

The Dependency of the Oppressed Peoples of Tajikistan

Tajikistan is one of five Central Asian states to declare independence from the Soviet Union in December of 1991 (Curtis, 1997, 205). Tajikistan has its independence, but in essence is still very much dependent on Russia. Life as a periphery country, in many ways, has deteriorated in Tajikistan with the new freedom. The country continues to struggle and is unable to sever the ties with Russia that have drained the country of resources, both human and natural.

Years of civil war after freedom from Russia have left many with never healing scars and a country that has gone backwards in development. Freedom of religion, inequality, and the availability of safe, clean drinking water are the rights of every individual. In Tajikistan, life is quite different for many citizens. Women and children are the most vulnerable, and therefore the most oppressed in a country that had been in servitude until 1991. Studies indicate that economic activity in the richer countries often led to serious economic problems in poorer countries (Ferraro, 2008). Tajikistan existed with Russia as a driver and controller for over a century and the country's present state is a result of the prolonged enslavement. This paper will investigate how Tajikistan's dependency and forced specialization under Soviet rule has set the country on a path of underdevelopment.

Tajikistan as a Specialization Country

The peoples of Tajikistan have a long history of servitude to others. The Soviet Union was in power from the 1920's until the early 1990's. Russia's efforts to conquer Tajikistan began in the 1860's. Prior to Soviet rule, the region was affected politically and culturally by China, Russia, and Iran (Curtis, 1997, 206). The translation of Tajikistan is "land of the Tajiks," Tajiks referring to the Persian speaking residents of Central Asia. Tajikistan, as shown below in Figure 1, became a state by Soviet decree in 1924. The country became Russia's breadbasket, and later the country became a leading producer of cotton as a periphery country dependent on the connection to the Soviet Union. Tajikistan is one of five Central Asian states to declare independence from the Soviet Union in December of 1991 (Curtis, 1997, 205).

Tajikistan's role in the Russian Empire was agrarian in nature, supplying raw materials, such as cotton and wheat, to industrialized areas in the heart of Russia. Cotton production began in the 1870's, prior to the region being Tajikistan, in the Fergana Valley and Bukhoro Khanate during the initial stages of the occupation (Curtis, 1997, 211). The grain crops the Tajiks grew in the 1860s became almost exclusively cotton by the end of the war. The first cotton processing plant, built near the end of WW 1 in 1917, is Russia's first improvement industrially in the region (Curtis, 1997, 211). By 1990 Tajikistan, now under Soviet rule, had 800,000 hectares under cultivation, 560,000, primarily cotton under irrigation (Curtis, 1997, 211). Tajikistan was the third largest producer of cotton in the Soviet empire achieving a comparative advantage over many competing countries. The country regularly forced schoolchildren and urban workers to help with the harvest during Soviet control (Batalden, 1997, 167-168).

Tajikistan "Land of the Tajiks"



Figure 1: Map of Tajikistan

The Soviet control brought modernization to the state at the price of repression. This modernization, although improving the area as a whole, primarily benefitted the Russian speaking urban centers. Moreover, this system supplied the transportation network and market for the regions raw materials. Although the income to the region was stable, the compensation

was low. During the Soviet domination, Tajikistan's economy became dependent on the supply line to and from the Soviet Union (Curtis, 1997, 205).

The not so new leadership of Tajikistan

Early in the civil war, September 1992, President Rakhmon Nabiev was forced to leave office by the opposition. Pro-communist forces gained control of Dushanbe and abolished the office of the presidency. The pro-communist appointed "power to the chairman of the Supreme Soviet, Imomali Rakhmonov (Batalden, 1997, 173)", in November of the same year. The pro-Communist Tajik government, under the leadership of Rakhmonov, initiated what are an ongoing suppression on Islamic and democratic parties, nationalist, the media, and any other potential opposition to the pro-Communist (Batalden, 1997, 173). Civil war in the early years of the country's independence attributed to the decline of the country's economic situation. Repression continued in Tajikistan due to the victors of the civil war being in favor of a Soviet era elitist system (Curtis, (1997), 206). According to the *BBC*, approximately 50,000 people perished in the five-year civil war and a tenth of the population fled the country (BBC 2014).

Emomali Rahmon, who altered his name to show his Persian heritage, changed the time he could stay in office as well as an age requirement that allows him to remain in office past age 65, which was the maximum age to be in office (Walsh 2003). Monitors from Europe indicate elections may not be free or fair (The Guardian 2014). Russia has troops stationed in Tajikistan and the country is highly dependent on Russia for economic and strategic aid.

The woman and children suffer the most in an oppressed nation

In countries with oppressive leaders, women and children are often the ones who suffer the most. Tajikistan is a prime example of the vulnerability of women and children, and the

abuse of power that leads to a lack of development. Of the former Soviet republics, Tajikistan is the poorest according to the UNDP human development index (The Guardian 2014). Often the members of the one million men working abroad find new families and never return to Tajikistan. The wives work at jobs previously performed by men and often require the placing of children in various types of facilities. Women work the farms of what was once the breadbasket of the Soviet Union (*Aljazeera*). Dissolving traditional Muslim marriages requires repeating the word “Talak” three times in the presence of witnesses. Sadly, many of these women are divorced via text message in this globally connected era. These families, left to fend for themselves, need to remove children from school to work. More women are entering into polygamous marriages in order to survive. These wives lack recognition by the system as the marriages are illegal and the women are more vulnerable than before in the event of a separation (*Aljazeera*).

Gender inequalities in education are greater in Tajikistan than any other post-Soviet country. Only 74 percent of girls enroll in school after the age of sixteen, compared to 89 percent of boys and by the age of eighteen, this drops to 24 percent of girls and 37 percent for boys (Olcott, 2012, 297). The absence of education perpetuates into the next generation as the mothers lack the ability to assist their children through the education process successfully (Olcott, 2012, 297).

According to Andrew Brown of The Guardian, Forum 18 reported that Tajikistan passed a bill banning children from practicing any type of religion. The new law requires parents to not let children and teenagers participate in any form of religious gathering or activities unless they

enroll in a religious school. Although the law allows religious school, this is problematic as there are only 13 authorized mosques for the 2 plus million Muslim children in Tajikistan that are under the age of 15. Brown went on to add that Amnesty International reports torture by the police is common in the country and Human Rights Watch indicated officials in Tajikistan continue to oppress the people in various ways including elections, woman's rights, religious freedom, and freedom of the press (Brown 2011).

The leader of Tajikistan, Emolmali Rahmon, encouraged all parents with children studying abroad to request their children to return home. The encouragement came labeled as a state effort to prevent exposure to extremists and terrorists. State law requires schools to register with the state and limited spaces for students in the schools that are registered is creating difficulties (Olcott, 2012, 48). Any indications of religious preference are not tolerated, especially in schools, by the authorities in Tajikistan. Head coverings are not allowed and diplomas are withheld because of girls wearing hijabs. The 2011 Parental Responsibility Law prohibits, with the exception of funerals, children from attending activities or ceremonies of a religious nature (Olcott, 2012, 48). "As a result, political, religious and cultural actors now compete in the public domain in Dushanbe for hegemony in matters of education with the aim of tightening their control over the young (Manja, 2010)."

Tajikistan's economic struggles in infancy

The dependency on the Soviet Union created many challenges as the newly independent country entered the global market. Without Russia, transferring goods to Tajikistan and the network to move the countries goods elsewhere not available, trade

problems arose in the country. Additionally, a lack of industrialization during Russia's leadership contributes to weak market diversity within Tajikistan. This lack of industrialization within the state led Tajikistan's standard of living to become one of the lowest in the Soviet Union.

Although Tajikistan has a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) Growth rate of 7.4% the country has 47.2% of the population below the poverty line for the country (World Bank, 2013). Tajikistan had a per capita gross domestic product of \$780 in 2010, making it the poorest of the former Soviet republics (Olcott, 2012, 85). This rate is in the same range as before the civil war in the 1990's. Tajikistan underwent two Structural Adjustment Programs, one in 1998 and the second in 2004 (IMF). The country has depended on the IMF and World Bank for during the period country had the inability to provide services. Tajikistan is 74 percent rural according to the Population Reference Bureau's data (PRB). The specialization under the Soviet rule has left Tajikistan with a population of farmers, and land that is not productive to farm. Additionally, Tajikistan is lacking in the ability to establish markets and negotiate terms of trade due to the decades of specialization for the Soviet Empire. As the lack of adequate employment forces Tajiks to seek employment abroad a large portion of the present GDP is generated outside of the country and is remitted back to the country. These remittances have aided in lowering the poverty rate (Olcott, 2012, 85-86).

Remittances, the life blood of a dependent country

Over one million, primarily men, leave Tajikistan to work in Russia and other countries in the region. World Bank data indicates 52% of Tajikistan's GDP is generated from funds migrant workers remit back from foreign employment (The Guardian 2014). The average migrant age is between 30 and 39, but a large portion is between 18 and 29 years of age.

Approximately 30 percent of the working age men leave Tajikistan to work abroad and 98 percent of remittances originate in Russia (Hemmings, 2010, 12). In 2009 to fund for the Rogun Dam the state sold shares (min \$690) and forced families to buy the shares. Many migrants quite returning to Tajikistan due to the heavy taxes (Hemmings, 2010, 30).

Water is plentiful in a country where only half the people have clean drinking water

Tajikistan is in Central Asia and borders Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and China. Like many other countries that became independent when the Soviet Union disintegrated, Tajikistan suffers from a water system that is dysfunctional due to a lack of maintenance (Beaubien 2013). Changes in climate, and how the country's water is distributed, may intensify this problem. In Tajikistan, which presently has an abundance of water, as much as half of the population is without safe, clean drinking water. Target 7C of the Millennium Development Goals seeks to half the number of people without adequate drinking water by 2015. The Soviet Union's failure to maintain and increase infrastructure during the controlling years have left Tajikistan in dire need of safe drinking water.

A study produced by the United Nations indicates the majority of Tajikistan's poor lack safe, clean drinking water (Beaubien 2013). Water that is drawn from rivers and ditches is often contaminated with agriculture runoff and animal and human excrements. Villagers gather at a rust covered pipe to fill jugs for the day's water supply, which often requires 2 to 3 hours of time. The villagers report conditions were better in the Soviet era with working water stands each 10 to 15 houses. Approximately ninety-five percent of the rural population in Tajikistan lacks safe water and inadequate sewage facilities have led to multiple typhoid and other waterborne disease outbreaks (Beaubien 2013).

Cotton is a leading crop in Tajikistan, and much like the United States, farming became popular in regions with minimal summer rainfall, and large irrigation networks were created by the Russians to grow the cotton and wheat needed in the homeland. The poor design of the networks along with the high water need of cotton and the production requirements of the Soviet Union strained the water system. Water usage for agriculture had reached 90 percent by the 1980's and the desiccation of the Aral Sea caused international attention (Curtis, 1997, 205). In addition to the large amounts of water, smelting and agriculture have also created large levels of pollutants effecting water quality (Curtis, 1997, 224). The years of specialization for the Soviet empire have resulted in the natural resource of farmland, and the water system used to irrigate this land, suffering degradation to the point of near uselessness.

The World Bank's 2007 Tajikistan Living Standards Survey indicates 38 percent of all Tajiks access drinking water from potentially contaminated lakes, rivers, streams, and open wells (Olcott, 2012, 223). Lack of infrastructure is due to a continuation of the Soviet leadership that concentrated on electricity, and the production of cotton and wheat, rather than safe drinking water and sanitation. The capital city Dushanbe is not exempt from infrastructure problems dating back to Soviet control. In 1994, the city experienced a typhus epidemic attributed to filtration systems falling into disrepair during the civil war. The majority of the municipalities in Tajikistan barely generates enough income to cover operating costs and do not have funding for maintenance and improvements to the system (Olcott, 2012, 223).

According to John Vidal, the environmental editor of *The Guardian*, Oxfam released a report detailing temperature increases causing glaciers in the Pamir Mountains to melt,

landslides, drought, increased disease, and food shortages. Additionally, Vidal states Oxfam has warned of dwindling water resources in coming decades (Vidal, 2010). Tajikistan has 8,492 glaciers, of which 20% are in retreat, and predictions indicate an additional 30% will retreat or disappear by midcentury. Fedchenko has lost 6% in size over a 34-year period, which is 44 square kilometers of the country's largest glacier (Vidal, 2010). Tajikistan has 1.5 million people with existing food insecurities, and expectations are that this number will increase as water shortages worsen. Vidal quotes Andy Baker, Oxfam Tajikistan's country director as saying, "There could even be a dangerous ripple across Central Asia, with countries throughout the region potentially wrestling over dwindling water resources in coming decades." (Vidal 2010) The region has experienced a larger than normal increase in temperature with areas increasing as much as 1.2° C, over a 65-year period, where the normal increase is 0.8° C. A portion of Tajikistan's glacier runoff flows to the Aral Sea and agricultural fields in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. As supplies to these countries diminish, tensions are predicted to increase (Vidal 2010).

Tajikistan is involved in the Central Asia South Asia (CASA) project to export power from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan in the summer season. The project, known as CASA 1000 may lead to further conflict with adjacent countries as hunger for the power and the water the country possesses intensifies (Mashrab 2013). The Water Conflict Chronology, inserted in portion as Water Brief 4 of the Pacific institutes World's Water Volume 8, has this 2012 entry for Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan.

Tensions escalate over two proposed dams in Central Asia: Kambarta-1 in Kyrgyzstan and the Rogun Dam in Tajikistan. These dams would affect water supplies in the downstream nations of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Uzbekistan's president, Islam Karimov, says the dams could cause 'not just serious confrontation, but even wars.' (Gleick 2012, 207)

Discussion

Tajikistan has suffered the most of the Central Asian republics released from bondage in 1991, after many generations of servitude to the Russian, then Soviet, Empire. The women and children of the country are taking the brunt of dire situations a century of dependence, and two decades of mismanagement, under the Russian influenced leadership of the country. Tajikistan lacks the oil and natural gas the downstream neighbors possess. Emolmali Rahmon, would like the dam at Rogun to be his legacy, a Stalinist salute to a pro-communist. His efforts have alienated the neighboring countries and the people of his own country. The country needs clean drinking water for the citizens and development of hydropower is reasonable way to generate power, but the scale of the dam is more than the neighboring countries may tolerate. Rahmon's actions have weakened Tajikistan's ability to export goods through Uzbekistan and Uzbekistan has cut off power supplies to the region due to the intent to build the dam at Rogun, adding more strain to residents of Tajikistan (Olcott, 2012, 315).

Russia and Tajikistan were in an almost exclusive trade agreement in the early years of the country's so called independence. Due to Tajikistan's dependence on international financial institutions, the county's economist and financial planners receive training that is helping find better ways to manage the trade deficit accumulated in the Russian trading (Olcott, 2012, 315).

Tajikistan's dependence on the wages remitted back to the country from Russia may become problematic as more of the migrants are staying in Russia. The migrants that have returned to Tajikistan may not have jobs to return to due the economic downturn and drop in oil prices, one of Russia's leading exports (Hemmings, 2010, 34). The many Tajiks that work in the informal economy of Russia may have better opportunity for employment, but at reduced wages. Up to 70% of the workers in Russia work illegally and work 20 to 30 more per week for the same wage (Hemmings, 2010, 14). Tajikistan's dependence on Russia continues the exploitation of before, now Russia is only taking the labor, not the natural resources.

Conclusion

Tajikistan existed as a specialization country for the Soviet Union, supplying raw agricultural materials to the other parts of the empire. This agrarian existence led the country to become one of the poorest of the republics at the time of independence in 1991. The Soviet Union's lack of infrastructure creation and Tajikistan's inability to maintain the existing infrastructure has left nearly half of the country without access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation facilities. Political, economic, and educational inequalities encouraged by the political regime that came to power after the civil war have resulted in poor conditions for women. The same regime is suppressing religious education under the premise of reducing exposure to extremists and terrorists. Tajikistan's land is no longer capable of producing the cotton that made the country an important asset for the Soviet Union, the comparative advantage no longer exist. A large portion of the country's GDP is dependent in remittances from migrant workers forced to live in Russia. How many more decades will pass before the people of Tajikistan are truly independent of the core?

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