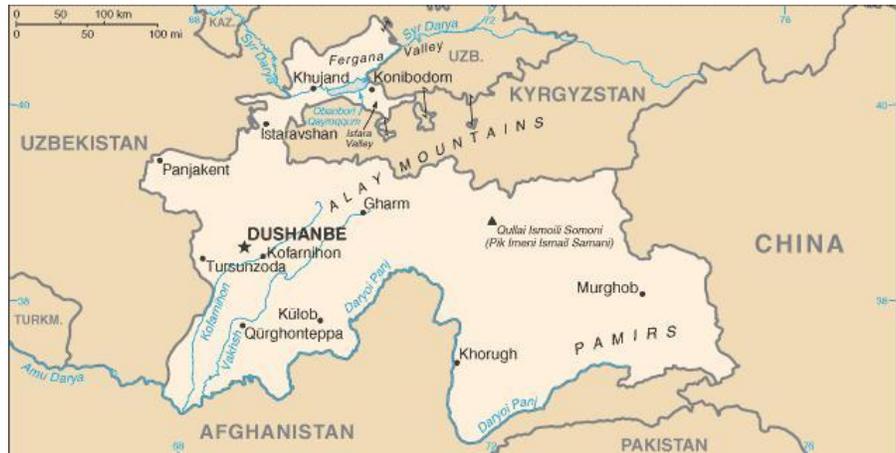


Tajikistan



GEOGRAPHY

Tajikistan covers 55,251 square miles, an area a little smaller than the state of Iowa. It is bordered by Kyrgyzstan to the north; China to the east; Afghanistan to the south; and Uzbekistan to the west. Tajikistan has many high mountains and valleys. Most of its inhabitants, as well as its agricultural industry, are concentrated in the rich Ferghana valley to the north and in the Hisor and Vakhsh valleys to the south. Outside these areas, Tajikistan is sparsely populated.



The population of 7.7 million is approximately 80 percent Tajik, 15 percent Uzbek, three percent Pamiri, one percent Russian, and one percent Kyrgyz. Less than 35 percent of the entire population lives in urban areas. Dushanbe, formerly known as Stalinobod, is the nation's capital and largest city, with just under 700,000 inhabitants. Approximately 80 percent of its population is Tajik, with Uzbeks making up the next largest ethnic group at 15 percent. The second largest city is Khujand (formerly Leninobod). Tajikistan consists of four administrative regions that are geographically and economically quite distinct. Two of these regions are provinces (*viloyat*) and one is an autonomous province (*viloyati mukhtor*).

In the southwest of the country lies the province of Khatlon, which borders both Uzbekistan and Afghanistan, and has the largest population—over 2,400,000. Due to heavy Soviet investment in irrigation in the Hisor and Vakhsh river valleys, most of the population of Khatlon is engaged in either cotton production or cattle and livestock raising. The Panj River forms the border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan. The administrative capital of Khatlon is Qurghonteppa, with a population of 90,000, and the other major town is Kulob, which played an important role in the civil war of the 1990s. During Soviet times, the people of Khatlon, especially Kulob, dominated the Tajik Interior Ministry, and the region is the birthplace and power center of the current Tajik president, Emomali Rahmon.

The province of Sughd, with its administrative capital of Khujand, lies in the northwest of the country. Sughd contains most of the country's arable farmland due to its location, stretching into the Ferghana valley. During Soviet times, Khujand was the cultural and intellectual center of the country. In antiquity, Khujand served as an important trading center. It is also home to a 2,500-year-old ancient temple, named in honor of Sheikh Muslikhadin. Sughd borders both Uzbekistan and

Kyrgyzstan, and its cotton and crops produce two thirds of Tajikistan's gross domestic product (GDP). It is cut off from the rest of the country by the Zarafshon mountain range, and many of the passes close in the winter due to snow.

The autonomous republic of Gorno-Badakhshan covers the eastern 45 percent of Tajikistan, but is home to only 218,000 people, or about three percent of the population. Gorno-Badakhshan is dominated by the Pamir mountain range and an inhospitable high-altitude plateau. The largest population centers in the province are Khorugh (22,000) and Murghob (4,000). In addition to being the most sparsely populated region, Gorno-Badakhshan is also distinct in terms of its ethnic make-up. Ethnic Pamiris make up almost 70 percent of the population, and the remainder is almost evenly split between Tajiks and Kyrgyz. There is hardly any industry to speak of in Gorno-Badakhshan, and the population is almost entirely dependent on livestock herding in the often treacherous terrain. One of the highest mountains of the former Soviet Union, Somoni Peak (elevation 24,589 feet, formerly known as Communism Peak and, earlier, Stalin Peak), is found here.

The central part of Tajikistan is administered directly from the Tajik capital, Dushanbe. Unlike Khujand, Dushanbe is a relatively new city, becoming the Tajik capital in the 1920s after being a village famous for holding a market on "Dushanbe," the Tajik word for Monday. This region is the most industrialized area of the country and sits in a valley surrounded by the Zarafshan mountains to the north, the Pamirs to the East, and the Hisor mountains leading south into Khatlon. This central region is home to 1.6 million people and is the manufacturing center for the raw materials, mainly cotton and hydroelectricity, which Tajikistan does not export.

HISTORY

Most of modern Tajikistan belonged to Achaemenid Persia until Alexander the Great conquered it in the fourth century BC. When Alexander died and his Macedonian empire collapsed, the area of modern Tajikistan became part of the Bactrian and Soghdian kingdoms. These kingdoms benefited from Tajikistan's position along the ancient trade routes between China and the West, and during the first four centuries AD, had extensive commercial and diplomatic ties with both China and the Kush kingdom. The Soghdians were instructed in Buddhism by the Kushans, and later passed on their knowledge of the faith to the Chinese and the Turks.

The Soghdian kingdom attracted a number of conquering armies. The Chinese tried to annex part of its lands, but were beaten back by the Arabs in the eighth century. With the Arabs came Islam, a new religion that would dominate the Tajik lands from the ninth century onwards. Its ascendancy marked the zenith of Persian influence over the Tajiks. Persian-speaking immigrants settled in the Tajik lowlands and intermarried with the native inhabitants. Persian language and culture slowly displaced that of the older, indigenous peoples, many of whom moved further and higher into the mountains.

In 999, the Persian state fell to the Qarakhanid Turks, who followed the well-established pattern of former conquerors and gradually moved into the area over the course of the next five centuries. Subsequently, the Seljuk Turks, Mongols, and Uzbeks arrived at different times. They attacked, settled, and intermarried with those already there, bringing new cultures and languages with them. The subsequent mixture of Persian and even earlier cultures with the predominately Turkic newcomers produced a new and distinct culture. Although the Mongol invasions, in particular, were

damaging to the cities, scholarship and the arts survived and were later encouraged by the conquerors.

Even as late as the 16th century, no native Tajik state existed; the area was divided among the Uzbek khanates of Bukhara and Kokand, and the kingdom of Afghanistan. This situation had not changed by the time the Russians arrived in Central Asia.

Several factors influenced the Russian decision to annex the lands that would become Tajikistan. Its military saw Central Asia as a place where careers could be advanced, while merchants were attracted to the markets it provided. The government—its cotton supply cut off by the civil war in America—saw the Central Asian steppe as the perfect place to grow such a crop, lessening Russian dependence on imports. The khanates aroused the interest of the British Empire as well, which wanted the lands as a buffer around India, and London feared that Russian expansion in Central Asia would not stop at the Afghan border. In the end, the khanates fell swiftly to the Russians, becoming protectorates by 1895.

Russian administration of Tajik land was cursory. Few Russians came to settle in the region, and the only real undertaking was to promote the cultivation of cotton rather than foodstuffs. This did not mean that the native peoples of the area meekly accepted Russian rule; on the contrary, a series of uprisings broke out in the last few years before World War I, with the most violent revolt against foreign rule in 1916. Locals were already seething over the tsarist taxation and price-fixing policies, but when the news arrived that the conscription exemption enjoyed by native peoples was to be abolished, anger boiled over into open revolt. The Russian army brought it to an end, but not without heavy civilian casualties.



After the fall of the tsarist government in 1917, the Central Asians were largely left to their own devices. It was not until 1919-1920 that the Red Army arrived to subdue the region, and, even then, local nationalists and Islamic fundamentalists fought a guerilla war until 1925. In 1924, the Bolsheviks redrew the Central Asian map; Uzbekistan was established as a Soviet Socialist Republic (S.S.R.), and Tajikistan was made an autonomous S.S.R. within Uzbekistan. Five years later, Tajikistan was

detached from Uzbekistan and became the smallest of the Central Asian S.S.R.s. However, the new Tajik republic did not contain Samarqand or Bukhara, ancient cities whose populations over the centuries became ethnically Tajik, with their mixture of Persian and Turkic influences.

Between 1927 and 1934, Stalin's collectivization drive—with its inherent violence—swept across Tajikistan. On its heels came the Purges, which decimated local party members, and, as a result, ethnic Russians would dominate Tajikistan's Communist party.

The Soviets expanded tsarist cotton policy, often at the expense of food cultivation, and, under Nikita Khrushchev, moved to implement a series of reforms designed to increase agricultural output. Irrigation systems were expanded in Tajikistan, and still more arable cropland was converted to cotton production.

Tajikistan became independent on September 9, 1991 and, shortly thereafter, joined the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). In 1992, however, the governing coalition fell after reformist and conservative groups clashed on the streets of Dushanbe, and civil war in the country continued until 1997.

POLITICS

In September 1991, after Islamic and democratic groups in the Tajik Supreme Soviet suspended the Communist party, its former deputies declared a state of emergency. They pronounced Rahmon Nabiyeu, former head of the Communist party, the nation's president. Although he also won the popular election held in November 1991, opposition groups claimed the results were fraudulent. The ensuing conflict can be seen as a power struggle between the four administrative regions described above. The Tajik governing elite, including Nabiyeu, had historically come from Leninobod (now Khujand), and had been supported in power by the Interior Ministry, whose cadres came overwhelmingly from Kulob in Khatlon.



The flag of Tajikistan

After the 1991 presidential election, in which the overall power structure of the country remained unchanged, opposition groups from Gorno-Badakhshan and Gharm formed a loose confederation. In May 1992, they began an assault on the Tajik government. The lack of a unifying goal, with the exception of the ouster of the Leninobod- and Kulob-led government, plagued the opposition from the start. As a result, its various factions of liberal democrats, Islamic fundamentalists, and Pamiri separatists never put forward a coherent alternative to the current government. They did, however, come to dominate Parliament in 1992, and even though the Leninobod-Kulob faction was supported by the Russian military and by Uzbekistan, opposition forces effectively surrounded Dushanbe by the autumn. In September, they forced Nabiyeu at gunpoint to resign. The Leninobod faction of the government was thus weakened, and the pro-government forces chose Emomali Rahmon (now Rahmon, after he deleted the Russianizing suffix from his name), from Khatlon, as their leader and head of parliament in an apparent compromise with the opposition.

Continued violence between various opposition factions and the now almost entirely Kulobi-led government made it impossible to hold presidential elections until 1994. During that time, the civil war became even more violent, as militias from Kulob organized what Human Rights Watch labeled ethnic cleansing against Pamiris and Gharmis. The area south of Dushanbe and the city of Qurghonteppa (home to many Gharmis) were the most affected. Tens of thousands were killed or fled across the Panj River into Afghanistan.

Emomali Rahmon, supported by the Kulobi militias and the Russian military, was named President of Tajikistan in November 1994. The various opposition groups re-armed in Afghanistan and formed an umbrella organization, the United Tajik Opposition. The UTO received support both from anti-Taliban forces in northern Afghanistan and from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). The UTO was moderately more successful than the original loose confederation of rebels, but could only fight the Kulobi militias to a stalemate. UN- and Russian-brokered peace talks began

in 1996, and an armistice was signed in Moscow by Rahmon and UTO leader Sayid Abdulloh Nuri on June 27, 1997. As a result of the armistice, the Leninobodi (Khujandi) faction continued to be completely absent from the government, and the representatives of the UTO were given only token government seats. Russian troops left Tajikistan, and Rahmon remained President, with the government almost completely controlled by his supporters from Kulob.

The country Rahmon led after the civil war was devastated. The government succeeded, to a certain extent, in portraying the civil war as a battle against Islamic fundamentalists, playing off of western fears of Islamic extremism. The reality, however, was far more complex. Other than a few radical parties, much of the opposition fought for a democratic Tajikistan. Atrocities were committed not only against those suspected of sympathy with the opposition, but against innocent civilians as well. Between 50,000 and 100,000 people died, and over a million were displaced, both internally and in Afghanistan. The Commission for National Reconciliation (CNR) was created to foster peace and understanding, but the conflict destroyed much of the country's infrastructure, and it has been slow to rebuild.

Tajikistan held presidential and parliamentary elections in 1999 and 2000, respectively. While the elections were criticized as flawed, opposition parties did not resort to arms. Over the past ten years, a war-weary opposition was not willing and/or able to force Rahmon from power. Rahmon won a presidential election in 1999, and in 2003 won a referendum allowing him to seek two more seven-year presidential terms. He won the presidential election in 2006 with 79 percent of the vote officially, and since then, ministerial posts in the Tajik government have been given increasingly to his closest allies, including many from his hometown.

Both the 2006 presidential election and 2010 parliamentary elections were considered by outside observers to be flawed and unfair, but peaceful. President Rahmon was elected to a new seven-year term in November 6, 2006. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) declared that the elections were not fair, since there were no viable opposition candidates. Some opposition parties boycotted the elections, while others decided not to advance a candidate. The ruling party won 55 of the 63 parliamentary seats in the 2010 elections, which also failed to meet OSCE standards.

Civil society continues to be weak in Tajikistan. President Rahmon and a small group of people run the country and opposition figures and parties have relatively little influence. Major areas of concerns in Tajikistan focus on the border with Afghanistan. The border is not well defended, in part due to corruption. People and goods flow fairly freely. The most profitable item is heroin from Afghanistan, and illegal narcotics regularly transit Tajikistan on their way to Russian and European markets, leaving crime and corruption in their wake. Many of the peoples living in northern Afghanistan are ethnically Tajik, so there is a lot of interaction across a fairly porous border.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

Tajikistan, like many countries in northern Central Asia, gained prominence after the attacks of September 11, 2001. As the United States prepared and launched its assault in Afghanistan, the Tajik government offered its bases and expertise to the U.S. military. Tajiks speak a variant of Persian which is very similar to Dari, the primary language spoken in northern Afghanistan. From Tajikistan, U.S. troops staged some of their incursions into Afghanistan. In addition to the military, journalists and aid workers have found a path into Afghanistan through Tajikistan.

Tajikistan maintains fairly peaceful relations with its post-Soviet Central Asian neighbors. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have never officially delineated a large section of their border. There have been occasional disputes between the two countries over water rights and arable land issues, but those disputes have been resolved peacefully. Uzbekistan has a large Tajik population, and Tajiks are a majority in the major cities of Samarqand and Bukhara. There is similarly a sizable Uzbek minority in Tajikistan. The Uzbek government was supportive of the Tajik government before and after the civil war, due to its own worries about armed opposition movements. The Uzbek Air Force (along with the Russian) even helped to delineate Tajikistan's airspace, since Tajikistan does not have an air force of its own. Nevertheless, relations between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are cautious and at times tense.

As a sign of their shared cultural heritage, Iran was the first country to open an embassy in post-Soviet Tajikistan. Iran offered material assistance during and after the civil war, but the main thrust of Tajik-Iranian relations has been cultural. Iran has opened many cultural initiatives in Tajikistan, and Iranian newspapers and television can be found in Dushanbe, as well as opportunities for cultural exchanges. The main factor limiting these cultural endeavors is that the majority of the Tajik population cannot read the Arabic script used in Iranian publications, but the contacts continue to grow each year.

One of the most volatile areas in Tajikistan is its border with Afghanistan. During the civil war, tens of thousands of Afghan refugees fled into this neighboring country, where they lived under terrible conditions. Continuing armed attacks by Tajik oppositionists and their supporters from the Afghan side of the border created a very unstable situation.

ECONOMICS

Tajikistan's most important foreign relationship is with Russia, and that is primarily due to economics. During Soviet times, the Tajik S.S.R. was the only Soviet republic that was a net importer of goods. After independence, Tajikistan was more dependent on foreign imports than any other Central Asian republic and was highly dependent on Russian aid. It was the last former republic to abandon the Soviet ruble as its currency in May 1995 in favor of the Tajik somoni.

Tajikistan's economy centers around agriculture, which is heavily dependent on irrigation. In the lowlands, cotton is the main crop, followed by rice and fruit. Mulberry trees grown here nourish silkworms. The mountains, especially those bordering on the Ferghana valley, are rich in minerals: coal is mined at Shurob and Zarafshon, and crude oil is found at Neftobod. Textiles and food processing are the major Tajik industries, and are centered in and around Dushanbe.

Reliable delivery of electricity and water is among Tajikistan's largest economic problems. Because of its many rivers, Tajikistan has great potential for hydroelectric development. The Nurek Dam is the second highest in the world. However, the destruction wrought during the civil war and government corruption since, have stymied any attempts to bring the delivery systems out of disrepair. Even in the capital, blackouts of electricity and the non-delivery of either hot or cold water to homes is not uncommon. In 2007-2008, the situation garnered worldwide attention as Tajikistan suffered its coldest winter in decades and hundreds of people died in their homes, unable to heat themselves.

Foreign investment in Tajikistan is minimal due again to the high levels of government corruption. Tajikistan's one heavy industrial establishment, the TALCO aluminum smelter (which alone often

accounts for 40 percent of the country's electricity use when it is running), is often idle due to either lack of deliveries or of power. A potential sale of the plant to a British company failed in 2008.

Tajikistan's economy is precariously dependent on another form of foreign aid: remittances from Tajiks who have moved abroad, primarily to Russia but also to nearby Kazakhstan, in search of work they cannot find at home. Close to one million Tajiks, primarily men, work in other countries and send money home to their families. Their absence has stunted the capacity of the Tajik workforce at home, forced Tajik women into roles in the economy that they were historically unaccustomed to in their traditional society, but have also given thousands of Tajik families some income. As the worldwide fiscal crisis hit post-Soviet countries very hard, especially for jobs in construction and other similar fields, the future of these remittances is unclear. If they disappear or are significantly lowered, the effects on the Tajik economy could be devastating.

RELIGION

The two major branches of Islam are the Sunni, which forms the majority of Muslims, and the Shi'a. Most of the Islamic population of the former Soviet Union is Sunni Muslim. About 90 percent of Tajiks are Sunni Muslims, their ancestors having converted to Islam in the seventh century; several hundred thousand Isma'ili Shi'a Tajiks are located mainly in the Pamir Mountains of eastern Tajikistan. The founding of Islam conventionally dates to AD 610 by the Prophet Muhammad, who is its central figure. He preached the word of God as revealed to him by the angel Gabriel. Islam is the Arabic word for submission; those who practice it are called Muslims, or "those who submit" (to God). The *sunna*, the "saying and doings" of Muhammad, serves as a guide to spiritual, ethical, and social life and consists of the Qur'an (Koran), a compilation of the word of God spoken to Muhammad, and the *hadith*, the saying and teachings of the Prophet. The Shi'a differ from the Sunni in many ways, the most important being that they consider that Muhammad's cousin Ali was the rightful choice to head Islam after Muhammad's death. Thus the Caliphs who were chosen after the death of the prophet are illegitimate when compared to certain direct descendants of Muhammad (known as *imams*).

Traditionally, both Sunni and Shi'a Muslims practice what are known as the Five Pillars of Islam: reciting the creed, praying daily, giving alms, fasting particularly during Ramadan, and making a pilgrimage to Mecca. Prayer is practiced five times a day, facing Mecca, and Muslims are expected to make a pilgrimage, or *hajj*, to Mecca at least once in their lifetime. Islam accepts what its adherents are able to practice under given circumstances, which allowed Muslims to adapt to the restrictions Soviets placed on religion.

When worshipping, men often pray together at a mosque, while women pray at home. Women are allowed to worship in mosques, but must do so in areas separate from men. The ninth month of the Muslim lunar calendar year is Ramadan, when adherents fast during daylight hours, but may eat after the sun goes down. (Neither children nor the sick are expected to participate in this ritual.)

CULTURE

While other Central Asians speak Turkic languages, the Tajiks speak a language closely related to Persian. The Tajiks used an Arabic script until 1930, when it was changed to Latin. In 1940 under the Soviet Union, Cyrillic was adopted. Native-language newspapers, books, and theater performances are now common, but Russian is still used, particularly in cities.

International organizations report that freedom of the press is not widely respected in Tajikistan. There are over 200 registered newspapers, printing in Tajik, Russian, and Uzbek, both government-owned and private. Independent newspapers, however, often face extreme difficulty in obtaining licenses, and have frequently been shut down.

Tajik television consists of one nationwide state-run channel, and three local state-run channels, all broadcast in Tajik. There is one private national channel broadcasting in both Tajik and Russian. Internet access remains very spotty for most Tajiks. As of 2010, 10.4 percent of Tajiks have access to the Internet; less than one percent use Facebook.

More than 65 percent of Tajiks live in rural areas and live a fairly traditional lifestyle. Although women were officially emancipated in the 1920s, the purchase of brides and marriage between children is still practiced in some rural areas. The role of women in Tajik society, however, is changing, as so many men have left the country to work elsewhere.

Rural areas are generally more family- and home-oriented, and families often visit relatives on the weekends. Students work in family vegetable gardens or have part-time jobs. Many older children have chores and work around the house; they will proudly and affectionately describe their responsibilities for their younger siblings. In the countryside, the average family may have seven to ten children, while in the cities, three to five children is average.

Tajik cuisine includes many hearty dishes. One favorite is a pilaf made of mutton or beef, carrots, onions, and spices mixed with rice and served with *shurbo*, a soup made with potatoes, carrots, and meat. Another popular stew, called *ugro* or *oshi burida*, features meat and noodles. Mutton and beef kebabs are often served. Like most Muslims, Tajiks do not eat pork.

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