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      II. THE TAJIK PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS
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I. The UN-Sponsored Inter-Tajik Dialogue

By Shahrbanou Tadibakhsh

Abstract: The United Nations has sponsored three rounds of inter-Tajik negotiations on the political resolution of the conflict, and is currently planning a fourth round to be held on May 22, 1995 in Almaty. Although leaders of the Opposition and the Government use the forum to conduct a direct dialogue, no fundamental issues have reached the negotiating table yet, and the cease-fire, one of the few concrete agreements signed, has been violated repeatedly by both sides. The negotiations have not been successful because of the hardening of the positions of not only the Government and the Opposition, and lack of incentives for agreement. But the UN-sponsored dialogue is the only way that peace might be achieved in the region and should be encouraged by the international community.

Three Rounds and a Half

The first round of talks between Dushanbe and the Opposition was held in April 1994 in Moscow, without any results due to the uncompromising position of the opposition, which demanded the creation of a temporary "Council of National Reconciliation" and the rigid position of the representatives of the government of Rahmonov. The talks in Moscow were supposed to put an end to the provocations on the Tajik-Afghan border. The second round took place in June 1994 in Tehran, the third round in October in Islamabad, and the preparation for the fourth round took place in an extraordinary meeting in Moscow in April 1995. A cease-fire was signed first in Tehran, then prolonged in Pakistan and Moscow although it has been violated ever since by the Opposition which has launched attacks on the border and by the Government which has deployed new troops in the province of Badakhshan.

During the second round in Tehran, general discussions outlined the conditions for cease-fire and the mechanism for its monitoring that the Government side desired.¹ The Opposition provided a list of 29 prisoners they wished to see free and asked for the dismissal of criminal cases and the lifting of the ban on political parties and their newspapers. But because the Government had not sent a high level delegation to the talks, its leader, the Minister of Labor, was not able to make any major decisions and the round ended without any victories. In September, Vice Speaker of the Supreme Soviet Abdumajid Dustiev met with Hoji Akbar Turajonzoda in an impromptu extension of the Tehran meeting which led to the signing of the cease-fire. The conditions agreed to included the cessation of hostilities, violations of the border, offensive operations within the country, shelling of territories, terrorism, arrest and
detention, blockades, use of communications and mass media to undermine the process of national reconciliation, as well as the use of "religion and the religious feelings of believers, as well as any ideology, for hostile purposes". The cease-fire was set for three months initially, until the referendum and elections.

In Islamabad, the third round agreed to the prolongation of the cease-fire for another three months until February 6, and the exchange of 27 prisoners of war of the Armed forces of the Government and 27 political detainee of the Opposition side by November 6th.² Even though the goal of the UN was to discuss initially "fundamental institutional issues and consolidation of the statehood of Tajikistan", the only agreements reached and even discussed were the cease-fire and the creation of a Joint Commission to monitor its implementation.³ For a fourth round, the UN hoped, issues on the table would include the arrangements for free and democratic elections to the Tajik parliament and to provincial and district legislative bodies, confidence building measures (lifting the ban on political parties), and a constructive engagement of the mass media to facilitate peace. But the fourth round of negotiations did not take place in Moscow as scheduled at the end of December. A preparation meeting was held in Moscow in mid-April in which the parties agreed to 1) hold the fourth round on May 22 in Almaty, Kazakhstan, 2) prolong the cease-fire until the end of May and 3) that President Emomali Rahmonov would meet with Seyed Abdullo Nuri, leader of the National Islamic Movement of Tajikistan, before the fourth round.

The Impasse

The Opposition saw obstacles in holding the fourth round initially because it accused the Tajik leadership of sending new troops from Kulob to Badakhshan after a truce agreement was signed in Tehran. Hoji Akbar Turajonzoda, in his trip to the United States in late January 1995, also protested that the Russian border guards had not accepted as valid the document of the cease-fire agreement and were bombarding the headquarters of the Opposition located within the territory of Afghanistan. More likely, however, the beginning of the Chechen War gave the Opposition an excuse to keep postponing the negotiations: it did not want to negotiate with Russia at a time when the latter was engaged in a bloody war with other Muslims of the former Soviet Union. The Government, on the other hand, was able to gain its desired legitimacy through the presidential and parliamentary elections in which the Opposition did not participate. It no longer sought actively to share power.
Representation at the Negotiations and the Issues

One of the reasons why the UN-sponsored negotiations might not lead to any long term important breakthroughs remains the problem of representation in both camps. As long as the Minister of Labor Zuhurov was heading the official delegation of the Government side, no important decisions could be taken on the spot. Even when Abdumajid Dustiev, First Deputy chairman of the Supreme Soviet joined the ranks of the delegation, the Kulobi faction of the Government was seen as wishing to negotiate apart from the Leninobodi one before the presidential elections. The negotiations were in fact a publicity point for Rahmonov who could prove that his government took concrete steps towards reconciliation. However, given that a number of key delegates on the Opposition side were native of the Leninobod province, an eventual alliance between the Kulobis and the Opposition versus the Khujandis was not welcome. The delegation of the opposition represented a group of six politicians: two Gharmis, two Zarafshonis from the province of Leninobod, one Badakhshani, and the Qazi, who is considered by many to be both a northerner and a southerner. The Opposition sought to represent the different regions and political parties of Tajikistan, but in vain: Two were members of the Democratic Party of Tajikistan, but the official Head of the Democrats had not accepted that they speak on the Party’s behalf. The native of Badakhshan neither coordinated with Davlat Khodanazarov who was the link between Pamir and the Agha Khan, nor with the "Mujaheddin", Pamiri fighters who in February sent a delegate to Moscow to investigate the doings of the Moscow opposition.

Meanwhile, the peace talks were supposed to bring about measures for confidence building within the country, yet the ultimate goals were never addressed. Disarmament, amnesty, a new state structure and national reconciliation which would bring the Opposition into the political process never made it to the agenda. The lifting of the ban on political parties and freedom of the press were only vaguely discussed. In the end, the Opposition agreed to a cease-fire, knowing full well that snowy conditions in the winter make fighting next to impossible in the mountains.

The Future of the Talks

Although Ramiro Piriz-Ballon, the UN Secretary General’s Special Envoy for Tajikistan, has been able to set a date for the fourth round, the talks are nevertheless faltering. There is not much left to gain from negotiations for both sides. The different parties have taken their positions, where there is incentive in disunity, and the consensus for peace does not really exist among the principles in the Tajik conflict. For the Government, the status quo is the best alternative. If before the November Presidential elections the Government was willing to be
seen in reconciliatory positions, once it did receive its required legitimacy, it could abandon all pretenses. The responsibility for safeguarding the borders falls on the Russians in any case, and the Government can concentrate on the process of self-legitimization. So far, it has imposed a forced internal peace, fragile that it may be, has rewritten the constitution, and taken complete control of the power ministries. The Opposition, on the other hand, given the lack of mechanisms for incorporating dissenting views, prefers to operate outside of the political system, as a strong force. Yet, knowing that a military victory over the regime is not possible given the Russian presence on the border, the Opposition is also lobbying the international community for support.

ENDNOTES


2. The exchange took place on November 12, 1994 in Khorog, Badakhshan, using the good offices of the ICRC and the Ambassador of Iran to Tajikistan, Aliakbar Shabestari.


4. The Qazi was born and raised in Kofernihon (formerly Orzhonikidzeobod) in south/central Tajikistan, but he has some parental linkage to Mountainous Matcho in northern Zarafshon. His regional loyalty, however, does not seem to play an important role, perhaps because of its ambiguity.

5. Shodmon Yusuf, Head of the Democratic Party, refuses to recognize Abdunabi Sattorzoda who represents the Party at the negotiations.
II. The Presidential Elections

By Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh

Abstract: Although the presidential elections were carried out with the slogan of the unity of the nation, they created an internal opposition within Tajikistan, in addition to the alienation of Tajiks living outside the country. Yet, even though the results might very possibly have been falsified, this "unfair" election prevented the outbreak of another bloody war, but proved again that democracy can hardly be achieved in a milieu overflowing with guns and ruled by censorship, fear and deference to authority.

The presidential elections in Tajikistan were first supposed to be held on the 25th of September, 1994, on the same day as a referendum on the adoption of the Constitution. Only the popular referendum on the Constitution could determine whether or not the office of the presidency, originally abolished at the 16th Session of the Supreme Soviet in December 1992, would be reestablished, and yet, the public would be voting at the same time for a new president. The Opposition boycotted the race, stating that with tens of thousands of Tajiks exiled, displaced, or traumatized by the war, the electoral process would not be free and fair. International organizations such as Human Rights Watch/Helsinki, OSCE (then called CSCE) and the UN encouraged the postponement of the elections until the political settlement of the conflict and the return of the refugees. When Russia and Uzbekistan also put pressure on the Government, it finally agreed to postpone the elections until the 6th of November.

Meanwhile, with the absence of the Opposition, the only two candidates who presented themselves in the contest shed light on the new axis of dispute between the south and the north of Tajikistan. Emomali Rahmonov, Speaker of the Supreme Soviet registered against Abdulmalik Abdullojonov, former Prime Minister and then Ambassador to Russia. The two candidates were nominated by the councils of their respective native provinces, Khatlon for Rahmonov, and the province of Leninobod for Abdullojonov. Rahmonov, in addition, gained the nomination of the Republican Union of Youth (formerly known as the Komsomol). Rahmonov campaigned as the candidate for peace while Abdullojonov, whose programs for economic reconstruction spoke of accelerated market reforms, the candidate for change. Russia, followed by Uzbekistan, cast its support for Rahmonov, a leader whom both countries had initially brought to power. Rahmonov's victory was unexpected for western Human Rights organizations, as well as for the majority of people in Dushanbe who had voted for the candidate of the north. Human Rights Watch/Helsinki reported that the elections "were marred..."
by a climate of fear and flagrant fraud". Although international organizations had refused to 
send official monitors, most western observers reported polling violations, including 
imimidation of Abdullojonov supporters and stuffing of ballot boxes.

The surprise of the elections, however, was to be expected: in the absence of a free 
press, of the fair participation of opposing political groups, and with a decree in effect banning 
all non-governmental political parties, the elections would not have been democratic to begin 
with. And yet, immediately following the elections, an atmosphere of peace, albeit forced and 
perhaps temporary, ruled in the capital. Local mafia gangs no longer brandished their 
Kalashnikovs in full view of civilians, the government adopted massive changes in the cabinet 
and intensified the disarmament campaign. In Khujand, a defeated Abdullojonov registered his 
own political party (the Party of Popular Unity) which was later banned from the parliamentary 
elections as well. He also explored possibilities to either align himself with the Opposition 
against Rahmonov, or, more likely, to act independently of the Dushanbe regime and for the 
advancement of Leninobod.

The Coverage: The coverage of the presidential campaign in the press proved once again a 
strong deference towards authority among the Tajiks. A survey of most of the dailies and 
weeklies beginning with August and leading up to the elections in November revealed heavy 
bias towards the candidacy of Rahmonov compared to that of Abdullojonov. The press depicted 
Rahmonov campaigning intensely in various regions of Tajikistan, meeting with veterans of 
World War II in the Lenin and Varzob regions, in the Hissor Valley, and with the workers of 
the aluminum factory in Regar (Tursunzoda), in addition to his native Khatlon. On the other 
hand, the campaign of his rival was covered mainly in his native Khujand, and only once at a 
meeting with the Dushanbe cultural elite. Not that Abdullojonov had a less extensive 
campaign. The biased coverage not only proved the atmosphere of censorship under which the 
press operated but also that no newspapermen dared to initiate change, to demonstrate a critical 
mind that could distinguish grey from black and white. Abdullojonov was strongly criticized by 
the followers of Rahmonov for the alleged role he played as a Prime Minister in the cabinet of 
the Opposition during the Government of National Reconciliation between June and December 
1992; he was mercilessly grilled about his relations with the Opposition, whom he was even 
accused of financially and morally supporting. His critics also raised suspicions about his 
alleged corruption, his numerous homes abroad and his shady deals through his company Sano, 
registered in Khujand, where he had sold large quantities of cotton without returning the 
money to the republic. As for charges that a businessman could not be a good politician since 
he would compromise national benefits in the interest of his personal wealth, Abdullojonov 
claimed that only successful businessmen would bring Tajikistan into a market economy.
The Campaigns and the Candidates: Abdullojonov pivoted his priorities on two slogans: bread for the people, and reconciliation of all the regions and nationalities of Tajikistan. His first priority coincided almost conspiratorially with one of the worst bread shortages that Tajikistan had experienced since World War II. Economic growth and reform as a precondition for political stability became one of Abdullojonov's main slogan. His campaign also stressed the need for a dialogue with the Opposition, and the opportunity for all his opponents (meaning both the Opposition and Rahmonov if he lost) to work within government structures. According to Abdullojonov, a dialogue with the Opposition would bring peace which would in turn raise the economic levels and prosper the republic.

Emomali Rahmonov stressed unity and national reconciliation as the essential elements of his presidential campaign as well. But unlike his rival, whose past came back to haunt him, Rahmonov made a point of falling back on what he saw as his positive accomplishments. His official biography claimed that he was a self-made man, the son of farmers, who "was always close to the people and struggled in the path of truth and justice and the defence of the constitutional law." Rahmonov devoted a large part of his programme to his achievements as Speaker of the Supreme Soviet after the war, when he was able to 1) extinguish the fires of the war, 2) bring the government out of paralysis, 3) create a national army and border guards, 4) fight crime 5) rehabilitate refugees 6) work closely with Russia and Uzbekistan 7) begin a dialogue with the opposition for the political settlement of the conflict etc... Rahmonov's goal was, as he claimed, to create favorable conditions for "the unity of all the people of Tajikistan regardless of their nationality or religion." Most important of all, however, Rahmonov had the support of armed formations who would not have ceded power to the Khujandis in case of defeat without waging war.

The Aftermath: The results were reminiscent of elections during the Soviet days. 94.4% of the 2.64 million who were registered went to the polls in 64 polling stations. Abdullojonov received 40.36% of the votes, while Rahmonov managed to reach 58.32%. 0.7 percent of the votes were declared not valid. The official press and TV stressed the fact that the turnout was especially strong in Khorog and Khujand where it was least expected. The Head of the Central Commission for the Elections had to paint a democratic atmosphere for the elections by pointing to the presence of reporters from the Times, Reuters, Izvestia and Itar Tass. Yet, Human Rights Watch and other Western unofficial observers saw stuffing of ballot boxes, intimidation, the threatening of people who would vote against Rahmonov (especially in the villages of returnees in Khatlon), and rewards for those who would vote for him. A Russian group of liberal newspapermen called Panorama showed ballots where the name of only one candidate appeared.
The problem was not only that the elections were rigged, but that they were undemocratic to begin with, given the absence of large parts of the population, who, had they been able to vote, would not have supported the current regime. People were fearful of voting for the wrong candidate, the independent mass media remained censored, and in general, the Government monitored the entire planning of the elections closely. Even though the Government was able to impose a forced peace through its control of local mafias, the elections led to the creation of an internal opposition among northerners and their supporters, the Dushanbe cultural elite.

ENDNOTES

1. See the Human Rights Watch/Helsinki report Tajik Presidential Election Conducted in Climate of Fear and Fraud (9 November 1994).
4. Ibid.
6. For a complete transcript of the campaign programme of Abdullojonov, see Navruz, No.16 (October 1994): 1-3.