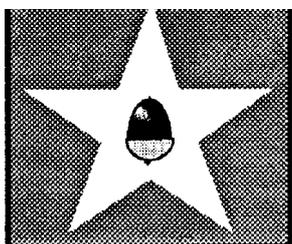


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**Border Security in Tajikistan:
Countering the Narcotics Trade?**

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Border Security in Tajikistan: Countering the Narcotics Trade?

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*"Borders must be open for friends and partners
yet closed to enemies, criminals and terrorists"*

Russian Major-General Vladimir Mochalov¹

Security problems resulting from the increasing flow of narcotics illegally smuggled across the porous 1,200km Tajik-Afghan border have become critical in understanding the nature of political instability within Central Asia. All Central Asian governments, to a greater or lesser extent, deny the fact that narco-mafia gangs are active within their territories, preferring to regard the phenomenon as an external issue. Nowhere has this process been more evident than in Tajikistan, where the drug smuggling trade across its border is flourishing unabated. Estimates vary concerning the scale of the problem, but Tajik authorities believe that they only succeed in stopping around 10-12% of narcotics at its border, though the UN Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) put the figure at 3-6%.² It is impossible to understand the instability and corruption that is endemic in Central Asia without reference to the drug trade. In Tajikistan attempts to cope with the issue internally have proven fruitless, whilst the authorities have their own interests in externalising the problem in order to receive more international help in addressing it.

Operation Enduring Freedom has had little direct impact on the drug trade within Central Asia, causing frustration in Moscow and Dushanbe, despite widespread calls for the US to focus its military power on destroying the Afghan narcotics industry. Narco-mafia gangs have proven extremely resilient in the face of growing pressure. Why has Dushanbe been so ineffectual in coping with the protection of its own state border? What is the structure of border security in Tajikistan? Is it badly organised, or simply incompetent? This study will seek to show how the Tajik border security structure operates, as well as establishing that the failure is in essence Russian and Tajik in origin. No solution will be found within Tajikistan, or by reliance upon Russian military and security support; and Dushanbe has desperately sought to make the struggle to contain the drug trafficking across its border an international issue demanding international finance and political resolve.

The Trade

There are six main trafficking routes operating in Asia from Afghanistan: two through Iran and Pakistan and four through Central Asia. One of these runs through Turkmenistan and three through Tajikistan. The most obvious drug trafficking routes in Tajikistan are in the Khorug area of Gorno-Badakhshan, and the towns of Panj and Moskovskiy in the Khatlon region, in southwest Tajikistan.³ Criminal organisations exporting Afghan narcotics were compelled to find

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alternative routes as a result of the success of Iran against the illicit trade across its border with Afghanistan. Tehran, in cooperation with UNDCP and Western governments, cracked down on drug trafficking across the Afghan-Iran border as tensions rose with the Taliban after 1998. In 1999 the UNDCP estimated that Iran alone accounted for 85% of world total seizure of opiates.⁴

This trade is well organised and lucrative. According to General Andrey Nikolayev, former Director of the FPS, an amount of heroin costs \$100 in Badakhshan Province in Afghanistan. Once it is smuggled across the River Panj into the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast, in Tajikistan its value increases to \$1,000. As it is taken through Osh in Kyrgyzstan it increases to \$10,000; when it reaches Europe it costs \$100,000.⁵

Typically, a group of armed smugglers will approach the River Panj under the cover of darkness, hoping to cross from Afghanistan into Tajikistan. A Russian Federal Border Service (FPS) Border Group detachment such as the Moskovskiy or Panj detachment may intercept the gang and exchange fire, either killing members of the gang or they escape to safety; drugs that are confiscated are incinerated, usually in the presence of local authorities. On the less frequent occasions that narcotics are seized in the area patrolled by the Tajik border guard force KOGG, it is often a result of close support with the local FPS units.⁶ Other weak points have been utilised along the Tajik-Afghan border. Mountainous and landlocked areas, such as the Ishkoshin to Khorug route are extremely difficult to patrol effectively.⁷ In addition, drug traffickers are willing to test the strength of the KOGG which has taken on responsibility for a 73km stretch in the Kalay-Khumb region, with its four detachments, poor training and low morale.

As the Central Asian states have reacted slowly and ineffectually, drug smuggling across the Tajik-Afghan border has become much more organised and sophisticated. A routine smuggling operation involves a small group of men going out in front of armed drug couriers. If they encounter border guards, the group will draw fire, allowing the smugglers time to escape into Afghanistan; their actions are surprisingly well coordinated. Indeed it is not uncommon for the border detachments to encounter a group of smugglers giving battle over several hours, using hand grenades, grenade launchers and machine guns, fired in different directions.⁸ And infiltration is difficult: according to Viktor Kondrashov, Commander of the Moskovskiy Border detachment, 'it's virtually impossible for an outsider to get into the gang'.⁹

Those arrested and prosecuted for drug related crimes in Tajikistan could expect little mercy; such crimes are punishable not only by lengthy prison sentences but also in some cases by capital punishment - a policy similarly pursued in Turkmenistan since 1997 without any tangible results.¹⁰ Proceedings keep the courts very busy. Azizmat Imonov, First Deputy Procurator-General, referred to the size of the problem for the judiciary, noting that of the 675 criminal proceedings brought against 681 individuals for drug-related crimes, 649 have reached court so far in 2002.¹¹

The inherent link with the growth of extremism is well documented: it is one of the main sources of funding for terrorism. In recent years the Tajik-Afghan border has become a 'front-line' in the struggle against drug smuggling.¹² Konstantin Totskiy, head of the Russian Federal Border Guard Service, believes the problem shows no sign of abating and recollects the view of Osama bin Laden: 'Narcotics is the same kind of weapon in the battle against the infidels as the sub-machine gun'.¹³ Totskiy

also expressed surprise at the lack of progress in targeting the narcotic production in Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom:

*An ordinary person from every corner of the globe has the opportunity to observe, almost in real time, how aircraft are making strikes against the bases of the extremists, the mountain caves... But not a single laboratory for the production of heroin has been eliminated yet. The Americans and their allies probably simply have not had the chance to destroy the fields of the opium poppies, they cover enormous areas. But the coordinates of those plants and laboratories are known, and they are quite easy to destroy. It remains to wonder, why not do that at once, in order to achieve two goals - undermine the economic foundation of the extremists, and rid Europe of the Afghan 'white death'?*¹⁴

Totskiy's frustration about the course of the war against terrorism highlights the wider implications of the failure to stem the rising tide of narcotics flowing across the Tajik border, and its potential for use as a propaganda as well as a terrorist weapon. The coordinates are as known to Tajik and Russian military planners as they are to the USA.

Tajik Forces

Tajikistan maintains modest armed forces. They consist of three services: the army, air defence forces and air force. The Tajik army has around 6,000 personnel (two motor rifle brigades, one mountain brigade, one special forces brigade, one special forces detachment and one SAM regiment) drawn from a conscript system of manning. Tajik paramilitary forces consist of 1,200 Border Guards (their numbers are currently being expanded) under the operational control of the Ministry of Interior.¹⁵ Large-scale training exercises take place in Tajikistan two or three times each year, involving units of the Tajik MoD, the Russian 201st Motor Rifle Division and Russian and Tajik Border Guards. Front line aviation assets, helicopters and artillery support these.¹⁶

The 1994 Law on Military Service provides the legal basis for conscription. All men above the age of 18 are liable for military service lasting for two years. Military service may be performed in the Tajik armed forces, border guards, etc, or in the Russian Border Guards Service Group stationed on the Tajik-Afghan border. The officer corps is divided into regular and non-regular officers. The regular officer corps is drawn from the graduates of the Tajik Higher Military College and the military institutes of the Russian Federation and other CIS countries. The non-regular officers are drawn from amongst the graduates of civilian educational institutions and those who complete the accelerated officer training courses.¹⁷

The KOGG

In Tajikistan itself the responsibility for border security is placed under two 'power-ministries': the Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Security. Though Tajikistan is heavily reliant upon Russia for supporting its border security it does possess its own border guard force, the *Komitet po okhrane gosudarstvennoy granitsy*, Committee for the Protection of the State Border (KOGG). It is formed from Tajik conscripts and Lieutenant-General Abdurahmon Azimov, appointed on 12 January 2002, commands it.¹⁸ In common with the uniformed armed forces, Tajik border guards swear an oath of allegiance to President Emomali Rakhmonov, in his capacity as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Tajikistan. However, given

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the choice, most Tajik conscripts prefer to fulfil their military service in the Russian *Federal'naya pogranichnaya sluzhba*, Federal Border Service (FPS) Border Group.¹⁹

The Tajik border guard service has its headquarters in Dushanbe and is divided into regional districts. The KOGG is much smaller than the Russian FPS Border Group stationed in Tajikistan and struggles to cope with its responsibilities. Its Chairman, Lieutenant-General Azimov, recognises the existence of shortcomings, though he is quick to point out that in the first quarter of 2002 the KOGG seized 120kg of drugs, including 77kg of heroin.²⁰ Of the 1,200km Tajik-Afghan border, the KOGG is responsible for only one 73km section. Tajikistan has also taken over duties carried out by the Russian FPS along its 430km border with China. The principal training centre in Tajikistan for border guards is the FPS Red Banner Training Centre, founded in 1930. Although an estimated 65% of its students are now Tajik, they also prefer to serve in the FPS Border Group rather than in the KOGG.²¹ On his appointment Azimov, whose background is in Tajik Special Services, sent a clear signal concerning his own views on the issue of training Tajik border guards: he immediately sent Tajik servicemen to receive training in FPS institutions in Russia.²²

Azimov has also looked elsewhere in his search to provide more training and equipment to fortify border security and the functioning of the KOGG in the US and through organisations such as NATO and the EU. The US has said it will assist the KOGG in supplying communications and transport as well as training 'skilled specialists'. The EU may also help in supplying technical equipment and financial aid.²³ Training of Tajik servicemen also takes place in other Central Asian states. At a graduation ceremony for members of the Military Institute of the National Security Committee (KNB) in Almaty, Kazakhstan on 31 January 2002, 318 officers graduated; amongst these were 19 officers for the KOGG, trained at the expense of the Kazakh government under a programme of assistance to a 'fraternal Republic'.²⁴ Yet, despite progress in widening the experience and sources of training for its servicemen, the KOGG still fails to attract quality personnel.

Azimov has said that Dushanbe plans to expand the KOGG in coming years, in order to take over more functions currently carried out by the Russian FPS Border Group in Tajikistan. Azimov hopes that the KOGG will triple in strength over the next two years, based on manpower cuts in other law enforcement agencies, though it remains unclear which departments and units will be reduced.²⁵ Difficulties emanating from this transition will place yet more strain on the already highly pressured KOGG.

Tajik Drug Control Agency (AKN)

President Rakhmonov has recognised that the scale of the problem is beyond the control of Tajikistan alone, and was not improving despite the efforts of the KOGG and Russian FPS. In 1998 he therefore accepted the financial assistance of the UN and created a new Drug Control Agency (AKN). The new security agency was placed under direct presidential supervision, with a staff of more than 300. Its main function is to document and collect data and curb regional drug trafficking. Rakhmonov said it signalled a 'declaration of war, once and for all, on the drug mafia'. The UNDCP promised to assist in hiring 350 specialist personnel for the AKN over a three-year period, as well as supplying communications and other equipment.²⁶ The AKN has become the main coordinating and controlling body responsible for all narcotics related problems in Tajikistan. The UNDCP provided most of the \$11 million budget, and retained the right of approval in appointments.

Since corruption and problems relating to personnel had beset the KOGG, Rakhmonov was aware that the success of the AKN would largely depend upon its director: Rustam Urmanovich Nazarov, who was born in 1959 in Dushanbe. He graduated from the USSR Internal Troops Higher School in Omsk in 1980. He served in the Internal Ministry in Tajikistan, holding positions ranging from inspector of criminal investigation to deputy minister of internal affairs in the Republic of Tajikistan. In 1996 he was appointed as head of Tajikistan's state commission for drug control. In 1999, on the creation of the AKN, Nazarov was appointed as its director and attained the rank of Major-General of police.²⁷

In order to help avoid the problems of corruption that have afflicted other law enforcement agencies, salaries to employees of the AKN are very high: between \$100 and \$600 per month (the average monthly salary in Tajikistan is less than \$10).²⁸ Employment in the AKN involves a strict selection process and over 90% of its employees have higher education - a rare figure in Tajikistan. Nazarov believes that the narco-mafia has its 'eyes and ears' everywhere²⁹ and on that basis he is aware that the work of the AKN can easily be compromised by disloyal employees. Since its creation in 1999 it has accumulated a database of drug smugglers containing 19,000 individuals. It also works very closely with Russian agencies such as the Internal Ministry, Federal Security Service (FSB) and FPS, and internally with the KOGG.³⁰

Nazarov has emphasised that the problem of combating narcotic smuggling across the Tajik-Afghan border necessitates close regional cooperation; unfortunately this has developed somewhat slowly, but bilateral accords have now been signed with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and more recently Uzbekistan. The authorities in Turkmenistan continue to deny that drug dealers are operating through its territory, which complicates future prospects for cooperation. According to Nazarov since six border posts of the Murgab Border Detachment were transferred to the control of the KOGG, AKN has supported it with mobile support groups in an attempt to fortify the border.³¹

On 27 May 2002 in Dushanbe AKN signed a protocol with the Afghan commission on drug smuggling. Although the document raises the possibility of cooperation between Dushanbe and Kabul, particularly in sharing intelligence and training Afghan specialists, the programme is reliant upon assistance from international bodies such as the UNDCP.³²

Officers from the AKN cooperate with the Russian FPS in joint operations against drug smuggling. In 2001 more than 153kg of narcotics were seized as a result of joint operations mounted by the FPS and AKN: in the first three months of 2002 113kg of heroin were seized during further operations.³³ These operations are certainly proving fruitful though the AKN, despite its high-profile status and presidential support, has existed for three years and has achieved only a limited impact in efforts to combat drug smuggling. The organisation itself is understandably reticent about publicity, but its infrequent press releases supply grounds for believing that the scale of the problem is continuing to escalate.

Avaz Yuldashev, head of the public relations centre of the AKN, gave an impression of growing alarm in February 2002. He said AKN was aware of the existence of 417 heroin producing facilities in Afghanistan, in keeping with the satellite images of Afghanistan released by Russia in 1999 showing the country covered in poppy fields, and believed there were around ten tonnes of heroin along the Tajik-Afghan border.³⁴ The anxiety is shared by the FPS. One of its Border Group Commanders,

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General Ramazan Dzhamatov, recently observed that 'serious efforts of the world community, including the allies of the antiterrorist coalition, will be needed for destroying the roots of that business, which has been flourishing almost legally for dozens of years'.³⁵ Indeed, one positive achievement of the AKN has been to introduce the idea that a solution to drug smuggling cannot be found by Tajikistan alone; it requires international assistance. At the official opening of the AKN regional centre in Khorug, representatives of law enforcement agencies in France, Germany, the UK, the EU Central Asian Drug Action Programme and UNDCP were in attendance.³⁶ Agencies in France and Germany have deepened their links with the authorities in Tajikistan in an effort to combat narcotic crime in the EU. Nazarov has stated that the AKN works closely with the German Federal Criminal Police, exchanging information and resulting in a number of arrests in Germany in 2001.³⁷

Russia's Role in Tajik Border Security

The most important structure in the security of the Tajik border is not in fact Tajik: it is the Russian FPS Border Group. Russia maintained the former USSR border troops within Tajikistan after the break up of the USSR in 1991, owing to the instability that was apparent in the country at that time. On 23 September 1992 the FPS Border Group was officially set up in Tajikistan. A bilateral agreement between Russia and Tajikistan signed on 25 May 1993 gives the authority for the protection of the Tajik border to the FPS. Originally this was intended only to serve as an interim measure until such time as Dushanbe could construct and sufficiently strengthen its own border guard.³⁸ It remains there, fulfilling an aid and cooperation role for the Tajik government, and it is still numerically and organisationally more competent than Tajikistan's own structures.

In fact the border group of the FPS stationed in Tajikistan is quite unique as a military formation, with 7% of its officers, nearly 50% of the warrant officers, 69% of contract servicemen and 99% of conscripts being Tajik citizens. The other personnel are Russian. Colonel General Konstantin Totskiy, puts the current strength of the border group in Tajikistan at 11,000, though this figure has varied over the past nine years.³⁹ The group is equipped with more than 300 artillery systems. Although they have potential support from the Tajik air force, in practical terms this often breaks down, since in the event of a violation of Tajik airspace the FPS can only inform the Tajik air force - operational control belongs to the Tajik MoD.⁴⁰

Russian President Vladimir Putin approved a border security concept for 2001-2005 on 1 September 2001.⁴¹ The concept describes the security concerns of the Russian Federation, including

- an increase of the smuggling of narcotics, weapons and ammunition, and the activity of transnational organized crime
- the activities of terrorist organizations and groups and illegal armed formations across the state border
- the possibility of the expansion of hotbeds of sociopolitical tension and the unleashing of armed conflicts near the state border
- the expansion of NATO to the east with its emergence at the state border.

In order to facilitate improved border security the concept particularly highlights the need for modernising FPS weapons and equipment. In reality this has proven very difficult, as the FPS has had to vie with the other 'power-ministries' for its share of the limited defence budget in recent years. However, the concept also points to the need for the 'support of the presence of the Russian FPS Border Groups in Tajikistan and Armenia, and the Russian FPS Operational Groups on the territories of the CIS member states for the purpose of defending Russia's geopolitical interests'.⁴²

The FPS group in Tajikistan is considered to be the best operational subunit in the FPS. Indeed, in January 2002 Konstantin Totskiy awarded the Challenge pennant and standard to the border group commander, Lieutenant-General Aleksandr Markin. Totskiy stated, 'This award is being made to border guards who for several years now have been guarding the Tajik-Afghan border, preventing various bandit formations and drug dealers from slipping into Tajikistan and other CIS countries'.⁴³ It certainly fulfils a trying mandate within a highly dangerous and sensitive border area. In 2001 the group was fired on 92 times and engaged in battle 57 times, losing one serviceman and suffering four wounded.⁴⁴

In fact, the structure of border security in Tajikistan is complex. The FPS group forms the backbone of the structure, working closely with its Tajik counterpart KOGG. Furthermore, the Russian 201st Motor Rifle Division stationed in Tajikistan plays a supporting role in border security, in so far as it can become involved in repelling an incursion across the border.⁴⁵ The Russian FSB works closely with the FPS group and it is also responsible for counterintelligence, monitoring all Russian uniformed personnel.

Moreover the intimate link between the FPS and Tajik Special Services in border security can be seen in practice. In early June 2002, Russian television broadcast a high profile special operation in Tajikistan, conducted between the FPS and Tajik Special Services. A sweep operation began at an island in the River Panj, in close proximity to the Moskovskiy and Panj Russian border guard units; they were supported by aviation and combed the islands that form in the river when it has burst its banks. Those islands are utilised by drug smugglers. A unit searched the territory whilst a helicopter circled the area. During the operation 55kg of heroin were found, but no drug traffickers were located.⁴⁶

In 1996 the Russian FPS Border Group confiscated only 2kg of heroin on the Tajik-Afghan border: by 2001 the Group confiscated 5,452kg of drugs on the same border. This represented a substantial increase on the previous year, which saw 3,130kg confiscated. It is estimated that the amount of heroin seized in 2001 is equivalent to 25 million 'hits'.⁴⁷ In the first six months of 2002 the FPS confiscated 1,700kg of drugs, including 1,100kg of heroin, on the Tajik-Afghan border, representing an increase of 60% on the same period the previous year. The largest consignment of drugs seized in the past nine years by the FPS in Tajikistan was on 13 July 2002, when the Panj unit of the FPS Border Group seized 215.46kg of heroin, a part of the opium harvested in May.⁴⁸

Clearly the presence of the FPS in Tajikistan continues to serve the national security interests of the RF; the twin threats of drug trafficking and the movement of militants across the Tajik border necessitate their continued presence there. According to Totskiy the Tajik border guards are unable to protect their own state border, since they lack a regular officer corps which will take 10-15 years to construct and they need to be properly financed. As soon as Tajikistan can train its

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own personnel and improve its economy, Totskiy said, 'we will hug each other, leave a group of advisors and retreat to our borders'. However, the economic factor does restrict the construction of the Tajik border guard. According to the bilateral agreement of 1993 Tajikistan should fund the FPS Border Group stationed on its territory to a level of 50%; but it can only afford 5%: the vast majority of the financial burden therefore falls on the RF. But the consequences of this situation are ruinous for the FPS Border Group. Because of financial restrictions the barracks and mess halls are dilapidated and it is proving more difficult to maintain the electrical and alarm systems or even keep fences in good order.⁴⁹

International Cooperation and Assistance

United Nations

The United Nations responded to the signs of the drug trafficking problem expanding in Central Asia in the 1990s, as drug traffickers exploited those countries in a period of transition from their former Soviet status. Weaknesses in the border controls of the former Soviet states seemed to stimulate trafficking from Afghanistan. The UNDCP, based in Vienna, launched a series of fact-finding missions to Central Asia between 1992-1994. In 1996 the UNDCP persuaded all five Central Asian Republics to join forces to combat drug trafficking at a subregional level, signing a memorandum of understanding, promoting institution building, law enforcement and supply-and-demand reduction.⁵⁰

In 1997 the level of support by the UNDCP was stepped up, and focussed on Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Enhanced border security by Iran and Pakistan along their borders with Afghanistan left other states more vulnerable to drug trafficking. A project launched in 1997 costing \$2 million was aimed at relieving the Khorug - Osh route. It sought to improve four border posts and three local police facilities in each of those states. At the ceremony marking the launch of the project in Osh (Kyrgyzstan) on 30 April 1997, as well as a number of experts from the UN and EU, officials from the Russian Ministry of Interior and the FPS also attended; reminding the various international bodies of the particular interest of the Russian Federation. The UNDCP called on the Central Asian States to develop a regional drug control programme to achieve the following:

- Regionally coordinated drug control legislation
- Enhanced levels of cooperation
- Promotion of national drug control intelligence units and sharing intelligence
- Joint operations for the prevention of drug trafficking
- Joint training for specialists.⁵¹

CIS

A CIS agreement was signed in Ashgabat in 1994: the Memorandum on Cooperation in Guarding the State Borders in the Central Asian Region. Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan allocated contingents for the support of the Tajik-Afghan border. At the height of the Tajik Civil War between 1994-1996 the border guards grouping reached 22,000 men. When the war ended in 1997 the border contingents from Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan left Tajikistan, and after being

reduced from 500 to 300 in 1999 the Kazakh border battalion was finally withdrawn in 2001; ⁵² leaving the burden placed firmly on Russia and Tajikistan. Since that time problems have beset attempts to create a stable and secure border environment along the Tajik-Afghan border, whilst the problem of drug trafficking has grown exponentially.⁵³

Cooperation at the CIS level has been fraught with bureaucratic and financial setbacks. The CIS Council of Commanders of Border Guard Troops (SKPV) plays an important coordinating role in CIS border security. During its jubilee meeting in Dushanbe in June 2002, General Totskiy used the opportunity to attempt to recover debts from his CIS counterparts. Indeed the functioning of the Coordinating Service has been severely hampered over the past eight years by the unwillingness of CIS countries to properly invest in it. A report by the Russian Auditing Commission in 2001 blamed the poor use of federal funds and the contributions from CIS countries not on criminality but on the tangled 'organization of financial activities and use of finances'. However, the report observed that 'military-technical cooperation was viewed by many CIS countries as an opportunity to solve their fiscal problems cheaply, or free of charge, at Russia's expense'.⁵⁴ A programme of increased border security cooperation was agreed at a meeting of the SKPV held in Minsk (Belarus) on 30 January 2002. Yet there were no Tajik delegates at the meeting, officially owing to a large-scale reshuffle of the leadership of the Tajik border guard service.⁵⁵ Lieutenant-General Aleksandr Manilov, Chief of the International Treaties Department of the FPS has admitted that the level of cooperation achieved by the SKPV existed largely on paper.⁵⁶

Matters of border security are dealt with most effectively at a bilateral level rather than at CIS levels, though progress can be equally theoretical. Closer cooperation between the Russian and Tajik interior ministries, particularly denoted by more frequent meetings within the past four years, has only resulted in reaffirming the high priority of combating drug trafficking - rather than agreeing on concrete counter-measures.⁵⁷ Tajikistan and Uzbekistan concluded a series of cooperation agreements on 5 February 1998 between their interior ministries, intelligence services and interior ministry bodies in border areas, aimed at enhancing border security. On 26 May 1999, their foreign ministries signed an agreement in Khojand (Tajikistan) on cooperation against drug trafficking, international terrorism and religious extremism. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan also signed a potentially important agreement on 21 April 2000 in Tashkent, agreeing to pursue joint efforts against drug trafficking, organized crime and the spread of Islamic militancy within the region. These agreements, though attractive on paper, have effected little change for the better in stemming the relentless flow of Afghan narcotics through Central Asia.

Russia and Afghanistan have shown significant interest in the prospect of deeper links aimed at promoting border security. The Afghan government has formed border troops under the control of the Afghan MoD. There are now 24 border guard brigades functioning within that structure. Lieutenant-General Sameyollah Qatra, commander of the Afghan border guard, believes that it is essential to promote close collaboration with their colleagues in neighbouring countries, particularly in combating terrorism and drug trafficking. Russian, Tajik and Afghan Border Group representatives met on 8 February 2002 in Kalay-Khumb to discuss cooperative measures to enhance border security. Such meetings are an indirect consequence of the 'regime change' in Kabul.⁵⁸ In May 2002 General Qatra asked the FPS Group in Tajikistan to supply technical support, train NCOs and field officers and organize links between Afghan and Russian subdivisions responsible for protecting the

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border. This approach was welcomed by the FPS. Within a month, Totskiy announced that the FPS Border Group in Tajikistan would train junior officers of the Afghan border service; final approval for that training to take place within Tajikistan was given by President Rakhmonov.⁵⁹

USA

In May 2001, General Tommy Franks, head of US Central Command described Tajikistan as 'a strategically important country' and pledged closer security assistance.⁶⁰ The US has since promised to assist in the development of Tajikistan's border security, providing training and equipment to the KOGG, through the US Export Control and Border Security (EXBS) programme; \$7,500,000 was allocated from the Emergency Response Fund in 2001, and an additional \$500,000 in 2002.⁶¹ General Azimov has been especially keen to stress to Richard Melton and Frederick Fetti, representatives of the programme, that the KOGG urgently requires improved communications and other equipment to detect cases of both drug and weapon trafficking across the border. General Azimov has however complained bitterly about administrative delays in seeing the benefit of assistance and it is unclear when the aid programme will start. By August 2002 Tajikistan had received 60 pairs of binoculars from the US. However, the entry of the US to the region and Tajikistan's recent membership of NATO's PfP signal closer links with the west and the aid promised by the US could make a significant impact on the KOGG: it is perhaps their one glimmer of hope.⁶²

There is no conflict of interest between Russia and the US in this instance, since the plan to provide aid and technical assistance for the improvement of Tajik border security is broadly in line with Russian policy. Indeed it has been welcomed by the FPS, no doubt hoping that American help will alleviate the financial burden on Russia in this regard, perhaps seeing some of the money improving the lot of the FPS Border Group during the next few years as serious efforts are made toward strengthening and expanding the role of the KOGG.⁶³ But Washington will be equally cautious in committing itself to resolving a 'soft security' issue which could entangle the US in an open ended and complex commitment.

Institutional Corruption

The Russian and Tajik paramilitary forces themselves have been a significant part of the problem of the rising tide of narcotic smuggling across the Tajik-Afghan border. Robert Baer, a former CIA head of station in Dushanbe (1992-95) claimed that Russian officers were willing collaborators with corrupt Tajik officials in the drug trade.⁶⁴

The press service of the FPS Border Group in Tajikistan has been at the forefront of efforts to play down, if not entirely answer, concerns about the involvement of Russian border guards in drug smuggling deals. On 22 April 2002, Tajik Interior Ministry officers arrested a Dushanbe resident, Olambi Obidova, allegedly while she was attempting to sell 8kg of heroin to a contract serviceman in a unit from the Border Group. The report was rapidly countered by the FPS press service. According their version, the detained serviceman, Taghoynazar Berdiyev, was not a serving member of the FPS: he had served in unit 2033 of the Border Group and was transferred to the reserve in October 2001.⁶⁵

Problems stemming from corruption, a notorious and pervasive problem throughout Central Asia, are hampering the attempts by the Tajik authorities to confront drug

trafficking. In Tajikistan the lack of a free press, public debate on policy and an independent judiciary, together with the presence of corrupt police, customs and border security personnel are an endemic part of the socio-political environment.⁶⁶ President Rakhmonov, during a meeting of the Tajik Security Council on 26 January 2001, severely criticised the law enforcement agencies in Tajikistan for their failure to organize effective measures against drug trafficking. In February 2001 Lieutenant-General Saidanvar Kamolov, Chairman of the KOGG until January 2002, confirmed the involvement of Tajik KOGG officers in drug trafficking, as well as those from other law enforcement agencies. However, Kamolov was convinced that the failure of the Tajik authorities, in only preventing a small fraction of the total amount of drugs smuggled across the Tajik-Afghan border in 2000, could be explained in relation to the country's relief, particularly the mountainous areas of Shurobod and Badakhshan.⁶⁷ Admittedly geographical factors do play a part in the border security problems experienced in Tajikistan, but they are markedly compounded by the weakness of the indigenous security structures. The Tajik ambassador to Kazakhstan was twice caught transporting drugs, including 62kg of heroin; shortly after his expulsion the Tajik trade representative in Kazakhstan was caught with 24kg of heroin. On 9 August 2002 a former Tajik deputy defence minister was imprisoned for using a military helicopter to smuggle drugs.⁶⁸

Rakhmonov continues to struggle with the problem of corruption within the state security structures, although its resolution is reported to be a presidential priority. Only recently has he publicly linked the issue with low standards of discipline within the state security organisations. He almost completely renewed the leadership of the KOGG in January 2002. In early April 2002 police and customs officials in the Soghd region were found promoting drug smuggling, resulting in the dismissal of Colonel Shavkat Yulchiyev, the head of the regional interior department and all his deputies. During a speech given by Rakhmonov in Soghd in April, he railed against violations in the law and military discipline amongst servicemen in the KOGG and its officers in particular.⁶⁹ Put simply, the whole structure of border security is undermined by the lack of integrity on the part of the individual border guard, regardless of nationality: if he is willing or open to the offer of bribery, then the system is bypassed by those it is meant to exclude. Border crossings can be purchased for around \$50; a small sum to the drug trafficking gangs.⁷⁰ Rather than being part of the solution, the KOGG has become part of the problem.

Future Tajik Border Security

Major-General Vladimir Mochalov believes that a well organised and efficient border security system contains the following:

- close support by intelligence agencies
- border guards professionally trained and technically equipped, carrying out border control using special units working in conjunction with intelligence services
- a passport control system capable of automatically reading documents, storing and transmitting information on people crossing the border.⁷¹

Achieving these goals in practical terms presents the sternest security challenge to Tajikistan.

Border Security in Tajikistan: Countering the Narcotics Trade?

Border security in Tajikistan has been confronted with increasing challenges from illegal migration to drug trafficking. Tajikistan has proven unable to control the situation on its own, relying principally on the assistance of Russia. The border security structure in Tajikistan can be likened to a dam: parts can be solidly constructed but its structural weaknesses do not need to be large to cause a breach in the dam. Likewise, the strength of the Russian FPS Border Guard Group, though amongst the most reputable within the FPS, has not been enough to cover the weaknesses in the Tajik border security system, mercilessly tested and penetrated by the gangs engaging in drug trafficking across the Tajik-Afghan border. Here the fundamental weakness of the system is exposed: the KOGG is underfunded and poorly trained and incapable of stemming the rising tide of drug trafficking. Equally, corruption within the law enforcement agencies of Tajikistan and Russia has clearly exacerbated a worsening situation. Efforts within Tajikistan aimed at addressing corruption are subject to the mass personnel changes frequently initiated by President Rakhmonov.

The security problems of the Tajik-Afghan border have never been an exclusively Tajik problem. Russia also believes national security is at stake. Much therefore depends on President Putin and his formulation of foreign policy priorities. In this context, faced with the growing problem presented by the Tajik-Afghan border, Russia will have to prioritise funding for the FPS and aid Tajikistan in developing its border forces. Russia must also balance its own security needs with its economic interests, which envisage Russia's borders becoming more open for interstate cooperation and the development of regional ties, as well as developing ties with CIS countries in order to form 'a single border space'.⁷² Andrey Nikolayev summarises these apparent divergent needs by referring to the 'zipper' model of border security. A border may be viewed as a fence dividing a state from its neighbours, or as a 'zipper' that connects the states.

Although the current border security structure was intended as a temporary measure, not envisaging the permanent basing of the FPS on Tajik soil, it has become part of the geopolitical landscape. Over time, internal security structures such as the KOGG and the AKN can be promoted as part of a Tajik solution to border security. The KOGG could be expanded, structurally replicating, to some extent, the model of the FPS Border Group; the willingness of Tajik men to serve within the FPS Group reveals a potential source of manpower. Kyrgyzstan developed its own border guard service with Russian assistance,⁷³ and thus removed the need for Russian servicemen to carry out the task for them. Bolstering paramilitary forces and expanding their role is appealing to the Tajik leader, as is the hope for new or modern weapons and equipment through US aid or subsidised internal prices for the CIS Collective Security Treaty states: initiatives which are already underway. However, President Rakhmonov, like the Director of the FPS, may be resigned to a lengthy stay for the FPS Group in Tajikistan: quite simply, the task is economically beyond his grasp.

The ability of the Tajik state to effectively combat drug trafficking is severely restricted by its topography, its impoverished and stagnant economy, pervasive corruption in political and security bodies and the poor condition of the KOGG. President Rakhmonov is consequently dependent upon the continued security assistance provided by the Russian Federation, and this is likely to persist over the next decade, despite public declarations in Dushanbe concerning expanding and increasing the role of the KOGG. Regional cooperation, existing largely on paper, and international efforts have failed to prevent an expansion in the illicit trade.

Nonetheless, the changing security dynamics within Central Asia in general, the UNDCP assistance to Tajikistan and US aid are serving to remind the authorities in Dushanbe of the inherently international dimension to the problem of drug smuggling. Its solution, however, may only be effected from beyond the region itself: the role of Russia and the US could be critical in bringing this about. To date Russia has borne the brunt of efforts to assist the Tajik government in its attempt to cope with the security challenges on its border with Afghanistan. The extent of future international assistance and action may yet depend on the assessment of 'white death' as a weapon of international terrorism and its ultimate linkage with the war on terror.

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