

UNMOT

(UN Military Observers in Tajikistan)



(Figure 1.: Map of Tajikistan)

Tajikistan.

Tajikistan, officially Republic of Tajikistan, Tajik Tojikiston or Jumhurii Tojikiston.

It's a landlocked country lying in the heart of Central Asia.

It is bordered by Kyrgyzstan on the north, China on the east, Afghanistan on the south, and Uzbekistan on the west and northwest. Tajikistan includes the Gorno-Badakhshan ("Mountain Badakhshan") autonomous region, with its capital at Khorugh (Khorog).



Figure 2.: Flag of Tajikistan in 1995)

Tajikistan encompasses the smallest amount of land among the five Central Asian states, but in terms of elevation it surpasses them all, enclosing more and higher mountains than any other country in the region

Tajikistan is a mountainous, landlocked country in Central Asia. It has an area of 143,100 square kilometers and a population of 8.6 million people. The capital and largest city is Dushanbe.

Land/relief

More than nine-tenths of Tajikistan's territory is mountainous; about half lies 10,000 feet (3,000 meters) or more above sea level.

The entire southern Central Asian region, including Tajikistan, lies in an active seismic belt where severe earthquakes are common. Seismologists have long studied the region, especially in connection with the massive hydroelectric dams and other public works in the area.

Politics

Tajikistan is officially a republic, and holds elections for the presidency and parliament, operating under a presidential system. It is, however, a dominant-party system, where the People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan routinely has a vast majority in Parliament.

Emomali Rahmon¹ has held the office of President of Tajikistan continuously since November 1994.

Geography

Tajikistan is landlocked, and is the smallest nation in Central Asia by area. It is covered by mountains of the Pamir range, and most of the country is over 3,000 meters (9,800 ft) above sea level.

The Amu Darya and Panj rivers mark the border with Afghanistan, and the glaciers in Tajikistan's mountains are the major source of runoff for the Aral Sea. There are over 900 rivers in Tajikistan longer than 10 kilometers.

Administrative divisions

Tajikistan consists of four administrative divisions. These are the provinces (viloyat) of Sughd and Khatlon, the autonomous province of Gorno-Badakhshan (abbreviated as GBAO), and the Region of Republican Subordination; formerly known as Karotegin Province. Each region is divided into several districts.

Lakes

About 2% of the country's area is covered by lakes.

Economy

The economy of Tajikistan is dependent upon agriculture and services. Since independence, Tajikistan has gradually followed the path of transition economy, reforming its economic policies. With foreign revenue precariously dependent upon exports of cotton and aluminum, the economy is highly vulnerable to external shocks.

Tajikistan's economy also incorporates a massive black market, primarily focused on the drug trade with Afghanistan. Heroin trafficking in Tajikistan is estimated to be equivalent to 30-50% of national GDP as of 2012.

Resources and power

¹ Emomali Rahmon (born October 5, 1952) is a Tajik politician who has been the President of Tajikistan since 1994. Rahmon rose to prominence during Tajikistan's civil war in the early 1990s, and he became President after a national referendum in 1994. He has since been re-elected several times, with his rule characterized by a strong authoritarian streak, political suppression, and crackdowns on opposition groups. Despite these criticisms, Rahmon has overseen economic growth and improved infrastructure development in Tajikistan.

Tajikistan possesses rich mineral deposits. Important metallic ores are iron, lead, zinc, antimony, mercury, gold, tin, and tungsten. Nonmetallic minerals include common salt, carbonates, fluorite, arsenic, quartz sand, asbestos, and precious and semiprecious stones.

Energy resources include sizable coal deposits and smaller reserves of natural gas and petroleum. Tajikistan is among the countries with the greatest potential for hydroelectric power in the world, and most of the electric power generated in Tajikistan is hydroelectric.

Agriculture

Farming still leads industry in importance in the economy of Tajikistan, and cotton growing surpasses all other categories of the country's agriculture.

During the Soviet Union, the country was converted into a cotton-producing region ("silanized"), so other crop production was secondary. As a result, after the break-up of the Soviet Union, clay cotton sales (a basic source of national income) declined sharply and other products were scarce.

Constitutional framework

In 1994 voters approved a new constitution to replace the Soviet-era constitution that had been in effect since 1978 and amended after independence. The new constitution established legislative, executive, and judicial branches. Tajikistan's constitution provides for a strong legislature. Executive authority is held by the president, who serves as the head of state.

Language

Tajik² is the official language and is spoken by most people in Tajikistan. Tajik as a lingua franca to communicate with outsiders. Russian is widely used for administration and business, but few speak it natively.

Religion

The vast majority of Tajiks are Muslim, mostly of the Sunni Hanafi school.

² Tajik is a variety of Persian (also known as Farsi) spoken mainly in Tajikistan, and also in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, China and Kazakhstan.

The Persian language in Tajikistan was renamed Tajik by Stalin in 1932 in order to distance Persian speakers in Central Asia from Persian speakers in Iran.

Finance of Tajikistan

The finance sector of Tajikistan is small, consisting primarily of commercial banks with limited access to foreign markets. The National Bank of Tajikistan functions as the central bank, issuing and regulating the nation's currency, the somoni (TJS).



(Figure 3.: Tajik currency, Somoni)

The currency is vulnerable to fluctuations in Russia's economy, since about one-third of Tajikistan's GDP comes from remittances from Tajik workers in Russia.

Cultural and historical heritage

Tajikistan is rich, with a diverse range of ethnicities and religions. The country is known for its beautiful mountainous landscapes, and its abundance of natural resources, including gold, oil, and gas.

Situation in Tajikistan in 1995.

The conflict in Tajikistan was rooted in the civil war of the early 1990s, which had broken out shortly after the fall of the Soviet Union. The civil war had pitted the government forces, known as the People's Front of Tajikistan, against the UIRP ("United" Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan or United Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan), which was composed of various Islamic factions. The UIRP was backed by both Afghanistan and Pakistan, while the People's Front was supported by Russia and the Central Asian states of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

The Tajik Supreme Soviet voted to proclaim Tajikistan an independent State on 9 September 1991. This vote followed the failed conservative coup d'état in Moscow in August of that year which marked the beginning of the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Tajikistan soon faced an acute social and economic crisis. In addition, its stability was upset by clan, regional and

political tensions, further compounded by differences between secularists and pro-Islamic traditionalists.

In 1995, Tajikistan was in the midst of a civil war that had begun in 1992. The war was fought between the government, which was dominated by the People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan, and a loose coalition of opposition groups known as the United Tajik Opposition (UTO)³. The UTO was made up of a variety of groups, including Islamists, nationalists, and democratic reformers.

The conflict began in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, as various groups vied for control of the newly independent state. The UTO had initially taken up arms in response to what they saw as the government's failure to address political and economic grievances.

The war had taken a heavy toll on the country, with thousands of people killed and many more displaced. Both sides were accused of human rights abuses, including massacres and the use of child soldiers.

In 1995, the situation in Tajikistan was particularly volatile. The government had been weakened by the war and was struggling to maintain control over the country. The UTO controlled large parts of the countryside and had launched several major offensives against government force.

In September of that year, the government and the UTO signed a Cease-Fire agreement, which was brokered by the United Nations.



(Figure 4.: in Afghanistan, Blessing (Joint prayer) on the occasion of signing an Agreement⁴ on Tajikistan)

(From left Emomali Rahmon, the President of Tajikistan, Burhānuddīn Rabbānī⁵, the President of Afghanistan, Abdullah Nuri⁶, Leader of the United Tajik Opposition)

³ The United Tajik Opposition (UTO) was a coalition of various Tajik opposition groups that formed in 1992 during the Tajikistan Civil War. The UTO included several Islamist groups, as well as democratic and nationalist factions that opposed the authoritarian rule of President Rahmon Nabiyeu

⁴ Agreement on a Temporary Ceasefire and the Cessation of Other Hostile Act on the Tajik-Afghan Border and within the Country for the Duration of the Talks.

⁵ Rabbani was born in the northern province of Badakhshan. He was a Persian-speaking ethnic Tajik and the President of Afghanistan in 1995.

⁶ Sayid Abdulloh Nuri, also transliterated as Abdullah Nuri, led the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan from 1993. During the Tajik Civil War of 1992 to 1997 he led the United Tajik Opposition.

The agreement called for the demobilization of both sides and the formation of a coalition government. While the peace process was initially successful, it was plagued by setbacks and violence, and it would be several more years before a stable government was established in Tajikistan.

Mission Mandate of UNMOT

The United Nations Mission of Observers to Tajikistan - UNMOT - was originally established by the United Nations Security Council in resolution 968 (1994), adopted on 16 December 1994, with a view to assisting the Joint Commission, composed of representatives of the Tajik Government and of the Tajik opposition, to:

- Monitor the implementation of the Agreement on a Temporary Ceasefire and the Cessation of Other Hostile Acts on the Tajik-Afghan Border and within the Country for the Duration of the Talks
- Investigate reports of ceasefire violations and report on them to the United Nations and to the Joint Commission
- Provide its good offices as stipulated in the Agreement
- Maintain close contact with the parties to the conflict, as well as close liaison with the Mission of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (now the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)⁷ and with the Collective Peacekeeping Forces of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)⁸ in Tajikistan and with the border forces
- Provide support for the efforts of the Secretary- General's Special Envoy
- Provide political liaison and coordination services, which could facilitate expeditious humanitarian assistance by the international community

New assignment and transfer of Colonel Forgacs

Colonel Forgacs has received a new assignment from the DPKO of UNHQ New York to serve as the Chief of Staff and second in command at UNMOT. As part of this assignment, he has been transferred from Sukhumi to Dushanbe, which is his new location of duty. This transfer was very interesting.

⁷ The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (**OSCE**) is the world's largest regional security-oriented intergovernmental organization with observer status at the United Nations. Its mandate includes issues such as arms control, promotion of human rights, freedom of the press, and free and fair elections.

⁸ CIS stands for Commonwealth of Independent States, a political and economic organization formed in 1991 by former Soviet Union republics after its dissolution. The organization comprises 10 member states, including Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and others. The primary goal of CIS is to promote economic, cultural, and political cooperation among its members. The organization has a vast territory and abundant resources, including oil, gas, and minerals, making it a significant player in the global economy. However, the CIS faces numerous challenges, including political instability, corruption, and conflicts, hindering its potential growth and development.

As there were no flights from Sukhumi to anywhere, Sochi would have been the closest available and operational airport, but from there it would have been a multiple transfer to Moscow or Istanbul.

It was just in time that a UN chartered Russian IL-76 transport plane brought material for UNOMIG, so it landed in Sochi and then carried UN cars to UNMOT Dushanbe.

The UN has authorized and instructed the use of this flight.

There was just one small difficulty, the biggest battles were taking place in Chechnya in those days and the shortest route would have been through Chechnya, so we had to fly a detour of about 3 hours because the airspace was closed because of the armed fighting.

Establishment and structure of UNMOT

Initially authorized (December 1994) 40 military observers with:

- Headquarter (HQ) - in Dushanbe
- Team Sites (TS) in Kurgan-Tyube, Pyanj and Garm
- Mobile TS collocated in UNMOT HQ in Dushanbe

Mission was led by the Head of UNMOT as CMO (Chief Military Observer) - Brigadier-General Hasan Abaza (Jordan) from 16 December 1994. (General Abaza arrived in Tajikistan in October 1994 to lead an advance group of UN military observers).

Deputy Head, second in command, Chief of Staff was Colonel Laszlo Forgacs (Hungary).

Contributor countries of Military Observers - Austria, Bangladesh, Bulgaria, Denmark, Hungary, Jordan, Poland, Switzerland, Ukraine and Uruguay.

Task and responsibility of Col. Laszlo Forgacs

Col. L. Forgacs was appointed as the second in command and Chief of Staff for the mission in January 1995. He was the only Hungarian military officer in said mission.

He was responsible for helping to coordinate the mission's activities and ensure that the mission's mandate was being followed. He was also responsible for providing advice to the mission's leadership on the political, security, and economic issues that affected the mission's operations.

Col. Forgacs was also responsible for working closely with the Commonwealth of Independent States Peacekeeping Force (CIS PKF), which was deployed to the region in 1995 to help maintain peace in the region. This included coordinating and overseeing joint operations and liaising with the CIS PKF on a regular basis.

Commonwealth of Independent States Peacekeeping Forces (CIS PKF)

The Commonwealth of Independent States Peacekeeping Forces (CIS PKF) is a multinational peacekeeping force created by the Commonwealth of Independent States in the 1990s. It is composed of military personnel from the member nations of the Commonwealth of Independent States, including Russia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. The CIS PKF operates under a unified command, with the headquarters located in Moscow.

The mission of the CIS PKF is to maintain peace and stability in the region, prevent armed conflict, and protect the human rights of the citizens of the member states. The force is authorized to use force, if necessary, to accomplish its mission. It is also authorized to carry out peacekeeping operations, provide humanitarian assistance, and support international negotiations.

Cooperation of UNMOs with regional peace-keeping forces in Tajikistan (UNMOT and CIS PKF)

The United Nations Mission of Observers in Tajikistan (UNMOT) and the Commonwealth of Independent States Peacekeeping Forces (CIS PKF) have been working together in Tajikistan since 1993. Both forces have been supporting the implementation of the General Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and National Accord in Tajikistan, as well as monitoring the ceasefire between the Government of Tajikistan and the United Tajik Opposition.

The two forces have worked together in a number of areas to maintain peace and stability in Tajikistan. These include monitoring the demilitarized zone, monitoring and verifying the withdrawal of armed forces from the conflict zone, as well as supervising the disarmament process. UNMOT and the CIS PKF have also worked to promote dialogue between the parties in the conflict, including through the facilitation of local meetings and negotiations.

The two forces have also coordinated their efforts to ensure the safety of civilians in Tajikistan. This includes providing security in areas that are prone to violence and providing humanitarian assistance to those affected by the conflict.

Overall, the cooperation between UNMOT and the CIS PKF has been instrumental in helping to maintain peace and stability in Tajikistan.

Curiosities and specialties from Tajikistan, UN and UNMOT:

(The following is a non-exhaustive summary of Mission's peculiarities, difficulties, interesting cases and situations.)

1. Accommodation, living conditions, security, support, food, healthcare:

- Security: This was one of the biggest problems in this country, the civil war and post-ceasefire conditions characterized our activities. Neither the country's - officially recognized or accepted - political-military leadership, nor the CIS PKF already stationed there initially did anything to this end.
Later, the Tajik leadership gave us a couple of armed guards, but this was not a guarantee of our safety. The security of our patrols left something to be desired.
- Mines and UXO (unexploded ordnance): The UNMOT MILOBs did not observe any visible markers indicating the presence of minefields or UXO in the area. Furthermore, there were no means to detect the minefields to ensure safety. It is fortunate that no incidents occurred given the lack of markings and detection mechanisms.
- Work area, operational area: The host country was unable or unwilling, and the UN was not yet in a position to provide the necessary area and building for operation. That is why we started our activity in the UN building that was already rented there, sharing the limited opportunities.
- Central accommodation was not available, so it had to be arranged individually. Colonel Forgacs, as a higher commander, was helped with accommodation - because he could not deal with this in addition to his daily duties as Chief of Operations. He was accommodated in one of the guesthouses in the area of the Earthquake Monitoring and Measuring Station of the Tajik Seismological Institute.
- Supply: There was a very limited supply of goods and services in 1995. It can be attributed to a combination of factors, including the country's transition from a centrally planned economy to a market-based system, the devastating civil war that had just ended, and a severe drought that affected agricultural production. The Civil war also had a significant impact on the country's economy, as it disrupted trade, destroyed infrastructure, and displaced hundreds of thousands of people. This further contributed to the shortage of goods and services in the country.
Overall, the combination of these factors contributed to the shortage of goods and services in Tajikistan in 1995.
The main and biggest problem was the **water** - there was no permanent running water, and if it was available, it was terribly dirty and muddy. Drinking water wasn't available at all - we never dared to drink from the tap. The UN later provided bottled and canned water, which was mainly delivered by air transport.
- Hygiene, medical care: In the light of the above, it was very difficult to establish proper hygiene conditions. Major ablutions were only possible if there was running water collected in storage containers and could be partially used after settling. We could only wash our teeth with the bottled water provided.
The healthcare services were provided by a team of Swiss doctors and nurses. The team was based in the same Seismological Institute where Colonel Forgacs

was accommodated, and they provided healthcare services to UNMOT to a high and reliable standard.

It is worth noting that providing high-quality healthcare services in Tajikistan can be challenging due to a range of factors, including a shortage of medical equipment and supplies, a lack of qualified healthcare professionals, and limited access to healthcare facilities in remote and rural areas. However, the presence of the **Swiss medical team** would have undoubtedly made a positive impact on the healthcare situation in the area where they were based.

2. Patrolling:

- Our patrolling activities were very difficult in the first period, because the competent Tajik authorities (mainly the military, police) could not really support us (they were still at the beginning of the policing) (escort, mine detection, etc.). Due to security concerns, the operation was limited to areas that were accessible by foot or vehicle.
- Both sides (government and opposition), the local residents and officials responded positively to the patrols carried out by UNMO, as they were attempting to provide assistance in an area that was not fully mapped (presumably due to its Soviet-era history). While more accurate
- Russian maps may have existed, they were not readily available.
- It is worth noting that the local inhabitants went out of their way to offer our patrol tea, which was not only delicious but also a traditional custom in Tajikistan. Despite the language barriers and cultural differences, the hospitality of the locals made our work in the area much more pleasant.

3. Area of responsibility, tripartite country:

- The mission's mandate was focused on Tajikistan, but initially, it was not feasible to cover the entire country due to logistical and security challenges. Additionally, the opposition was based outside the country, in Afghanistan, which further complicated the mission's implementation.
- The country can be divided into three main parts based on geological, geographical, controllability, and accessibility considerations:
 - Leninabad area,
 - Khatlon and capital area,
 - Gorno-Badakshan ("Mountain Badakshan") autonomous area.
- The first (Leninabad) was a well separated Pamir area bounded and wedged between two countries (Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan) - relatively peaceful region, not the primary task for monitoring.
- The second was our first and main concern, bordering Afghanistan (main base and support of opposition). The team sites (Kurgan-Tyube, Pyanj and Garm) were activated from the beginning of the mission.
- The third (Gorno-Badakshan): This part of Tajikistan is a different world, a different story. At the time the mission was set up and launched, the security situation - not fully under government control - did not allow for the deployment of one or more Team Sites. This is where most of the UTO fighters were and where the resistance controlled a large area.

Later, a UNMO team led by the CMO explored deployment and deployment options and negotiated with local agencies and the Russian border police, because Tajik border police did not exist at that time.

4. Meeting with opposition leader, S. A. Nuri:

There were several meetings and negotiations (mainly ceasefire violations) with the parties, which were relatively easier to do with the government, CIS PKF representatives, as they had their HQ in the capital, Dushanbe. In contrast, A.S. Nuri and the UTO leadership were based in Taloqan, Afghanistan.

During my service, January-August 1995, we had to organize two meetings, which was not easy because Nuri and his entourage could not enter Tajikistan (they would have been arrested immediately). So the UNMOT operational leadership went to Taloqan.

This was generally cumbersome, as there was only one place to cross into Afghanistan by ferry (barge) on the Panj River at Panj settlement. The border itself was controlled by Russian border guards, so you had to coordinate your way there and back with them.

They were cooperative, so it was doable. We did it in two UNmarked cars on unpaved roads in Afghanistan, but they were cooperative on that side too.

Nuri and the UTO leadership have been positive and cordial in their dealings with UNMOT.

5. Seismological-earthquake sensitive area:

- Tajikistan is a seismologically-earthquake sensitive area due to its location in the Alpine-Himalayan seismic belt, which is a zone of intense tectonic activity. The country is prone to earthquakes, and the region has experienced some of the most powerful earthquakes in history. The high seismicity in Tajikistan is mainly due to the collision of the Indian and Eurasian tectonic plates, which is causing the uplift of the Pamir Mountains and the creation of deep faults in the region. Therefore, Tajikistan is at risk of seismic hazards, and it is crucial to develop appropriate seismic-resistant building codes and emergency response plans to mitigate the effects of future earthquakes.
- UNMOT MILOBs were lucky because, during my service in Tajikistan from January to August 1995, we only felt the earth move twice, but we didn't feel it when we were driving.
- I (Colonel Forgacs) was in an interesting and advantageous position, because I was accommodated in the area of the Earthquake Research and Recording Station of the Academy of Sciences and thus I was able to get first-hand information about earthquakes. Fortunately, no strong earthquakes were recorded, but I was told that there is an average of 400-600 quakes a year, of which 4-6 are larger.

6. Drugs: 90% of the drugs produced mainly in Afghanistan, but in Pakistan (mainly opium → morphine → heroin derived from poppy seeds) are transported to Russia and Europe via Tajikistan (the so-called Silk Route, which runs from Gorno-Badakhshan).

- Monitoring and controlling the drug trade was not within the mandate of UNMOT. The military observers were not trained or equipped to carry out such tasks.
- We have received a lot of information, mostly news, about the events taking place in the region. One such report, which came from a high-ranking Tajik official

and was considered reliable, though not independently verifiable, stated that a lieutenant of the Russian border police in the Gorno-Badakhshan area had acquired a brand new Mercedes car after just one year of service. This seemed unlikely given his salary and daily allowance, and raised questions about possible corruption or illicit activity.

During his time in Tajikistan, Colonel Forgacs was known for his unwavering commitment to his work and his relentless pursuit of sustainable peace. He went above and beyond in his duties, and his exceptional efforts were recognized through numerous commendations. In recognition of his contributions, he was awarded a UN Peacekeeping Medal.



... and lastly

A comment on the timeliness and foresight of our military and diplomatic leaders:

- The most important thing for them was to inform me in time that I would be retired on 1 September 1995.
- Previously, when I asked for Hungarian soldiers to be sent as UN observers, they told me that the mission was dangerous (which mission is not dangerous?) and they would not send them. And I am to survive this!
- At the last minute (at the end of my mission) they asked me to do everything I could to keep this post (Chief of Staff) for the Hungarians, because they would like to send a colonel to this post. It is interesting to note that Tajikistan was no longer dangerous and an Austrian colonel had already been selected.