

“Tensions in Tajikistan Following the 1997 Peace Accord and September 11”
Kamoloudin Abdullaev (Sumitomo Bank Fellow, Yale University, Center for
International and Area Studies)

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Summary by Melissa Griggs, AM candidate in REECA

John Schoeberlein introduced Kamoloudin Abdullaev as “representing the voice of Tajikistan today.” The voice he represents is certainly an optimistic one. His presentation focused on Tajikistan’s place amidst its Central Asian neighbors, the peace process following the civil war, the role political Islam plays in the country, and the fundamental obstacles to political and economic growth in the country today. Abdullaev believes that although tensions exist in the country, Tajikistan is on the road to recovery.

Kamoloudin Abdullaev claimed that Tajikistan holds a very unique position among the Central Asian states. He characterized Tajikistan as the most easternized of the Central Asian states, partly due to the fact that Tajiks comprise the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan. Because of Tajikistan’s eastern orientation, it was the state least prepared to become independent and also was the “center of Islamic activities.” In comparison with the four other Central Asian states, Abdullaev characterized Tajikistan as “the poorest and least attractive.”

The civil war in Tajikistan lasted from 1992-1996 and ended with the “successful” UN-sponsored peace process. In which Tajikistan was “saved from collapse.” Although the international community saved Tajikistan from collapse, Abdullaev also credited the rise of nationalism as assisting in this process. Tajiks may be artificial byproducts of Soviet delineation, but this process raised the national awareness of these “Stalin makers.” One nationalist claim that unites all Central Asian states is Islam and Shariah beliefs. Abdullaev believes this is why there is little conflict between peoples of Central Asia, as opposed to the ruling elite. “People of Central Asia are much wiser and clever than their rulers, they don’t want to go to war.” It is their common religion which unites them and helps them survive.

Political Islam in Tajikistan today, represented by the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan, is centered in the southern and central part of the country and it is Sunni Militant Islamic in nature. The Party achieved legal status from 1991-1993 and regained it in 1999, following the objectives of the peace accord. However, many members of the IRP party do not believe they are a legal party and still hide their party agenda. Abdullaev believes this may be because the issue of legality was rushed in the peace process and it originated from the outside. Support of the IRP of Tajikistan was very low in the latest election, and this may be due to organizational weaknesses.

Abdullaev then described the two main obstacles facing Tajikistan: governance/statelessness and corruption. The weakening of Western controls in

Tajikistan exacerbated these problems, with, for example, an increase in drug smuggling across the Afghan border. Nearly one-half of all drugs coming from Afghanistan go through Tajikistan. The Tajik Government is also unable to control the economy mostly because of its corrupt nature. "Corruption is becoming institutional in Tajikistan." However, Abdullaev does feel that these problems are successfully being solved.

In closing, Kamoloudin Abdullaev mentioned that although Tajikistan is weak and the government is unable to protect its citizens, the country is open to change and he is optimistic that the future will witness many improvements. His attitude is best summed up by what he stated in the closing minutes of the session, "We don't want to fight, we want to enjoy life."