

American University of Central Asia

**Conflict Resolution in Tajikistan: The Pamir Case**

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## **Abstract**

In the early morning of July 24<sup>th</sup> 2012, a Special Military Operation was launched in the small town of Khorog, Tajikistan. The special operation was the central government's response to the killing of Major-General Abdullo Nazarov. All sorts of communication services were blocked and the town was isolated from the rest of the world for over two months. The consequence of the special operation was a violent conflict, after which the region remains unstable to date.

Therefore, this paper looks at the process of conflict resolution of July 2012 unrest, and looks at the main actors that took part in it. The main aim of the thesis is to look at the role of Aga-Khan Development Networks (AKDN) and other civil society groups and activists, in order to evaluate the degree to which their role was important and adequate. AKDN played an important, yet not the central role during the conflict, acting as a mediator in an effort to help organize a proper conflict resolution. During the conflict, ordinary people and civil society groups played the central role in the context of conflict resolution and prevention of further escalation of violence. This paper will demonstrate to which level the role of ordinary people and the civil society was important during the clashes. Furthermore, this research looks at the conflict resolution approaches and applies them to the case study of July 2012 events in Khorog, Tajikistan.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **1.1 Introduction:**

Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO) has been a region that has occupied the Tajik news and concern of the people since the July 2012 events that took place in the small regional capital Khorog. Therefore, Khorog has been a hotspot of events. GBAO occupies almost half of Tajikistan, and is on most of its territorial area, mountainous. The population of the region represents less than 4% of the total population of Tajikistan and is mainly comprised of an ethnic minority, known as Pamiris. The Pamiri ethnic minority has been one of the opposition blocks during the civil war in Tajikistan, with them most importantly securing GBAO. Nevertheless, with the end of the civil war and restoration of peace, the allocation of power remained questionable in the region. Officially, Badakhshan region is supposed to be an autonomous region, but the degree to which control is exercised by the centralized government in Dushanbe is extremely high. As a matter of course, when too much control is assumed by a centralized government over an autonomous region with an ethnic minority, conflict is more likely to arise. Accordingly, on July 24<sup>th</sup> 2012, the government of Tajikistan sent troops into Khorog, the regional capital of the semi-autonomous region of Gorno-Badakhshan in the eastern part of the country, initially in order to deal with the killers of Major-General Abdullo Navarov (Ismail-Beben, 2012, n.p.).

The death of the General has served as a trigger for the government to move military units into the region. Nevertheless, it remains questionable, why so many army units were brought into the small city. But the main problem arises concerning the way the conflict was resolved and what people have endured, and what role they took. Thus, the central objective of this work lies on the conflict resolution process and the main actors participating in it. Therefore, I focus on the following questions:

What conflict resolution mechanisms/approaches were used for the clash in the Pamirs in 2012?

What was the role of civil society and the Aga-Khan Development Networks (AKDN) in the conflict prevention?

Throughout my research, I will try to answer these questions. My first step is to examine the conceptual framework of conflict resolution itself. Within this framework I will operate the factors of ethnicity, mediation and the role of the people and civil society in to the context of conflict resolution.

Secondly, I will look in depth at the conflict that took place in July 2012, analyzing it from the scope of conflict resolution and conflict prevention. It is essential to look at the core reasons of the conflict, the approaches of conflict resolution that were implemented, and the consequences and outcomes.

Finally the core objective of my research will be to look at the actors who took part during the process. In this regard I will analyze the role of the civil society and AKDN. Mainly, the focus will be on their role during the negotiation process and their input in the resolution of the conflict. Therefore, the main objective will be to find out the importance and adequacy of AKDN's role, and that of civil society's.

Considering the special conditions in the Pamirs and the field of power in Tajikistan, leads to the following hypotheses:

The governments' rhetoric of justification of the attacks was crucial to keep the conflict on the national level and to prevent international intervention as well as to appease the local population.

The government's official agenda does not match the actions that were taken. This suggests different reasons, intentions and goals.

Religious reasoning was used to appease the population.

Civil society organized itself quickly through neighborhood networks, thus diminishing the impact of the assault.

The government found itself in an unsuccessful military predicament, and was thus forced into negotiations.

AKDN was taking a big part in the negotiations, serving as mediator, but failed to provide an effective resolution to the conflict, and lost the trust of the people.

## **1.2 Theoretical Framework:**

### **What is conflict?**

As a theoretical framework, I will operate approaches and models of conflict resolution, which are relevant to my research. But beforehand, it is expedient to look at the meaning of conflict resolution and identify its importance. Therefore, we should look at the meaning of the word conflict, in the context of my research. Conflict is defined as a serious disagreement or argument, typically a protracted one (Oxford Dictionaries, 2015), or an active disagreement between people with opposing opinions or principles (Cambridge Dictionaries, 2015). But at this

point it is vital to understand that while conflict in its original meaning identifies a disagreement or dispute, in the case of Pamir 2012 the conflict has turned into violence. When a conflict occurs, especially when the conflict leads to violence and killings, a resolution is necessary. In this regard, it is crucial to review and operate conflict resolution theory. The meaning and perception of conflict resolution is widely interpreted and has been studied in different fields. Therefore, it is appropriate to define a more traditional meaning first. Conflict resolution is defined as an intervention aimed at alleviating or eliminating discord through conciliation (Business Dictionaries, 2015). In a more academic terminology Conflict resolution is a more comprehensive term, which implies that deep-rooted sources of conflict are addressed and transformed. Since in my case study, an ethnic minority was in the center of the conflict, I will focus on research related to conflicts around that line.

### **Ethnicity: Ethnic minority, “Ethnic Conflict”**

As already indicated, one of the main factors that should be included in the case of the Pamirs, is the issue of ethnicity, as it also plays a great role in the context of conflict resolution. Therefore, it is reasonable to look at the existing approaches which can be applied to the term “ethnic conflict”. The term itself already recognizes the fact that the conflict arises on the internal level, and is applied to a certain group which distinguishes from the majority group of a state. The minority group essentially derives enough difference in terms of culture, religion and linkage to a certain territory. Thus, ethnicity is one of the features that distinguish groups and actors; it is one of the features that produce differences, difficulties, and conflict. Despite its prominence, however, ethnicity is but one of the possible causes of conflict (Bercovitch, 2003, p.56). In the case of ethnicity conflict, the main actors are identified as the minority side and the governing side, which is the majority. Thus, basically ethnic conflicts arise when the groups with a separate sense of identity perceive their governing structure to be incapable of addressing their basic needs. When such needs are denied or are not met, grievances are formed, and demands that the situation be redressed become more and more voluble (Ibid, p.57). The demand and



grievances could also be viewed on different grounds, which most likely result in tensions and conflicts.

There are different types of ethnic conflicts, and following the distinction introduced by Bercovitch's (2003) paper, the most relevant to the Pamir case are autonomy conflicts and political voice conflicts. Autonomy conflicts reflect an ethnic group's desire for the right of self-government of their ethnic group (Bercovitch 2003, p.61). Autonomy is one of the most important factors for an ethnic minority, especially with a territorial possession at hand. Minorities in a setting like that want to define a set of rules themselves, responding to their needs as well as to preserve their cultural identity and local specificities. Therefore, with less autonomy comes a certain discontent within the population, connected to a fear of loss of identity. Political voice conflicts concern the distribution of political influence among different ethnic groups (Bercovitch, 2003, p.62). Political voice and political share is another important issue for an ethnic minority and closely related to autonomy. These types of conflicts arise in relation to discontent and poor distribution of power, more or less, and are furthermore driven into a stage where conflicts become tense and therefore even turn into violence. Concerning this stage, it is important to look at certain models and approaches which are relevant in ethnic conflict resolution context.

Simona Sharoni (1995) brings in a different perspective referring to the work of Rabie (1994) on "Conflict Resolution and Ethnicity", who examines that conflicts on the interstate level and presence of ethnic minority, are not a negative phenomenon, but a rather integral part of human life, and that conflicts can never be eliminated, but rather reduced, contained or managed. In this context it is observed that conflict resolution is the most desirable approach to deal with the conflicts, especially in the context of ethnic conflicts. Therefore, different models are designed and the one more closely related to the case of the Pamirs is the control model. The control model is designed "to achieve political stability by allowing the majority to have a near-total control over the minority, and to enhance the interests of the controlling majority at the

expense of the controlled minority, reducing it to a position of subordination and submission (Sharoni, 1995, p.524). According to this model, the majority or the ruling power should have the advantages on their sides. Other closely related approaches are identified by Alexis Heraclides (1989) in his elaborations on modes of conflict resolution. In this context he clarifies that there are policies of 'denial' and policies of 'acceptance'. Denial policies include all those modes of resolution that directly or indirectly deny the existence of the insurgent in group as separate people or a nation and as the other party to the conflict (Alexis Heraclides, 1989, p.199). Acceptance on the other hand, admits the existence of the other side, and is therefore more or less a negotiable solution. At this point the imbalance of the parties shows its presence and relevance. Therefore, in a conflict where an ethnic minority is presented as a resisting force, and obviously the governing force is more powerful, the notion of asymmetry and resolution is relevant and dominant.

In the context of conflict resolution it is important to look at the issue of asymmetry structure, where the parties are in an unequal possession of power. In other words, the parties are in power imbalance. C. R. Mitchell (1991) theorizes asymmetric resolution in the framework of protracted conflicts. Therefore, he looks at the asymmetric conflicts from the Pruitt and Rubin's "dual concern" model and applies it to the resolution process. While the initial Pruitt and Rubin's model of "dual concern" represents the behavior of one party, C. R. Mitchell (1991, p.26) applies this model to both parties and therefore defines the possible structure of the parties in the context of asymmetry. Asymmetric, where for example, one party is unconcerned about its own goals but is highly concerned about the other's goals and welfare, and the second party is wholly unconcerned about the first's goals but highly concerned about its own; or where one party is highly concerned about both its own goals and its adversary's, while the other is concerned only with its own goals (C. R. Mitchell, 1991, p.26). Therefore, it is complex and unclear, but it implies that while the parties have different goals, the outcomes can be less desirable for both. The model implies that at least in the first stage of the conflict, parties will each use very

different strategies to end the conflict and that this asymmetry of behavior is likely to make the achievement of a solution – whether win-lose, lose-lose, or win-win – more difficult, at least in the short and medium term (Ibid, p.28).

### **Mediation and NGOs:**

Mediation is one of the important factors in a conflict resolution process and it is therefore crucial to look at this approach. It is an important factor in dealing with conflicts, and is identified as a third-party intervention. Mediation has been common and has deep historical roots. Basically it is related to dispute resolution, and therefore has existed since a long time. The mediator is often perceived as a peaceful third-party intervention which takes a more active role in the process, formally and sometimes informally. A mediator is able to steer the parties towards an agreement through communication and diagnosis, and may press and reward the parties so as to have a degree of control over the context of the conflict and its process (Bercovitch, 2003, p.63). It is vital for a mediator to have a certain amount of control and influence in the conflict process, and therefore to propose a more or less desirable solution for both sides.

Moreover, mediation seems to be one of the oldest forms of dispute and conflict resolution, and it is often used in conflicts. Other definition of mediation is assistance to two or more interacting parties, by third parties who usually have no authority to impose an outcome (Wall, Stark and Standifer, 2001, p.370). At this point it is a debatable statement, and by some scholars it is seen in the way that the third party has no authority to impose the outcome, while other research suggests that mediators do in fact possess enough power to impose an outcome. Nevertheless, it depends on the case and what third party actor serves as a mediator as well as the level of competence they display in the conflict sphere. Therefore, at this point it is important to look at the goals of the mediators and the role those can play. There are different views on this topic. In one facet of the controversy, one side states that mediators should be evenhanded and impartial so that the outcomes of the mediation will be based on the merits of

each side's case. The other side in this debate argues that a mediator should be partial toward the weaker party to protect it (Ibid, p.375).

Using expectancy theory Wall, Stark and Standifer (2001) propose that disputants will seek mediation from a third party to the extent that each expects his or her own net outcomes rather than the joint outcome from the mediation to be greater than those from the current interaction or from an alternative approach (Wall, Stark and Standifer, 2001, p.374). Thus, the mediators can also be used for certain purposes, and can act upon the interests of a certain party. In other words, this theory clarifies the fact that the disputant can often consider the mediators presence inevitable, in order to serve for an expected outcome. But for this desirable outcome of one disputant, it is vital to look at the way the mediator would deal or make the opposing party agreeable to this outcome. In this regard according to Wall, Stark and Standifer (2001) there are tools that can be used by the mediator to control one or the other party in a conflict. These tools can be identified as the norms and laws that demand mediation. Therefore, norms and laws can be used by a mediator to take certain actions, in order to approach the resolution of the conflict. Some of these norms can be addressed to religious reasoning, as Wall, Stark and Standifer (2001, p.373) apply it in the example of the Confucian harmony-oriented religion in the case of Korean norms for disputants.

Hence, now as the relevance of mediators becomes clear with the definition and the examination of their role, it is important to look at the possible actors who act as mediators, in the case of benefiting the disputants.

One of the most prominent examples for a Mediator or a third-party intervention are nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). The importance of NGOs on the international level has intensified over the past 20 years, including in what is commonly known as conflict resolution (Branco, 2011, p.79). Basically, the NGO's role can be conceptualized as being appropriate, because they tend to serve for peaceful purposes and have been partners to humanitarian aid and

emergencies, engaging in issues of violation and abuse of human rights, and putting efforts for peace and reconciliation processes. Regarding the processes the NGOs, which can act as mediators and intermediaries, interact following communicative strategies and therefore, there are often either formal or informal communications at place. Thus, it can be interpreted in the framework of Bercovitch's (2003) analysis using the terminology of noncoercive interventions by Fisher and Keashley, in the context of informal communication by intermediary, which I am applying to NGOs. Accordingly, Bercovitch (2003) interprets that it can be said that conciliation involves a trusted intermediary who provides an informal communication link between the parties with the purposes of identifying the issues, reducing tensions, and encouraging the parties to shift their negotiating positions (Bercovitch, 2003, p.62). Branco (2011, p.78) follows a similar approach and applies the role of informal diplomacy as complementary to formal diplomacy, but emphasizes that informal cannot replace formal, and will thus always play a supporting and secondary role.

NGOs are commonly considered as independent agencies in peace operations because they are not part of the military structure and strongly desire to protect their independence (Irrera, 2011, p.100). Nevertheless, NGOs usually have to work with the official, military and civilian personnel on the issues of peace missions. Subsequently, Irrera (2001, p.100-101) clarifies that throughout the peacekeeping process and over time the aims change and there is a massive increase in a number of civilian personnel, and therefore the NGOs are often accepted as participants supporting the execution of civilian tasks. Moreover, it is important to note that NGOs have a great role in modern politics. In his work "Should NGOs be viewed as political corporations" Robert Blood (2005, p.125) points out that NGOs have been a very important political development since the end of the Second World War. In his paper Blood (2005) applies NGOs as an important player by identifying their role through the corporate model, and clarifies that NGOs possess important advantages with which they have 'out-competed' traditional political institutions to win greater public influence, awareness and trust. In the increasingly

important arena of supranational politics and treaty organizations, NGOs have exploited the flexibility of their corporate structure to become the sole players apart from governments (Blood, 2005, p.120). Nevertheless, it should also be noted at this point that the level of competence and adequacy of an NGO should be taken into consideration depending on issues related to mediation in the conflict.

### **Civil Society: What is civil society, and what role it plays in conflict resolution?**

Another important actor is certainly civil society, which plays a great role in the state and in the context of conflict resolution, especially in the negotiation process. Therefore, it is central to look at the role of civil society in this research. Firstly, it is important to look at the definition of civil society itself. Since the term civil society can be interpreted on different levels and can be understood with regard to certain implications, the term is complex in its natural form. Therefore, a proper and precise but also very broad explanation is that civil society is a society considered as a community of citizens linked by common interests and collective activity (Oxford Dictionaries). Consequently, it can be interpreted that a civil society has more linkages to the interests of the community and therefore, the people. Considering this understanding of civil society, I will now apply it to the framework of conflict resolution and in that context especially of taking part in negotiation processes.

In order to approach civil society interaction in conflict resolution processes, it is first relevant to look at the clarification of the role of civil society on the political level. Civil society is typically defined as the vast array of public-oriented associations that are not formal parts of the governing institutions of the state: everything from community associations to religious institutions, trade unions, nongovernmental organizations (such as human rights groups, relief organizations, development organizations, and conflict resolution groups), business associations, and professional associations such as the Bar or accountants' associations (Pfaffenholz, Kew, and Wanis-St. John, 2006, p.67). Following up on these clarifications of civil society and its

linkage to a political and conflict interaction, it has to be underlined that a civil society can be any actor, who assumes a role in the process of decision making and/or the negotiation process, or is taking an active role in the conflict resolution. Therefore, it also implies that a member of a civil society can be a person who is linked to the conflict negotiations and is a member of a civil society group or is linked to both.

Civil society is basically linked to the citizens and therefore, the participation of the citizens, in a form of a civil society, is one important factor for the identification of democracy. Pfaffenholz, Kew, and Wanis-St. John (2006, p.67) underline that the role of NGOs as a representation of civil society is important, but the notion is much more than just NGOs, even though they represent the main interlocutors for international cooperation. However, the rise of civil society organizations does not mean that the state is either in decline or at risk. According to Irrera (2011) citing Cakmak (2008), the case is quite the opposite. Civil society has opportunities to flourish in conditions of a strong, stable and effective government. In addition, NGOs play significant roles that are not performed by the state and international actors like IOs (Irrera, 2011, p.86).

Civil society has been believed to have the powers of transforming the state, thwarting authoritarianism and achieving democracy. The idea of civil society dominant in the 1980-90s equated it with the wide scale dissident or opposition movements opposed to a totalitarian state (Ina Zharkevich, 2010, p.16). In this statement Ina Zharkevich (2010) applies the role of civil society as an actor more crucial for the authoritarian regimes, and identifies the role of the civil society important in this case, and she brings example of democratic civil society opposed to Soviet Union from outside the state. And as the role of the civil society is important, one could argue that its role is crucial within the state also. Therefore, it is appropriate to address this notion as vital in the context of conflict negotiations and resolution as well, since not only NGO's interactions are crucial, but also the civil society groups involved in the negotiations. Therefore, Pfaffenholz, Kew, and Wanis-St. John (2006, p.68) indicate that the less democratic

the parties in a conflict are, the more civil society participation is mandatory. Moreover, the authors suggest that undemocratic parties can resist the inclusion of the civil society in the peace negotiations. Therefore, in these cases, civil society groups are dependent on the leverage of the mediator(s) to gain access to the talks (Pfaffenholz, Kew, and Wanis-St. John, 2006, p.68). Thus, the civil society in this case should be in reliance with the mediator, and therefore play an indirect role in the negotiation process and terms.

It has been suggested that since the mid-1980s, development experts have turned their attention from such conventional notions as structural adjustment and basic needs toward a new approach that emphasizes participatory, small scale, community-based development involving nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and grassroots associations. One approach that follows this notion is the "civil society empowerment" model (Stiles, 1998, p.199). This model basically clarifies the fact that the civil society groups should be placed at the center of development process, or in the negotiation processes in this context. Moreover, the logic of the model develops the argument that civil society actors could or should perceive themselves as those seeking to be a beneficiary. Therefore, following the logic of a beneficiary, it also would awaken collective consciousness and a sense of self-actualization. This implication is notable in the sense that the civil society grows stronger with the help of the collective efforts and involvement.

While it has been clarified that the role of civil society interaction and presence is vital for decision making, in the context of conflict negotiations, conflict resolution and prevention, it is also important to underline another aspect. Here it is appropriate to look at the linkages of civil society and religious reasoning. Faith-based NGOs have a great importance on providing a voice for the local civil society (Irrera, 2011, p.102). Religious institutions provide a good example of civil society groupings and offer the opportunity to illustrate these fissures (Brewer, 2010, p.1023). Both Irrera (2011) and Brewer (2010) imply that faith-based institutions conceptualized as civil society can be helpful in the conflict negotiation part, although Brewer (2010) also suggests that religion in the context of civil society is a binding force which creates solidarity



among the group members and therefore, can resolve into anti-peace collective action. In this context it can be assumed that religious reasoning can increase solidarity but at the same time can result in further conflict escalation, depending on the agenda setting. Thus, religion can be easily operationalized in order to achieve a certain outcome, either peace-building or resistance.

Lastly, it has been suggested that global civil society is an antidote to war and that civil society groups support the introduction of deliberative democracy as a way to deal with violent politics (Brewer, 2010, p.1023). There is also a naïve assumption in much of the global civil society literature that civil society is always progressive and works towards the same peaceful end (Brewer, 2010, p.1023). In this context it is also important to note the ways civil society can be useful. According to Pfaffenholz, Kew, and Wanis-St. John's (2006, p.69-70) the advantages of the civil society participating directly in the negotiations, are their *Local Knowledge*, and *More Effective Public Communication*. In this regard Brewer (2010, p.1024-1025) also suggests strategic social spaces for civil society involvement with regard to positive peace, which are *Intellectual spaces* and *Political spaces*. These strategies by Brewer (2010) and Pfaffenholz, Kew, and Wanis-St. John are interconnected and present the perception that civil society has the advantage of local knowledge through intellectual spaces which can help to reconsider the terms in the conflict and therefore, making it easier to find a proper and appropriate conflict resolution intellectually. Additionally, with the advantage of more effective public communication through political spaces as well as embeddedness in social networks, civil society is able to communicate properly in the negotiations and peace settlement. In the research these approaches will partially be addressed to the civil society activities during the conflict in the Pamirs, in July 2012.

## **1.2 Limitations and Importance of the Research**

Since this research covers a very sensitive topic for the Pamiris, and a splinter for the Tajik government, there have been many limitations in conducting this work. The research covers the overview of the July 2012 events and analysis of the role of civil society and the

mediator, AKDN. Although it was important to take interviews from both, conducting a wider survey for the people would have been very important too. Unfortunately, it was next to impossible to launch a survey, since it is a highly sensitive topic, and the government in Tajikistan does not welcome a research of this kind. It would have been dangerous for my safety, and I did not possess enough resources to cover my trip to Pamirs and back. Previous works have been done on this topic, with one of the Tajik scholars, Alexander Sodiqov, trying to collect information for his work while researching in the field of conflict studies, ending up under arrested. Sodiqov's case made headlines after he was arrested in June in his native Tajikistan and accused of espionage and treason. (Clibbon, 2014) This incident has shown that the case study itself is limited.

I have directed my research by means of collecting data from the media coverage, academic articles, previous researches on this topic, as well as conducting expert interviews with civil society activists. The interviewees decided to remain anonymous due to the sensitivity of the topic and out of fear for their own security, since they are currently in Tajikistan.

The importance of this research is that it looks at the role of the civil society groups and activists' role during the conflict, identifying their importance during the settling and resolution of the conflict. This research attempts a more in-depth analysis of the conflict resolution process during the military incursion in Khorog in more detail. Furthermore, certain conflict resolution theoretical frameworks have been used to support the research.

Moreover, as a Pamiri, I am very well familiar with the case and the region. Therefore, in this research, I analyze a number of details and put them in the wider context of the conflict. Furthermore, the topic does not possess many academic research works, particularly concerning the role of civil society. Therefore, this research will be significant in terms of examining the role and importance of civil society during the conflict and its input in conflict resolution.

### **1.3 Methodology:**

In this research I will use qualitative methods of research, in order to analyze the case study and to respond to my research questions. The research questions mainly concentrate on the conflict resolution methods and approaches, as well as the population of the Pamirs, particularly of Khorog, identified as informal groups of civil society. Therefore, I will use previous works on the events of 2012, as well as sources on the aftermath of the conflict, in order to identify important factors in regard to my research, especially concerning the sustainability of the peace process and the impact of the conflict resolution. Furthermore, in order to explain the processes, my methodology includes theoretical background of Conflict Resolution approaches, mainly tackling the mediation, ethnicity and civil society.

I will operate the Triangulation method which includes multiple methods and multiple sources and thus supports my research to analyze different sources and using multiple methods in order to examine and find valid answers to my research questions. The basic methods operationalized for the fieldwork are mainly observation and ethnographical methods. I consider these methods important and expedient for my research, as I am dealing with a lack of literature on this topic. Therefore, apart from the theoretical and analytical part of the literature that I am reviewing in this paper, I am focusing on the people's positions in order to investigate civil society perspective on this matter by means of qualitative research methods. In this regard I conducted four in-depth expert interviews with civil society activists in order to strengthen my research. The interviews were conducted over the phone and Skype, due to difference in geographical location of the interview subjects. And some interviews were conducted in Russian and Pamiri languages. Therefore it was essential to take notes and identify the most important ones, since the interviewees wished not to be recorded.

Furthermore in this research I use a YouTube video of the disarmament process, which is essential for the analytical part. Therefore I translated the whole video and used some of its content in my research, as well as attached it to the research.

## **Chapter 2- Struggle in the Pamirs.**

### **2.1 Overview of the region**

Starting from the Great Game GBAO with its geographical location, bordering Afghanistan and separated by the narrow Pyanj river, has been a strategically important area on geopolitical grounds. Officially GBAO is an autonomous region, and the centralized government has less authority in the region, compared to other regions of Tajikistan. Situated high in the Pamir mountains, the region covers about half of Tajikistan but its 250,000 people account for less than 4 percent of the country's 7.5 million population. More than 30,000 people live in Khorog alone (Kozhevnikov, 2012). According to these estimates it is reasonable to say that the region is practically vulnerable, in terms of population, also taking into account the fact that an ethnic minority inhabits there. This ethnic minority broadly defines their identity as Pamiris. The main factors that determine the identity and difference from Tajiks, is that GBAO is home to 250,000 Ismaili Shiites who speak one of seven Pamiri languages of the Eastern Iranian language family. In this they differ from the majority ethnic Tajiks of Tajikistan, Sunni Muslims who speak Tajik Persian (Tadjbakhsh, 2012). Therefore, the difference in language and religion play the most important role in identifying the difference and the local identity.

The ethnic minority of GBAO has been part of the opposition block during the civil war, and had one of the most important roles. As it was mentioned earlier, the region plays an important geopolitical role, and therefore power over the region is an important factor for national control over resources and access to cross-border trade. After peace negotiations and the signing of the peace agreement between the United Tajik Opposition (UTO) and the established government, the period of peace building started. During this period there were no signs of any

demonstrations or discontent until sometime. Demonstrations have been notably rare in the country overall. One reason for that are laws which hinder demonstrations, but also the propagation of a scenario of a returning civil war with a subsequent Islamist government.

In the regional capital Khorog, unrest had been brewing throughout the spring of 2008. Discontent increased in April, when the central government transferred parcels of border territory to China without consulting local people as was claimed by an opposition leader (Tajikistan: On The Road To Failure, 2009). At this point it is notable that the discontent and unrest has started in the region. The peace building process therefore has been going on the road to failure. But the discontent did not end at this point and further unrest was to come next. At this point it is adequate to apply this rising discontent and unrest in the region, through Bercovitch's (2003) analysis of ethnic conflicts, applying his remarks of the autonomy conflicts and political voice conflicts. Grievances and dissatisfaction from the people can be identified as important local factors and dynamics. It is important to note this development, as a root of the conflicts, before shifting to the July events.

Therefore, it is notable that too much power was exercised by the government authorities. Reconsidering Sharoni's (1995) control model in the context of ethnic minority analysis, most likely the government's policy towards the region has been notably implemented using the control model, which suggests that there is a necessity for the controlling majority to have a near-total control over the minority, in order to enhance the interests of the controlling majority at the expense of the controlled minority, reducing it to a position of subordination and submission (Sharoni, 1995). Therefore, considering the control model at hand, the response from the local population came in the form of autonomy and political voice conflicts. These tensions most notably brought the government to take some action to eliminate the causes of resistance and regain control over the region. It can be analyzed that these causes are linked to local warlords who took an active part during the civil war and are partly still powerful local actors today. These aspects and local actors will be relevant in the overview of the July 2012 events.

## 2.2 July 2012.

In the early morning of July 24<sup>th</sup>, a Special Military Operation was launched in the small town of Khorog. The government of Tajikistan responded to the stabbing of the head of the National Security Committee in the Mountainous Badakhshan Autonomous Province, at the border with Afghanistan, with a particularly heavy Special Operation (Tadjbakhsh, 2012). According to Shahrbanou and my own observations, questions arise in regard to the reasons why such heavily armed units were dropped to the region in order to deal with the problem, and not the police. This decision has markedly resulted in the clashes and escalation of the conflict. Nevertheless, the government started an operation reportedly involving over 3,000 armed personnel, armed vehicles and helicopters in the densely populated areas of Khorog town. Furthermore, all means of communication in the Badakhshan region, including telephone, mobile and internet were blocked by the Government. The only road connecting Khorog to other parts of the country was also blocked. Approximately 30,000 residents of Khorog, including women, children and elderly, were trapped in the conflict (Majidov, 2012).

This strategy of isolating the region in the process of conflict resolution can be reconnected to the conflict resolution theory by Perry Mars, according to which such strategies and decisions are made under the conditions of the state being weak and having security vulnerability as well as fragility. Therefore, the greater these weaknesses are, the more likely the state will use force as a primary means of conflict resolution (Mars, 1995, p.157). This strategy is an aggressive conflict resolution approach (Interviewee #2, 12.03.2015). Therefore, isolation can be recognized as one of the tools operationalized by the government, in the logic of aggressive conflict resolution. Nevertheless, the decision and actions of the government can be conceptualized on the basis of lack of power and unlawful incidents occurring in the region. Despite the efforts to entirely isolate the region, there were some ways how information was given to the outside world. Pamiris inside used satellite phones and Afghan SIM cards to communicate with the large community of expatriates outside, whom in turn raised awareness

and mobilized protest around social networks, particularly Facebook (Tadjbakhsh, 2012). This factor is vital, especially in terms of conflict resolution. At this point, this shows the presence of civil society and their input. The role of the civil society will be further discussed later. At this particular point it is important to look at the course of the conflict within the town.

The scale of the operation, which used helicopters, mortars and dozens of snipers posted on the steep mountains enveloping the town, made clear that the government's goal was not just to capture the commanders but also to send a message that it intended to rein in the Pamiris' autonomy (Kucera, 2013). This statement can be identified through numerous factors, such as the use of force, the goals of the Special Military Operation, and the quasi autonomy of the region. At this point it is vital to look at the reasons, why the conflict has erupted and to analyze the reasons behind the conflict thoroughly, in order to understand and put it in the framework of conflict resolution.

### **Reasons for the conflict**

First of all, it is important to look at the way this conflict was described from the perspective of the government. Security officials in Dushanbe have portrayed the operation as targeting criminals linked to militant groups in Afghanistan (Sodiqov, 2012). While Khorog was isolated from the outer world, this first handed statement seemed to be legitimate in the eyes of International Organizations and the rest of Tajik population, and did not raise suspicion and preliminary monitoring. On the first glance this act seemed to be adequate, relying on the governments' statement, although there is no clear evidence of any presence of terrorism or links with Afghanistan whatsoever. Therefore, the first hand reason for the conflict, from the perspective of the government, cannot be seen as fully evidential.

The authorities claim that the main perpetrator of the general's death was his subordinate within the regional GKNB branch, Colonel Tolib Ayombekov, who had served as deputy head of

a border post on the frontier with Afghanistan (Sodiqov, 2012). At the same time, the authorities publicly accused the four individuals Imomnazar Imomnazarov, Mamadboqir Mamadboqirov, and Yodgor Shomusallamov of being involved in the smuggling of narcotics, tobacco, and gemstones, and also in human trafficking and banditry (Sodiqov, 2012). At this point it is vital to notice, that while the flow of information was rising, new versions of the conflict reasoning were provided. It is also important to mention that these figures have a significant role in the community and they are known as informal leaders of the community. The initial goal of the Special Military Operation was to capture the ones guilty for the assassination of Nazarov, but later the scope of the operation widened into capturing the local informal authorities. Hence this resulted in further escalation of the conflict, as the local population seemingly supported the local commanders in order to restore peace. Some analysts said that the military operation, the largest of its kind in almost two years, was a display of power and force by President Imomali Rakhmon, whose control over parts of the country remains tenuous 15 years since the end of a civil war. According to Kozhevnikov's research several local residents, who declined to give their full names, said by telephone that many former warlords in the region earned money through crime. However, many had won the respect of local people by dividing the spoils. "People in Gorno-Badakhshan are very poor. The commanders have always given some of their riches to their neighbours, helping them to organise weddings, funerals and studies," said one Khorog resident, who stated her first name as Midzhgona (Kozhevnikov, 2012).

The Badakhshan assault was thus part of a series of moves to marginalize, or remove by force, local commanders and former civil war leaders and thus powerful actors in different regions (Tadjbakhsh, 2012). Therefore, the aim of the assault seems less connected to the eradication of illegal figures linked to Afghan illegals, but rather connected to the goal of restoring or gaining control over the region through eradicating the local commanders. Although many different factors might have played into the government's decision to initiate the military operation, at its core the intrusion aimed at completing the regime's long-term agenda of



eradicating former opposition commanders. By ordering the military operation in GBAO, the central government has demonstrated that it will no longer permit former opposition commanders or any other groups or individuals to challenge the power of state organs in the country (Sodiqov, 2012). The resistance forces in other parts of Tajikistan have been eliminated and cracked down by law-enforcement agencies during the 24-year rule of president Rakhmon. At this point the reasons can to some extent be conceptualized as gaining full control of the region through demonstrating power and force, although not looking at the perspective of the people. Therefore, with this kind of conflict escalation, and the local predicaments, the role of civil society is one of the main factors, as it represents the interest of the people as well as it is vital for establishing and progressing peace.

After two days of gunfire and unrest, the population took the initiative in their hands. There are videos and pictures accessible over social media networks, of the roads being blocked within the city, so that the army units was not able to move within the city. The second dynamic which was important, were the demonstrations. This kind of action was uncommon for the population of Khorog. Accordingly, the role of the people and the civil society will be explained and framed in a more detailed form, in the empirical chapter (Chapter 3). At this point it is important to describe the way conflict resolution took place.

### **Conflict resolution: Role of the mediator**

There are different ways how the conflict was resolved, through negotiations, through the demonstrations, and with the help of a mediator, the Aga-Khan Development Networks (AKDN). This organization has operated in the area since the civil war and has seemingly been the main source of development in the region. It is important to note that the people living in the Pamirs are of the Ismaili branch of Islam, and consider the Aga Khan as their spiritual leader. Therefore, the organization which is headed by Aga Khan had interfered and served as a mediator during the conflict. Nevertheless, many people have criticized the institution for

interfering in the conflict resolution process, since they evaluate their position as unfavorable to the interests of the region. It is important to note the importance of the demonstrations that took place in the city center in front of the Hukumat, local governments' building, where locals expressed their opinions and appeals in regard to the conflict. The representative of the AKDN institution has also taken part in these demonstrations, by means of appealing the people. The speeches and the scenes from the demonstrations can be viewed on the internet in YouTube (*Youtube*). In this setting Yodgor Faizov was the main figure, who has spoken as a representative of the Aga-Khan Foundation (AKF), a branch of AKDN, and has played a role of a negotiator. Further analysis of the negotiation process will be provided later. De Cordier (2008) states that 'in Gorno-Badakhshan in particular, the AKF and its specialized agencies have become a state within a state in the sense that nowadays they are the main provider of functioning social services and infrastructure in the region. (De Cordier, B, 2008)

It is through the institution that the people associate with their spiritual leader, that the conflict was resolved at that point. At this point the strategy of using religion becomes more visible. As suggested in my hypothesis, religious reasoning was used to appease the population. The resolution demanded the disarmament, and it was accomplished by the mediator. At this stage it is relevant to mention the expectancy theory (Wall, Stark, & Standifer, 2001), which states that a party, in this case the government, uses the mediator for its own net outcomes, through religion reasoning.

The majority of the population in the Pamir Mountains are followers of the Ismaili branch of Islam and revere the Aga Khan as their spiritual leader. Representatives of the Aga Khan's charity organizations helped broker the July truce (Eurasianet.org, 2012, n.p.). Therefore, the local resistance has been disarmed with the help of AKDN institution and thus the conflict was settled, to some extent.

## **Chapter 3: Conflict resolution**

In this chapter I will further elaborate on the process of conflict resolution in July 2012. I will focus on the key aspect of disarmament as well as the central local actors who were involved and which position they managed to acquire. This is especially crucial in order to comprehend the process and the role of mediation.

### **3.1 Disarmament process**

The disarmament process played a central role in the negotiation process and a proper conflict resolution, which would fit for the terms of both sides. On the one side there were the government officials, demanding disarmament, and on the other hand the civil society and the people, who demanded the establishment of peace and withdrawal of the army forces from the small town. And in the middle there was AKDN, serving as a mediator and taking an active part in the negotiation process. A one-sided disarmament took place on 28<sup>th</sup> of July, four days after the clashes. The main objective has been to disarm all local armed groups and allow government forces free access to all parts of Khorog (Recent Military Action in Khorog, 2012). It is essential to look at the disarmament process in order to understand at what grounds and under which terms the conflict was resolved and whether the outcome was satisfactory to both sides. The whole process of disarmament has been videotaped and posted on YouTube by an anonymous user (Pamir, 2012). These videos were taken by engaged members of the community who strived to capture the processes and thus to create transparency as well as national and international awareness. According to the videos and verified through my interviews, the disarmament process took part in three spots in Khorog, UPD, Bar Khorog and Khlebzavod neighborhoods. These neighborhoods were essential, as the clashes took place at these spots, and where the local commanders live.

#### **Meeting in UPD neighborhood**

In the meeting in UPD, all three actors were active. Colonel Iskandarov, the most important commander in the operation, was taking part as a government official, while Yodgor Faizov, head of AKF and representative of AKDN, served as a mediator. Members of the Group of 20, and ordinary people, men and women also took part in the process and expressed their opinions. Group 20 was formed which consisted of representatives from the local population, civil activists and the *mahala* leaders to serve as a negotiating partner between the government and the resistance forces. It seemed very effective from the beginning but doubtfulness of some members defamed the group in the eyes of many who initially had high hopes in it. (Interviewee #1, 28.02.2015). The dynamics occurring in this situation and during the negotiations, as well as the arguments, are central to understand the sentiments, the positions in terms of power as well as the rhetoric in the process. Accordingly, I will analyze:

An elder woman, a member of the neighborhoods' women council speaking to Colonel Iskandarov to pass a message to the President: "using his own phrase, "A World of Thanks" to him for bringing this hellfire upon our heads in this month of Ramadan. It was outrageous! A world of thanks to you as well that our innocent sons were put to death!"

The woman interrupting Colonel Iskandarov as he tried to give a reply, continues: "I am a mother to both sides, not only for Badakhshanis, but also for the Kulyabis and Leninabadis ... but see to it that after you have taken all these shabby guns away, do not turn back on us with heavy cannons. We would like to express our gratitude to this person (point to Mr Fayzov, Head of AKF.)"

Mr Fayzov: "All thanks should not go to me but to Mawlono Hozir Imom, may thanks be to His Court, to Aka-i Imomnazar, to all those people who made it possible during these three days for us to come in, who received Mawlono Hozir Imom's representative, and who spoke to him and shook hands with him and promised him; I want to thank Aka (Brother, referring to Imomnazarov) for that "(Pamir, 2012).

In this communication, we can see different central elements that dominated argumentations. While the member of the community emphasizes the brutality as well as the position of Pamiris in Tajik society, she at the same time expresses her skepticism whether the disarmament will lead to safety. Furthermore, it becomes obvious that Mr Fayzov assumes the position of representing the Imam, spiritual leader of the Pamiris, identifying him as Mawlono Hozir Imam (the religious title of the current Imam Aga-Khan IV.). Therefore, Mr Faizov convinces the people to give up arms, clarifying that it is the Imam who asks them to do so. Additionally, he mentions the local leader Imomnazar in order to emphasize the local cooperation and loyalty even by those who are depicted as local criminals. Furthermore, the conversation continues as follows:

Col. Iskandarov to the woman: “You said something in regard to His Excellency the President, and I would like to say to you that I am born of Gharm, and am an ex-opposition mujahid and have fraternal relations with Imomnazar, Tolib, and Yodgor. Today, however, one of the reasons for the war to stop was his involvement, Aka Yodgor (head of AKF) knows this, the moment that he (the President) found out, he called and warned that there should be no clashes. If a crime has been committed, the people of Badakhshan have never harbored any criminals nor traitors in their home. So, on a par with the Aga-Khan, we would like to ask you to give blessings to His Excellency (the President) as well, for he is a very caring person” (Pamir, 2012).

In order to legitimize his own standing in the community, the government official mentions his own ties to members of the community. Additionally he legitimizes not only Yodgor Fayzov but also refers to the Imam thanking the president. At this point, it is essential to notice that, Colonel Iskandarov mentions the fact that the president was not well aware of what was happening. This leads to more confusion, regarding a possible unawareness of the President of the situation in Khorog. Therefore, one could assume that all the actions were undertaken by the government

commanders and the Minister of Defense. This makes the intentions and goals as well as the power structures even more difficult to frame.

It is also important to note that internet and telephone connections were shut down. A justification for this was provided by the Minister of communication Beg Zukhurov claiming that a stray bullet took out all communication links with Gorno-Badakhshan (Tajikistan Blocks YouTube, 2012). Therefore, the negotiation took part within the city, officially without external intervention, and was in the hands of the government commanders in charge of the operation. This provides an interesting setting, since the question of authority and thus the liability of the terms on the side of the government remains. Despite this lack of transparency on the government's side and thus, especially due to the reference to the Imam, the disarmament of the population was executed. According to Colonel Iskandarov, there a trench mortar, a grenade launcher, and about 10 machine guns and around 10 boxes of bullets were collected solely from UPD neighborhood.

### **Meeting in the neighborhood of Bar Khorog**

The second central space for the disarmament process was Bar Khorog neighborhood, where the local leader Mamadboqir Mamadboqirov lives. At the negotiations in this neighborhood, the main actor was Mr Fayzov, a representative of the mediator in the conflict. On the other part, it was Mamadboqirov surrounded by men from the neighborhood, as well as civil society members. At the negotiations, Mr Fayzov convinced the local commander and the people to surrender the weapons. No government commanders were present in this neighborhood and during the negotiations. The negotiations took place as follows:

Mr Fayzov addressing the people of the district and their leadership: "I would also like to thank Janobi Oli (the President) for reacting as soon as he found out and declaring a ceasefire."

Mamadboqirov: "You don't say!"

Yodgor Fayzov: “Indeed, he did give a chance for the situation to quiet down.”

Mamadboqir Mamadboqirov; “Well, that’s because his own position became precarious.”

Yodgor Fayzov: “Our Mawlo (the Aga Khan) was recognized, our Mawlo reached out to us, to you. What more should we need?”

Mamadboqir Mamadboqirov: “But how did they hit us!”

Yodgor Fayzov: “No, I am talking about Mawlo; whoever has turned in their munitions has entrusted their souls to their Mawlo, and for the sake of their own people. Everybody knows what happened here in Bar Khorog, and what you did, and it will go down the history, nothing is a secret now how many men came here and what they did here, and how they did it” (Pamir, 2012).

Here, it becomes even more obvious than in the case of UPD that during the disarmament process, religious reasoning has been used, although with no clear guarantees that people would be safer after the arms are laid down. Mr Fayzov uses the word Mawlo repeatedly, giving the impression that he is speaking on behalf of the Imam.

A civil society member: “What about all these check-posts all around?”

Yodgor Fayzov: “You will be informed soon by the government, by the Minister.”

Mamadboqir Mamadboqirov: “But bear in mind that now you will be our guarantor, whatever happens. Listen, people, he will be our guarantor here, Mawlo is far from us, but you are here, and will bear responsibility.”

Yodgor Fayzov: “No, I am not a guarantor but am here with you.”

Mamadboqir Mamadboqirov: “Listen, all people of Barkhorog! Yodgor, will you assume responsibility for our safety?”

Yodgor Fayzov: “I brought you a word from the Mawlo, and if they kill you, let them kill me too, I’ll stay with you.”

A civil society member: “Tell us, brother, you are here now and are telling us all these things, what if they charge at us again after you have taken all from us and left? What if they start chasing us and our kids, breaking into our homes? What will happen then?”

Yodgor Fayzov: “If this is their intention, then let them do it, let them kill us all, let us die, it ends all there, then, we don’t need anything anymore.”

Voices from the crowd: “They are not to be trusted!” (Pamir, 2012)

At the end of the negotiations, Mamadboqirov gives up the weapons, but with little conviction, because no clear guarantees were provided and the limited role of the mediator was visible. It seemed that the mediator was controlled by the government and was more or less pressured too. At the negotiation at this point, it was visible that people were highly concerned about the government’s actions, and had no trust in it. Only due to religious pressure were the people convinced to give up arms.

### **Meeting in Khlebzavod neighborhood**

The meeting in Khlebzavod neighborhood was the last spot for the disarmament process, and where the last negotiations took place in regard to disarmament. The main actors were Paishanbe, a leader of the Khlebzavod neighborhood and active member of a movement called *Maslihat*, who took part in peace negotiations throughout the conflict. Colonel Iskandarov of the Tajik Special Forces, Yodgor Fayzov, the head of AKF, as well as some members of the Civil Society. This included Nozir Navjavonov, the lawyer for the Group of 20, who took record of the negotiations and composed the terms of the peace pact.



Paishanbe addressed the government official Colonel Iskandarov, Mr Faizov, civil society members and other participants in the meeting, with his statement of sadness and about the violent flow of events. Furthermore, he expressed his condolences to the losses of both sides:

I have always known that the book of Shahname belongs to us Tajiks, because we are so easily tricked into conflict and at times go as far as to kill our own brothers. This is a mistake, God did not set us on this path. Today I can see brethren who were with us in the past but today we face each other from opposite sides. Trust me, personally on my behalf, on behalf of the residents of Abdulamon Ayombek Street, on behalf of the whole community of Badakhshan, we are very regretful about the loss of lives on the other side just as well as on this side, as they were Muslim too, they were all our brothers. We want to apologize to their families, and we will visit their families (Pamir, 2012).

What we can trace here, is the emphasis of the national as well as Muslim identity. A woman from the same community stated this comment:

There are soldiers with guns all around us, wherever we look. My poor old mother is so afraid of them, she doesn't know what to do. All the children are in shock right now. Perhaps, those soldiers also feel the same, but who is behind this whole situation and what is going on? Wherever we have been before, be it in Russia or elsewhere, we were always proud of Tajikistan, that it is improving day-to-day. Is this improvement now? Is it improvement that sisters, brothers, and mothers of the killed once can't even bury their own, they are shaking out of fear. I have to put cotton plugs in my mother's ears so she doesn't hear any of this. A mother is one for all. Everyone was born by a mother and she takes all the grief and sorrow into her heart. The soldiers who were brought here and died also have mothers. Isn't there a way to put your minds together and get us all out of this situation. Thank God that during all these fourteen hours of the sleepless night, all these poor people, all these women, and the young boys standing outside at the guard

with nothing in their hands survived. I ran from one window to the next to check what was going on, thinking that all of Khlebzavod area was covered with dead bodies. And now we are out here, facing the current situation. Who wanted this situation? Neither you nor us. Who in their right mind would do such a thing, especially on the day of fasting, during Ramadan? This is a disgrace for all Tajik people! (Pamir, 2012).

This comment by the woman is very important for the whole negotiation part and clarifies the view of most community members. People were frustrated by the useless loss of many lives and scared by the perceived arbitrariness of the events. After this comment Colonel Iskandarov promises people the withdrawal of all troops from Khorog:

“We achieved peace now, so please do not listen to all sorts of people who might have bad intentions, maybe some of them work for other countries. And all the forces that are here today, once the weapons are collected today, will be pulled out of here tomorrow.” (Pamir, 2012).

In this announcement the colonel again strives to declare no one responsible for the events. While earlier in UPD he claimed that the president was not aware of the army mission, he now mentions the influence from outside forces. Despite this statement made by Colonel Iskandarov, it proved to be a false promise.

P.S. in the video: After all these promises Iskandarov received the rank of General, while Imomnazarov was murdered, and the troops are still there (Pamir, 2012).

This last statement in the video already reflects the one-sidedness of the disarmament. Thus, I will now discuss the consequences of this process.

### **Consequences of the Disarmament process:**

The disarmament process has shown some signs of a conflict resolution that would more or less fit the demands of both sides. The role of the mediator and the presence of civil society members

have also been important factors. During the disarmament process it has been estimated by different sources that more than 500 weapons have been collected from the local commanders, although no official data was released. During the process community members took an essential role. Thus, the negotiations were not only taking place between certain official actors, but also included respected and renowned members of the neighborhoods and thus people concerned about the security of the community. The terms of the negotiations were more or less fair, and would have led to a win-win conflict resolution, in the case of compliance to the demands by both sides. Therefore, in order to give more strength to the analysis it is essential to look at the consequences of the disarmament and the events after the negotiations.

As it has been noted, the negotiations resulted in a disarmament process in which over 500 weapons have been turned over to the authorities (Olimova, 2012). Analyzing the following events, it becomes clear that the local commanders have fulfilled the requirements of the negotiations towards a conflict resolution on their side, responding to and implementing the terms. It is important to note that the disarmament process would have been more complex without the intervention of the mediator, which in this case was AKDN, representing the Aga-Khan, the spiritual leader of the Pamiri Ismailis. Their influence and credibility is high in the region due to the religious connection. The demand from the government officials was to disarm the local commanders, and in return to provide security and prevent further conflict escalation along with the withdrawal of the military forces, that have been deployed initially to deal with the killing of General Nazarov. Nevertheless, after the disarmament of the population in Khorog, the military units remained in the region.

The situation in the city seemed to be calm and controlled until the night of August 22, after 24 days of the peace agreement, when Imomnazar Imomnazarov, a former opposition commander from the Tajik Civil War, was killed in an attack on his home in Khorog (RFE/RL, 2012). At this point the peace agreement was violated and people were frustrated. Imomnazarov had already been targeted during the assault on July 24<sup>th</sup> along with the other local commanders

suspected of killing of General Nazarov, and was also alleged to have been involved in illegal activities. But analyzing the conflict resolution process, it was proven that the killing was a clear violation of the peace treaty, which assured that peace and stability would be granted after the disarmament. Additionally, it has to be emphasized that the disarmament process was more or less a voluntary act and, Imomnazarov is believed to have been the first to lay down the arms, motivating others to do so, in order to end the conflict and restore peace. Therefore, in order to frame this incident, which was a violation of the peace treaty, it is important to look at the reaction of the people, to the killing of Imomnazarov.

Shortly after the killing of Imomnazarov 3,000 residents of the city of Khorog demonstrated outside a regional government building, demanding that the government and President Emomali Rahmon investigate why the peace agreement had been broken (Aslamshoyeva, 2012). The demonstrations and discontent seem reasonable, since the agreement was not complied with and the local commander was killed. People in their turn felt very frustrated, scared and betrayed. The killing of somebody who gave up his weapons as the only means of defense only after being asked by heads of AKDN and AKF, and being assured peace, meant a perfidy to many. A lot of people felt shocked and confused at the least, and betrayed at the most (Interviewee #1, 28.02.2015). At this point it must be emphasized that in an environment where the state fails continuously to provide justice and liability to the population, any institutions or individuals can fill this vacuum. In Khorog, since there is high degree of mistrust to the central government which could not create any favorable condition for a decent life for the population, informal leaders play a very important function, among them Imomnazarov.

Imomnazarov was seen as one of the most influential leaders and according to Interviewee #2(12.03.2015), Imomnazarov was truly one of those leaders who managed to guarantee security to the local population for over a decade in the town of Khorog and prevented many conflicting situations. Notably he was a key figure for the locals and proved to be a good

negotiator and a mediator between the government and the locals. During his life-time he resolved many serious conflicts between the government and the local population within GBAO peacefully (Interviewee #2, 12.03.2015). Thus, his killing was regarded by many locals as a big loss as well as an infringement on the peace agreement and thousands of people took to the streets of Khorog to demonstrate their protest against this act. Therefore, the reaction of the people was very negative, breaking the truce, indeed it was only the civil society group who managed to calm the local youth who were ready to burn and destroy all the government facilities. Protesters flocked to the administrative building in the city center demanding security, pelting the building with rocks, and even attempting (unsuccessfully) to storm the building (RFE/RL, 2012). The actions were aggressive from the side of the people, but these actions were a reply to an aggressive act threatening their security. According to BBC news, police opened fire on the protesters, when they tried to storm the government building (BBC News, 2012). The main demonstrations at this point were notably aiming at the authorities to realize the promises made in the negotiation process, and to ensure stable and safe security for the people.

Accusations of the government's direct involvement in the killing of Imomnazar, were rejected by the government officials. But analyzing the whole situation, it was seen that the initial aims to capture the local commanders had failed, and the operation had backfired, and therefore the government was on the losing side. In this case one could say that, with the death of Imomnazarov, at least one of the local commanders was eliminated and the government has not launched the special operation for nothing. Therefore, after the protests following the death of Imomnazarov on the 27<sup>th</sup> of August some government troops have been withdrawn from the region. The withdrawal of the military was organized in line with the agreement between the regional headquarters of the governmental forces and representatives of protesters with participation of international organizations (TCA, 2012).

Summing up the events, one can state, that the operation proved to be unsuccessful, the conflict resolution was implemented ineffectively, and the mediator's role was limited and

complicated. At this point the disarmament process and the consequences that followed in the framework of asymmetry and resolution will be theorized. Naturally, the stronger party only follows the aims of its own, and furthermore strives to fulfill only its own demands through a mediator. This behavior or strategy has been suggested through the framework of the expectancy theory by Wall, Stark and Standifer (2001), where a stronger party uses the mediator for its own net outcomes. Therefore, the government which is the stronger party in the conflict in Khorog 2012 outweighs the opposing party even higher and accordingly, a less effective conflict resolution is at hand. Although there was a conflict resolution on July 28<sup>th</sup>, the outcomes have shown that the conflict resolution proved to be ineffective and imbalanced. At this point it is essential to look at the role of the participating mediator, which in this case was AKDN, in order to look and analyze its relevance and adequacy to a certain extent. The expectancy theory suggests that the government managed to use AKDN to enforce its goals.

### **3.2 Analysis of the role of AKDN.**

The Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) works towards the vision of an economically dynamic, politically stable, intellectually vibrant and culturally tolerant Tajikistan. AKDN supports the establishment of programs and institutions that allow the government, private sector and civil society to play complementary roles in increasing prosperity and creativity within a pluralistic society (*AKDN.org, 2015*). Aga-Khan Foundation is one branch of the AKDN institution. The role of this organization has been tremendous for the region, one of the reasons being the linkage to the founder, the Aga-Khan, who is the spiritual leader for the Pamiris. AKDN has always been regarded as a representation of Imam Aga-Khan by the people of GBAO, and therefore, been perceived as a powerful, progressive, internationally recognized, people-oriented, constructive force. Already with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent civil war, AKDN became an important actor in the region. The official Tajik Peace Agreement was signed in 1997, the Imam's official and religious visit to Tajikistan in 1995 marked, what everyone perceived, as the end to the persecutions of the Pamiris, as well as the

end of violence in the country in general (Interviewee #4, 15.04.2015). At the outset of the AKDN mission, and in the course of its work in Central Asia, the Imam, as the founder of this organization, held continuous meetings and dialogues with central and local governments, opposition leaders, local community leaders and the clergy. AKDN was one of the key institutions behind fostering a peace agreement between the Tajik government and the United Tajik Opposition during the Civil War. It was the first private international development agency that took the risk of investing in various projects in post-civil war Tajikistan. During the Civil War for almost 6 years it was providing humanitarian assistance in the form of basic food stuff and other vital goods to the entire region of Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO) which saved its population from starvation (Interviewee #4, 15.04.2015). Ever since then, AKDN has been perceived as a bridge-builder between people, their government, the opposition, and the international community.

This is an important background in order to explain the position AKDN was able to assume as a mediator during the July 2012 events, although the network nominally does not have a conflict resolution or security mandate on an organizational level. Therefore, it still must be questioned, how the organization reached the status of a mediator during the civil war and put an end to the conflict. In this regard Faisal Devji, an Ismaili intellectual and director of the Asian Studies Centre at St Antony's College, Oxford University, argues that:

So much for the bright side of “global civil society”, whose darker aspect I will now show is entailed in its very virtues. The agreement ending the civil war involved the Aga Khan asking his followers to disarm, in return for which their military commanders would be absorbed into the Tajik armed forces, as were both the officer killed last month and his alleged murderer. The AKDN would then set up relief and development projects not only in Gorno-Badakhshan but the rest of the country as well, and in addition raise funds and support for Tajikistan internationally. This plan worked well for a few years, but once the government's rule had become more stable, and especially after 9/11, when

its support in providing military bases and medical facilities was needed in the War on Terror, the AKDN was suddenly no longer indispensable (Devji, 27.11.2012).

This suggests, that AKDN lost power in Tajikistan in the last couple of years. At this point it is expedient to relate this analysis to the theoretical framework of conflict resolution by Bercovitch (2003), who states that: “A mediator is able to steer the parties toward agreement through communication and diagnosis, and may press and reward the parties so as to have a degree of control over the context of the conflict and its process” (Bercovitch, 2003). The key aspects in this statement are to “press” and “reward” the parties and therefore, to impose an outcome that would fulfill both sides. Accordingly, one can analyze that the main tool of AKDN to ensure certain control, was through the investment and development sphere. Although, as Devji suggests, after 9/11 Tajikistan has received more attention on the international level and therefore, attracted more investment from other organizations, decreasing the degree of influence of AKDN on the government noticeably. It now becomes clear in connection to the July 2012 events, that AKDN was not a powerful mediator. Rather, the findings suggest that the role of AKDN was to serve the government to exert influence on the people as a locally credible and respected actor, in order to fulfill the government’s net outcome. Nevertheless, as a mediator and as an NGO, AKDN is considered as a civil society promoter, and therefore, tends to promote the interests of the people and development of life. In the conflict resolution context, a civil society organization on theory also fulfills the same duties, as to protect the interest of the people, promote peace and a proper resolution to a conflict.

From the speeches of His Highness the Aga Khan it can be derived that AKDN is definitely a promoter of the idea of civil society (Interviewee #1, 28.02.2015). The vision of the chairman of AKDN and the spiritual leader of the Shia Ismaili, the Aga Khan was to create civil society institutions and build the capacity of the local population to the highest possible level and then hand over these institutions the local communities which in turn can use them for the betterment of their societies (Interviewee #3, 03.04.2015). Following these statements it is



essential to look at the perspective of the civil society and the role of formal and informal civil society presence during July 2012 events. The long-time presence of AKDN should have, according to its official goals, empowered the civil society.

### **3.3 Findings on Civil Society**

First of all, it's important to note that the Civil Society in Tajikistan is very young and very weak. It is also important to understand that in an authoritarian state like Tajikistan the activities of civil society groups are heavily monitored by the authorities and many limitations are imposed on their operations. There are, of course, institutions that by definition fall under the civil society category but they don't have very much space for maneuvering. They are often marginalized and tend to concentrate on non-political causes. Nevertheless, in the case of the July events in Khorog, ordinary people and citizens organized themselves in official and unofficial groups and were thus a crucial factor influencing the events. Many observers of Tajikistan regard the town of Khorog as an island of democracy and civic engagement in Tajikistan, since several times people assembled and organized demonstrations in reaction to unlawful actions of the authorities. There are no similar cases other places of the country, where citizens can freely exercise their rights and liberties to some extent. So, this suggests that the only relatively functioning civil society that currently exists in Tajikistan is in the town of Khorog, in eastern part of Tajikistan. The civil society played a very important role in preventing the escalation of violence in Khorog during the military operation conducted by central government in July, 2012 which resulted in numerous victims among the civilian population(Interviewee #3, 03.04.2015).

In the course of the negotiation process, of which the most central part was the disarmament process, one of the key actors was the civil society, in regard to making certain demands. These demands are linked to the withdrawal of government forces from the region and ensuring safety and security for the people. Additionally, the local civil society, which is organized through neighborhood networks, initiated actions to prevent violence in the region. In order to evaluate

the role of the civil society and their function during the conflict, it is important to look at the actions which were undertaken by the civil society activist, internally and externally.

Internally, ordinary people were the main actors who put an effort to reduce the force of the assault. One of the examples is that people cut down trees and laid them on the road to prevent military vehicles from advancing on the targeted neighborhoods (Interviewee # 2, 12.03.2015). Other than that, demonstrations have been ongoing throughout the course of the conflict. One of my interviewees, who was a civil society activist internally in the conflict said that since all forms of communication available to the population in the region were shut down by the government, the priority was to inform people from outside the region, hoping that this could create awareness and pressure on the government. “At the risk of being shot we sneaked from one street to the next until we found an office where there was access to e- mail, Skype, and a sat phone. I called, e-mailed and skyped all my local and oversea contacts in the press, reporting exactly what I saw, heard, and experienced” (Interviewee #2, 12.03.2015). Here, one can emphasize that communication linkages are very important for the ordinary people, in order to ensure their security and to stop the conflict. The civil society, in this case, meant the people engaging themselves, no longer relying on the official authorities and media, but seeking help elsewhere. At this point the issue of linking ordinary people in the context of civil society has to be raised. Since there is no civil society in the proper sense of the word, one could conceptualize all groups that are performing some functions of civil society as such. Civil society is typically defined as the vast array of public-oriented associations that are not formal parts of the governing institutions of the state: everything from community associations to religious institutions, trade unions, nongovernmental organizations (Pfaffenholz, Kew, and Wanis-St. John, 2006, p.67).

Externally, civil society initiatives have also played a significant role. As all state media was notably controlled by the central government, the only vacant platform that was available for the public, were social media networks. So, while the authorities managed to shut down cell phone and internet connection during the military offensive, the Internet in other parts of the

country was accessible. Thus, while some of the information was sent from the internal by civil society activists, externally it was proliferated on social networks, a medium that normally reaches both, local and global space. One of my interviewees who was an external civil society activist in the conflict says that: “The information which with the help of these groups was made available to the public raised awareness and helped organize demonstrations in different parts of the world against violence in Khorog. We also organized a group which was constantly in touch with Khorog and provided important information to the concerned parties inside and outside Tajikistan. All these joint efforts significantly contributed to end the military offensive in Khorog” (Interviewee #1, 28.02.2015). It is important to note that I define external civil society activist as Pamiris who were outside the region, highly concerned about their families in Khorog and thus actively engaged. The platform where most of the discussions and information gathering and proliferation took place, was Facebook. Here, one can even observe new forms of organizations through groups (i.e. Peace in Khorog), which became a central organ in monitoring the security situation in Khorog. During the conflict this culminated for example in an open letter published over this medium to the president from the "Youth of Gorno-Badakhshan" bemoaned the deteriorating situation (Aslamshoyeva, 2012). These kinds of activities show that civil society had a certain role, without which the conflict would have escalated. Although the opportunity structures were limited, old structures of civil society as well as new initiatives were able to influence the situation.

On the last stage of my research it is vital to look at the perspective of the civil society towards the mediator and the negotiation that took place. The interviewees note that the role of AKDN has been significant through years, and had already proven to bring a resolution to a conflict during the civil war in Tajikistan, and thus has saved many lives. But they state that, during July events in Khorog, the presence of AKDN as a mediator was inadequate and to some degree not effective. As one of the interviewees states: “I think certain individuals, namely Mr. Faizov, took this opportunity to get some credits for “resolving” this conflict situation, at times,

going beyond the allowed frontiers. For example, signing the disarmament act as an AKF representative is in violation with the mandate of this AKDN in Tajikistan. There is no way AKDN can participate in this type of procedures along with law-enforcement agencies” (Interviewee #4, 15.04.2015). Clearly, the population partly perceived the role of AKDN as highly questionable.

The actions undertaken by the civil society activists and ordinary people reflected democratic values, by means of peaceful resolution of the conflict through demonstrations and expression of discontent. Devji also asserts the importance of those activities, stating that “These democratic and collective actions would not have been possible within the framework of an NGO like the AKDN, which, relying as it does on secretive deal-making, has remained conspicuously silent about conditions in Gorno-Badakhshan” (Devji,2012, n.p.). Despite its crucial role during the conflict, the resolution itself was not in favor of the population. At this point one can establish that during the civil war, the mediator had a certain offer to provide, in terms of providing money assistance and putting an effort in the development of the country, while in July 2012 there was no offer to be implemented. Therefore, the mediator provided a solution, which correlated with the interest of the stronger party, which in its terms contradicts the values of democracy, where people are the driving force and civil society is the actor defending the best interest of the people.

### **Conclusion:**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the conflict resolution mechanisms/approaches which were used during the clash in the Pamirs in 2012. The conflict could be addressed in the style of autonomy and political voice conflicts, which have been identified in the research and applied to the case, in the context of ethnic minority and allocation of power. The study covers the overview of the conflict and the possible reasons for the conflict. Therefore this brings us to one the first hypothesis, which states that the government’s official

agenda does not match the actions that were taken. This suggests different reasons, intentions and goals. According to the study one of the reasons for the conflict, if not the main, was to regain power in the region and eliminate the local commanders. As the study shows, the special operation launched by the government has failed to capture any of the local commanders, and in an unsuccessful military predicament was forced into negotiations.

Additionally, the role of civil society and Aga-Khan Development Networks (AKDN) was central to the research. Civil society formed quickly and ordinary people also took a central role, by organizing demonstrations, blocking the roads for the military vehicles to not be able to move within the city, finding any sorts of connection to reach the outside world and end the violence. Thus these efforts have reduced the level of the assault and forced the government to find a peaceful solution to the conflict and end the unrest.

The study has shown that the resolution for the conflict was asymmetric, and the mediator was used by the government for its own net outcomes. The mediator tried to find resolution, peaceful and effective for both sides, but failed to provide it. Civil society and ordinary people on the other hand proved to be reacting democratically, and concerned about their security. Although the civil society that formed during July 2012 in Khorog could be said to be informal, but it could also be said that it is the people who are the driving force, and the people who know their interests concerning security, and the people who want to prevent violence and make changes.

Hence, I come to a conclusion that, when ordinary people do not remain indifferent and react to something that is unacceptable in their society, to me, that is the sign of a growing civil society. But, of course, in order for a civil society to succeed it needs to be strengthened in so many aspects. In that context, the measures taken by different groups inside and outside Khorog during and after the July unrest which led to some relative compromises by the central government can be regarded as a small but important achievement of civil society.

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## Appendixes

### Interview questions:

- 1) What was the role of civil society in conflict resolution in 2012 during Tajik government's Special Operation in Khorog?
- 2) What actions were undertaken by civil society members and groups during the military assault and local resistance?
- 3) What were the signs of civil society in this case?
- 4) And who exactly represented civil society in the course of the resolution process?
- 5) How do you see the role of AKDN, as a civil society organization?
- 6) What role did AKDN play in the conflict, and what concrete actions did it take?
- 7) What approaches did AKDN use to resolve the conflict?
- 8) Were these decisions taken in consultation with the civil society members and groups?
- 9) What was the outcome of AKDN's involvement?
- 10) What was the reaction of the civil society to the killing of Imomnazarov?

### Disarmament process: *(Video text translated into English)*

#### Meeting in UPD:

Colonel Iskandarov (the most important commander in the operation) talking on the phone with his superior (most likely, General Khayrulloev, Minister of Defence): "Here it is, there are already a trench mortar, a grenade launcher, and machine guns, about 10 of them, some 10 boxes of bullets ... it seems like some sort of a provocation, somebody must be playing tricks... I have received one trench mortar, I have received one grenade launcher, ten machine guns, about twenty of ... and this is just from one spot, we will go for collection to other points as well. Just like I was saying ... whoever... Thank you."

Col. Iskandarov hangs up the phone and walks up to the window of Imomnazarov's car, saying: "Somebody up there said that there were fifteen..."

Civil society activist, part of the group of 20 (the group acted as the main negotiating body) addressing a resistance fighter: "how many magazines are there?"

An elder woman, a member of the neighborhoods' women council speaking to Col. Iskandarov to pass a message to the President: "using his own phrase, "A World of Thanks" to him for bringing this hellfire upon our heads in this month of Ramadan. It was outrageous! A world of thanks to you as well that our innocent sons were put to death!"

Col. Iskandarov trying to respond: "there is one thing, mother..."

The woman interrupting him, continues: "I am a mother to both sides, not only for Badakhshanis, but also for the Kulyabis and Leninabadis ... but see to it that after you have taken all these shabby guns away, do not turn back on us with heavy cannons. We would like to express our gratitude to this person (point to MrFayzov, Head of AKF)."

MrFayzov: "All thanks should not go to me but to MawlonoHozirImom, may thanks be to His Court, to Aka-i Imomnazar, to all those people who made it possible during these three days for us to come in, who received MawlonoHozirImom's representative, and who spoke to him and shook hands with him and promised him; I want to thank Aka (Brother, referring to Imomnazarov) for that. "

Col. Iskandarov to the woman: “You said something in regard to His Excellency the President, and I would like to say to you that I am born of Gharm, and am an ex-opposition mujahid and have fraternal relations with Imomnazar, Tolib, and Yodgor. Today, however, one of the reasons for the war to stop was his involvement, Aka Yodgor (head of AKF) knows this, the moment that he (the President) found out he called and warned that there should be no clashes. If a crime has been committed, the people of Badakhshan have never harbored any criminals nor traitors in their home. So, on a par with ImomiZamon, we would like to ask you to give blessings to His Excellency (the President) as well, for he is a very caring person.”

Another woman stepping in: “Tell them to stop spreading the wrong information! Why there is always misinformation out there?”

Col. Iskandarov: “This is all the doing of the spies from other countries.”

A third woman approaching: “Will you please make sure the military vacate our homes?”

Col. Iskandarov: “Dear sister, with God’s help, if it works out today, we will take all the forces out of here in the morning.”

### **Meeting in Bar Khorog:**

MrFayzov addressing the people of the district and their leadership: “I would also like to thank JanobiOli (the President) for reacting as soon as he found out and declaring a ceasefire.”

Mamadboqirov: “You don’t say!”

YodgorFayzov: “Indeed, he did give a chance for the situation to quiet down.”

MamadboqirMamadboqirov; “Well, that’s because his own position became precarious.”

YodgorFayzov: “Our Mawlo (HH the Aga Khan) was recognized, our Mawlo reached out to us, to you. What more should we need?”

MamadboqirMamadboqirov: “But how did they hit us!”

YodgorFayzov: “No, I am talking about Mawlo; whoever has turned in their munitions has entrusted their souls to their Mawlo, and for the sake of their own people. Everybody knows what happened here in Barkhorog, and what you did, and it will go down the history, nothing is a secret now how many men came here and what they did here, and how they did it.”

MamadboqirMamadboqirov: “Well, then, you must tell it all to people! What have you done till now? What have you done?”

YodgorFayzov: “May God protect you all. From now on we are all united, no matter who is who, we are all together now, as brethren bound by the same Farman, by the same idea, by the same ideology.”

MamadboqirMamadboqirov: “Thanks be to them that they got us all get together. Thanks are to them for getting Badakhshanis together. And thank you for coming here. Welcome! And now, whatever the people want to say, please. Also, what of the Four Persons? How does that question stand now? They came here and killed our people, all because they wanted to get to these Four.”

YodgorFayzov: “It is now the responsibility of the government officials, they will have to answer for themselves. On our part, we will do whatever we can, through the institutions of MawlonohozirImom, to insure that no one goes after anyone.”

A civil society member: “What about all these check-posts all around?”

YodgorFayzov: “You will be informed soon by the government, by the Minister...”

MamadboqirMamadboqirov: “We will give up our rifles, but, need be, will fight them with rocks, honestly, I swear.”

YodgorFayzov: “I know that, I know you.”

MamadboqirMamadboqirov: “But bear in mind that now you will be our guarantor, whatever happens. Listen, people, he will be our guarantor here, Mawlo is far from us, but you are here, and will bear responsibility.”

YodgorFayzov: “No, I am not a guarantor but am here with you.”

MamadboqirMamadboqirov: “Listen, all people of Barkhorog! Yodgor, will you assume responsibility for our safety?”

YodgorFayzov: “I brought you a word from the Mawlo, and if they kill you, let them kill me too, I’ll stay with you.”

MamadboqirMamadboqirov: “What do we need you for? We don’t need you to stay with us.”

YodgorFayzov: “At the moment, all of our system is working on it.”

A civil society member (neighborhood member?): “Tell us, brother, you are here now and are telling us all these things, what if they charge at us again after you have taken all from us and left? What if they start chasing us and our kids, breaking into our homes? What will happen then?”

YodgorFayzov: “If this is their intention, then let them do it, let them kill us all, let us die, it ends all there, then, we don’t need anything anymore.”

Voices from the crowd: “They are not to be trusted!”

A senior member of the community speaking: “Let us listen to the man who came from the Mawlo, we are all brethren, let us listen to the words of our Mawlo... we will further hold talks with them and everything will hopefully settle, now that there are guarantees... we must speak with one voice.”

MamadboqirMamadboqirov: “Excuse me, brother, but we must find out first, because people do not know anything at all.”

Senior member of the community continues: “Let us listen to and obey the will of our Mawlo.”

MamadboqirMamadboqirov: “Alright then, bring the guns out, and give it all to them.”

### **Meeting in Khlebzavod neighborhood:**

Paishanbe, a leader of the Khlebzavod neighborhood and active member of a movement called Maslihat, who took part in peace negotiations throughout the conflict. In addressing Colonel Iskandarov of the Tajik Special Forces, YodgorFayzov, the head of AKF, as well as

some members of the Civil Society, (including NozirNavjavonov, the lawyer for the group of 20, who took record of the negotiations and composed the terms of the peace pact) said:

“First of all, I would like to acknowledge our brothers here, who have come here as guests and say that we all wanted the 80th anniversary to be celebrated here in the land of Badakhshan by all Tajiks, but it all went wrong in the month of Ramadan. I have always known that the book of Shahname belongs to us Tajiks, because we are so easily tricked into conflict and at times go as far as to kill our own brothers. This is a mistake, God did not set us on this path. Today I can see brethren who were with us in the past but today we face each other from opposite sides. Trust me, personally on my behalf, on behalf of the residents of AbdulamonAyombek Street, on behalf of the whole community of Badakhshan, we are very regretful about the loss of lives on the other side just as well as on this side, as they were Muslim too, they were all our brothers. We want to apologize to their families, and we will visit their families.

A woman from the same community:

“There are soldiers with guns all around us, wherever we look. My poor old mother is so afraid of them, she doesn’t know what to do. All the children are in chock right now. Perhaps, those soldiers also feel the same, but who is behind this whole situation and what is going on? Wherever we have been before, be it in Russia or elsewhere, we were always proud of Tajikistan, that it is improving day-to-day. Is this improvement now? Is it improvement that sisters, brothers, and mothers of the killed once can’t even bury their own, they are shaking out of fear. I have to put cotton plugs in my mother’s ears so she doesn’t hear any of this. A mother is one for all. Everyone was born by a mother and she takes all the grief and sorrow into her heart. The soldiers who were brought here and died also have mothers. Isn’t there a way to put your minds together and get us all out of this situation. Thank God that during all these fourteen hours of the sleepless night, all these poor people, all these women, and the young boys standing outside at the guard with nothing in their hands survived. I ran from one window to the next to check what was going on, thinking that all of Khlebzavod area was covered with dead bodies. And now we are out here, facing the current situation. Who wanted this situation? Neither you nor us. Who in their right mind would do such a thing, especially on the day of fasting, during Ramadan? This is a disgrace for all Tajik people!

Colonel Iskandarov promising people the withdrawal of all troops from Khorog:

“We achieved peace now, so please do not listen to all sorts of people who might have bad intentions, maybe some of them work for other countries. And all the forces that are here today, once weapons are collected today, will all be pulled out of here tomorrow.”

P.S. to the video:

After all these promises Iskandarov received the rank of General, while Imomnazarov was murdered, and the troops are still there.