

Tajikistan: An Evaluation of Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism Policies Since Independence

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Abstract: Tajikistan, a country overloaded with the horrific memory of bloody civil war, an increasingly devastated economy, and the ineradicable misfortune of having long borders with Afghanistan and Uzbekistan, has been reigning consistently by the Emomali Rahmon's regime for three decades with wide-scale surveillance and draconian acts. Taking advantage of the weak governance, poor military infrastructure and porous border, Islamic extremists and cross border terrorist groups have also been seen persistently deepening their influence in the region either by perpetrating a series of terrorist activities in the terrain or joining Tajik national into their organizations. This paper presents a detailed analysis of how and to what extent terrorism has posed security threats to Tajikistan through examining the Global Terrorism Database and RAND database that includes the numbers and intensity of the terrorist incidents in the territory since independence. It systematically analyses the prominent terrorist groups and, more particularly, the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL), which has widened its network in the region. The paper also makes a sincere effort to evaluate the counter-terrorism acts adopted and implemented by Tajikistan. Moreover, the article also examines how the Tajik's authority constructs state discourse on terrorism by delegitimising social acceptance of the terrorist on the one hand and projecting the state as the severe victim of terrorism on the other.

Keywords: Terrorism, Tajikistan, Terrorist Attacks, Counter-terrorism Act, Taliban.

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Introduction

Tajikistan is the smallest country in Central Asia, sketching an area of 143,100 square kilometers, of which 400 square kilometers is water. It was the southernmost republic of the former Soviet Union. Tajikistan shares

a rugged, mountainous 1,206 kilometers border with Afghanistan in the South and 1161 kilometers border with Uzbekistan in the West. In the East, it shares a border with China's Xinjiang province, which is 414 kilometers. The thin wedge of the Wakhan corridor is mapped in the eastern part of Tajikistan, which has separated Tajikistan from Pakistan. In the North, it shares 870 kilometers border with Kyrgyzstan. Significantly, it is the only country in Central Asia sharing the longest border with Afghanistan, known for its fragile political situations and Islamic insurgencies. This peculiar geographical location has brought constant fear of insecurity and political turmoil to the terrain. Tajik Foreign Minister Lakim Kaqumov admitted this as early as in December 1991- "Afghanistan is the most difficult and complex problem we face, that we have ever faced because we share a long border with it. The Mujahidin control most of the border region, and there have been incursions into Tajikistan. If Islamic fundamentalism is very high in Afghanistan, it is natural and will influence Tajikistan" (Ahmed, 1994, p. 172). Tajikistan's location makes it a gateway to Central Asia from Afghanistan to drugs, weapons, people and radical ideas. It is also crucial for transit in the opposite direction (Jonson, 2006). The Tajik government has persistently addressed the rise of Islamic extremism and the cross-border terrorism coming from Afghanistan as severe security concerns in preserving the *raison d'état* of the state. The recent recapturing of power in Afghanistan by the Taliban has heightened the risk of terrorism in the region. However, Afghanistan's new political developments have opened the way for the Rahmon regime to garner attention from the western block by reaffirming its hardline against the influx of terrorism in general and the resurgence of the Taliban in particular.

Tajikistan is also seen continuously projecting Uzbekistan as the direct threat to the region's national security. Being an influential power within Central Asia, having enormous natural resources, a large population and the largest Central Asia's Army, Uzbekistan, on many occasions, constitutes a threat by taking unilateral decisions against Tajikistan and by using Tajikistan's energy dependence for political pressure, closing the Uzbek-Tajik border, and restricting Tajikistan's contacts with the outside world. The resentment between the two CA states is also evident on the issue of large-scale refugees entering Uzbekistan during the Tajik Civil War and the proposed construction of Rogun Dam by Tajikistan on the Vakhsh River as well as the project of the building of Kamchik Railway pass by Uzbekistan that would shorten the distance between Tashkent and Ferghana valley but cut the link of Tajikistan's northern Sughd Province from the outer world (Sadykov, 2013).

However, the Tajikistan leaders have always been bearing terrorism and radical Islam in mind as the grave security threat to the region. The establishment and official registration of the first Islamic political party, namely the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) in Tajikistan and the due course of the eruption and infliction of civil war have made the Tajik authorities desperately suspicious about the activities of the radical Islamic

and militant groups. They advocate harsh prosecution for Islamic militants to eradicate such real or perceived security threats (Naumkin, 2005). This paper has been divided into three parts. The first part makes a systematic effort to present a brief historical overview of Tajikistan to understand how several powerful empires in different historical epochs continuously fought amongst themselves to establish political control and linguistic and cultural hegemony over the region. It is also essential to understand when Islam was brought into the area and with the changing time how it has been a dominant religion in the region. The second part deals with the detailed accounts of the terrorist incidents in the region from 1992 to 2018. For this purpose, this paper has collected data from the Global Terrorism Database and RAND database. The third part of this paper explores the state's response to Terrorism in Tajikistan. This part presents an analysis of the region's counter-terrorism policies. It investigates how the Tajik's authority constructs state discourse on terrorism by delegitimising social acceptance of the terrorist on the one hand and projecting the state as the severe victim of terrorism.

A Brief Historical Overview

Tajikistan is the only Persian-speaking country of the former Soviet Union with a long history of ups and downs of the various empires, dating back to the first or second millennium BC. In the first volume of the official account of Tajiks Nation, namely, *The Tajiks in the Mirror of History* (1997), written by a collective of scholars but published under Tajik President Emomali Rahmon, has provided a chain of such empires and dynasties. This chain included the ancient Bactria and Sogdiana (6th and 7th centuries BC), the Achaemenid Empire (from mid-6th centuries to 321 BC), the Graeco-Bactrian state (300 to 140 BC), the Kushan (from the 1st to 4th Centuries AD) and Ashkonid dynasties and the Khuttal Kingdom respectively. In the 8th century, the Arabs conquered modern-day Tajikistan and brought Islam, which turned to be the predominant religion within one century. They ruled Central Asia for almost 150 years, which was full of war and revolts. The Arabs destroyed most of the pre-Islamic culture. Their clergy burned pre-Islamic literature and destroyed objects of culture and religion (sculptures and paintings) from previous periods. Pre-Islamic religious halls were demolished and rebuilt as mosques (Jonson, 2006). The contemporary Tajik official historiographers have termed the Arab invasion "The most disastrous setback of all [invasions] caused by the Arab conquest" (Rahmon 1997). On the other hand, the Soviet Tajik scholar Gafurov argues that Arab rule and the introduction of Islam contributed to the socio-economic and cultural development of Mawarannahr (Nourzhanov & Bleuer, 2003).

However, the Samanids Empire was established in mid of the 9th centuries AD and continued until the end of the 10th centuries AD is regarded as the first stage of Tajik Statehood. This period was considered the Golden Age of Iranian culture in Central Asia. During that time, the whole country became a unified national state and remained united during the entire century (Rahmon, 1997). The end of the Samanid dynasty

was caused by another spate of Turkic invasions: The Karahanid Turks, the Kara-Kitai nomads from Mongolia. The conquest of that dynasty by the Qarakhanid Turks intensified Turkic peoples and culture's introduction into the region. "Between the eleventh and the sixteenth centuries, modern-day Tajikistan was ruled successively by Turks, Mongols, and Uzbeks" (Ahmed 1994). The defeat of Tajikistan in Uzbeks' hands paved the way for Persian and Tajik's influence in Central Asia.

In the first part of the nineteenth century, as the Tsar expanded the Russian Empire into Central Asia, Moscow annexed Tajikistan in 1868. During that period, Russia was afraid of possible British incursion from India that caused mutual distrust and rivalry. To settle this boundary dispute, both the authorities agreed to set up an Anglo-Russian Boundary Commission in March 1884, which "eventually demarcated Afghanistan's highly porous northern border with present-day Tajikistan". To prevent "the new Russian frontier from being contiguous with India", the Wakhan corridor, which divides Tajikistan from present-day Pakistan, was created in the Pamirs (Ahmed 1994).

When the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 overthrew the Tsarist regime, the Tajik's clan leaders also initiated a movement (later known as Basmachi Movement) in the Ferghana Valley. It set up Provisional Kokand Autonomous Republic and demanded the promulgation of Islamic sharia law and the private ownership of land. However, the Bolsheviks refused to accept their demands and cracked down their movement by the Red Army's massive attacks. After that, the Tajik Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was created as part of the Uzbek SSR in October 1924. Finally, the Soviet leaders established Tajikistan as a full-fledged union republic on October 15, 1929.

In the late 1980s, Mikhail S. Gorbachev's *perestroika* stimulated a nationalist movement in Tajikistan again. In 1990, the state emergency was declared in Dushanbe after riots stormed the city, costing dozens of lives and countless injuries. Finally, when the dissolution of the Soviet Union became inevitable, Tajikistan had to declare its independence along with its long history of Islamic revolts and the fresh political turmoil that soon drifted Tajikistan towards partisan and bloody civil war.

In its first year of independence, Tajikistan witnessed an unbridled storm of political unrest between the pro-communist Rakhmon Nabiev's government and the political opposition, including anti-government forces led by the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP). The longstanding clan rivalries between the pro-communist Kuliab district in the South-East and the Kurgan Tube in the South-West further intensified the region's instability. In September 1992, as soon as the Nabiev government was forced to resign by massive violent demonstrations of the IRP militants, the civil war got new momentum in Tajikistan. It was against this background of chaos that a special session of the parliament was held in Khujand in November 1992. In this session, the pro-nomenklatura groups (later known as People's Front) elected Emomali Rakhmonov as the state's acting head, who consolidated his position after that. In spring 1993, different

opposition groups came under the same roof and created the United Tajiks Opposition (UTO). In short, the civil war in Tajikistan was nothing but a lengthy violent struggle to acquire political power between the People's Front and the Tajik's Opposition Party that lasted for five years. The casualties of this war have been estimated between 40,000 to 80,000. Besides, this long-lasting political strife forced more than 800,000 people to seek refuge abroad, mainly in Afghanistan and Iran and Russia (Jonson 2006). Aside from the casualties, the bloody war generated a massive number of refugees and internally displaced persons, led to large-scale destruction and looting of property, resulted in the rape and torture of many, and further destroyed the already fragile economy of Tajikistan (Nourzhanov & Bleuer, 2003).

Finally, in 1997, the General Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and National Accord in Tajikistan" and the "Moscow Protocol" were signed between the Rahmon's government and the UTO on June 27, 1997, in Moscow that formally ended civil war. However, the situation of Tajikistan remains fragile in the post-civil war period. Omelicheva (2010) writes that examining the post-civil war scenario, "intermittent skirmishes with remnants of fighters from the civil war era have been a destabilising factor in the republic". The consequence of the Tajik Civil war paved the way for the authoritarian regime of Emomali Rahmon, who became the President of Tajikistan by winning the 1994 election for the first time and has never been confronted with defeat in four consecutive presidential polls held in 1999, 2006, 2013 and 2020, respectively. However, the Election Observation Mission (EOM) of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR), while submitting the final report on the 2013 Presidential election of Tajikistan, categorically pointed out the "restrictive candidate registration requirements" that resulted in a "lack of genuine choice and meaningful pluralism" (OSCE, 2013). The report also mentioned the formalistic nature of the election campaign that limited the voter's opportunity for taking an informed decision. Nonetheless, despite the constant criticisms against Rahmon about his alleged undemocratic occupancy of the presidential post, a law in December 2015 was passed by the Parliament of Tajikistan that honoured him the title-"the founder of peace and national unity of Tajikistan". The law further granted lifelong immunity from prosecution, stating that he cannot be prosecuted for anything he has done while in office (RFE/RL, 2015).

A Brief Account of Terrorist Attacks

Being the only country in Central Asia devastated by political strife, ethnic-regional clashes, and Islamic militancy, Tajikistan witnessed the highest number of terror attacks than any other Central Asian state during the first decade of independence. The global terrorism database, a popular open-source database containing details about the domestic and international terror attacks globally and which began in 2001 and has been managed by The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to

Terrorism (START) since 2006, has identified a long list of incidents within the purview of terror attacks based on certain norms. All these incidents, which are included in the list, are somehow related to various types of terrorist attacks such as “assassination, armed assault, bombing/explosion, hijacking, hostage-taking (Barricade Incident); hostage-taking (Kidnapping), facility/infrastructure attack an unarmed assault” (START, 2006). In a period, from 1991 to 1997 when Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan witnessed only a total of 16 terrorist incidents with the least intensity that cost only 11 fatalities and two injuries, and the Turkmenistan which did not have even experience any single terror attacks, Tajikistan turned to be the worst terrorist affected countries in Central Asia that confronted with 144 terrorist incidents during that period (START, 2006). The dream of creating an independent, united Tajik nation got stuck at the very early transition steps due to clan rivalry, violent political enmity amongst the political groups and the increasing terrorist activities were evident in the region that claimed 241 human lives; most were civilians and injured hundreds.

However, the Global Terrorism Database was quite skeptical about the perpetrators of the terror attacks that occurred in the region. It categorically mentioned the perpetrators of most of the terror attacks as ‘unidentified’. After the end of the ghastly civil war, the number of terror attacks and their frequency fell rapidly and significantly. The database has included 49 terrorist attacks from 1998–2019; most of them can be considered minor in terms of their intensity and effects.

Another open-source database on global terrorism, namely the RAND Database of World Wide Terrorism Incidents, has maintained that Tajikistan has faced 44 incidents of terrorist nature from 1998 to 2010. However, this database includes ambiguous incidents within the sphere of the terrorist attack. The RAND database has also clarified that most of the terror attacks in Tajikistan from 1998 to 2010 are minor regarding causality as in 38 incidents, numbers of casualties and injuries are less than five (RAND, 1994).

Terror groups that destabilise the region

The supreme court of Tajikistan has branded many organisations as terrorist organisations in different courses of time. Tajik Prosecutor-General Bobojon Bobokhonov, on behalf of the Tajik Supreme Court, included ten organisations and political groups to the country’s official terror list on January 15, 2006. The list included organisations such as the Islamic Party of Turkestan and Tochikistoni Ozod (Free Tajikistan), an Uzbekistan-based political party that authorities described as a threat to Tajikistan’s national security (RFE/RL, 2007). The list also included the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan(IMU), which was suspected to be responsible for the Dushanbe blast in January and June 2005 (RFE/RL, 2006). The IMU is identified as a foreign terrorist organisation by the US Department of States, which maintained strong ties with the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, later seen publicly declaring its allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq and

Levant (ISIL) in 2015 (Lemon, 2015). However, the IMU has posed considerable security threats to Uzbekistan rather than Tajikistan.

Another significant terror group that is increasingly widening its terror network in the Tajik region is the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL), an Islamic terrorist organisation infamous as the third deadliest terrorist organisation in the world that committed 943 deaths in 2019 (IEP, 2021). The Tajik Supreme court has recognised ISIL as a terrorist organisation and banned its activities in the region in May 2015 (Tajikistan Times, 2015). Taking advantage of rampant poverty, widescale unemployment, draconian censorship on religious activities and porous and unforced borders, the ISIL successfully joins many Tajiks into the organisation (Counter Extremism Project, 2019). Tajikistan is now the leading exporter of suicide bombers to ISIL, as more than 1300 Tajik nationals are currently fighting in Iraq and Syria (Global Risk Insights, 2017). Using the Tajik fighters to perpetrate small scale bombing and shooting in other countries or sometimes within the terrain of Tajikistan, the ISIL has constantly posed fear and insecurity to the region. The hit-and-run attack of seven cyclists in July 2018 in Danghara was the first ISIS-sponsored attack in Tajikistan. In this attack, two Americans, one Dutch and one Swiss cyclist lost their lives, two cyclists of Swiss and Dutch nationality succumbed to injury, and one Frenchman managed to escape without injury. This unfortunate terror attack shocked the international community and validated the severity of terror threats into Tajikistan.

The ISIL has also claimed responsibility for a deadly terror attack on May 19, 2019, in Vakhsh, Tajikistan, which erupted in the form of a prison riot that killed 29 inmates and three prison guards. Among the deceased, Sattor Karimov, Saeed Qiyomiddin Ghazi, and Jomahmad Boev were the prominent members of the opposition party of Tajikistan, namely the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) (Aljazeera, 2019 May 29). In this context, it is noteworthy to mention that the High court of Tajikistan, at the request of the Tajik Prosecutor-General, by making democracy mockery, also has branded the IRPT as a terrorist organisation on September 29, 2015. The IRPT, known as the lone mainstream Muslim party in Central Asia, also has been playing the only opposition party in Tajikistan since 1990 was permanently dissolved by the Tajik Justice ministry due to 'failing to meet membership quotas' as it failed to retain its two seats in the parliament in 2015 election (Columbia Global Freedom of Expression, 2022). Moreover, the Supreme court of Tajikistan has also designated "Al-Qaeda, East Turkestan Islamic Movement, Turkestan Islamic Movement (TIM), Taliban, Muslim Brotherhood, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Dzhamoati Tablig, Sozmoni Tabligot, Tochikistoni Ozod, Islamic society of Pakistan, Hizb ut-Tahrir" as terrorist organisations and banned their activities in the region (Abdukhamitov & Abdullayeva, 2018).

Counter-Terrorism Laws and the Official Definition of Terrorism

The ghost of terror threat has always been haunting Emomali Rahmon and his regime. Undoubtedly, the potential terrorist threats arising from Afghanistan and Uzbekistan's porous and fragile borders exert insecurity and instability in the region. However, the Rahmon government often uses cross-border terror threats to garner attention from the international community and has left no stone unturned to project itself as the severe victim of terrorism. Like Uzbekistan, known for the extensive and harsh counter-terrorism laws, the parliament of Tajikistan is also not an exception in enacting anti-terror laws "riddled with unclear terminology" and "ambiguous enforcement procedures" (Counter Extremism Project, 2022). After experiencing the deadly civil war, Tajikistan passed a state counter-terrorism program from 1998 to 2000. This program was elaborated and approved by Decree No. 707 of the President of the Republic on April 21 1997. It directed the law enforcement agencies to ensure actions in identifying and suppressing the channels of international communication of terrorist groups operating in the Republic of Tajikistan from abroad (United Nations, 2005). The Majlisi Oli of the Republic of Tajikistan (Parliament) adopted a law on "Combating Terrorism" on November 16, 1999 and further enacted another act on "Combating Extremism" on December 8, 2003. However, the parliament has passed a new law called "Countering extremism" on December 25, 2019, and declared the Combating Extremism Act 2003 invalid. Besides, on November 12, 2016, Tajikistan has approved the National Strategy of the Republic of Tajikistan on counter-extremism and counter-terrorism for 2016–2020, specifying the main priority guidelines on counter-extremism and counter-terrorism. Moreover, the Criminal Code of Tajikistan has also provided a broad outline of terrorism and terrorist acts. These counter-terrorism laws and programs have represented Tajikistan's official stand on terrorism.

The Law on Combating Terrorism 1999

It is a fundamental law in the field of countering Terrorism in Tajikistan. Since its adaptation, it has been amended five times precisely in 2005, 2007, 2008, 2012 and 2015 to deal with the region's changing security complexity. The primary objectives of this law, as mentioned in Article 1, are the implementation of the state policy and showing international commitment towards combating terrorism. Besides, it seeks to "uncover, prevent and stop terrorist activity", to "eliminate causes and conditions", which give rise to Terrorism (Majlisi Oli of the Republic of Tajikistan, 1999). Significantly, creating a strong negative attitude towards terrorism in the minds of Tajikistan people is also included as an objective of this law.

Article 3 of this law has incorporated a definition of terrorism which is as follows-

"Terrorism — is violence or the threat of violence against individuals, compulsion or threat of compulsion against legal entities, and also the destruction

(damaging) of or threat to destroy (damage) property and other material objects of individuals and legal entities, which threaten to cause loss of life, significant damage to property, or other socially dangerous consequences and are implemented with a view to violating public security, intimidating the population, or influencing the adoption by state organs of decisions advantageous to terrorists, or satisfying their unlawful material and (or) other interests; attempts on the lives of statesmen or public figures perpetrated with a view to weakening the foundation of the constitutional order and security of the state or with a view to ending their state or other political activity or out of revenge for such activity; attempts on the life or infliction of a bodily harm to statesmen, public figures or representatives of authorities perpetrated because of their political or public activity, with a view to destabilising the public order or influencing the adoption of decisions by organs of power or obstructing the political or public activity; attacks on representatives of foreign states or staffers of international organisations enjoying international protection, or members of family living together, and also on the offices, dwelling places or vehicles of persons enjoying international protection if these actions are committed with a view to provoking war or complicating international relations” (Majlisi Oli of the Republic of Tajikistan, 1999, p. 1).

In Article 4, this law has identified a long list of activities of terrorist nature and has listed them under the category of the terrorist act. This list comprises actions like “the explosion, arson, or the use of or threat to use nuclear explosive devices or radioactive, chemical, biological, explosive, toxic, noxious, aggressive or poisonous substances; the destruction, damaging, or seizure of vehicles or facilities” (Majlisi Oli of the Republic of Tajikistan, 1999).

This list further includes activities such as “an attempt on the life of a statesman or public figure or representative of national, ethnic, religious, or other population groups” as the terrorist act subject to legal action.

Similarly, the act of “taking hostages, kidnapping”; “carrying danger to life, health, or property of a nonspecific range of people by creating the conditions for accidents and man-made disasters or the real threat of the creation of such a danger” are also identified as the terrorist crime. Lastly, “the dissemination of threats in any form and by any means” and other actions that pose a danger of loss of life; “significant property damage”, or “other socially dangerous consequences “have been listed as a terrorist act by this law.

This law has assigned authority and responsibility to certain competent entities for directly implementing the fight against terrorism. The Ministry of Security of the Republic of Tajikistan is the central body. The other agencies now engaged in combating terrorism are — Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan, the Ministry of Defense

of the Republic of Tajikistan and the Ministry for Emergency Situations of the Republic of Tajikistan. Similarly, the Committee for the Protection of the State Borders under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan and the Presidential Guard of the Republic of Tajikistan also have the legal authority to counteract terrorism in the state. (Majlisi Oli of the Republic of Tajikistan,1999).

Criminal Code of Tajikistan 1998

The official stand of Tajikistan on Terrorism is also reflected in the criminal code that provides a definition of terrorism and determines legal action against such acts. Being the defender of rights and freedom of the persons and citizens and as a principal crime prevention mechanism, the code has first defined terrorism and later categorically determined different punishments for different terror-centric offences. The code has incorporated the phenomenon of terrorism in section VIII, chapter 21 of the code, placing it under crime against public security.

Article 179 (Chapter 21) of the Code has defined terrorism in the following words:

“Terrorism, that is committing an explosion, arson, firing with firearms or other actions, which create the danger of destroying people, causing a substantial financial damage or coming other socially dangerous consequences if these actions committed with the goal of violating public security, frightening the population or influencing the decision making of the power organs, as well as the threat of having committed the mentioned actions with the same goals” (Majlisi Oli of the Republic of Tajikistan, 1998, p. 46).

After defining terrorism, the criminal code has granted different penalties for the actions specified in the definition. Firstly, the code has determined punishment with imprisonment for 5 to 10 years who commits such crime. Secondly, the law has maintained that if a group of people in a conspiracy commits the same actions in a repeated manner, then the tenure of the imprisonment will be extended from 8 to 15 years with an additional punishment of confiscation of property. Thirdly, the code has granted long-term confinement from 10 to 18 years regarding acts such as an attempt to murder, significant bodily injury caused to a politician, public man, or representative of the power committed to their state public activity. However, the goal of such intentional acts must be destabilising the situation, influencing the decision-making of the state bodies, or hindering political or public movement. In addition to imprisonment, the law has also established punishment with confiscation of property.

Finally, the law has declared the longest possible tenure in prison, a period starting from 15 to 20 years with the confiscation of property or the highest award, i.e. the death penalty for committing terrorist acts. Such harsh punishment may be awarded for having committed the offences as specified in those mentioned above first, second and third of the paragraphs with certain conditions which are as follows: (a) if such

actions are committed by an organised group; (b) if such acts are committed along with the threat of using a weapon of mass destruction, radioactive materials and committing other actions which can lead to mass loss of people; (c) if an especially dangerous recidivist perpetrates such actions; (d) if such actions cause the death of a person or other serious consequences carelessly (Majlisi Oli of the Republic of Tajikistan, 1998).

Law on Countering Extremism 2019

The parliament of Tajikistan adopted a new law in December 2019 to deal with the potential threats coming from the religious extremist groups in the region by declaring the previous law on Combating Extremism, 2003, as null and void. This act has extensively elaborated terminologies such as extremism, extremist activity, extremist organisations, extremist financing, extremist materials and provided directions on countering extremism from the region. The act defines extremism as “an expression of ideology and extremist activity to resolve political, public, social, national, racial, regional and religious issues by force and other illegal actions” (Majlisi Oli of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2019). The act further defines extremist activity as the activity of various entities aimed at “committing extremist activity, instability of national security and defence capability of the state, as well as public calls for a violent seizure of state power or a violent change in the constitutional order and actions aimed at inciting national, racial, regional or religious enmity or hatred” (Majlisi Oli of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2019, page 2). Although the Tajik Government has justified the indispensability of this act for ensuring sovereignty, integrity and safety of the Republic of Tajikistan, the law has been facing severe criticism across the world due to its rampant misuse of the acts for suppressing the voices of dissent. This act has authorised wide-ranging powers to restrict freedom of expression and has directed thirteen government agencies to request the communication service to block any website without judicial review (Amnesty International, 2020).

Criminalisation and Social Construction of Terrorism

With the experience of six years of political turmoil and consistent violence, Tajikistan’s authority is seen envisaging terrorism as one of the most dangerous threats to the state’s sovereignty and stability. Their concern about terrorism is evident in the legal statutes of the republic. For example, the Criminal Code of the Republic of Tajikistan 1998 has identified terrorism as a ‘criminal act’ by incorporating terrorism under the heading of “crime against public security and health of the population”. The official documents of Tajikistan also construct terrorism as one of the gravest crimes against public security, rather than just stating it as a criminal act. The code has provided four folded divisions of the offence by the nature and degree of the crime and has constructed terrorism as the gravest crime by categorizing it as “especially grievous crime” (Majlisi Oli of the Republic of Tajikistan, 1998).

Further, the social construction of terrorism is reflected in the language of Article 17 of the same code, which constructs terrorism as a socially dangerous act by defining crime as a “socially dangerous act”. Another statute of the republic, namely the Republic of Tajikistan Law on Combating Terrorism 1999, has further strengthened this social construction. This law has defined terrorism as “violence or the threat of violence against individuals, compulsion or threat of compulsion against legal entities... that threaten to cause loss of life, significant damage to property, or ‘other socially dangerous consequences’...” (Majlisi Oli of the Republic of Tajikistan, 1999).

The Tajikistan government is also seen as proactive to dehumanize terror outfits for nullifying their social acceptance systematically. The Tajik authority in various national and international platforms often take the opportunity to delegitimize the demands of the extremist groups by using emotive words. For example, in the Report of the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1373 of September 28, 2001, concerning counter-terrorism (2002), Tajikistan uses derogative words by stating terrorist act as “being in blatant defiance of progressive humanity”, “scourge”, “barbaric”. Moreover, this document also condemned the September 11 terrorist attack with the following words- “unprecedented, cruel and inhumane”. Similarly, addressing the United Nations General Assembly Debate, the President of Tajikistan Emomali Rakhmonov dismissed the ideological base of terrorism by noting “international terrorism has no ideology, nation or homeland”. In the same speech, he also described terrorism as “crimes”, committed by “cruel”, “merciless people” “who are driven by the lust for power and personal gain, people who have nothing to do with the holy religion of the world’s Muslims” (United Nations General Assembly fifty-eight sessions, 2003).

Conclusion

Tajikistan, the only country in Central Asia that experienced five long years of horrific civil war due to intense political conflict and ethnic-religious clashes, has been seen struggling for peace, political stability, and the Tajik nation’s integrity since the day of getting independence from the former Soviet Union. Terrorism has undoubtedly posed a significant security threat to Tajikistan for bearing the misfortune of sharing the longest border with Afghanistan, a haven and the safest shelter for terrorist groups across the globe. The recent retaining of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan has heightened the terror threats to the national security and stability of the region. However, the government’s failure to deal with the issue of rampant poverty and wide-scale unemployment also have made Tajikistan a fertile ground for recruiting Tajiks into ISIL and other terror groups. Similarly, the Rahmon regime’s draconian policies to suppress the political opponents, freedom of expression, and religion have further deepened the resentment among the masses. Tajikistan has to adopt two-way approaches to countering terrorism

at this critical juncture. On the one hand, sufficient attention must be given to strengthening the law enforcement agencies to deal with terrorism, and on the other, a holistic approach should be initiated to resolve the people's resentment against the regime.

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