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Tajikistan (1992 - 1998)

In 1992 Tajikistan, newly independent from the Soviet Union, plunged into a violent civil war, as an amalgam of opposition groups sought to overthrow the government and introduce Islamic reforms. The fighting continued until 1997, with the opposition pursuing the war from sanctuaries in neighboring Afghanistan. The civilian cost of the war was great - an estimated 40,000 people were killed, more than a tenth of the country's population was displaced, and twenty percent of country's schools were destroyed. Tajikistan today ranks among the poorest countries in the world.

The two sides in Tajikistan's civil war often have been labeled "Communist" and "Islamist," but the groups are more accurately identified along regional rather than ideological lines. In the Soviet era, northern Tajikistan exported cotton and minerals, becoming much wealthier than other parts of the country. Since independence, northern and later southern politicians have held power, while the opposition's main strength came from the center and the mountainous Pamir region in the east, the poorest part of the country.

The first year of the war was marked by summary executions and intense repression. In 1993 opposition fighters fled to Afghanistan, carrying out incursions from bases there. Russia officially claimed neutrality, but its troops remained in Tajikistan after the breakup of the Soviet Union and they were deployed along the Afghan border in support of the government. In 1995 diverse opposition groups joined together to create the United Tajik Opposition, strengthening their military and diplomatic position.

The war formally ended with a peace accord signed in June 1997. Under the agreement, the President retained power but opposition parties were to be integrated into the government. Today the parliament remains overwhelmingly pro-government. International observers deemed the most recent elections, held in 2006, to have been neither free nor fair.

Print Resources

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Timeline

1991 - Tajikistan becomes independent from the Soviet Union; former Communist leader Rahmon Nabiev elected president

1992 - pro-democracy and pro-Islamic forces battle government; Nabiev replaced by Emomali Rakhmonov as president

1993 - government consolidates power, bans all parties except Communist Party of Tajikistan, restricts media; opposition forces flee to Afghanistan; Russian troops deployed along Afghan border

1994 - temporary ceasefire

1995 - opposition creates United Tajik Opposition (UTO); military stalemate reached

1996 - government and UTO agree to UN-sponsored ceasefire

1997 - government and UTO sign peace accords

1998 - Rakhmonov pardons opposition leaders; uprising in north repressed with help of former opposition forces

1999 - Rakhmonov re-elected (with 96% of vote by official tally)

2005 - Russian border guards withdraw

2006 - Rakhmonov wins third term in election deemed unfree and unfair by international observers