are shielded from arctic air masses due to the surrounding mountains. Tajikistan's valleys are warm and temperate, with mean temperatures of 27°C (81°F) in Khujand in the far north, and 30°C (86°F) in Kulob in the south. Winter temperatures in the north may drop to as low as -1°C (30°F), but temperatures as low as -20°C (-4°F) have been recorded. In the south, in the Pamir highlands, mean winter temperatures around the city of Murghob are -3°C (26°F), but can drop to as low as -46°C (-51°F). Annual precipitation is mainly confined to the winter and spring months. The southern highlands receive the least amount of precipitation, 51-76 mm (2-3 in) per year.

To the north and west, the amount rises to 150-250 mm (6-10 in) annually, but is slightly higher in the Gissar Valley.²⁸ The country's heaviest precipitation falls on the Fedchenko Glacier in central Tajikistan, which averages 2,236 mm (88 in) per year.^{30, 31}



Fedchenko Glacier
Flickr / GRID Arendal

Rivers / Bodies of Water

Rivers

Tajikistan has an extensive river system. The country's rivers swell in the spring during the rainy season and from melting mountain snow, and in the summer from melting glaciers. Snow and glacial melt from the mountains feed a system of more than 25,000 rivers.

The Amu Darya, one of the nation's largest rivers, is located in southwestern Tajikistan and is important to the nation's survival.³² Formed by the confluence of the Panj and Vakhsh rivers, the Amu Darya drains an enormous amount of water on its way to the Aral Sea, creating irrigation for agriculture and hydroelectricity.³³ The Amu Darya, the longest river in Central Asia, reacts delicately to changes in precipitation and glacier ice melt.^{34, 35}



Syr Darya River, Khujand
Wikimedia / Shavkat Kholmatov

The Syr Darya, another important river in Tajikistan, is located in the Fergana Valley of northwestern Tajikistan. The river stretches along 195 km (121 mi). Its tributaries help irrigate densely populated farmland.³⁶ Numerous hydroelectric power stations have been built along its course.^{37, 38}

The Vakhsh River is also an important river. Flowing 524 km (325 mi) in Tajikistan, it provides irrigation to cotton fields in the southwest. Although high mountains

restrict the river's passage in places, glacier ice melt provides significant water flow during the summer months, powering five hydroelectric dams.^{39, 40, 41}

Most of the country's lakes are glacial and located in the Pamir mountain region. The largest of these lakes is the salt lake Qarokul (Karakul) in the eastern Pamirs, which is devoid of life and lies at an elevation of 4,200 m (13,780 ft).^{42, 43}

The Nurek Dam (also written as Nurak), is an earth-filled dam, located north of the southern river valleys on the Vakhsh River, in west central Tajikistan, at 885 m above sea level. The Nurek Dam formed the largest water reservoir in Tajikistan, called Nurek. The Nurek Dam is one of the tallest dams in the world.⁴⁴ Construction of the dam started in 1961 and ended in 1980, when Tajikistan was still a Soviet republic. In addition to providing energy to regional hydroelectric plants, the reservoir's waters are diverted through the Dangara irrigation tunnel to irrigate almost 700 sq km (270 sq mi) of farmland, totaling 648,000 hectares (1.6 million acres). However, snow and ice conditions often prevent the flow of water to and from the reservoir, negatively affecting electricity production and agricultural irrigation.⁴⁵ During warm months, the reservoir generates a surplus of electricity, which is sold to neighboring countries.^{46, 47}



*Vakhsh River
Flickr / Christian Benke*

In late 2016, work on the Rogun Dam, located on the Vakhsh River, has started. The Rogun Dam will be the tallest dam in the world; towering at 335 m (1100 ft). Construction began in 1980 but stopped with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The Rogun Dam will double Tajikistan's energy production, and surplus energy generated by the hydroelectric power plant will be sold to Pakistan and other neighboring countries.⁴⁸

The Kairakum Reservoir, located in the far northwest, is part of the Syr Darya River system. Built in 1956 as part of the hydroelectric power production system, it has limited electricity production capabilities.⁴⁹ Tajikistan trades irrigation water to Uzbekistan in return for electricity during the winter months when the country's hydroelectric power plant are paralyzed by snow and ice.⁵⁰



*Kayrakkum Reservoir
Wikimedia / Dogross*

Major Cities⁵¹

| City | Population |
|--------------------|------------|
| Dushanbe (capital) | 679,4000 |
| Khujand | 144,865 |
| Kulob | 78,786 |
| Qurghonteppa | 65,000 |
| Istaravshan | 52,851 |

Dushanbe

Tajikistan's capital, Dushanbe (formerly known as Stalinabad), is located in west central along the Varzob (Dushanbinka) River in the Gissar valley. The city was built during the Soviet period on the site of three settlements that were part of the former Uzbek khanate of Bukhara.⁵² With an estimated population of 8,330,946, the city served as the capital of the new Soviet Tajik Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (S.S.R.) from 1929 to 1991, and experienced rapid industrial and population growth as a result.⁵³



Dushanbe
Flickr / Ronan Shenhav

The center of the nation's industrial output, Dushanbe is home to the nation's light industries, including the production of textiles, electric cables, and refrigerators, as well as the Tajik Academy of Sciences, Tajik State University.^{54, 55, 56} The city's population consists primarily of Tajiks and Russians, and smaller populations of Tartars and Ukrainians.⁵⁷

Khujand

One of the most ancient cities in Central Asia and the second largest city in Tajikistan, Khujand is located in the extreme northwest of the country in the heavily populated Fergana Valley. The old Silk Road that once ran from China to Europe ran through the valley near Khujand. Captured by Arabs in the eighth century, Genghis Khan in the thirteenth century, and the Russians in 1866, the city is modern Tajikistan's second

largest city.⁵⁸ Khujand lies mainly on the left bank of the Syr-Darya River, surrounded by mountains and orchards. Upstream is the Kayrakkum reservoir—a popular place for locals and tourists to go swimming, fishing, or sunbathing.⁵⁹ Silk and cotton processing, and food canning are among the city’s major industries.^{60, 61} The city is also home to a theater, a historical museum, and a teacher-training institute.⁶²

Kulob



Kulob
Flickr / Ronan Shenhav

Located in southwestern Tajikistan 203 km (133.4 mi) southeast of the capital Dushanbe, on the Yakhsu River at 580 m (1,903 ft) above sea level is the third largest city in Tajikistan. As one of the region’s oldest cities, Kulob (formerly Ura-Tyube), was a center for glazed pottery, embroidery, gold and silver ornaments. Today, the city relies on cotton and grain cultivation, as well as sheep grazing. Food processing and the manufacture of building materials are also economically important.⁶³ Historically,

Kulob was isolated due to its location next to the border with Afghanistan to the south and east, and the Pamir mountains to the north. In recent years, rail connections and roads in the area have been upgraded and extended through the Pamirs to Dushanbe.⁶⁴ The city was a supply point for Afghan militias and the surrounding area served as the base for the ruling party following independence from the former Soviet Union in 1991.⁶⁵

Qurghontepa

Formerly known as Kurganteppa, this city is a major stop on the railway from Kulob to Dushanbe. The city lies in the Vakhsh River Valley on the main north-south route between Tajikistan’s capital city Dushanbe and Afghanistan, about 100 km (62 mi) south of Dushanbe. The city’s diverse populations of Tajiks, Uzbeks, Russians, Tartars, Ukrainians, Kazakhs, and others have contributed greatly to the country’s



Qurghontepa
Flickr / Christian

economy.⁶⁶ The city's economy relies on agriculture and animal husbandry, mostly cotton and sheep, and is home to food processing and cotton ginning plants, textile manufacturers, a medical school, and a power engineering technical college.⁶⁷

Istaravshan



Istaravshan
Wikimedia/ Bertramz

Founded in the northern foothills of the Turkistan Range by the legendary king Cyrus of the Parthian empire in the sixth century BC, Istaravshan is another ancient city in Central Asia.⁶⁸ Like Kulob, Istaravshan was once renowned for its glazed pottery, carvings, embroidery, and gold and silver ornaments. Today, the city's economy is based on wine making and fruit processing. A number of historical monuments bear witness to this city's significant historical past, such as the beautifully tiled sixteenth century Kok-Gumbez Mosque at the center of the city.⁶⁹

Environmental Concerns

Although Tajikistan has abundant water resources, access to clean water remains problematic due to sanitation and waste management issues related to outdated infrastructure and inadequate funding in the water sector. According to the United Nations Environmental Protection Report (EPR), only one third of the nation's 7.2 million people have access to treated piped water, while some 30% rely on spring water, with the rest depending on river and ditch water sources. Furthermore, only 5% of the population is connected to a sewer system, which is provided only in urban areas. This situation is intensified by frequent power outages that limit access to potable water to just a few hours a day.^{70, 71}



Spring water, Sari Khosor Valley
Flickr / Christian

Natural Hazards

Tajikistan is prone to natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, mudflows, landslides, drought, avalanches, windstorms, epidemics, and insect infestation.⁷² In 2015, prolonged torrential rains caused significant flooding and mudslides in the Rasht valley in central Tajikistan. This flooding affected about 1,776 people, creating an urgent need for shelter and safe drinking water. In July 2015, climate change also resulted in higher than normal temperatures, causing rapid glacier and snow melt that triggered dangerous mudslides and considerable damage to infrastructure.^{73, 74}



*Mud slide, Bartang valley
Flickr / steynard*

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Tajikistan in Perspective

Chapter 1 | Geography

Assessment

1. Tajikistan is a mountainous country.
2. There are only two large rivers in Tajikistan: The Amu Darya and The Vakhsh River.
3. Khujand is the new capital of Tajikistan.
4. Tajikistan trades irrigation water in return for electricity.
5. The Nurek Dam formed the largest water reservoir in Tajikistan. It is one of the tallest dams in the world.

Assessment Answers: 1. True; 2. True; 3. False; 4. True; 5. True



*An Old Castle in Hisor, XV - XVII centuries
Flickr / Steve Evans*

Chapter 2 | Tajikistan in Perspective

History

Introduction

Over the centuries, waves of conquest have flowed through Central Asia. From the west came Alexander the Great, from the east Genghis Khan and the Mongols, and from the north Russian czarists and later the Soviets.¹ Under Soviet rule, Tajikistan became a province in Uzbekistan, which had developed into a vast cotton plantation and was the most populous Soviet state behind Russia and the Ukraine.^{2,3} Expectations that independence would open a path to political pluralism have been dashed as the government reverted to Soviet-style rule, in which dissent is not tolerated.⁴

History

Early



A Sogdian wall mural
Wikimedia / Sailko

Modern Tajiks are descendants of both the indigenous Sogdian people and the ancient Iranian groups that settled in Central Asia over 2,500 years ago. By the first century CE, the Persian Samanid Empire ruled the region, building irrigation systems along the rivers. They also built settlements that became stopping points on the Silk Road, commercially linking Europe and Asia.⁵ In 999, the Qarakhanid Turks overthrew the Samanids, the last major Persian state to have ever existed in Central Asia.

Conquered by Alexander the Great during the fourth century BCE, Zoroastrianism became the dominant religion while the Persian language and culture spread even further across the region.⁶ The Tajikistan region grew into a prominent trading center, intensifying the mixing of cultures and religions.^{7, 8}

When the Arabs arrived in the eighth century, they brought Islam to the region, and expanded trade and commerce. Eventually, Islam replaced Buddhism as the dominant faith.⁹ The region, was renamed Mawarannahr by the Arabs, and continued to thrive under the Arab and later the Turkish rule.¹⁰ A number of successive invasions led by the Turks, Mongols, and Uzbeks between the eleventh and the sixteenth centuries resulted in the Uzbeks dividing the area of modern-day Tajikistan into a series of khanates. However, the Persian language continued to be in use for government, literature, and academia.¹¹ The Uzbeks continued to rule Tajikistan until the mid-nineteenth century, at which time the Russians took control of the economy and instituted a thriving cotton industry. During the 1930s, the Soviets declared Tajikistan an independent Soviet state, with Dushanbe as its capital.^{12, 13, 14}

Genghis Khan

Genghis Khan's Mongolian army conquered the Tajikistan region and the rest of Central Asia in 1225. This conquest changed the people of Mawarannahr and hastened the Turkification of the region. Although Genghis Khan was a Mongol, conscripted Turks primarily made up his army as it moved southward. The conquerors burned cities to the

ground, destroyed irrigation systems, and intermixed with the local population. The conquest of the region resulted in a reduction of the Iranian population in Mawarannahr.^{15, 16}

Following the death of Genghis Khan's 1227, the empire was divided between his three sons, and orderly succession prevailed for a few generations. By the early fourteenth century, the empire broke up when tribal groups began to compete for influence. Tamerlane, a tribal chieftain and member of Genghis Khan's extended family, fought his way to become the unchallenged ruler of Mawarannahr Province.^{17, 18} By the 1380s, he proceeded to conquer all of western Central Asia, Iran, Asia Minor, the southern steppe region north of the Aral Sea, and Russia.¹⁹ Tamerlane, whose Turkish name Timur means "iron," established the second-largest empire in history (after Alexander the Great).²⁰



Genghis Khan
Wikimedia Commons

By the early sixteenth century, Turkish nomads had migrated into the area and established several states. Of these, the khanate of Bukhara was the most powerful, since it controlled the Fergana Valley, which is the most fertile region in Central Asia. However, new routes and modes of transportation, including freight shipped around the Cape of Good Hope, brought to the decline of the region since less commerce traveled the Silk Road.²¹ This new development condemned the region to economic stagnation, making it more difficult for local leaders to sustain the armies that they needed to retain their influence and expand their empires. Invasions from Iran, as well as incursions by the nomad tribes in the North, further weakened the khanate. Russians also appeared on the scene in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, in part to protect their lands from possible conquest by the British who were showing colonial interests in the region. Caught between these powers, Central Asians continued to fight among themselves.^{22, 23}

Russian Conquest

By the nineteenth century, Russian interest in Central Asia had increased, in part because of a concern that the British would gain control over the region. Shortly after the Russians began asserting control over Central Asia in the mid-nineteenth century, the United States' Civil War broke out and disrupted American cotton supplies. Because

Europeans had relied on cotton grown in the American South to manufacture textiles, they needed to find an alternative source. The czarist rulers of Russia saw Tajikistan and surrounding regions as a suitable replacement site to grow cotton.^{24, 25, 26}

By 1876, the Zarafshon and Fergana valleys in the Bukhara khanate in Uzbekistan fell under Russian control.²⁷ This change had little effect on the daily lives of most Tajiks since most Russians did not mingle with local populations. Transportation links were established, but the light textile industry was slow to develop. As the crop balance shifted from food to cotton, the czarist government laid the groundwork that would allow its eventual successor (the USSR) to embark on a program of cotton production self-sufficiency. The first cotton-processing plant was built in the Bukhara khanate during World War I, which lies in the eastern part of modern-day Tajikistan.^{28, 29}



*Cotton fields in the Fergana Valley
Flickr / Peretz Partensky*

Twentieth Century

The Soviet Empire

Following the establishment of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic in 1924, the administrative governing structure shifted to the Soviet Union. Five years later, the southeastern part of the Uzbek Republic was split off to form the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic. This division excluded the historically important Tajik cities of Bukhara and Samarkand, where they remain part of the Republic of Uzbekistan.^{30, 31, 32}

The borders of Tajikistan were supposed to achieve three goals; 1) to prevent a resurgence in loyalty to the traditional khanate boundaries that would challenge Soviet authority; 2) to distribute ethnic groups across political boundaries in order to avoid the domination of one group over other groups or the formation of a unified opposition; 3) to ensure dependence on Moscow for political power and to establish Russian as the common language.³³

Building an administrative structure in Tajikistan was not difficult, but changing longstanding cultural norms was another matter. Pre-existing social and political ties

simply adapted to the new empire. The Soviet practice was to install local elites in top administrative positions and have them served by Russian deputies. Since the local elites were not going to be appointed to positions outside Tajikistan, those who help top national positions had every incentive to build local support networks.³⁴

Following the anti-corruption campaign against Uzbekistan which was initiated by the president of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, in the mid-1980s, Moscow prepared for a “full frontal assault” on Tajikistan.³⁵ Gorbachev’s successful campaign against Tajikistan’s patronage network lasted from 1986 to 1990, resulting in Moscow’s full control over all government recruitment.³⁶

Under Soviet rule, Tajikistan expanded irrigation capabilities and improved its agricultural output. Educational programs were also developed. Yet, despite improvements in the country, political life remained concentrated in the hands of few men. In 1991, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Tajikistan gained its independence.^{37, 38, 39}

Independence

Tajikistan never existed as a true nation-state before it gained independence in the end of 1991. The prospect of independence presented serious challenges to Tajikistan, because it meant the loss of Soviet subsidies.⁴⁰ After declaring independence on 9 September 1991, Tajikistan held elections in which the leader of the Communist Party of Tajikistan, Rakhmon Nabiyev, was elected the first president of Tajikistan. The Communist Party continues to lead and observers considered the elections neither free nor fair. Nabiyev’s presidency was short lived. In September 1992, he was forced out of office after he was seized in Dushanbe. Several months later, in November 1992, Imomali Rahmonov, head of the Supreme Soviet, was elected as Tajikistan’s new president. Soon after, a new neo-Soviet government was elected, maintaining political power structures across the region.^{41, 42}



*Rally on Shakhidon square, 1992
Wikimedia / RIA Novosti*

Coinciding with the installation of a new president, a military alliance called the Popular Democratic Army was created out of an alliance of Islamic-democratic militias, which



15th Spetsnaz Bde troopers in Tajikistan during Tajik war
Wikimedia / Уссурийское суворовское военное училище

held control of Dushanbe until December 1992.⁴³ Although the Popular Democratic Army had agreed to hand over the city once the new government was formed, government forces attacked and took back the city. Fleeing to the mountains along Tajikistan's southern border with Afghanistan, the Popular Democratic Army continued to wage guerrilla warfare against the Tajikistan government.⁴⁴ The civil war lasted until the end of June 1997, when the United Nations, Russia, and Iran brokered a peace agreement between the

warring factions. After five years of fighting, an estimated 50,000 to 100,000 people were left dead and more than a half million people became refugees.^{45, 46, 47}

In recent years, Tajikistan and its Central Asian neighbors have become aware that ongoing conflicts provide the necessary conditions for the infiltration of Islamic State ideology into local militias.⁴⁸

Recent Events

Deep economic hardship continues to be felt across Tajikistan, which helped fuel the country's increasing levels of religious radicalization. In addition to local militant groups, Islamic State has stepped up its recruitment campaign via Russian language social media, Furat, and through Twitter, Facebook, and Tumblr.⁴⁹ As of 5 June 2015, Furat also began producing and distributing a mix of subtitled propaganda videos in the Russian language, made in Syria and Iraq. Furat also distributes DVDs and Islamic State motivational messages.^{50, 51}

Russia also continues to intensify its economic influence across the region and maintains its military presence in Tajikistan. The Chinese government also continues to strengthen its economic ties with Tajikistan, developing infrastructure and investing in



Emomali Rahmon,
3rd President of Tajikistan
Wikimedia / Lawrence Jackson

oil, gas, and gold extraction.^{52, 53, 54}

In recent years, changes to the constitution allow Rahmonov to run for unlimited terms in office.⁵⁵ This has received overwhelming support, in which 94.5% of the votes backed this change in 2016. However, this constitutional change applies only to Rahmonov, who continues to enjoy widespread support across the country.⁵⁶

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Tajikistan in Perspective

Chapter 2 | History

Assessment

1. Modern Tajiks are descendants of ancient Iranian people.
2. The British conquered Tajikistan in the nineteenth century.
3. The southeastern part of the Uzbek Republic was split off to form the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic.
4. Tajikistan gained independence after a long and bloody civil war.
5. President Emomali Rahmonov can run for unlimited terms in office.

Assessment Answers: 1. True; 2. True; 3. False; 4. False; 5. True



Tajik Apricots
Flickr / UNDP

Chapter 3 | Tajikistan in Perspective

Economy

Introduction

Since the end of the civil war in 1997, Tajikistan's economy has experienced sustained and consistent growth. Yet, the nation continues to suffer one of the highest unemployment rates in the region and poverty remains high. Unofficial unemployment data suggest that unemployment rate varies from 30-45% due to a shortage of skilled labor.^{1, 2, 3, 4}

Of the 15 former Soviet republics, Tajikistan maintains one of the lowest per capita Gross Domestic Products (GDPs) and ranks as the poorest country in Central Asia.⁵ Outdated infrastructure, power shortages, external debt, and corruption continue to

hamper the country's economic development.⁶ Narcotics smuggling across Tajikistan's southern border with Afghanistan constitutes between 30-50% of Tajikistan's GDP.⁷

Due to the lack of employment opportunities in Tajikistan, over 1 million Tajiks work outside the country, primarily in Russia, sending money home to support their families. Remittances from Tajiks working in Russia produce almost 50% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), making remittances a significant growth driver of Tajikistan's economy. The connection between Tajikistan and Russia means that downturns in Russia's economy influence Tajikistan's economy, which continues to face significant challenges.⁸

Agriculture

Tajikistan is largely rural and dependent on agriculture, which accounts for around a quarter of the country's GDP, with tax revenues of 39%. Over 50% of Tajikistan's population is employed in the agricultural sector.^{9, 10} Families own 65% of agricultural land. However, nearly 35% of land is still held in the dehkan system (Soviet style collective farm system), although there have been some reforms to this system.^{11, 12}

Nonetheless, food insecurity makes Tajikistan one of the most vulnerable countries in Central Asia due to underdevelopment in the agricultural sector and inadequate links between agricultural production and the markets.^{13, 14} Private plots, small farms, and small herds provide a subsistence existence for many rural Tajiks. Yet, few people have the resources to save or produce a surplus of food or goods. As a result, they are often forced to sell portions of their limited resources.¹⁵

By necessity, many rural Tajiks cultivate cotton, Tajikistan's main agricultural export crop. Government regulations and subsidies provide the resources necessary to employ large numbers of people. In reality, government corruption permeates the industry. Many rural residents have been forced to plant cotton to the exclusion of other crops, leaving people without sufficient food supplies. The resulting poverty has forced families to resort to child labor; children earn money from picking cotton to help their families survive the long winters. The country also exports limited amounts of fruit, vegetables, and silk products.^{16, 17, 18}



*Tajik cotton
Flickr / UNDP*



Melon Market
Flickr / kvitlauk

In almost all agricultural areas in the country, only a single crop can be produced annually. Some early maturing crops, however, allow for second crops, such as melons or buckwheat. The main crops grown in Tajikistan include mostly wheat and cotton, but legume production has steadily increased. Yet, agricultural production remains low compared to other Central Asian countries.¹⁹

Reduced glacier melt due to climate change threatens Tajikistan’s agricultural development, intensifying the country’s food insecurity and the government’s ability to respond. In 2015, Climate Investment Funds (CIF) invited Tajikistan to join their Pilot Program for Climate Resilience (PPCR), and receive USD \$47.8 million in grants to develop a strategic plan to “climate proof” the management of critical water sources, hydroelectric infrastructure, and agricultural land.²⁰ Tajikistan’s PPCR strategic plan is to be implemented over a five-year period in which the government will work with the Asian Development Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, members of the World Bank Group, and Tajik stakeholders.²¹

Industry and Manufacturing

The industrial sector accounts for about 20% of GDP and employs 10.7% of the workforce.²² The driving industrial force in Tajikistan is metal and mineral mining and production, but these industries remain weak and underdeveloped. There are more than 600 reported mineral deposits in Tajikistan. Some of the country’s minerals are coal, boron, copper, gemstones, gold, iron ore, lead, manganese, nickel, phosphor, salt, silver, tin, uranium, and zinc.²³ Other contributions to the GDP come from state-run construction projects in communications, hydroelectric power transmissions, and infrastructure.²⁴



Mini hydro power plant
Flickr / UNDP

The United States is Tajikistan's largest donor, having budgeted USD 988.57 million from 1992 through 2010 mainly for food and humanitarian aid.²⁵ Yet, U.S. exports to Tajikistan remains small. The U.S. supported Tajikistan admission to the World Trade Organization (WTO) by providing advice on negotiations and legal reforms, but did not pass legislation to grant normal trade relations with Tajikistan, yet.²⁶

Energy

Oil and Natural Gas

The national oil company Tajikneftegaz controls oil exploration, drilling, and production in Tajikistan, while the import and distribution of oil products are the responsibility of the State Company Tajiknefteproduct.²⁷ The country's oil reserves are located mostly in the northern Leninobod Soghd Region.²⁸



*Constructing the fuel farm
Wikimedia / Brian Harrington Spier*

Since over 93% of the country is mountainous terrain, it makes oil and gas extraction complex and difficult. Consequently, oil and gas production is too small to meet the country's needs, so it has to import most of its gas and oil.²⁹ The leading import partner for natural gas and petroleum products is Uzbekistan.³⁰

Since 2012, the Bokhtar region in southwestern Tajikistan has shown considerable potential for future increases in oil and gas production.³¹ Although the region has not been fully explored or drilled, this basin is a prolific producer of oil and gas in the neighboring countries of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, and shows great potential for the development of Tajikistan's energy sector. As of 2016, the BOC (Bokhtar Operating Company) was gathering geological and geophysical data that would help to locate and later drill deep exploratory wells.^{32, 33}

Electricity

Tajikistan's mountains and rivers provide hydropower for the country, and supply 4% of world's hydropower resources.³⁴ Most of Tajikistan's hydroelectric plants are located along the Vakhsh River, which flows through central and western Tajikistan, where the

300 m (984 ft) Nurek Dam - the tallest dam in the world-is located.³⁵ During the winter months, the country experiences electricity shortages due to the accumulation of ice that reduces the production of hydropower and an increase in demand for heating. The country has plans to upgrade its hydroelectric production.³⁶



*Sangtuda 1 hydroelectric power plant
Wikimedia / Russian Presidential Press and Information Office*

Mineral Resources

Coal is the main component of Tajikistan’s energy resources. With an estimated 41% of all coal deposits in Central Asia, Tajikistan might be among the region’s richest source of coal. Tajikistan has a variety of coal types that are mined by 14 companies—six of which are government owned. In May 2012, the government banned coal exports due to a shortage in natural gas, and encouraged the use of coal as the primary fuel source for industry, rather than natural gas.^{37, 38, 39}



*Mid-winter at the mining camp, Darvaz
Flickr / Brian Harrington Spier*

Tajikistan had a well-developed mining sector in the 1980s, during the Soviet era, but mining declined rapidly due to economic, political, and civil unrest that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union. In an effort to improve the economy after the return to political stability, Tajikistan increased mineral production through foreign loans, investments, and partnerships with Russian and Chinese companies.^{40, 41, 42, 43}

Trade and Investment

Since the end of the civil war in 1997, the country has maintained a robust annual growth rate of over 7%.⁴⁴ Major exports include aluminum, electricity, cotton, fruits, vegetable oil, and textiles.⁴⁵ The country's main export partners are Turkey (19.7%), Kazakhstan (17.6%), Switzerland (13.7%), Afghanistan (7.5%), Russia (5.1%), China (4.9%), and Italy (4.8%).⁴⁶



*TadAZ aluminum smelting plant, Tursunzoda
Wikimedia / Brybry26*

Tajikistan's major imports include petroleum products, aluminum oxide, machinery and equipment, and foodstuffs. Its primary import partners are the China (42.3%), Russia (17.9%), Kazakhstan (13.1%), and Iran (4.7%).^{47, 48, 49}

The Tajikistan government is currently directing foreign investments in new industries. Yet, mediocre productivity in the industrial sector and an underdeveloped infrastructure have created a less than optimal foreign investment climate. The government screens and approves all foreign investments, and the implementation of laws remains inconsistent.⁵⁰ Between 2007 and 2015, China, Russia, Kazakhstan, the United Kingdom, and the U.S. were Tajikistan's main investing countries. Russia's main investments are in medium capacity hydroelectric power plants and banking.⁵¹

Transportation

Tajikistan has an estimated 30,000 km (1,864 mi) of roads. Most of the roads were built before independence in 1991, and are in need of upgrades.^{52, 53, 54} The country has made major improvements to existing highways in recent years, but the deterioration of rural roads continues and nearly 84% of local roads are unpaved.⁵⁵ The country transported nearly 75% of its freight by road in 2010.⁵⁶

Armed police and military checkpoints are often set up outside of the capital, Dushanbe, making road travel difficult and unreliable. It is advisable that car travel be limited to daytime hours and familiar routes. Road travel is dangerous through mountainous areas, especially at night. Tajikistan drivers are erratic and car accidents are common. Pedestrians often jaywalk and walk along highways without watching oncoming vehicles.^{57, 58} In the winter, the roads are not well maintained. Do not attempt to travel across closed mountain passes and be aware that avalanches are common.⁵⁹

Traffic police in Tajikistan often randomly pull cars over to extract bribes.⁶⁰

Getting around by bus or taxi in Tajikistan is difficult. The most common way to travel in town or between towns is by marshrutka (shared taxis).⁶¹ They follow a set route and fares are cheap, with passengers getting on or off anywhere along the route. Hail a marshrutka anywhere along the street and pay the fare as you board. When the vehicle approaches your desired destination, tell the driver to stop (haminjo eested in Tajik). Although buses are available for travel between towns and cities, they are often overcrowded and break down frequently. Trips should begin early in the day so arrival is before dark. Bus tickets can be purchased at bus stations.^{62, 63}



*No powered electric bus
Flickr / Robert Thomson*

Tajikistan railroads are used mainly for the import and export of commodities and for the transport of goods between cities. There are only a few designated passenger trains in the country; they travel between Khujand or Dushanbe and Moscow, departing twice weekly. A very small number of domestic passengers use the country's primarily freight railway system to travel between cities.⁶⁴



*Tajik Air
Flickr / José Luis Celada Euba*

Most international air travel arrives at Dushanbe International Airport (DYU) in Dushanbe, Tajikistan's capital.⁶⁵ This airport is a hub for the nation's domestic passenger service, Tajik Air, and the private carrier, Somon Air.⁶⁶ The Khujand International Airport (LBD) serves the second largest city in Tajikistan, Khujand. Some 12 carriers fly into and out of Khujand International Airport, including Tajik Air, with flights to Moscow and St. Petersburg. Almost all travel to Tajikistan transits through Russia; Turkish Airlines is the only major international carrier to fly into Dushanbe.⁶⁷ Minibuses and taxis are available at airport terminals.⁶⁸ In all, there are 13 domestic and military airports in Tajikistan that link different part of the country with international destinations, mostly Russia. Bad weather often disrupts air services.⁶⁹

Tourism

Tajikistan's tourism sector is still underdeveloped due to a lack of financial resources and access to specialized banking institutions.⁷⁰ However, with recent infrastructure developments, the sector is improving.⁷¹ There are a number of World Heritage sites in Tajikistan, such as ancient cities, ruins, fortresses, Silk Road sites, and a medieval Buddhist monastery complex situated approximately 97 km (60 mi) from the capital, Dushanbe.^{72, 73}



*Silk Road City
Flickr / Ronan Shenhav*

The Committee of Youth Affairs, Sports, and Tourism Development Department (TDD) regulates Tajikistan's tourism sector. The TDD operates in four regions and 56 districts across the country and is responsible for adopting tourism related legislation and regulations.⁷⁴ In 2014, the TDD reported 90 officially registered tourism service companies most with a focus on regional tourism.⁷⁵

In 2016, tourism continued to develop in the Pamir and Fann mountain regions, which attracted hikers and climbers. All-inclusive driving tours of the Pamir Highway, Wakhan Valley, and the Zarafshan Valley are also becoming popular, as are hiking expeditions with guides, porters, and mules. Hang gliding, paragliding, whitewater rafting, and skiing are also on the rise.⁷⁶

Banking and Currency

Tajikistan's national currency is the Somoni (TJF), which was introduced in 2000.^{77, 78} The official January 2017 exchange rate is TJF 7.88/USD 1. Tajikistan has a two-tiered banking system dominated by state-owned banks.⁷⁹ The National Bank of Tajikistan acts as the central bank, while commercial banks act at the second level. The Bank of Tajikistan is responsible for standard central bank functions, such as controlling the movement and transfer of currency.^{80, 81}



*Tajik Somoni
Flickr / Ronan Shenhav*

The second tier comprises of about 15 licensed commercial banks, the largest of



Orienbank in Faizabad district
Flickr / Overseas Development Institute

which is Orenbank.^{82, 83} The Tejorat Bank of Iran, Kazcommercebank of Kazakhstan, and First Micro Finance Bank of Tajikistan are foreign-owned and partly run by the Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development and the International Finance Corporation.⁸⁴ In addition, Tajikistan has one non-banking financial organization, seven credit societies, 35 micro-lending organizations, and 41 micro-lending foundations.^{85, 86} However, Tajikistan's banking system remains undeveloped. Banks have

insufficient capital and offer limited banking services, creating concerns that a potential banking crisis is looming—made worse by the recent reduction in remittances from Tajiks working in Russia.^{87, 88}

Remittances dropped by 65% in 2015 due to Russia's ongoing economic recession.⁸⁹ The country's poor business climate continues to hamper investments that could spur economic growth and provide jobs for Tajiks.⁹⁰ Public debt that is about 35% of the GDP, while the National Bank has spent most of its reserves to bolster the Somoni. This leaves little space for monetary measures that would bolster Tajikistan's poor economy.^{91, 92}

Standard of Living

Tajikistan has the highest rate of poverty in Central Asia, with a per capita income of USD 879 in 2011; nearly 47% of the population lives on less than USD 1.33 per day, while 17% live on less than USD 0.85 a day.^{93, 94} The majority spends nearly 80% of their income on food. Around one fifth of Tajiks are affected by food insecurity. Of all former Russian republics in Central Asia, Tajiks suffer from the highest levels of malnutrition.⁹⁵



Water
Flickr / Christophe Chenevier

According to the National Bank of Tajikistan, the country's inflation rate from January to June 2016 was 5.5%, while the annual GDP for the same period was 4.2% (according

to the World Bank).⁹⁶

Life expectancy in 2016 for men was 64.6 years and 71 years for women, producing an overall life expectancy of 67.7.⁹⁷ The World Health Organization shows a slightly higher life expectancy of 67 years for men, and 74 years for women. Infant mortality rates are 32.8 deaths per 1,000 live births.⁹⁸

The scarcity of employment options has led to an exodus from rural areas of young men. In 2015, Tajik males were the largest migrant group in Russia, where they seek jobs in the construction industry. The wages are high enough to enable them to support their families at home.⁹⁹

Employment and Jobs



*A butcher, Dushanbe
Flickr / Ronan Shenhav*

Tajikistan exceeded economic growth expectation in 2015, despite a less than favorable external economic environment.¹⁰⁰ Growth trends were strongest in the construction and industrial sectors, largely driven by a shift from consumption to investment.¹⁰¹ Construction is a growing industry and additional jobs are likely if various planned infrastructure projects are implemented.¹⁰² Expansion in social services, especially healthcare, appears strong.¹⁰³

Official estimates of unemployment stand at 2.43% from 2000-2016. Unofficial unemployment and estimates, however, range from 30% to 45%.¹⁰⁴ The agricultural sector has particularly high levels of underemployment, which is significant because approximately 66.7% of the population lives in rural areas.^{105, 106} Forecasts by some agencies suggest that the unemployment rates in Tajikistan will increase slightly over the next several years.¹⁰⁷

Economic Outlook

Although estimates vary, there is agreement that the country's economic outlook is mostly positive, yet significant risks remain. Russia's recession combined with slowing economic growth in China, Kazakhstan, and Turkey continues to have a negative impact.¹⁰⁸ While the expectation is that the country's GDP will recover gradually, it is projected to remain below its historical average. This has slowed the pace of poverty reduction, although the level of poverty is projected to fall slightly.^{109, 110}

Although not directly dependent on oil and gas prices, Tajikistan will continue to feel the effects of the weakening economies of their hydrocarbon trading partners. It is predicted that this will have a significant effect on Tajik migrant workers in Russia whose remittances have dwindled due to Russia's economic recession.^{111, 112}

The country remains poor, with more than 47% of the population living on less than USD 1.33 daily.¹¹³ Poor infrastructure, high unemployment, and weak health and education systems stifle development in the private sector. The small elite maintains control of the country's wealth and external risks such as uncertainty in global financial markets, increase in food prices, and inflation might stall or slow down Tajikistan's economic recovery.^{114, 115}



*Train bridge over Vakhsh River
Flickr / Christian*

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Tajikistan in Perspective

Chapter 3 | Economy

Assessment

1. Tajikistan has one of the lowest per capita GDPs in Central Asia.
2. Over 1 million Tajiks work outside the country.
3. Tajikistan's rivers provide enough hydropower for the entire population.
4. Many farmers use their land to grow grain, fruits and vegetables to feed their families.
5. Tajikistan has successfully blocked the smuggling of narcotics transiting across its southern border.

Assessment Answers: 1. True; 2. True; 3. True; 4. False; 5. False



Heroes of Tajikistan
Flickr / Christian

Chapter 4 | Tajikistan in Perspective

Society

Introduction

Tajikistan was artificially created by the Soviets as an administrative entity that managed several ethnic groups. When the Soviet Union created the new Central Asian republics in the 1920s, the terms “Tajik” and “Uzbek” had little meaning for the people in this region. Tajiks and Uzbeks shared most social customs and norms despite possessing different native languages. Tajiks spoke traditional Persian Farsi, which the Soviets later relabeled “Tajik” to differentiate it from Persian speakers outside the Soviet Union. The Soviets also required Tajiks and Uzbeks to identify as one of these two nationalities and since then, confusion ensued.¹

At the end of Soviet Era in the early 1990s, ethnic Tajiks made up the majority of the country's multiethnic population, as did an even larger majority of Muslims. These factors played a considerable role in weakening the Soviet's control of Tajikistan's society.² However, due to the prevalence of Russians and other ethnic groups in Tajikistan—particularly in the country's capital, Dushanbe—some cities became mostly non-Tajik. Russians occupied a disproportionate number of top positions in Tajikistan's communist party and industry. This led to accusations of Russian bias, as well as discriminatory hiring practices that targeted Tajiks. Such practices persisted in spite of decades of improved education among ethnic Tajiks.³

Ethnic Groups and Languages

Tajiks



*A Tajiki girl
Flickr / Christophe Chenevier*

The Tajiks are an Indo-European people who speak a Persian-Farsi dialect. Sart is another name referring to the original Persian-speaking groups that settled in Afghanistan and Turkistan.⁴ Officially, they make up nearly 84.3% of Tajikistan's population.⁵ Historically, the term Tajik only describe speakers of Persian-Farsi who lived in Tajikistan or Afghanistan. In recent decades, however, the term has expanded to identify them as a distinct ethnic group.⁶

Uzbeks

The Uzbeks, who account for 13.8% of the population, are primarily of Turkish origin with some Mongolian and Persian ancestry.^{7, 8} Their language is related to Turkish and their Turkish-derived language is one of the most widely spoken in Central Asia.⁹ Uzbeks are generally followers of Sunni Islam.^{10, 11, 12} The household division of labor follows traditional conventions; women are responsible for caring for the



*An Uzbeki man
Flickr / whl.travel*

home and children. Despite these obligations, about 48% of women worked outside the home in 2014.¹³ Due to past Soviet policies, there is a substantial number of Uzbeks living in Tajikistan.¹⁴

Kyrgyz



*Kyrgyz shepherd and his family
Flickr / Catherine Hine*

Kyrgyz are descendants of nomadic livestock herders of Mongol descent.¹⁵ Over 75,000 Kyrgyz live in Tajikistan, primarily in the southern Fergana Valley, the fertile area that was split into administrative entities by the Soviets. The Kyrgyz are mainly Sunni Muslims. This group was primarily nomadic until the 1930s, when the Soviets introduced collectivization. Most Kyrgyz men today still herd flocks in the mountains, while Kyrgyz women work on farms in the valley. Having maintained

their tribal organization, their basic social unit is the extended family consisting of five and 15 nuclear families, all descended from one common ancestor. Kyrgyz villages are composed of five to seven extended families forming clans that belong to numerous tribes.¹⁶ Kyrgyz in Tajikistan make up around 1.3% of the population. The Kyrgyz language is a Turkic language.¹⁷

Religion

Tajikistan's constitution establishes the country as secular, with clear separation between state and religion. Accordingly, Tajikistan's citizens are free to adhere to any or no religion and to take part in religious customs and ceremonies. Most Tajiks are followers of the Sunni Islam's Hanafi School of jurisprudence, which enjoys special legal status. About 4% of the population are followers of Ismaili Shia Islam and live in the remote eastern Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region.¹⁸



*Praying at the mausoleum
Flickr / erikenmieke*

There are a variety of religious minorities in the country who practice Christianity, International Society of Krishna Consciousness (Hare Krishna), Jehovah's Witness, and Judaism. The largest Christian group is Russian Orthodox, a remnant of the Soviet period. There is also a small number of Baptists, Roman Catholics, Seventh-day Adventists, Lutherans, and Korean Protestants.¹⁹



*Mosque in Khujand
Flickr /erikenmieke*

The modern history of Islam in Tajikistan includes strong anti-Islamic campaigns by the Soviets, and even purges in the 1920s and 1930s. During their 70 years of rule, the Soviets attempted to purge Islam from the region. Between 1950 and 1970, the more moderate Hanafi legal school began to lose influence to the more conservative Salafi-Wahhabi schools. These more fundamentalist groups began to operate more openly in the 1980s, resulting in a greater politicization of Islam.²⁰

In 2012, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom designated Tajikistan a country of particular concern (CPC). Although Tajikistan's constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the country has no official religion, the government violates its citizens' right to religious freedom. Religious organizations must successfully register with the government to receive legal status. Failure to receive such status forces religious organizations to operate illegally, and their clergy and practitioners face fines and incarceration. In 2011, the government created the Law on Parental Responsibility for Educating and Raising Children. This law makes it illegal for children under the age of 18 to receive religious training and instruction. It is also illegal to send people abroad to receive religious instruction.^{21, 22, 23, 24}

The repression of religion by the state extends to all religious groups. Arrests of Muslims continues, as is the repression of individuals, groups, and mosques that do not subscribe to government-approved practices. While there is some validity to the government's concerns about extremist groups, many of those targeted by the government pose no credible threat to national security.²⁵

The government of Tajikistan has banned the fundamentalist Islamic Salafia movement as an extremist organization, as well as Al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and the Muslim Brotherhood.²⁶ These organizations pose a threat, leading to a violently repressive

response from a government that views most Islamic organizations with great suspicion.^{27, 28}

Protestants in the country face a double jeopardy. No Protestant groups have licensed Christian schools. It is therefore illegal for them to provide religious education to their children. Sending them abroad for religious education also violates the law. The government resists international pressure to relax its laws on religion. It claims that by severely regulating religion it reduces the possibility of religious extremism, a very real threat considering Tajikistan's proximity to Afghanistan. Despite government efforts, Islamic radicalism is on the rise across Tajikistan—especially among impoverished youth who have few employment opportunities.^{29, 30, 31, 32}

Cuisine

Russia, Afghanistan, Iran, and other Central Asian countries have influence on Tajik cuisine. Staples include mutton, flat crusty round bread, rice, and tea. In accordance with Islamic beliefs, people in Tajikistan do not eat pork. Alcohol is not consumed as frequently as in other Muslim majority Central Asia countries.³³

As over 80% of Tajiks live below the poverty line, food is scarce.³⁴ Breakfast typically consists of tea and bread, but families that are more prosperous might add butter, jam and eggs or porridge. Soup—made from a meat-based broth with vegetables, such as carrots, onions, and potatoes—is typically served for dinner. Rice dishes, such as osh (made with carrots, onions, and meat) are served two or three times a week. Other typical dishes are meat and onion filled pastries, pasta, and tomato and cucumber salad.³⁵ The Tajik national dish is kabuli pulao, a rice dish with shredded yellow turnip or carrot, meat, and olive oil drippings.³⁶



*Tajik rice dish
Flickr / twiga*

Lipioshka (bread) is very important to Tajiks, who never eat a meal without it. Tajiks bake large, flat round loaves that can be prepared using any number of grains and ingredients. If lipioshka is not available, a person will claim to have no food no matter how much food he or she has. All lipioshka is treated with reverence. Tajiks consider lipioshka a sacred symbol of life, so treat it respectfully. Never throw away bread or

place it on the ground. To serve, lipioshka is set upright and carefully broken, never cut with a knife.^{37, 38} It is taboo to place lipioshka face down, and leftover lipioshka or lipioshka crumbs are never thrown away or allowed to fall to the ground. People usually use leftover lipioshka and lipioshka crumbs to feed animals.^{39, 40, 41}



*A woman selling lipioshka
Flickr / Mountain Partnership at FAO*

Traditional Dress

Tajik men and young people working in the public and non-profit sectors typically wear Western-style clothing.^{42, 43} Tajik women, however, commonly wear traditional curta (dresses) made of cotton or silk with aezor, or jomas (baggy, wide colorful pants) underneath. The traditional outfit is complete by a head covering that varies, depending on the marital status, region, tribal affiliation, and time of year. Girls and young unmarried women might wear intricately detailed and brightly colored skullcaps.^{44, 45}

Some areas of the country have banned women from wearing the Islamic headscarf (hijab) in public places, such as bazaars, public buildings, and schools. In an effort to try to curb Islamic extremism, Tajik officials have launched a campaign encouraging women to wear traditional Tajik clothing, which is quite different from Islamic clothing. For example, the Islamic headscarf covers the entire head, neck, and chest area, and sometimes the face. Islamic women's clothing might also include gloves.^{46, 47, 48, 49}



*Tajik men wearing tupi
Flickr / Ronan Shenhav*

Some Tajik men continue to wear traditional round or four-cornered hats called topq or tupi, which vary by region. In rural areas, village elders often wear a long open coat called a joma or chapam and tie it closed around the waist with a sash called a meeyonband or chorsi, or with an embroidered kerchief called romul. Also worn are toki kallapush (skullcaps). The most popular toki kallapush is the embroidered black and white chusti. Some men also wear a solid colored curta, which

is similar to, but shorter than, the woman's curta.^{50, 51}

Men have also fallen under bans regarding facial hair. Tajik officials claim that long beards are an outward sign of Islamic radicalism. In some places, they have issued regulations limiting access for men with beards. Schoolteachers below age 50 may not wear beards of any length, while those above 50 may not grow a beard longer than 3 cm (1.2 in). Bearded men report difficulties finding work. Many men have been detained by security forces, beaten, and fined because of their beards.^{52, 53, 54}

Gender Issues

After independence, Tajikistan codified equal rights for men and women. In 1993, the government ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.⁵⁵ The reality is somewhat different and reflects a strong tradition of patriarchy. Women disproportionately lost their jobs when the economy slowed down. Domestic violence remains a widespread problem.⁵⁶ Although prohibited by law, domestic violence is widely accepted, rarely resulting in conviction against the offender. The trafficking of women for prostitution abroad is also a serious problem.⁵⁷



*Tajik women
Flickr / UNDP*

Women face additional discrimination in the form of forced marriages, early marriage, and polygamy. The minimum age for legal marriage for women and men is 18 and parents can face charges and penalties that include correctional labor for up to two years if they marry off a girl who has not yet reached legal marriage age. However, due to overwhelming poverty, local courts approve underage marriages because the husbands' families will support the young wives.

In rural areas, people follow highly formalized traditional gender roles. Sexual division of labor is strict, and men exert a high degree of control over all aspects of family and community life.^{58, 59}

Arts

Dance

Dancing is an integral part of everyday life and of significant life events, such as births, deaths, and family and religious holidays.⁶⁰ Traditional dances are divided into pantomime and ceremonial dancing.^{61, 62, 63} Pantomime dances, based on the imitation of animals and birds, are the most ancient.⁶⁴ Men's dances tend to be more aggressive, incorporating sharp, swift movements to symbolize power and strength.⁶⁵ Men and women often dance with instruments or props, such as spoons, dishes, or axes. Tajiks also have a tradition of dance-based dramas that include elements of pantomime, drama, and circus.⁶⁶



*Tajiks dancing at the wedding, Hisor, Karategin
Flickr / Ronan Shenhav*

Literature

Before the 1920s, Tajikistan had a long history of Persian literary tradition. Under Soviet rule, the arts came under increasing political constraints. Artists of all types, including writers, suffered greatly because of the Stalinist purges of the 1930s and the literary scene declined.⁶⁷ Although the Soviets permitted some contact with Tajik culture, very little Persian literature was published in Cyrillic transcription.^{68, 69}

Sports and Recreation

Tajikistan is one of several Central Asian countries that play buzkashi or kodpar (goat grabbing). Traditionally played on Friday afternoons from November to April, buzkashi players ride on horseback as they compete to grab a headless goat and either drag it around a pole or drop it into a hole. Regional tournaments can include teams from Afghanistan, China, Kazakhstan, Russia, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan.



*Buzkashi rider with the dead goat, Gissar
Flickr / Catherine Hine*

Genghis Khan is generally believed to have introduced this sport throughout Central Asia.^{70, 71, 72}

Besides buzkashi, cricket has become increasingly popular since its introduction in 2012 by the Tajikistan Cricket Federation. Rugby is slowly gaining in popularity as well.⁷³ However, soccer is by far the most popular sport in Tajikistan. The national soccer team is a member of FIFA and AFC and enjoyed the first international win in 2006 after beating Sri Lanka 4-0 in the inaugural AFC Challenge Cup.⁷⁴ Tajikistan also has a number of Olympic medalists, such as the wrestler Yusup Abdusalomov and judoka Rasul Boqiev, who took the silver and bronze medals respectively in Beijing in 2008. Boxer Mavzuna Chorieva won the bronze in London in 2012 and Dilshod Nazarov won the gold in Rio de Janeiro in 2016.^{75, 76}

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Chapter 4 | Society

Assessment

1. Tajiks are an Indo-European people.
2. It is illegal for children under the age of 18 to receive religious training and instruction.
3. Tajik men frequently wear beards as a sign of authority and piety.
4. Islamic radicalism is on the rise across Tajikistan.
5. Parents can legally marry off their daughters once they turn 10 years-old.

Assessment Answers: 1. True; 2. True; 3. True; 4. False; 5. False



*Tajik Military Officers During a Military Exchange in Dushanbe
Flickr / Virginia Guard Public Affairs*

Chapter 5 | Tajikistan in Perspective

Security

Introduction

Following the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, Tajikistan gained independence. The country shares borders with Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and China.¹ The Kuhistoni Badakhshon Autonomous Region, also known as Gorno-Badakhshan, is an autonomous region (A.R.) in the Pamir Mountains in eastern Tajikistan. Although the Gorno-Badakhshan A.R. makes up 45% of Tajikistan's land area only about 3% of the country's population lives here, the majority consists of followers of Ismaili Shiism.²

Perceived threats from Islamic fundamentalism have laid the foundation for Tajikistan's foreign policy. Relations with neighboring countries are strained. Uzbekistan has laid

landmines near the border of Tajikistan. De-mining operations have taken place, but the haphazard placement of landmines across the border areas means removal is difficult and slow.³

Tajikistan enjoys good relations with the United States and continues to assist NATO efforts in Afghanistan.⁴ This has led to the strengthening of the ties with the EU and China, which extend their influence not only in Tajikistan, but also across the region.^{5, 6}

U.S.–Tajikistan Relations

During the Cold War, the containment of communism drove U.S. foreign policy, but the abrupt demise of the Soviet Union (USSR) in 1991, necessitated revisions in foreign policy. Following its demise, the new reality of independent Central Asian countries (which were part of the USSR) did not come easily to the U.S. government.⁷ Almost as an afterthought, the George H. W. Bush and Clinton administrations categorized newly independent Central Asian nations as merely part of the “former Soviet Union.” Consequently, U.S. thinking largely marginalized Tajikistan and its neighbors—until the attacks of 9/11. At that time, the Department of Defense reviewed their thinking and placed Tajikistan (and Central Asia) in Central Command’s (CENTCOMs) area of responsibility. This reclassification recognized Tajikistan as strategically important to U.S. interests, mainly due to its extensive border with Afghanistan and the possibility of Islamist militants operating in the mountainous Tajik-Afghan border region.^{8, 9, 10}



*US Adjutant General meets with Tajikistan delegation
Flickr / Virginia Guard Public Affairs*

Tajikistan thus experienced a regional rise in geo-political significance. As part of the war effort in Afghanistan, the United States attempted to build a military base in Tajikistan, but failed—although Tajikistan did permit U.S. refueling and overflights in support of U.S. military operations in the region.^{11, 12}

Currently, Tajikistan shares membership with the U.S. in several international organizations. In 2002, Tajikistan joined the Partnership for Peace (PfP), becoming the 27th country who joined the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council. Through this partnership, Tajikistan entered a framework for practical security cooperation with NATO.¹³ Tajikistan and the United States also share membership in the United

Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank.¹⁴ In 2010, the United States launched an effort to improve cooperation with Tajikistan in the areas of counterterrorism, nuclear non-proliferation, counter narcotics, economic growth, and regional stability.¹⁵

Relations with Neighboring Countries

Kyrgyzstan



*Tajikistan-Kyrgyzstan border
Flickr / We overland*

Tajikistan's relationship with Kyrgyzstan remains somewhat problematic. Significant border issues stem from the Soviet-led forced resettlement of indigenous populations. At the time, the Soviets claimed this was in response to the economic constraints of the post-war industrialized agricultural sector in the Isfara Valley along the Tajikistan-Kyrgyzstan border.^{16, 17} Yet, the resulting infrastructure ignored the interdependence of the various indigenous groups living in the border region. For

example, new roads separated long-standing intergenerational arrangements made between traditional Kyrgyz and Tajik extended families. The complexity of social life in this area is thus difficult to ignore. The most visible distinction between the Kyrgyz and Tajik peoples rests in the border villages themselves. Most villages are known by both their Kyrgyz and Tajik names, while the villages themselves contain a mix of Kyrgyz and Tajik markers, such as Kyrgyz and Tajik streets. Additionally, each group uses a different school that follows different curricula, each group celebrates different independence days, and each group uses a different time zone.¹⁸

A coup in April 2010, in Kyrgyzstan, prompted Western donors to urge the authorities in Kyrgyzstan to tighten its border with Tajikistan. To convince villagers who live near the border of the benefits of this move, the government told the Kyrgyz border population that this move would eliminate their need to cross into Tajikistan in order to reach markets and administrative centers.¹⁹ While this move gave the appearance of strengthening security and local economies, it resulted in some dangerous incidents involving Kyrgyz and Tajik citizens and the border guards. It has also fed ongoing conflicts over power lines, roads, and canals.^{20 21}

Since the Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan border remains somewhat fluid, it continues to pose a broader regional concern related to the potential movement of Islamist militants. Moreover, the booming Afghan drug trade has moved northward through Tajikistan and into Kyrgyzstan, thus increasing the need for tighter regional border security.²²

Uzbekistan

The relationship between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan remains strained and complex. Tajikistan lost territory to Uzbekistan when the Soviets drew the new borders for the republics. Poor, remote, and engulfed in civil war immediately following independence, Tajikistan has been able to exploit its main natural resource—water. The control of water in a landlocked, desert region places Tajikistan in a unique position in relation to its Central Asian neighbors. Glaciers inside Tajikistan’s borders supply 55% of Central Asia’s water. In the past, Tajikistan withheld irrigation water from Uzbekistan for political advantage.²³



*Tajikistan-Uzbekistan border
Flickr / Muzaffar Bukhari*

Further complicating the Uzbek-Tajik relationship, Uzbekistan placed landmines along the Uzbek-Tajik border in 1999. Uzbek officials claim this was to prevent religious extremists from entering the country from Tajikistan. Under international pressure, Uzbekistan began demining operation in the Tajik-Uzbek border region in 2005. Two years later, only about 20% of the border had been cleared. Haphazardly placed landmines have made this effort slow and difficult.²⁴

Tajikistan remains heavily dependent on Uzbekistan for overland and rail transport. In February 2010, Uzbekistan attempted to exert influence on Tajikistan’s internal politics, in part, by restricting rail and road transport to and from Tajikistan. The likely motive was to pressure Tajikistan to abandon plans for building the Rogun Dam on the Vakhsh River, which will ultimately affect water flow to Uzbekistan.²⁵ In addition, Uzbekistan twice raised tariffs on trucks crossing into Tajikistan.²⁶

Uzbekistan has fiercely objected to the Rogun Dam from the beginning, fearing that it will threaten its downstream cotton crops. However, to reduce the dependency on Uzbekistan for energy and bolster the failing electrical grid, Tajikistan continued to move forward with the Rogun Dam project. As of 2017, the dam project is moving

forward with support from the World Bank and China.²⁷

In 2016, Tajikistan signed an agreement with Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan to ensure the country's position as a strategic recipient of electrical power and natural gas, lessening dependence on Uzbekistan.^{28, 29, 30} Recently, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan met to discuss various ways they might cooperate to halt drug and weapons trafficking from Afghanistan. They are also exploring the development of an enhanced transportation-communication corridor between the two countries.³¹

Afghanistan

The main focus of Tajikistan's relationship with Afghanistan is border security.³² The porous 1,345 km (835.7 mi) Tajik-Afghan border follows the meandering Panj and the Amu Darya Rivers, which are located in the Pamir Mountains at the juncture of the Hindu Kush and Karakoram mountains.



*Tajikistan-Afghanistan border outpost
Flickr / kvitlauk*

Aimed at combating the spillover of drug trafficking and Islamic militancy across the Tajik-Afghan border, Tajikistan increased the number of border security checkpoints, replete with barbed wire and watchtowers. According to some estimates, however, this increase has actually served to decreased border security.³³ On the one hand, criminals frequently negotiate entry into Tajikistan using bribes and false passports to ensure that large-scale criminal operations get through border

checkpoints. On the other hand, smaller scale drug traffickers prefer to navigate difficult mountain passes and river crossings to avoid border checkpoints altogether.³⁴

Tajikistan government considers Afghanistan a significant member of the Central Asian community, even while peace and stability in the region are not possible without resolving Afghanistan's political problems. Despite these challenges and concerns, Tajikistan continues to help development efforts in Afghanistan.³⁵

In 2007, the U.S. funded the construction of a bridge across the Panj River to link the two countries. The European Union and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have been instrumental in providing additional support for bridge development along the Tajik-Afghan border. As of December 2016, there were six bridges connecting



*A bridge at the Tajikistan-Afghanistan border, Gorno-Badakhshan
Flickr / Timon91*

Tajikistan and Afghanistan, with plans to build at least one additional bridge in the near future.³⁶ Tajik-Afghan border bridges have increased the flow of Tajik goods into Afghanistan, and have enhanced commercial opportunities on both sides of the border.³⁷

On 2 May 2013, the Pamir Energy Company (a project of the Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development) began exporting electricity from Tajikistan to Afghanistan on the newly constructed power transmission line.³⁸ This is the first transmission line to cross the mountainous region between Tajikistan and Afghanistan. In addition to improving electrical supply capacity, the transmission line supplies around 800 households, healthcare facilities, schools, and government offices in Sultoni Ishkashim, Afghanistan.³⁹

A 2015 study revealed that between one and two thirds of Tajiks and Afghans who live in border areas had obtained a Bachelor's degree or higher.⁴⁰ The study concluded that a lack of livelihood opportunities for this highly educated population contributed to local instability. While teaching positions are an important source of income in these areas, construction in Tajikistan and agriculture and trade on both sides of the border are also important for economic development and stability.⁴¹ Towards that end, Tajikistan is taking a guardedly optimistic approach that the way forward is to build relationships on both sides of the Tajik-Afghan border through integrated employment projects.⁴²

China

Tajikistan and China signed a border delimitation treaty in 2002 (ratified in 2011) to settle a centuries-long border dispute. By signing this treaty, Tajikistan agreed to cede to China a sparsely populated 1,000 square km (621.4 mi) mountainous zone east of the Pamirs in eastern Tajikistan's mountainous Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (GBAO).⁴³ This border treaty gave China access to minerals, railroad right-of-ways, agricultural land, and hydroelectric power. It also has been instrumental in China's fight against Uyghur separatists in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Province, as well as China's fight against heroin smuggling from Afghanistan.⁴⁴



*A Chinese flag in Ayni, North-West Tajikistan
Flickr / Robert Thomson*

Tajikistan also saw significant benefit from an increase in Chinese loans and goods, including vehicles, flowing into the country. By 2016, China had become Tajikistan’s leading trade partner.⁴⁵ Tajikistan’s economic movement towards China began during the 2009 world financial crisis, when few countries (including Russia) were interested in making financial investments in Tajikistan.^{46, 47}

Tajikistan’s has also turned to China for direct investment and trade to improve its energy sector. As a result, in just one year—from 2009 to 2010—China became Dushanbe’s largest trade partner and loaned Tajikistan around US \$700 million, primarily for infrastructure projects.^{48, 49} China has also made significant direct investments in Tajikistan; by 2016, Chinese direct investments reached more than US \$355 million.^{50, 51}

China has also expanded its influence in the area of regional security, with the goal of setting up buffer zones between Tajikistan, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. China’s main interest is to control the threat of religious extremism, which has the potential to destabilize the region—especially the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Province in western China.⁵²

Police Force

Referred to as “militia,” the Ministry of Internal Affairs heads Tajikistan’s police force. There are multiple departments in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, such as the Presidential National Guard, the Drug Control Agency, and the Tajik Internal Troops—Tajikistan’s military reserve in charge of Tajik Border Guard Services.^{53, 54}



*A Community Police Officer
Flickr / myxabyxe*

Military

As of 2013, Tajikistan's armed forces consist of about 8,800 ground forces, air defense forces, and mobile (rapid reaction) forces.⁵⁵ The defense establishment has 5,800 troops in the Interior Ministry, 1,200 in the National Guard, 2,500 in the Emergencies Ministry, and unknown number of border guards.^{56, 57}

The Border Guard Service consisted of poorly trained, poorly paid, underequipped and often under-fed conscripts. Charged with protecting the borders from infiltration by Islamist terrorists from neighboring countries, border guards tended to rely heavily on mobile paramilitary units. Spread thinly over the country's borders, the border guards also had to coordinate frequently with the Mobile Forces when dealing with armed terrorists.^{58, 59}



*Cross-border control to prevent terrorism and drug smuggling
Flickr / UNDP in Europe and Central Asia*

outposts, and material support (including ground-sensor interdiction technology) to the Tajik Border Guards.^{60, 61}

Tajikistan's Mobile Force is the counterpart to the Russian Airborne Troops.⁶² Consisting of light infantry (sometimes inaccurately called paratroopers), Tajikistan's Mobile Forces deploy in helicopters, making them air mobile rather than paratroopers.⁶³ Trained in counterterrorism and crises management, their role is to strengthen Tajikistan's capacity to handle threats. A critical aspect of training is regular participation in joint security exercises



*Tajikistan's Mobile Forces deploying in helicopter
Flickr / Vladimir Varfolomeev*

with Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Uzbekistan—all members of the Collective Rapid Reaction Force. Tajikistan also engages in joint counterterrorism exercises with China.⁶⁴

Since Tajikistan does not face a threat of attack from the air, air defense has not been a priority. In 2007, the Tajikistan's Air Defense Forces had around 800 troops and 4 combat helicopters used for air attacks. It also has 12 support helicopters used for search and rescue and airlift operations. The country's air force unit structure is unknown.⁶⁵



Russian President Dmitry Medvedev with Emomali Rahmon, Okno space surveillance station
Wikimedia / Presidential Press and Information Office

In 2002, Tajikistan became a member of NATO's Partnership for Peace. Tajikistan also joined Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan as a member of the Collective Security Organization (CSTO). In October 2004, Tajikistan signed a 10-year basing agreement with Russia. The country also transferred ownership of the Okno space-tracking base to Russia in exchange for cancelling \$242 million in debt.⁶⁶ During President Putin's visit in October 2012, Russia and Tajikistan agreed to extend the basing lease until 2042. In

return, Russia has agreed to provide duty free oil to Tajikistan over the next few years, as well as \$200 million in military assistance.⁶⁷

Military service in Tajikistan is 24 months, with officers receiving extensive training in Russia. Tajikistan's armed forces are fractured and not as effective as they should be due to regional clan loyalties among troops. Lastly, because Tajikistan is landlocked, it has no navy.^{68, 69}

Issues Affecting Domestic Stability

Terrorism

Terrorist attacks have been infrequent in Tajikistan, mostly focusing on the government, although there are supporters of several known terrorist organizations in the country.⁷⁰ Terrorist organizations that might target U.S. government or private interests in the region are the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), which has known ties to al-Qaeda, the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) and Jamaat Ansarullah. Although supporters

of al-Qaeda fought alongside the Taliban in Afghanistan and against coalition forces in Iraq, they are not known to operate in Tajikistan.^{71, 72} Initially aimed at overthrowing the government of Uzbek President Islam Karimov, the goal of IMU shifted to create an Islamic State across Central Asia and the Muslim-dominated Xinjiang Province in China.⁷³



*Tajik border guards patrolling
Flickr / UNDP in Europe and Central Asia*

Based in the Fergana Valley, the IMU is a contiguous community divided among three countries: Kyrgyzstan, containing half the valley's population; Tajikistan with one third; and Uzbekistan. Dividing the area into national states, or even ethnic groups, is fraught with difficulty because local networks and the economic ties predate modern administrative governance. The IMU takes advantage of the difficulty this poses to national law enforcement agencies. Further complicating matters, IMU combatants can easily retreat into villages and blend in with local populations after engaging in guerrilla warfare.⁷⁴

As part of its ongoing counterterrorism effort, Tajikistan has increased its military, police, and border security capabilities through programs funded by the United States, Russia, Japan, and the European Union (EU).⁷⁵ Tajiks receive mostly Russian news and television programming, exposing them to anti-Western views. Yet, Tajiks generally hold positive views of the West. Only rarely does anyone express anti-American opinions.⁷⁶

Poverty

Rural poverty is severe, even in the Fergana Valley with its agricultural production. Cotton, which is procured under conditions close to slavery, is a contributing factor.⁷⁷ Since the rural poor have little prospect of improving their standard of living, and any protest is labeled by the government as dissident Islamist activity, and provides a pretext for harsh repression,



*Inhabitants of the mountain village, Northern Tajikistan
Flickr / Ronan Shenhav*

Islamic militancy might prove attractive to many people.⁷⁸

Water Security

According to the Water Security Risk Index, Tajikistan ranks 154th in the world regarding water security risk.⁷⁹ Neighboring Uzbekistan, on the other hand, ranked 12th on the same list, raising the risk of tension between the countries. Further, during the 2009 global recession and economic contraction, Russia took a strong pro-Uzbekistan position on Tajikistan's Rogun Dam project—a project initiated by Russia in 1999. Although the goal of this project was to end Tajikistan's critical energy shortages, Uzbekistan (and Russia) attempted to stop work on the project, arguing that it would cause economic damage to Uzbekistan's economy. After receiving millions of dollars in direct investment, loans, and trade with China, however, the Rogun Dam project continues to move forward.^{80, 81}



*Golovnaya Dam, Sarband
Flickr / Christian*

Outlook



*Promoting cross-border security and stability initiative
implemented by UNDP in Tajikistan
Flickr / UNDP in Europe and Central Asia*

Tajikistan is an important factor of the region's stability and security. Unfortunately, the repressive tactics of the Rahmon government and the socioeconomic problems affecting the population create the potential for domestic unrest. Yet, the regime is unlikely to change, at least in the short term.

The Fergana Valley, often considered the area most likely to experience unrest, is the most densely populated region in Tajikistan, and competition for land, water, and resources provide fertile grounds for large-scale disturbances. Furthermore, neighboring Kyrgyzstan, previously rocked by violence, remains a threat to stability as well. Fueled by ethnic tensions, the border areas are especially vulnerable.⁸²

Internationally, Tajikistan enjoys good relations with the United States and continues to assist NATO efforts in Afghanistan.⁸³ This has led to the strengthening of the ties with the EU and China, thus extending the influence of China and the EU in the region.⁸⁴



*EU-Central Asia Ministerial Meeting
Flickr / European External Action Service*

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Assessment

1. Tajikistan continues to assist NATO's efforts in Afghanistan.
2. Tajikistan's armed forces are well organized and effective.
3. Tajikistan is building the Rogun Dam on the Vakhsh River to reduce its dependency on energy from Uzbekistan.
4. The Fergana Valley is the most stable region in Tajikistan.
5. Tajikistan improved the security on the Tajik-Afghan border.

Assessment Answers: 1. True; 2. True; 3. False; 4. False; 5. True

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Further Readings and Resources

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Final Assessment

1. The Syr Darya is a highland desert region in Tajikistan.
2. Tajikistan has a continental climate.
3. The Fergana Valley and the lowland valleys freeze in the winter months due to their elevation.
4. Tajikistan is the only landlocked country in Central Asia.
5. Despite high elevation and extreme temperatures, the Pamir Mountains are home to a diverse range of wildlife.
6. Zoroastrianism is the official religion of Tajikistan.
7. The Communist Party of Tajikistan was dismantled and outlawed after Tajikistan gained independence from the Soviet Union.
8. The Fergana Valley, which is the most fertile region in Central Asia, experienced economic stagnation when trade routes and modes of transportation changed.
9. Europeans companies started buying cotton from Tajikistan after striking a trade deal with Russia.

10. Tajikistan shares transportation routes that were established by Moscow to meet the needs of the former USSR.
11. Tajikistan has a high level of food security due to its well-developed agricultural sector.
12. Tajikistan's oil and gas production are currently too small to meet the country's needs.
13. Tajiks who work abroad produce almost 50% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).
14. Traveling by bus between towns and cities is the recommended mode of transportation.
15. Most of Tajikistan's hydroelectric power plants and dams are located on the Amu Darya, the longest river in Central Asia.
16. The constitution declares that Tajikistan is a Muslim country.
17. It is illegal for Protestants to provide religious education.
18. Most Tajiks are followers of the Shia Islam.
19. Tajik women wear the traditional Islamic hijab (headscarf) outside of the home.

20. Buzkashi is a traditional Central Asian sport played in Tajikistan.
21. Water security is a major source of tension between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.
22. Between one and two thirds of Tajiks and Afghans who live near the border areas have a Bachelor's degree or higher.
23. Tajikistan's Border Guard Service is a highly trained, elite security force.
24. Tajikistan experienced many terrorist attacks since the end of the civil war.
25. Tajikistan's Mobile Forces are trained in counterterrorism and crises management.

Assessment Answers: 1. False; 2. True; 3. False; 4. False; 5. True; 6. False; 7. False; 8. True; 9. False; 10. True; 11. False; 12. True; 13. True; 14. False; 15. False; 16. False; 17. True; 18. False; 19. False; 20. True; 21. True; 22. True; 23. False; 24. False; 25. True;