

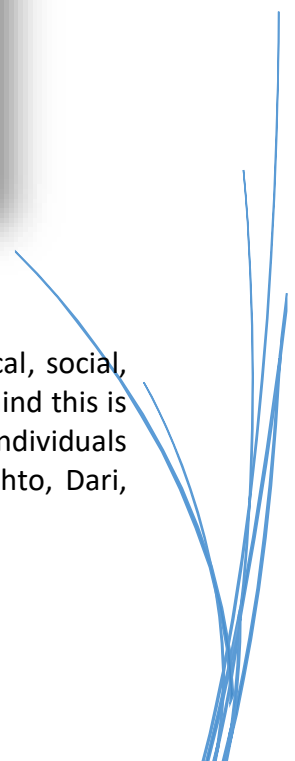
WEEKLY ANALYSIS

Issue Number – 430
(Feb 27 – March 5, 2024)

A LOOK AT THE ISLAMIC EMIRATE OF AFGHANISTAN RELATIONSHIP WITH TAJIKISTAN



Weekly Analysis is one of the CSRS publications analyzing significant weekly political, social, economic, and security events in Afghanistan and the region. The prime motive behind this is to provide strategic insights and policy solutions to decision-making institutions and individuals in order to help them design better policies. Weekly Analysis is published in Pashto, Dari, English and Arabic languages.



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A LOOK AT THE ISLAMIC EMIRATE OF AFGHANISTAN RELATIONSHIP WITH TAJIKISTAN

Introduction

Tajikistan is Afghanistan's northern neighbor. The Afghanistan-Tajikistan border is 1,357 km in length. The common border between the two countries is mainly covered by the Amu Darya (Oxus River), which is considered as an official and natural border between the two countries. Historically, the areas which form the two countries were once connected before the division of the Islamic countries by the colonial powers. In addition, the people living in the two countries have many things in common: language, religion, and cultures. After the Tsarist Russia in north and British India in south conquered the region, colonial borders established in the areas of historic Khorasan. Since Afghanistan and Tajikistan were part of historical Khorasan, they were separated into two countries. With the formation of the Soviet Union and the official annexation of the Central Asian countries to the Soviet Union, Tajikistan became as the republic of the Soviet Union in the neighborhood of Afghanistan.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Tajikistan gained its independence from the Soviet Union. Diplomatic relations between the two countries were established in 1992. The outbreak of civil war in Afghanistan complicated matters since Tajikistan supported one side of the war. After 2001 and the establishment of the American-backed republic system in Afghanistan, Tajikistan like other countries, resumed its relations with Kabul, which have been expanding ever since. Apart from the official relations that existed between Afghanistan and Tajikistan, another side of Afghanistan-Tajikistan relations is the interaction between the Islamic Emirate and Tajikistan. Therefore, the main question is what happened between the Islamic Emirate and Tajikistan? and how are their relations after the Islamic Emirate returned to power in Afghanistan? To provide an answer to this question, at first the relations between the two sides in the 1990s were studied, then the view of Tajikistan towards the Islamic Emirate during the 20-year war between the Emirate and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan was analyzed, and then the relations between the two countries during the period that Islamic Emirate took over the power is analyzed.

RELATIONS BETWEEN THE ISLAMIC EMIRATE AND TAJIKISTAN IN THE 1990S

During the outbreak of civil war in Afghanistan, Tajikistan supported the Jamiat -e-Islami Party in which the Mujahideen government was established under the name "Islamic State of



Afghanistan". When Tahreek-e-Taliban seized control of Kabul, Tajikistan entered a new stage of intervention in Afghanistan. With the formation of Tahreek-e-Taliban and its control of Kabul, all Mujahideen groups gathered under one umbrella against the Taliban. The Mujahideen groups controlled the entire parts of Panjshir valley, Badakhshan, Takhar and some parts of Kunduz, Baghlan, Parwan and Kapisa provinces. Tajikistan was the only country in central Asia that directly supported the opposition group forces against the Islamic Emirate which known as the "Northern Alliance".

During the period of the Islamic Emirate's war with the Northern Alliance, Tajikistan played a critical role in opening its border to Northern Alliance forces for receiving supports from other countries. Therefore, Tajikistan became the only country in central Asia that supported the opposition forces "Northern Alliance" against the Islamic Emirate.

TAJIKISTAN'S VIEW OF THE ISLAMIC EMIRATE DURING THE REPUBLICAN SYSTEM

After the United States invasion of Afghanistan and the establishment of the republican system in Afghanistan, which was directly supported by the US, Tajikistan resumed its relations with Kabul. In addition to establishing extensive relations with Kabul, this country started its intelligence and military cooperation with the United States to fight the Islamic Emirate, where the Islamic Emirate at that time had launched its war against the United States and the Afghan government. This support included allowing US war planes to safely pass the airway border and exchange of classified intelligence information on the activities of Islamic Emirates Mujahideen in the north of Afghanistan. Tajikistan was the strongest critic of the Islamic Emirate, and by considering the support that the US provided to Tajikistan, this country was more interested than other central Asian countries to allow the US to establish its military bases in Tajikistan. However, the Russian intervention in Tajikistan forced the Tajikistan government to ignore implementation of allowing US bases in their territory. And only during the first years of US invasion of Afghanistan, Tajikistan had provided support to US in the areas of intelligence, transit and military cooperation. The Tajikistan and the United States cooperation to fight against Taliban had decreased over the years when Taliban seized control of northern parts adjacent to Tajikistan border and assured Tajikistan that there will not be any imposed threats from Afghanistan. After this confirmation from Islamic Emirate regarding the threats, Tajikistan perception towards Islamic Emirate has changed. As a result, Tajik officials overall



perception towards Islamic Emirate has totally changed and state-run media prohibited using “terrorist group” phrases. Instead, “Armed Group” has been used for Islamic Emirate. In addition, in response to the security guarantee provided by the Islamic Emirate regarding their forces presence in rural areas of Badakhshan, and Kunduz provinces, Tajikistan like other countries in the region has addressed that ongoing conflict and continuation of war is not bringing peace and stability in the region. The only way to resolve the conflict is by negotiations to bring peace to Afghanistan and end the conflict.

Relations between the Islamic Emirate and Tajikistan after returning to power in AFGHANISTAN

Political Relations

After the Islamic Emirate returned to power in Afghanistan, Tajikistan followed the same approach as they did during the first period of Islamic Emirate. Tajikistan has not established any political relations with Islamic Emirate and remained the only country in the region and/or world that has not even recognized the defacto level government in Afghanistan.

Apart from the fact the government of Tajikistan has not established any political relations with Islamic Emirate, the official position of Tajikistan government regarding the Islamic Emirate remains steady and consistent as the Tajikistan is the strongest critic of Islamic Emirate. This has repeatedly been heard by the president as he expressed his vision and/or high-ranking officials of the country in international meetings. Not only in international meetings, but in internal level the Tajik officials have always considered the presence of Islamic Emirate in their neighborhood as a threat to their national security and the region.

The behavior of this country towards the Islamic Emirate, which reflects the policy and declared positions of that country, is to support the opponents of the Islamic Emirate. However, the authorities of this country have officially denied directly supporting the opponents of the Islamic Emirate, the presence and activity of some opposition members of the Islamic Emirate in the city of Dushanbe shows that Tajikistan supports them. Apart from the fact that the president of Tajikistan has repeatedly announced that "Tajikistan will not recognize any other government that forms in Afghanistan through oppression and without considering the situation of the Afghan people, especially all its national minorities".¹ Moreover, he sometimes expressed his concern about the existence of terrorist groups in the provinces of Afghanistan bordering Tajikistan, which was denied



by the authorities of the Islamic Emirate.² To prevent spreading of insecurity from Afghanistan to other countries, even the president of this country has repeatedly proposed the creation of a security belt around Afghanistan in international events, which he proposed for the first time in the virtual meeting of the Collective Security Treaty Organization.³ In addition, this country has so far conducted several military maneuvers around its border areas with Afghanistan, in which the Russian soldiers participated, too.

In general, three major issues have caused Tajikistan to have a negative and critic view towards the Islamic Emirate. The first issue is lack of participation of the Tajik people in the structure of the Afghan government. From the point of view of the government of Tajikistan, the effective participation of the Tajik in the structure of the Islamic Emirate is not obviously seen.

According to the Tajikistan officials, the fundamental rights of Tajiks that they deserve have not been given in the structure of the Islamic Emirate, and the official position of the president of that country is that the Islamic Emirate has discrimination action towards the Tajik population, and until the rights of Tajiks are not considered within the structure of the government, the Islamic Emirate will not be recognized.

The second issue is the presence of anti-government groups of Tajikistan in Afghanistan. The government of Tajikistan claims that the anti-government group of Tajikistan, especially the "Ansarullah" group, is based in Afghanistan, and from there they carry out destructive activities against Tajikistan. However, the government of Tajikistan has not explicitly claimed that Ansarullah has close ties with the Islamic Emirate, it can be understood from the positions of the officials of that country that they implicitly believe that Ansarullah maintains close ties with the Islamic Emirate. The third major problem of the Tajik government is drug smuggling from Afghanistan to Tajikistan. The government of Tajikistan claims that large amounts of drugs have been smuggling from Afghanistan to Tajikistan and that the country and the region are negatively affected.

Considering the critic view of Tajikistan government towards the Islamic Emirate, the authorities of the Islamic Emirate have always called Tajikistan's concerns unfounded and unnecessary. The spokesman of the Islamic Emirate considered Tajikistan's criticism of the absence of Tajiks in the government structure as interference in Afghanistan's internal affairs and has always warned other governments, including Tajikistan to avoid interfering in internal issues of Afghanistan. In addition,



the Islamic Emirate has denied the presence of Tajikistan anti-government groups in the territory of Afghanistan and has always emphasized that no foreign terrorist group present in the territory of Afghanistan. Moreover, Islamic Emirate does not allow anyone to carry out terrorist activities against any government from Afghanistan. Regarding drug trafficking, the authorities of the Islamic Emirate have announced their strong commitment to fight against its cultivation and trafficking. Apart from this, the Islamic Emirate has always taken a relatively soft and peaceful stance in response and calling for restraint on the other side and not interfering in Afghanistan's internal affairs. The Islamic Emirate has always expressed its willingness and readiness to have good relations with Tajikistan⁴. Although usually the extremely tense political relations strongly affect the security relations of the countries and even lead to military clashes in some cases. During the one-and-a-half years that have passed since the Islamic Emirate's neighborhood with the Republic of Tajikistan, except for a brief military conflict and exchange of fire between the two sides was reported at Shirkhan border, north of Afghanistan.⁵ This exchange of fire lasted only four hours and ended peacefully.

On the other hand, positive signs have also been seen in Tajikistan. News was reported about visiting of the delegation of the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the city of Kharog, the capital of Badakhshan province of Tajikistan, where Afghanistan has a consulate there.⁶ The delegation of Ministry of Foreign Affairs visiting the Afghan consulate facilities in that city.⁷ It was later announced that the official representatives of the Islamic Emirate took control of the consulate. However, the Afghan embassy in Dushanbe is still under the control of the ambassador of the Afghan republic, and the secretary who was introduced by the Islamic Emirate in that embassy was rejected by Zahir Aghbar, the designated ambassador of the Afghan republic in Tajikistan. The consulates are officially part of the embassy. In this case, it should be said that the embassy is still under the control of the opponents of the Islamic Emirate, while the consulate in Kharugh is operating under the guidance of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Emirate. However, the government of Tajikistan has not officially commented on this matter, the meaningful silence of the government of Tajikistan shows that the country is gradually taking steps towards positive interaction with the Islamic Emirate. Based on the decree of president of Tajikistan, the border markets that existed between the two countries were opened,⁸ which practically means moving towards the normalization of relations between the two countries.



Cultural relations

It's obviously clear that Afghanistan's historic and rich culture shares many things in common with Tajikistan. But the exact history of this common culture is not known. Based on the poems of Persian poetry (Abu Abdullah Jafar Rudaki) during the third century AH indicates the historical culture history, which can be considered as a clear example of shared cultural history between the two countries.⁹

After the Tajikistan gained its independence, the cultural relations of this country with Afghanistan along with diplomatic relations have had their ups and downs. Though Tajikistan did not establish any diplomatic relations with this country during the first rule of Islamic Emirate. But during the 20-years of ongoing war in Afghanistan, both countries have been able to normalize diplomatic relations. Besides normalizing diplomatic relations, number of cultural visits on official level were conducted. As part of common culture programs in 2013, Mir Ali Dost Youf, deputy Minister of the Ministry of Culture of Tajikistan, visited Afghanistan at the invitation of the Minister of Culture of Afghanistan to take part in Ghazni Festival as the capital of Islamic culture.¹⁰ Prior to this visit, Sayeed Makhdoom Rahin, the former Minister of Information and Culture of Afghanistan, paid a visit to Tajikistan at the invitation of the Minister of Culture of Tajikistan.¹¹

In addition, the presence of 5,619 Afghan immigrants in Tajikistan play a significant role in the cultural influence between the citizens of two countries.¹² When the Islamic Emirate returned to power, all types diplomatic and cultural relations have been cut off by Tajikistan. It is important mentioning that, Tajikistan's cultural relations with other countries are aligned based on their diplomatic relations. If a concern raises in diplomatic relations, the cultural relations will be affected, too. In 2014, Mohiuddin Kabiri, the leader of Islamic Movement of Tajikistan, were invited by the Islamic Republic of Iran to attend the Islamic Unity Conference in Tehran. Following the visit of Mohiuddin Kabiri to Iran, Tajikistan stopped all cultural activities of Iran's cultural advisor in Dushanbe. This reaction of Tajikistan affected the political relations between the two countries.¹³

Today, it has become regular practice to associate culture and politics in the area of international relations to resolve conflicts and political issues.¹⁴ Those countries that have strong cultural capacities



and capabilities are placed at the top of international relations. Therefore, by considering the historical cultural relations of Afghanistan and Tajikistan, the two countries must pay serious attention to establish political relations, and strengthen their economic relations.

Economic relations

Despite the negative view and lack of political relations between Tajikistan and the Islamic Emirate, that country is not willing to change negatively regarding its interaction and economic relations with the Islamic Emirate. The assessment of the economic relations between the two sides shows that there has not been any decline in the field, but it has also increased more than in previous years. As in 2020, the trade between the two sides, which was about 37.2 million dollars, increased to 52.7 million dollars in 2022. The increase shows a 38% increase compared to the last year,¹⁵ which includes energy (energy is the major part of Tajikistan's exports to Afghanistan) and other commercial goods. The main trade route between the two countries is through the Dosti Bridge, which is located over the Amu Darya at Shir Khan border. After the Islamic Emirate returned to power, this bridge remained open to truck traffic, except for a few days, which was closed as a result of the conflict between the two countries, and there was no longer a pause in its opening. According to reports, currently, Afghanistan is among the seven main trading partners of Tajikistan, and the prospect of trade between the two countries shows growth and expansion. Energy is one of the main products that export from Tajikistan to Afghanistan. An important issue that has achieved despite the tension in political relations between the two sides is signing of the extension of the energy export from Tajikistan to Afghanistan for 2023, which took place in Turkey between the authorized authorities of the two countries.¹⁶

THE ECONOMIC ATTRACTIVENESS OF THE TWO COUNTRIES

Despite having economic relations between the two neighbor countries Afghanistan and Tajikistan, there are many economic attractiveness for each other, which will play a vital role in the economic prosperity of both countries. The following outlines, three economic attractiveness: The first major economic attraction of the two countries is the consumer market for each other. Afghanistan and Tajikistan have products that can complement each other and can meet each other's needs easily if more sophisticated facilities are provided.



The second economic attraction of the two countries is transit. Afghanistan can play an exceptional role for Tajikistan as a transit route in two dimensions. The first dimension is, the role of transportation of commercial goods that Afghanistan connect Tajikistan to the markets of South Asia and West Asia. In this context, big projects such as the Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Iran railway line or the five nations railway line have already been planned, which should be implemented as soon as possible. This project, which connects the three countries: Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Iran, through rail and road lines, will benefit Tajikistan the most, because this landlocked country will be connected to Iran and its seaports through Afghanistan. This project will have a major impact on the economy of all three countries, especially Tajikistan. If this transit line is constructed, the countries of Iran, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and China will be connected through a rail network, which is also known as the Five Nations project. The second dimension is the transit role of Afghanistan in the transfer of Tajikistan's energy to the south. Apart from the fact that Afghanistan is the only possible route for Tajikistan that connects that country to South Asia, West Asia, and open waters, it is also the only route that can transfer the country's energy production to the big markets of Pakistan and India. In this context, the famous and profitable 1000-megawatt project is considered one of the vital projects for the economy of Tajikistan. Through this massive project, 1,000 megawatts of energy supplied from two large power plants in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan will be transferred to Pakistan. This project, which was supposed to be completed earlier, it's construction work has been completely stopped. As the Tajikistan side claimed that the Islamic Emirate gained power and the situation in Afghanistan is deteriorated.¹⁷

Fortunately, the World Bank has recently announced that it will resume its work at the request of the three neighboring countries of Afghanistan.

- The third economic attraction that exists jointly between the two countries is the joint use of the Amu River. Both countries can build joint dams above the Amu River for using the water of this river for the purpose of cultivation and to produce energy. In this context, talks were already held between the two countries, which should be reorganized so that both countries take the necessary benefit from this great resource.



CONCLUSION

Tajikistan and Afghanistan as two neighboring countries, have many things in common which include historical background, religious, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural. Each of the two countries never feel comfortable without having good political relations.

In addition, the political relations between the two countries are currently broken, the existence of broad commonalities between the two countries makes it easy to have good relations. On the other hand, instead of issuing negative declarations against each other and making the future of the relations between the two nations more difficult. Both countries must make joint efforts against the existing security issues, especially in the field of fighting against destructive groups and drugs. As existing of these factors will negatively affect both countries. In addition, the grow and expansion in economic relations show that the two countries cannot achieve the desired result without supporting each other. Capacities and mutual economic needs require both countries to have good political relations.

Although Afghanistan needs its neighbors, including Tajikistan, for its economic development. And through this, it should seek to have good political relations with them, but for Tajikistan, this needs doubles. Because Afghanistan is not only a good export destination for Tajikistan, but it is the only country that it gives Tajikistan access to South Asia and open waters. Considering that, both countries give priority to economic growth and development, it is necessary to use the mutual economic capacities that both countries have for each other by establishing political relations.

SUGGESTIONS

According to the issues mentioned, the following suggestions are provided:

- It is suggested that the two countries should launch their political relations as soon as possible. Since the Islamic Emirate has already shown interest, Tajikistan should also take steps forward.
- The Islamic Emirate should address the legitimate concerns of countries including Tajikistan by considering the national interest of Afghanistan.
- The two countries should focus on resumption of their political relations to resume implementation of economic projects. So that they can benefit from these projects.



- Since Afghanistan and Tajikistan complement each other in terms of transit, it is suggested that the two sides take basic steps by creating specialized commissions in this field.
- Both countries must take advantage of the opportunity that the World Bank has announced to resume work on the Casa 1000 project and to take quick action as soon as possible to collaborate in this field in coordination with other beneficiary countries.

End

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