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Instability in Tajikistan? The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and the Afghanistan Factor

Christian Bleuer

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By Christian Bleuer

Key points:

- Foreign diplomats, local officials and many analysts argue that Central Asia, and Tajikistan in particular, is vulnerable to security threats emanating from Afghanistan.
- While the threat of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan to security in Tajikistan is over-exaggerated, insurgents and terrorists here are capable of creating a level of localised instability.
- Much of the violence in Tajikistan is tied to local issues and has few, if any, strong connections to international networks of radical Islamists.
- At present local security forces in Tajikistan are capable of defeating challengers; yet the dangers of future spill-over effects from a disintegrating Afghanistan are unclear.
- More effort must be made for objective, independent research on the nature of conflicts in northern Afghanistan and Tajikistan, particularly the connections between these two countries.

NB: The views expressed in this paper are entirely and solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the OSCE Academy in Bishkek or the GCSP.

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OSCE Academy in Bishkek, Botanichesky 1A, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, 72004 Tel: 996 312 54 32 00 Fax: 999 312 54 23 13 www.osce-academy.net Geneva Centre for Security Policy, Avenue de la Paix 7bis P.O. Box 1295, CH-1211 Geneva 1 www.gcsp.ch

Christian Bleuer is a PhD candidate at The Australian National University's Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies (Middle East and Central Asia). In August 2011 he submitted his dissertation, which is a case study of Tajikistan's civil war. He is currently scheduled to travel to Tajikistan for an IREX-funded research project examining Tajikistan's foreign relations in a broad regional context. His current research interests include Central Asia's relation with Russia and the United States, and the effect of insecurity in Afghanistan on the region. This paper was prepared on the basis of a study undertaken in the framework of the Research and Teaching Fellowship at the OSCE Academy in Bishkek in 2011.

Introduction: Central Asia and Security Risks Connected to Afghanistan

In March 2011, Tajik President Emomali Rahmon expressed concern over NATO plans to draw down troops towards a 2014 hand-over to Afghan security forces and the possible resulting security spill-over effects of this action on Tajikistan. President Rahmon listed the dangers as including terrorism, extremism, drug trafficking, weapons smuggling and illegal immigration.¹ Local analysts provide a similar list of challenges in Tajikistan when stressing that country's strategic significance, particularly to the United States and Russia.² Publicly, American officials do agree that Tajikistan is vulnerable to Afghan-based threats. For example, the US Director of National Intelligence stated in his Senate testimony:

Tajikistan's abilities to cope with the challenges of Islamic extremism – should it spread from Pakistan and Afghanistan – represent an additional cause for concern. In 2010, Tajikistan's President Rahmon was forced to negotiate with regional warlords after failing to defeat them militarily, an indicator that Dushanbe is potentially more vulnerable to an Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan with renewed interests in Central Asia.³

Many Russian officials are of the same opinion – at least in their public comments. The CSTO Secretary General Nikolai Bordyuzha stated at a meeting in Dushanbe that instability emanating from Afghanistan was a threat to the entire Central Asian region – a threat that would become especially acute if international military forces were to withdraw from Afghanistan.⁴

¹ 'Tajikistan concerned over decision to withdraw anti-terrorist coalition forces from Afghanistan', RIA Novosti (12 March 2011). In particular, Rahmon stressed the budgetary constraints faced by Tajikistan in countering the increased challenge of fighting threats that originate in Afghanistan.

² For example: Faredun Hodizoda, "Misunderstanding": A Road to Nowhere – Reflections from Tajikistan', *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, Volume 8, No. 2 (2010) p. 113.

³ James R. Clapper, 'Statement for the Record on the Worldwide Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence', Office of the Director of National Intelligence (16 February 2011), p. 21.

⁴ 'Security Group Says Afghanistan Poses Threat To Central Asia', RFE/RL (17 March 2011), <http://goo.gl/rQNLu>. See also: Boris Gromov and Dmitry Rogozhin, 'Russian Advice on Afghanistan', *The New York Times*, Op-Ed (11 January 2010), <http://goo.gl/XOCof>

However, in reply to the type of sentiments expressed by Bordyuzha, one Afghan analyst stated that CSTO member states are unfairly placing blame for the region's problems on Afghanistan in order to draw attention away from their inability to manage their own affairs.⁵ Alternately, within Tajikistan some local politicians, government officials, and analysts argue that Tajikistan is capable of containing threats to its stability.⁶ Going even further against these types of alarming assessments are analyses that stress the exaggeration of the dangers faced in Central Asia – whether the danger is Islamist movements, terrorism, drug trafficking or border security.⁷ The following sections will analyze the dangers faced by Central Asia, and Tajikistan in particular as it is usually named as the most vulnerable state in the region. The focus will be on terrorism and insurgency as they are an immediate threat to government control, with drug trafficking not actually being an immediate security threat to Central Asian governments.⁸ In particular, an assessment of Afghanistan-based threats will be offered. The most prominent of these is the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.

On the Other Side of the Border: The IMU in Northern Afghanistan

Numerous local and foreign analysts, as well as local government officials, have pointed to the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) as a major threat not only within Pakistan and Afghanistan, but also a potential threat further north into Central Asia. Indeed, the now dead IMU leader Tahir Yuldashev stated that the goal of the IMU was to invade the Central Asian states to the north of Afghanistan. More recently, in late 2010, RFE/RL reported that analysts “point to the IMU when assessing the causes of the spike in violence in northern Afghanistan over the past two years, suggesting its militants expanded their presence in the region to disrupt NATO's northern supply route and use the region as a launch pad for crossborder forays into Central Asia.”⁹ RFE/RL noted that the important role of the IMU in the north is reflected in the views of Afghan government officials. Numerous local leaders claim that the IMU and fighters from Central Asia are common throughout the north of Afghanistan.¹⁰ The International Crisis Group offers similar analysis. They argue that the IMU has rebuilt its forces and is a potent force in northern Afghanistan, with a network extending into Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.¹¹ A

⁵ ‘Security Group Says Afghanistan Poses Threat To Central Asia’, RFE/RL (17 March 2011), <http://goo.gl/rQNLu>

⁶ Dilafroz Nabiyeva, ‘Tajikistan says it is capable of resisting threats Islamic militant attack seen possible’, Central Asia Online (8 June 2011), <http://goo.gl/mJjYC>

⁷ See, for example: John Heathershaw and Nick Megoran, ‘Contesting danger: a new agenda for policy and scholarship on Central Asia’, *International Affairs*, Vol. 87, No. 3 (2011) pp. 589–612.

⁸ David Lewis, ‘High Times on the Silk Road: The Central Asian Paradox’, *World Policy Journal* (Spring 2010), pp. 39-49; Filippo De Danieli, ‘Counter-narcotics policies in Tajikistan and their impact on state Building’, *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (March 2011), pp. 129–145; Erica Marat, ‘The State-Crime Nexus in Central Asia: State Weakness, Organized Crime, and Corruption in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan’, CACI & SRSP Silk Road Paper (October 2006).

⁹ Abubakar Siddique, ‘IMU Takes Root In Increasingly Insecure Northern Afghan Provinces’, RFE/RL (8 December 2010), <http://goo.gl/msUDA>

¹⁰ For example, in one alarming statement, an ethnic Uzbek Afghan politician from the north claimed that “People loyal to former [IMU leader] Tahir Yuldash operate in the Qal-e Zal and Chahar Dara [districts]. They strive to infiltrate every place that borders Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. [...] In Dasht-e Archi [district], there are Chechens and Uzbeks and Tajiks affiliated with Al-Qaeda.” Another Afghan politician stated that “In Konduz we have Turkmens, Uzbeks, and Tajiks who have come from [Central Asia] and are now being spotted by locals in some remote regions.” See: *Ibid.*

¹¹ International Crisis Group, ‘Tajikistan: Changing Insurgent Threats’, Asia Report N°205 (24 May 2011) pp. 10-14.

CSIS report also points to the presence of IMU fighters in Kunduz.¹² Many other sources also regularly point to the IMU as a potent force on the ground in Afghanistan, include representatives for NATO/ISAF.¹³

However, other analysts are skeptical of the above types of IMU assessments. For example, in 2010 Alexander Knyazev, a researcher from Kyrgyzstan who spent time in Kunduz, pointed to assessments of IMU numbers in that region as exaggerated.¹⁴ More recently, Afghanistan Analysts Network researcher Kate Clark wrote:

It is highly unusual for [...] an Afghan to be a member of the IMU. The latter appears to be a fairly routine allegation for ISAF to make when Special Forces kill or capture any Afghan who is an ethnic Uzbek whom they suspect of being a Taleb. [...]

Labelling dead ethnic Uzbek Afghans as IMU adds to the narrative of an external 'terrorist' threat and makes whoever was killed or captured sound extremely dangerous. From our point of view, it just underlines that international security forces have a blurred picture about whom they are opposing and that not much is known about IMU and its links to the Taleban, al-Qaeda and other militant Islamist organisations.¹⁵

Similarly, one source noted to me:

We see it here (Mazar-e Sharif) in the provincial hospital, where dead bodies of insurgent KIAs are brought to. When the bodies are not claimed by family members they are automatically labeled Foreign Fighters and depending on their faces: Asiatic = Uzbeks; dark-skinned = Pakistani; and caucasian = Chechens. This is done by doctors as well as police and everybody takes it at face value.¹⁶

In regards to the non-Pashtuns who are active in the insurgency in northern Afghanistan, Antonio Giustozzi provides an analysis that does acknowledge the presence of the IMU in the north. However, he overwhelmingly points to the Tajik, Uzbek and Turkmen members of the insurgency as local Afghans, and he stresses mostly Taliban recruiting in these communities.¹⁷ In another report, Giustozzi did mention Uzbeks from Uzbekistan fighting in Kunduz, but only reported on one group of fighters amidst a broader analysis that was overwhelmingly focused on Uzbeks, Tajiks and Turkmen who are from Afghanistan and who chose to join the Taliban.¹⁸

¹² Thomas M. Sanderson, Daniel Kimmage and David A. Gordon, 'From the Ferghana Valley to South Waziristan: The Evolving Threat of Central Asian Jihadists', CSIS Transnational Threats Project (March 2010), esp. p. 15.

¹³ For example: 'ISAF Joint Command Evening Operational Update', ISAF Joint Command Afghanistan (13 September 2011), <http://goo.gl/yLw2k>

¹⁴ Bakhtiyar Akhmedkhanov, 'Who is "squeezing" the Taliban out into the former Soviet republics of Central Asia, and why are they doing it?', *New Eastern Outlook* (23 February 2010), <http://goo.gl/WFNTG>

¹⁵ Kate Clark, 'Kill or Capture 2: Another Takhar Night Raid Fans Ethnic Discontent', Afghanistan Analysts Network (25 May 2011), <http://goo.gl/Vh4p1>

¹⁶ Correspondence with former ISAF officer with several years' experience in northern Afghanistan, October 2011.

¹⁷ Antonio Giustozzi, 'The Taliban Beyond the Pashtuns', *The Afghanistan Papers*, No. 5 (July 2010), The International Centre for Governance Innovation.

¹⁸ Antonio Giustozzi and Christoph Reuter, 'The Northern Front: The Afghan Insurgency Spreading beyond the Pashtuns', Afghanistan Analysts Network, Briefing Paper (24 June 2010).

Some clarification was recently provided by an IMU-affiliated website. In November 2011 *Furqon.com* released a list of martyrs along with biographies for the Hijri year 1432.¹⁹ Their losses were a relatively tiny number in comparison to other more prominent groups in the Afghan insurgency. In total, 87 IMU members were killed. Yet 64 of the listed martyrs were Afghans, and only 21 were from the former Soviet Union – including 10 from Tajikistan. What is not known is not just how many Central Asians have travelled to Afghanistan to fight as members of the IMU, but how many have not died in Afghanistan and have now – or will in the future – return to Central Asia. An analysis of IMU activities in Central Asia is needed in order to ascertain how strong of a threat it is to governments in the region.

The IMU in Central Asia

Two years ago, IWPR authors investigated a possible return of the IMU to Central Asia. They found that local security analysts agreed – in regards to Tajikistan and Uzbekistan – that continued acts of insurgent violence are possible. However, they stressed that “this would not be on a scale that Central Asian governments could not handle, and the IMU lacked a substantial following in the region.”²⁰ And the current situation? In regards to researching the presence of the IMU and other potential jihadist groups in Central Asia, CSIS researchers outlined the difficulties: “Unfortunately, years of intemperate and biased assessments have muddied the waters of Central Asian jihadism to a state of near-impenetrable murkiness.”²¹ Yet they do argue that “The IMU is Central Asia’s largest and most important militant organization, and all known strains of Central Asian jihadism are linked to it in some fashion.”²² Going against views that emphasise an imminent IMU threat to stability is, for example, the opinion of Joshua Kucera, who states that “Exaggerating the threat suits the governments of Central Asia, who can appeal to foreign powers for military aid and justify crackdowns on legitimate opposition.”²³ After noting the two polar opposites of threat assessments, the CSIS report’s authors note: “Both perspectives have some validity, but each obscures almost as much as it illuminates. The skeptics ignore the demonstrated presence of jihadist groups and their clandestine support networks. The fear-mongers exaggerate the threat that small groups of extremists pose and downplay the gains authoritarian states reap from dramatizing the militant menace.”²⁴

As for the capabilities of the IMU in Central Asia, the security analyst Farhod Tolipov argues that groups like the IMU will always present a threat to security in regards to localized acts of violence. However, he maintains that the last 20 years of counter-terrorism efforts by Central Asian governments

¹⁹ ‘O'zbekiston Islomiy Harakatining 1432 hijriy yil (melodiy 2011) shahidlar’, *Furqon* (November 2011), <http://goo.gl/BgEv0>

²⁰ Ainagul Abdrakhmanova et al., ‘Is Uzbek Guerrilla Force Planning Homecoming?’, IWPR Special Report (18 November 2009), <http://goo.gl/7i2Fz>

²¹ Sanderson, Kimmage and Gordon, ‘From the Ferghana Valley to South Waziristan’, p. 3.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 5.

²³ Joshua Kucera, ‘Why Russia Fears US Afghan Plan’, *The Diplomat* (18 October 2011), <http://goo.gl/logHL>

²⁴ Sanderson, Kimmage and Gordon, ‘From the Ferghana Valley to South Waziristan’, p. 3.

demonstrates that local security forces are capable of handling the threat.²⁵ He added further that radical Islamist groups have little support: “If their ideas were popular among the population we would have already seen large-scale disturbances.”²⁶ Tolipov has a good point: where are the attacks of a level one should expect from a terrorist-insurgent organization as strong as the IMU is reputed to be in much of the analysis and reporting on the region? Are IMU volunteers capable only of fighting and dying in Afghanistan? Or are they also capable of threatening the stability of countries to the north in Central Asia? As a case study the following section will concentrate on Tajikistan – the country that has seen a locally significant recurrence of violence in the last couple of years.

The IMU in Tajikistan?

In late November 2010, one month after an ambush in the Rasht Valley that left dozens of Tajik soldiers dead, the influential Pakistani journalist Ahmed Rashid – a long-time Central Asia watcher – wrote an article titled “Tajikistan: The Next Jihadi Stronghold?” Rashid provided a very bleak view of Tajikistan – socially, economically, and politically. Rashid then presented the “key issue” being the “extent to which the Taliban, al-Qaeda, and their Central Asian allies such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and its splinter, the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU), are returning to Tajikistan and Central Asia.”²⁷ This is followed by Rashid giving credit to the IMU for the deaths of Tajik government forces in the Rasht Valley and by repeating government claims that the anti-government forces included Uzbeks, Tajiks, Kyrgyz, Russians, Pakistanis, Afghans, and Chechens. Rashid does concede that American and Western diplomats do not believe this narrative. These diplomats instead say that the fighters are local Tajiks fighting over local issues – not transnational jihadists. While airing an alternative view, Rashid stresses that “Nevertheless both Tajiks and foreigners concede that it would make perfect sense for al-Qaeda and the Taliban to expand their operations and bases into the weak southern hinterland of Central Asia, which includes southern Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.”²⁸ Other sources also find, as did Rashid, that there was and is still a strong international connection to the recent fighting – as argued by some Tajik officials and commentators. Some pointed to the IMU while one official, the Deputy Minister of the Interior, claimed that the main commander for the anti-government forces – Mullo Abdullo – was “al Qaeda’s man in Tajikistan.”²⁹ Similarly, a retired police commander pointed to both al Qaeda and the IMU, and noted that while Mullo Abdullo may have been killed, he is easily replaceable by others.³⁰ Even some foreign analysts, such as one STRATFOR writer, saw some

²⁵ ‘Militant Islamic Force Signals Return to Central Asia’, Institute for War and Peace Reporting, RCA Issue 631 (13 October 2010), <http://goo.gl/fiSu6>

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ahmed Rashid, ‘Tajikistan: The Next Jihadi Stronghold?’, New York Review of Books (29 November 2010), <http://goo.gl/OwJU7>

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Lola Olimova, ‘Few Tears Shed for “Tajik Bin Laden”’, Institute for War and Peace Reporting, RCA Issue 647 (5 May 2011), <http://goo.gl/BfbkT>

³⁰ Ibid.

level of IMU involvement in the recent instability – notably the large prison break in Dushanbe that preceded the fighting in Rasht.³¹

Other analysis is more cautious, such as the International Crisis Group report on the incident that noted only that someone claiming to represent the IMU made a claim of responsibility and that the Tajik government offered no evidence of its claim that Mullo Abdullo was appointed by al Qaeda to be their local commander.³² Similarly, a self-proclaimed IMU spokesman gave an interview to the RFE/RL Uzbek language service and claimed responsibility for the attack on Tajik government troops that left 28 dead.³³ An IWPR analytical article went even further than the ICG analysis and noted that the IMU, according to some analysts, could be making false claims in order to bolster the perception of the scale of its presence in Central Asia. Marat Mamadshoev, the chief editor of the independent Tajikistan-based ASIA Plus news service, argued that "Whatever the IMU says, it's nothing but talk. I'm sure that either there are no foreigners in Rasht at all, or else there are so few of them that it isn't worth mentioning."³⁴

The above CSIS report notes that Central Asia is not at this time an environment conducive to operations or training for the IMU, but that some mountainous and remote areas of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are a concern. In particular, the report mentioned the Rasht Valley and Tavildara area of Tajikistan, citing two sources that claim there was a significant return of IMU fighters from Afghanistan to the area with the Tajik opposition commander Mullo Abdullo.³⁵ Indeed, someone claiming to represent the IMU did claim responsibility for an attack on a Tajik military convoy that killed 28 soldiers.³⁶ Regarding the recently killed Mullo Abdullo, STRATFOR – focusing its analysis of the Rasht Valley violence almost entirely on the IMU as the main suspect – claimed that Abdullo was a “key member of the IMU.”³⁷ Within Tajikistan the official view of Mullo Abdullo is clear. IWPR’s Lola Olimova notes that Tajikistan’s Deputy Interior Minister claimed that Abdullo was “al-Qaeda’s man in Tajikistan.”³⁸ Olimova, while not endorsing this view, leaves open the possibility that Abdullo may have built links to al-Qaeda, the Taliban or the IMU during his exile in Afghanistan.³⁹ STRATFOR went even further and framed the fighting in Rasht as having a significant IMU component.⁴⁰ However, more

³¹ Ben West, ‘The Tajikistan Attacks and Islamist Militancy in Central Asia’, STRATFOR (23 September 2010), <http://goo.gl/N4PGH>

³² International Crisis Group, ‘Tajikistan: The Changing Insurgent Threats’, pp. 7, 9.

³³ Bruce Pannier, ‘The Growing Threat Of Militants In A Corner Of Central Asia’, RFE/RL (23 April 2011), <http://goo.gl/MgFTI>

³⁴ Lola Olimova and Nargis Hamrabaeva, ‘Tajik Authorities Struggle to Quell Militants’, Institute for War and Peace Reporting, RCA Issue No. 630 (4 October 2010), <http://goo.gl/mwuPm>

³⁵ Sanderson, Kimmage and Gordon, ‘From the Ferghana Valley to South Waziristan’, pp. 11, 15.

³⁶ ‘Uzbek Islamists claim responsibility for Tajikistan attack’, The Voice of Russia (23 September 2010), <http://goo.gl/VqgMO>; ‘Militant Islamic Force Signals Return to Central Asia’, Institute for War and Peace Reporting.

³⁷ Eugene Chausovsky, ‘Tajikistan Security Sweeps and the Possible Return of the IMU’, STRATFOR (11 November 2010), <http://goo.gl/9bEqr>

³⁸ Lola Olimova, ‘Few Tears Shed for “Tajik Bin Laden”,’ Institute for War and Peace Reporting, RCA Issue 647 (5 May 2011), <http://goo.gl/gv8tX>

³⁹ Aleksandr Shustov, ‘Mullo Abdullo Reported Dead in Tajikistan’, Strategic Culture Foundation (26 April 2011), <http://goo.gl/9m1Ty>. Similarly, “Tajik Security Council Secretary Amirkul Azimov [...] stated that the terrorist forces behind Mullo Abdullo’s group were the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, the Taliban, and Al Qaeda.” Ibid.

⁴⁰ Chausovsky, ‘Tajikistan Security Sweeps and the Possible Return of the IMU.’

recent analysis by two researchers with long-term experience in this area, John Heathershaw and Sophie Roche, reveals that the fighting in the Rasht Valley is not part of a large regional network:

Moreover, what is taking place in Kamarob specifically, and in Rasht as a whole, is not, as has been claimed by the Government of Tajikistan, a conflict with foreign terrorists, e.g. the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, representing regional Islamism. Rather it is a local conflict between the regime and former commanders, who were incorporated into the state following the peace agreement, but now find themselves excluded from it once more.⁴¹

While this analysis does not rule out any and all connections to Afghanistan and/or the IMU, it certainly does undermine the government's narrative.

Elsewhere in Tajikistan, the government has pointed to the presence of the IMU in several other cases. One oft-mentioned area in northern Tajikistan is the district of Isfara. In 2009 a local prosecutor stated that since 1997 about 80 IMU members had been identified locally and half of them had been arrested. Since that time arrests have continued.⁴² Total arrests of accused terrorists and religious extremists in all of Tajikistan for 2011 totaled nearly 200 people.⁴³ In terms of government actions related to the IMU, during 2011 the Tajik government arrested 86 IMU suspects, and sentenced 53 to jail terms.⁴⁴ In December 2011 the Tajik courts were particularly busy, sentencing 43 accused IMU members to prison for a September 2010 suicide car-bombing in northern Tajikistan – claims of torture being used to extract confessions notwithstanding.⁴⁵ Indeed, the systematic practice of torture being used to

ensure confessions by police and security officers casts doubt on the actual affiliations – if any – of suspects in custody.⁴⁶ In regards to the suicide bombing – a September 2010 attack on a police station in Khujand that left two dead – a new group called Jamaat Ansarullah claimed responsibility.⁴⁷ However,

⁴¹ John Heathershaw and Sophie Roche, 'Islam and Political Violence in Tajikistan: An Ethnographic Perspective on the Causes and Consequences of the 2010 Armed Conflict in the Kamarob Gorge', *Ethnopolitics*, No. 8 (March 2011), p. 5. Heathershaw and Roche found that one incident used to support the argument for a significant presence of foreign fighters is quite problematic. When a former opposition commander's house was bombed, the victims, ethnic Kyrgyz workers from nearby Jirgatol, were identified as "international terrorists." *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁴² Farangis Najibullah, 'Four Suspected IMU Members Killed In Tajikistan', RFE/RL (19 October 2009), <http://goo.gl/ALT8n>; Mavlouda Rafiyeva, 'Alleged IMU activist detained in Isfara', ASIA-Plus (30 August 2011), <http://goo.gl/DVeLG>; Mavlouda Rafiyeva, 'Four IMU members from Isfara handed jail terms between 8 and 30 years', ASIA-Plus (16 February 2010), <http://goo.gl/n1zZp>; Mavlouda Rafiyeva, 'Three IMU Members get long jail terms', Asia-Plus (3 November 2011). In October 2009 the government stated that it killed several IMU members in operations in that same month. Additionally, several accused IMU members from Isfara have been arrested and sentenced to long sentences in the two years since then for their roles in attacks on police.

⁴³ Nargis Khamrabaeva, 'V 2011 godu v Tadzshikistane zaderzhano okolo 200 terroristov i ekstrimistov', Asia-Plus (10 January 2012).

⁴⁴ 'Tajikistan convicts 170 extremists, terror suspects in 2011 – prosecutor', RIA Novosti (10 January 2012), <http://goo.gl/z4TeG>

⁴⁵ Roman Kozhevnikov, 'Tajik court jails 53 for terrorism', Reuters (26 December 2011); 'Scores Convicted Over Deadly Tajik Car Bombing', RFE/RL (26 December 2011), <http://goo.gl/YyfKR>; Mika Akramova, 'Torture Claims Mar Trial in Tajik North', IWPR, RCA Issue 662, (16 November 2011), <http://goo.gl/guEVB>

⁴⁶ On the use of torture by Tajik law enforcement and security agents, see: Alexander Sodiqov and Payam Foroughi, 'Tajik Security Agencies Face Allegations of Detainee Abuse and Extrajudicial Killings', Eurasia Daily Monitor, Vol. 8, Issue 222 (7 December 2011), <http://goo.gl/bzvHa>; 'Tajikistan: A coalition of non-governmental organizations is calling on the government to end torture and fulfil its international obligations', FIDH (27 June 2011), <http://goo.gl/bPJZW>

⁴⁷ Pannier, 'The Growing Threat Of Militants In A Corner Of Central Asia.'

the government charged 53 accomplices to the bombing with being members of the IMU – all of whom confessed during the investigation amidst allegations of torture being used to secure confessions.⁴⁸

Conclusion

Commentators and analysts have consistently, since President Rahmon came to power in late 1992, portrayed Tajikistan's government as being at risk of imminent collapse in face of dire security threats. However, the government has proved remarkably resilient in the face of insurgent threats, even throughout the most recent round of violent conflict in the Rasht Valley. Government forces suffered significant losses, but the opposition forces involved were killed or neutralised. Security forces have consistently emerged victorious against all challengers, despite some temporary setbacks. Meanwhile, terrorist attacks, of which the suicide bombing in Khujand was the most severe, are rare events. Still, some analysts and government officials point to threats to security that emanate in Afghanistan. However, the above analysis made clear that there is no large reserve of Central Asian IMU fighters about to stream across the border into Tajikistan. And within Tajikistan the number of IMU sympathisers is hard to discern. Making a guess based on convictions of IMU suspects is especially difficult considering that confessions in Tajikistan are routinely secured through torture. Nevertheless, future instability that may occur as a result of elite-level political upheavals, external shocks or mass mobilization unconnected to Islamist militants could provide groups such as the IMU an opportunity to gain strength in Tajikistan. Furthermore, sympathetic forces across the border in Afghanistan could, in the future, possibly provide significant support and a safe-haven to insurgents and/or terrorists inside Tajikistan. Although there is no sign of this being a possibility at the moment, there is still a need to watch events in Tajikistan closely as the situation in Afghanistan gets consistently worse.

⁴⁸ 'Tajik Suicide Bomber's Alleged IMU Accomplices Go On Trial', RFE/RL (12 July 2011), <http://goo.gl/kI5iO>

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