

# **Technical Inquiry**

## **Who are the Tajiks and what is their Path to Radicalization?**



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**Technical Inquiry Summary.** HDIAC received a technical inquiry requesting analytical research on what path the typical Tajik takes to radicalization and recruitment into the Islamic State (IS) and affiliated violent extremist organizations (VEOs).

## **1. Who Are The Tajiks And What Is Their Path To Radicalization?**

In order to understand the Tajiks, this report will begin with an overview of Tajikistan, its geography, history, demographics, religion, and economic situation. Factors influencing radicalization can come from almost any ideal that touches the core of someone's beliefs and how they identify themselves as an individual and as a group. The underlying causes of radicalization can come from what is perceived as past historical transgressions (unequal treatment by the governing body, lack of economic opportunity, lack of social services, discrimination against a particular ethnic or tribal group, suppression of religion, personal predisposition, ideology, or unlawful military occupation of their homeland). Other causes may come from divided loyalties between tribes, ethnic groups, religion, and their country, i.e., do they identify with the tribe before their nationality. Radicalization is not limited to the uneducated and poor; it reaches out to the educated and upper social classes, young and old, male and female. There is not a single profile of an Islamic State (IS) supporter. They can be businessmen, hairdressers, school dropouts, or university students.<sup>1</sup> The IS wants teachers, nurses, and engineers, not just fighters. In Tajikistan, as well as the Central Asian states, religion and religious organizations fill a void created by the lack of credible governance and social insecurity.<sup>2</sup>

## **2. Tajikistan Overview**

The overview of Tajikistan is provided for context. It includes a brief synopsis of the country's geography, population, history, economy, religion, and Russia's influence. Then, the factors of radicalization will be discussed. For this report, we are using IS to denote the Islamic State instead of Da'esh or ISIL.



Figure 1. Administrative Map of Tajikistan.

## 2.1. Geography and Population

Tajikistan is divided into four administrative divisions or provinces (*viloyats*) (See Figure 1).<sup>3</sup> The provinces are: Sughd (Capital: Khujand) and Khatlon (Capital: Qurghonteppa), the autonomous province of Gorniy-Badakhshan (abbreviated as GBAO, Capital: Khorugh), and the RRP (Region of Republican Subordination - in Russian transliteration: Rayonî respublikanskogo podchineniya, or in Tajik: Ноҳияҳои тобеи ҷумҳури (NTJ); formerly known as Karotegin Province, (Capital: Dushanbe)).<sup>4</sup> Tajikistan is a remote and mountainous country (over 90 percent) with an estimated eight million people in 2013. In terms of area, it covers 55,300 square miles and is bordered by Afghanistan to the south, Uzbekistan to the west, Kyrgyzstan to the north, and China to the east.<sup>5</sup> Its location is strategic; it was part of the old “Silk Road” and now serves as a main corridor for drug trafficking from Afghanistan. Afghanistan has populations of ethnic Uzbek and Tajik minorities. Tajikistan’s borders are rugged and porous, making it convenient for extremist groups like the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) to mobilize their members.<sup>6</sup>

Tajiks represent the country's largest ethnic group (79.9 percent), and Uzbeks are the next largest ethnicity at 5.3 percent. Over half of the Uzbek are employed in agriculture and one-fifth in industry. Other ethnic groups include Russian (1.1 percent), Kyrgyz (1.1 percent), and other (2.6

percent). Tajikistan has a very young population, nearly half of the country's population is under 14 years of age.<sup>7</sup> In 2014, the median age was estimated to be 23.5.<sup>8</sup>

In the 19th century, the ethnic composition of the inhabitants of Tajikistan was characterized by heterogeneity: apart from Tajiks and Tajik-speaking Turks (called Chaghatai in southern provinces), there were also various Uzbek tribes, Kyrgyz, Turkmen, Jews, Persians, Afghans, Arabs, Lesgins, Armenians, and Indians. The Tajiks were subdivided according to their affiliation with ancient cultural and historical regions: Kulob (medieval Khuttal), Panjakent (in Zarafshon Valley), Asht (Upper Syr-Darya), and Qarotegin (foothills of the Pamirs). The Kulobis may have accounted for more than 60 percent of the Tajiks in Eastern Bukhara.<sup>9</sup>

The official language is Tajik, which is very close to Persian and Dari. Russian is also widely used in business and government.<sup>10</sup>

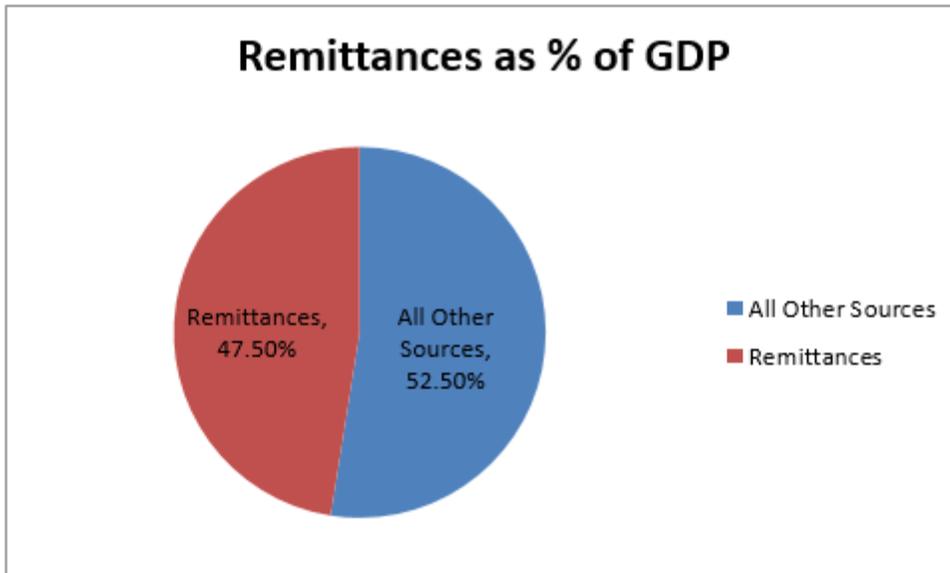
## **2.2. History**

The Tajiks have a complex and ancient history dating from the Samanid era (875 – 999 AD) and earlier. Tajikistan was part of the “Silk Road,” the meeting point of Mediterranean, Indian, and Chinese civilizations, which resulted in a number of mixed-type cultures.<sup>11</sup> Contemporary Tajiks are the descendants of ancient Eastern Iranian inhabitants of Central Asia, particularly the ancient Soghdians and Bactrians and possibly other groups that had a mixture of western Iranian Persians and non-Iranian peoples, Mongols, and Turkic peoples.<sup>12</sup>

Tajikistan has been ruled by numerous empires and dynasties, including the Achaemenid Empire, Hephthalite Empire, Samanid Empire, Mongol Empire, Timurid dynasty, and the Russian Empire, which ruled for seventy years.<sup>13</sup> Prior to the war, Tajikistan was a state divided by various religious, regional, and ethnic movements, and these movements were further fragmented by the harsh geography of the region. This fragmented Tajik identity resulted in the people associating more closely with regions and clans than with a nationalist Tajik identity.<sup>14</sup> Tajikistan became an independent nation in 1991 as a result of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Almost immediately following independence, a five-year civil war ensued from 1992-1997.<sup>15</sup> The civil war between the Moscow-backed government and the Islamist-led opposition resulted in the deaths of 50,000 people and over one-tenth of the population fleeing the country.<sup>16</sup>

## **2.3. Economy**

Tajikistan's economy has never really recovered from the civil war. Unemployment is high, and poverty is widespread. Almost half of the GDP is earned by migrants working abroad, especially in Russia (See Figure 2).<sup>17</sup>



**Figure 2. Tajikistan: Most Remittance-Dependent Country in the World**

The recession in 2009 threatened even the migrant income. According to the World Bank, 2011 remittances received by Tajikistan amounted to 47.50 percent of the country's GDP. Almost all of the remittances in Tajikistan come from Russia, since 90 percent of Tajik migrant workers are in Russia. This means that nearly half of the GDP of Tajikistan is directly dependent on Russian economic activity.<sup>18</sup>

Tajikistan needs to attract much more foreign investment to lessen its dependence on remittances. The country is also dependent on oil and gas imports.<sup>19 20</sup> However, recently, Tajikistan accepted an offer of \$6 billion USD in new investments from China over the next three years. This investment is equivalent to just under half of Tajikistan's substantial annual remittance flows.<sup>21</sup>

Tajikistan endured several domestic security incidents during 2010-12, including armed conflict between government forces and local strongmen in the Rasht Valley and between government forces and criminal groups in Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast. The country remains the poorest in the former Soviet sphere. Tajikistan became a member of the World Trade Organization in March 2013. However, its economy continues to face major challenges, including dependence on remittances from Tajiks working in Russia, pervasive corruption, and the major role narco-trafficking plays in the country's informal economy.<sup>22</sup>

## 2.4. Religion

Islam was introduced to the region by the Arabs as early as 728 AD and was the predominant religion by the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The new religion was mostly well received for it claimed greater social mobility and created favorable conditions for trade. Islam provided the peoples of Central Asia with spiritual and cultural bonds, brought them together, and stimulated the emergence of the modern Persian language (Dari). Arabic was the language of science, poetry, trade, and religion.

During this period (875-999 AD) intellectuals from all over the Islamic world came to Bukhara, the Samanid capital.<sup>23</sup> Tajikistan is predominantly Sunni Muslim (85 percent) with a smaller number of Shia Muslim (5 percent) and other religious groups (10 percent).<sup>24</sup>

Although there were differences between the various anti-government Tajik movements in 1990, Islam was a unifying concept because it was a national religion respected and accepted by the majority of the population. It remained strong, albeit underground, during much of the Soviet period. In 1999, President Rahmanov pushed forward legislation that allowed the formation of religious-based political parties, making Tajikistan the only Central Asian state that constitutionally tolerated Islamic political parties.<sup>25</sup>

## **2.5. Russia's Influence**

Russia's seventy year rule served to divide local peoples by artificial administrative and cultural boundaries and sealed off the whole region from the world outside. The regime did not attempt to introduce truly radical changes to Central Asian societies. However, the regime did create socialist nations by applying an arsenal of communist-style modernization to the mosaic of traditional local identities.<sup>26</sup> Russia left a legacy of corruption, inefficiency, and ethnic strife. Under Soviet rule, Islam was driven underground, but even the Soviets could not destroy it entirely. Mosques were closed, destroyed, or used for other functions. The effect of mosque closures was particularly felt in Tajikistan where 16 out of 34 were closed.<sup>27</sup>

## **3. Radicalization Factors in Tajikistan**

### **3.1. Islamic Extremist Groups and Islam**

What is the difference between radical and moderate or mainstream Islam? The terms "radical" or "moderate" are often used in a subjective and imprecise way. In some cases, the term radical or militant is defined in terms of support for terrorism or other forms of violence. There is, in fact, a much larger universe of fundamentalist or Salafi groups who may not practice violence themselves, but they propagate an ideology that creates conditions for violence and is subversive to the values of democratic societies. One element that separates radical from moderate Muslims is the willingness to use or justify violence to attain political objectives. Radicals are a minority almost everywhere in the Muslim world. Extremists have been able to exercise disproportionate influence because moderates are often unwilling to confront them and fear the consequences of taking on the radicals. In many parts of the Muslim world, the radicals have been generally successful in justifying terrorism as part of a struggle between Islam and the West.<sup>28</sup>

Radical Islamist groups are those that ideologically reject democracy as well as the legitimacy of political pluralism. Their goal is to bring about a radical change in social, political, and economic aspects of a country. Radical movements refuse to work within the established state institutions, but not all of them favor violent methods to achieve their goals.<sup>29</sup> There are two main radical groups in Tajikistan: Hizb ut-Tahrir and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). Recently,

the Jamoati Ansorulloh, who have links with graduates from Pakistani madrasas, have returned to Tajikistan. All three groups call for jihad against the current government.<sup>30</sup> The Tajik government has not defined what radicalization is, but they apply the term to everything considered suspicious or seen as a possible threat to the government's stability.

There have been several incidents of violent extremist action over the past 15 years, including incursions of the IMU in the summers of 1999 and 2000; the clash in the Rasht Valley in 2008-2020; a car bomb that detonated at a garrison of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Khujand on 3 September 2010; and on 19 January 2013, a terrorist suspect carried out a suicide attack in Istaravshan, which is located in northern Tajikistan.<sup>31</sup> However, in general, terrorist violence has been more of a sporadic problem, partly because the vast majority of the population does not support violence.<sup>32</sup>

While radical Islam is often invoked by Central Asian leaders to justify poor human rights records and harshly dictatorial regimes, the variety of Islam that has historically been dominant in the region is definitely not of the fundamentalist variety. According to Muriel Atkin, it was the decentralized and informal nature of traditional Tajik Islamic practices, referred to as "folk Islam" that allowed Islamic customs to survive and thrive during the Soviet period. This folk Islam was deeply rooted in the Sufi tradition, which does not embrace or espouse the same type of "purifying" process that is dominant in the Salafi school of Islam. Tajikistan is home not only to Sunnis of the Sufi tradition, but also a Shi'a minority that adheres to Ismailism or severner Shi'ism (4%). The group is located primarily in the Badakhshan province.<sup>33</sup> Ninety percent of Tajiks self-identify as Muslim with most being followers of the Hanafi school of Islam.<sup>34</sup> Tajikistan's Supreme Court decided that Salafi Muslims were extremists in January 2015.<sup>35</sup>

Tajikistan still bears the legacies of Soviet rule today concerning Islam. Muslim elites enjoy a legitimacy not derived from the secular state and, as such, have long been perceived as suspect in the eyes of Tajikistan's secular rulers. During the Soviet period, Tajikistan's Moscow handlers addressed this challenge and attempted to replace the Islamic idiom of legitimacy with a new, communist language of power. Labeling it as a campaign for female emancipation, Moscow's appointees in Central Asia initiated the *hujum*, which was an all-out attack on Islam, in 1926. Tajik communist elites were compelled to unveil their wives and daughters and, more broadly, abandon any outward markers of Islam. Central Asian political elites who did not comply were removed from office, tried in court, and often jailed.<sup>36</sup>

Policing outward markers of religiosity is a practice that persists in Tajik state-society relations today. For example, government officials, as well as public school teachers, cannot have beards. In 2010, male students were required to shave, and female students were prohibited from wearing the hijab.<sup>37</sup>

Tajik's current government policies continue to be repressive and serve to increase the allure of unapproved and radical Islamic groups. Examples of even more restrictive religious oppression include legislation that ban all mosques, except those that receive special certification and clearance from the government;<sup>38</sup> ban private koranic lessons; prohibit children from participating

in worship; and ban teenagers and other children from participating in the activity of religious organizations, with the exception of those officially enrolled in religious education. Given these restrictions, many young Tajiks are left without any options to pursue an education.<sup>39</sup> Further crackdowns have banned Muslim prayers via loudspeakers at the beginning of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan in the Sughd Region. The authorities in Dushanbe, the capital, asked the Islamic Revival Party to stop holding prayers in their party building.<sup>40</sup> These restrictions further disenfranchise those susceptible to influence from radical Islamists and, if left unchecked, will open the door to expanded recruitment from IS and other VEOs.

### **3.2. Poverty and Unemployment**

In the Soghd region of northern Tajikistan, experts say young people are being recruited into Islamic extremist groups in urban areas that were once industrial but suffered economic collapse and large job losses in post-Soviet years. Recruitment is also taking place in the southern Khulon region, which is agricultural and poor. Tajik analysts believe the causes for young people joining the jihad have to do with poverty, unemployment, and low levels of education.<sup>41</sup>

There are also rumors that were reported in a centralasia.ru web article that every IS fighter is paid \$3,000 - \$5,000 to fight – much more than the average Tajik would make at home or as a migrant laborer in Moscow. Fighters are being recruited via leaflets calling for the overthrow of the Tajik government and the republic's president, Emomali Rahmon. The leaflets were rumored to be distributed in mosques, markets, and schools across Tajikistan.<sup>42</sup> The rumor and headline reflect concerns in Tajikistan that IS militants and the extremist group's ideology could pose a threat to the Central Asian republic, particularly amid domestic economic issues and instability. The total number of Tajik fighters is unknown, but it is estimated to be around 100 or less. The rumors are likely to be untrue, especially regarding the distribution of leaflets, as the Tajik government has closed down most of the mosques and is closely watching all religious groups. On the other hand, since the Tajik government is so corrupt, they could have invented the rumor to legitimize their repressive actions against Islam. Corruption in the government has reached unprecedented levels, prompting the population to question its legitimacy. The majority of the population is weary of social injustices and being marginalized and may be more open to extremist Islamic ideologies because they offer an alternative to the existing regime.<sup>43</sup>

As mentioned earlier, Tajikistan has a sizeable young male population with a lack of regular employment opportunities. This is sometimes referred to as the “youth bulge” theory. Research has confirmed the close statistical correlation between the likelihood of conflict, especially civil strife, and the size of a society's youth bulge. From the 1970's through the 1990s, more than 90 percent of all societal conflicts broke out in countries whose populations displayed a youthful age structure with a median age of 25 years or less.<sup>44</sup> Tajik's youth do not remember the extreme hardships and difficulties endured during the civil war or Soviet rule like their parents. They are fatigued by the lack of social services and economic opportunities.

Between 2010 and February 2015, Tajik law enforcement detained 467 suspected extremists, and 311 were from Sughd Province. Within Sughd, the extremists were most active in the Isfara, Istaravshan, Panjakent, and B. Gafurov districts. Extremists were said to be trying to organize networks in southern Tajikistan. The majority of those arrested are affiliated with the Islamic Movement of Turkestan or IMU, Jundullah, Jamaat Ansarullah, and joined these movements abroad.<sup>45</sup>

### **3.3. Jihad Recruitment**

Radical Islamist groups use aggressive and sophisticated recruitment techniques. The targets are separate potential pools of recruits, each requiring different methods and venues for recruitment. The key recruitment nodes are mosques and Islamic study circles; schools, universities, and youth organizations; health and welfare organizations, including charities; and other social clusters. Recruitment methodologies vary. In universities, for instance, the process involves Quranic study groups or circles where members gradually internalize the ideology of the group. In economically and socially marginalized districts, recruits might be willing to join the extremist group out of sheer frustration with their condition in life.<sup>46</sup>

Violence itself plays a role in recruitment. International jihadists have become involved in conflicts from Chechnya and Kashmir to Mindanao and the Moluccas, ostensibly to help beleaguered Muslims in these regions, but also to gain credibility among the broader Muslim communities. They especially focus on the young people that they hope to entice into joining. These local jihads provide new members with a “rite of passage,” which is the functional equivalent of the founding generation’s experience in Afghanistan.<sup>47</sup>

Many Tajiks work as immigrant laborers in Russia because of the lack of jobs in Tajikistan. Twenty people from the small town of Chorqishloq were recruited in Russia. In at least two cases, the men took their wives and children along to Syria. This Tajik village has been labeled as a jihadist breeding ground by the government. How these men were recruited is not known, but some villagers insist that they were brainwashed. More likely, the recruitment was done by a charismatic leader via social media or texting to reach out to friends in their social network. One parent whose son was killed in Syria proudly says his son lost his life in a “holy war.” The local imam of the only mosque in the village is now telling young men during mosque sermons that the conflict in Syria and Iraq is not the holy war they might think it is.<sup>48</sup> Local traditional networks, regional groups, extended families, and clans, are exploited by both secular authorities in the government and radical Islamists.<sup>49</sup>

Although some feel that their children were “lured” to jihad, the lack of jobs in the country is also mentioned as a factor in radicalization.<sup>50</sup> In Russia, migrants are often marginalized, sometimes doing illegal and badly paying jobs, and they often seek solace and a sense of identity and community in religion. They may link up with Caucasian networks, Dagestani, or Chechen that blur the lines between religion and organized crime while offering a degree of protection against

other criminal groups. Word of mouth is one of the most powerful tools of recruitment in Central Asia; one family member or friend leaves for IS controlled territory, then several more follow. Social media allows for communication between those in Syria and those at home thinking about joining. Recruiter cells in Central Asia are small and secretive and often extensions of prayer groups.<sup>51</sup> Many Tajiks have cell phones to keep in contact with family and friends. In fact, many immigrant Tajiks have used SMS texting to get a divorce, while others use it to lure their longtime friends to join IS.<sup>52</sup>

### **3.4. Local Media Coverage**

A survey of regional journalists in four regions (Sughd, Kahtlon region, Kulob Districts, and Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast) of Tajikistan was conducted by Media Consulting, a non-governmental organization (NGO), from November – December 2012. The study focused on examining the regional media outlets in Tajikistan, and their willingness to cover the problems of radicalization. The results of the survey showed that while mass media would be a great venue for countering radicalization, it is not being used because of various factors: media is subject to local authorities, strong professional journalistic staff are needed, journalists are unable to engage with civil society and are regarded with suspicion, there are limited number of print runs, internet usage is still very low, there is a lack of electricity, and the economy is weak.<sup>53</sup> The very lack of media coverage on radicalization is reflective of a repressive government. The real consequences of radicalization and its effect on families and the broader community are for the most part not covered as the press reports to local authorities who censor content.

Most newspapers have low circulation, are published weekly, and distributed only in cities and towns; they do not reach remote villages where the majority of the population lives. Some newspapers have online editions, such as ASIA-Plus and Tojnews. However, their audiences are limited mostly to the urban educated population that have internet access. Mobile phones are now the most widespread tools of communication in Tajikistan with millions of subscribers. Social media is the place where most Tajiks get their news.<sup>54</sup> Mobile phones are also one of the prime tools used to lure Tajik recruits to IS or other extremist groups.

The local press also plays a role in increasing the production of rumors. For example, on 19 September 2010, a military convoy entered the Kamarob gorge of Tajikistan seeking fugitives from a prison break. The convoy was attacked, and 26 of the troops were killed. This incident was of international interest briefly, before the government set up an information blackout. Journalists depicted Kamarob as a place full of foreign Islamic terrorists after the bombing of a house in Gharm. Locals claim that these were Kyrgyz workers who were building the house and were among the victims of the recent military attacks who were falsely identified as international terrorists. This could also possibly be an example of violence being promoted by the Tajik government to further its iron-hand in dealing with Islam.<sup>55</sup>

### **3.5. Allure of Jihad**

Why are Tajiks drawn to IS or other VEOs? Young Tajiks have a sense of disillusionment with the nation, the government, and traditional forms of Islam and may be predisposed to being ready for something that is refreshing, energizing, and different from their current circumstances. The causes of this disenchantment are mostly due to the bloody legacy of war, a faltering economy, staggering corruption and cruelty in government, and a public health crisis in the country. These young Tajiks are seeking a purpose, structure, and livelihood for themselves. Insurgent groups and radical Islamists are able to present themselves as the moral and structured alternative to a more secular life.<sup>56</sup> Some Tajiks are prompted by marginalization and bleak economic prospects. Women are vulnerable to radicalization because of the lack of social, religious, economic, and political opportunities afforded to them in Central Asia. Also, the idea of a holy struggle to advance Islam is the main reason to join IS for many. Others envision a more devout, purposeful, fundamentalist religious life, yet for others it is an adventure.<sup>57</sup>

As mentioned earlier, Tajikistan has a very young and impressionable population who live under a very repressive government with few social services, lack basic infrastructure services, and have extremely limited opportunities for employment. Their unrest with the current situation can be seen in protests at stadiums or movie theatres when concerts have been canceled.<sup>58</sup>

### **3.6. Government Policies**

The underlying issues behind the civil war (1992-1997) are still existent and in some cases have intensified and contributed to the mass disillusionment that has allowed fundamentalist Islam to gain a strong foothold in the country. These include mass poverty among the general population with great wealth concentrated among the elite, rampant corruption among officials in the police and civil service, a lack of economic opportunity, and perceived disrespect for traditional religion and culture. These hardships were all exacerbated by the memory of Soviet Rule, especially the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. During the years of the Soviet-Afghan war, Mujahadin fighters entered Tajikistan and spread the newly militant Islam in some areas of the country. Since the civil war, the president and his party have worked diligently to strip away any power from the United Tajik Opposition (UTO). There have been suspicious deaths of UTO leaders, and a persistent campaign to delegitimize, disbar, and condemn former generals and leaders who represent a challenge to the president.<sup>59</sup>

In July 2014, Tajikistan introduced laws criminalizing fighting abroad. Rehabilitation programs for Tajik IS returnees have not been addressed due to lack of resources and political will to implement them.<sup>60</sup>

Clearly, Tajikistan needs to address its historic and pervasive government corruption. Further, the government needs foreign assistance and guidance in establishing and implementing social, political, legal, and economic reforms. The United States is urging Tajikistan's civil society

groups to get involved in the fight against radicalization. A three day conference was held in Dushanbe beginning on February 24, 2015 for regional experts on regional cooperation and effective measures to combat the phenomenon of foreign militants.<sup>61</sup>

Tajikistan provides an ideal sphere in which terrorism, human trafficking, and drug trafficking survive. These elements include: trans-state nationalist, ethnic, and religious movements; armed conflict; and constraints on transnational exchanges of illegal commodities, exchanges that involve third and fourth party intermediaries and corruptible internal security forces.

### **3.7. Drug Trafficking**

Tajikistan shares a remote and rugged border with Afghanistan making it a natural transit corridor for drug traffickers and a difficult area for security officials to operate. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNDOC) reported in 2010 that of the estimated 380 tons of heroin manufactured in Afghanistan, 25 percent (about 90 tons) was sent via the Northern route through Tajikistan.<sup>62</sup> It is believed by senior Western officials that the drug trade is protected and facilitated in Tajikistan at a very high political level. Border security guards and diplomats and others manage to carry drugs through official crossings without being checked. While small traders are often arrested, large seizures are rare. The drug trade is where organized crime, high-level corruption, and national security intersect. Opiate trafficking adds at least 30 percent to the country's GDP.<sup>63</sup>

Militant Islamists are returning to the region along previously established drug routes. The IMU involvement includes providing security for shipments of heroin as they move out of Afghanistan. Indeed, the clash in Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast in 2012 is thought to be more about control of drug turf than of concern for Tajikistan's stability.<sup>64</sup>

## **4. Conclusions**

The increasing low-level insurgency in Tajikistan is an example of a vicious cycle with religion becoming a source of support in difficult times and a refuge from the stifling presence of the state. However, government oppression of unofficial religious bodies in turn sparks a politicization of religion and among a small number, radicalization. Frequent jailing of Islamists has provided a new path to radicalization.<sup>65</sup>

Political extremism and organized crime will continue to feed the militant mindset in the region as income from organized crime, such as drug trafficking, helps fund extremist groups. Additionally, regional and international security threats provide good opportunities for Islamists to further mobilize their constituents.<sup>66</sup>

Tajikistan has also emerged as the main route for the export of Afghan narcotics, which enjoy protection at various levels of government and accounts for almost 50 percent of total economic

activity in the country. Foreign assistance for counter-narcotics agencies has allowed the government to turn them into tools for eliminating rival traffickers and concentrating the flows of money and drugs in the hands of a few well-connected groups.<sup>67</sup>

The factors that influence a Tajik to go down the path of radicalization are many. However, it is clear that the Tajik government's repression, marginalization and consequential exclusion of Islamic groups will continue to cause them to seek out different ways to express their grievances.<sup>68</sup>

Tajikistan is a perfect place for extremist groups: corrupt and repressive government, drug trafficking, border security issues, economic crisis, lack of social services, crumbling infrastructure, and a large population of unemployed young males. However, experts on Islamic movements in Central Asia indicate that the probability of the IS situation in Syria and Iraq being replicated in Central Asia is very improbable. Although destabilization is a very real threat, particularly in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, where the suppression of dissent and corrupt authorities have reached unprecedented dimensions, and the population is questioning the government's legitimacy.<sup>69</sup>

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has developed a specific list of fourteen root causes of terrorism: lack of democracy, civil liberties, and the rule of law; failed or weak states; rapid modernization; extremist ideologies; historical antecedents of political violence, civil wars, revolutions, dictatorships, or occupation; hegemony and inequality of power; illegitimate or corrupt governments; powerful external actors upholding illegitimate governments; repression by foreign occupation or by colonial powers; the experience of discrimination on the basis of ethnic or religious origin; failure or unwillingness by the state to integrate dissident groups or emerging social classes; the experience of social injustice; the presence of charismatic ideological leaders; and triggering events.<sup>70</sup> There are few causes in the list that are not found in Tajikistan.

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