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Containing the Rise of Violence by Illegal Crime Armed Groups and Drug Gangs in the Republic of Tajikistan: Condemning Crime Gangs of Khorugh

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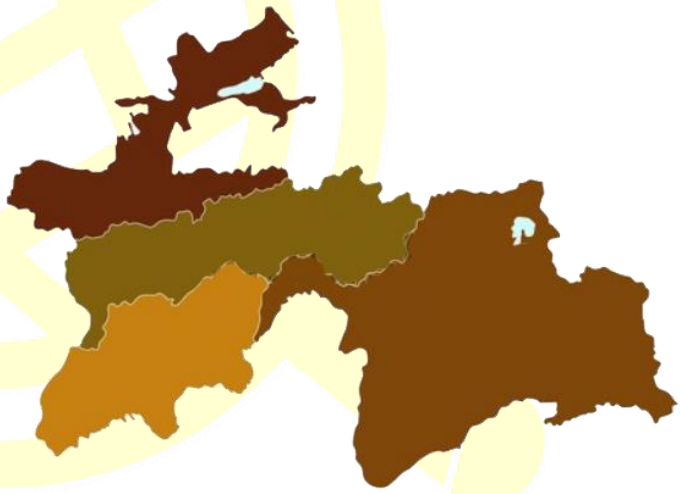
The upsurge of drug related crimes and violence in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (GBAO) is condemnable— as well as manipulated hostility towards Tajikistan's rule of law, public order and security—actors in the region should stress urging armed groups to cease all forms of violence, lay down their arms and engage constructively in the country's evolving peace process. The Interagency Commission in charge of providing law and order in the GBAO has been established. In Tajikistan for which The President of the Republic of Tajikistan His Excellency

Emomali Rahmon on September 15, 2018 in a meeting with public active of the GBAO gave a number of specific instructions to designated persons to ensure rule of law; maintain public order and security, the detention of criminals in search, seizure of illegal weapons and ammunition and investigation of drug related crimes through this commission.

Gorno-Badakhshan is one of the most strategically sensitive areas in Central Asia. Situated high in the Pamir mountains, this autonomous region of eastern Tajikistan is bordered to the south and west by Afghanistan and to the east by China's Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region. Since the 1990s, Gorno-Badakhshan has sought to strengthen its self-rule, including through armed struggle.



H.E President Rahmon is carrying out the social and economic controls across the country. Key threats to internal security include: well-armed local gangs who sit astride politics, law enforcement and organised crime, and whose personal clout in GBAO often surpasses the governments. The persistent violence perpetrated by armed groups in few areas of Tajikistan is a matter of great concern. Acts of incitement to violence, especially those based on

ethnicity or religion — as well as engaging in or providing support for acts that undermine the country's security and stability — constitute a requirements to ensuring the rule of law and the capture and prosecution of criminals who are wanted. The peace loving people around the world support H.E Emamoli Rahmon in his efforts to promote lasting peace and stability in the Tajikistan as well as the region. It also called on the Tajik Government authorities to advance dialogue with the country's armed groups and promote national reconciliation, the extension of State authority, the strengthening of the security sector as their highest priorities.

It should be noted that to date from the leadership of organized crime gangs of Khorugh – Ayombekov Tolib Abdrahmonovich, Mamadboqirov Mamadboqir Karamalishoevich, Mamadaslamov Yodgor Shomusallamovich, Mazorov Khursand

Mirzohayotovich, Shanbiev Munavvar Navruzbekovich and dozens of province residents, a large of quantity of firearms and ammunition of including 186 illegally possessed firearms have been seized, in particular 72 assault rifles Kalashnikov, 3 machine guns, 2 grenade launchers, 1 anti-aircraft complex, 37 pistols, 11 carbines, 47 types of other weapons, 36 grenades, more than 4700 units of ammunition and 900

grams of explosives. The leaders and members of organized criminal groups will face immediate action in relation to the existing laws if the weapons demanded are not surrendered. It has proven difficult to control their subversive activities as they are well-funded and maintained by ties of kinship amongst its members. Quite often criminal gangs consist of young males from one mahalla, and, due to the regionalist patterns of settlement in Dushanbe and other cities, it is prone to issues of sub-ethnic rivalry.

For hundreds of years, China, Russia, and an assortment of emirs and khans had claimed the area of GBAO, but probably few of those living there ever knew they were part of any empire. Gorno-Badakhshan accounts for some 45 percent of Tajikistan's territory, yet only about 220,000 of Tajikistan's 9 million people live there. Tajik language is spoken there, but local languages, Pamiri languages, are also still spoken, including Shugnani, Rushani, Yazgulomi, (Vakhani), and Sariquli, the latter in the Chinese border area, preserved by isolated communities in the region's remote valleys.

By orders of H.E Rahmon, no operations will be carried out against civilian population, says GBAO interagency commission. The GBAO interagency commission members

include representatives of power-wielding structures and leadership of the region. The process of voluntary surrender of weapons has begun; the head of state harshly criticized the work of local law enforcement authorities and gave them one-month deadline to address the situation in the region, especially in Khorog, and implied that more robust measures could be adopted if he was dissatisfied with the results. A range of personnel changes were made in the region. By president's decree chairperson of the GBAO regional court, chief of GBAO police, chief of Khorog traffic police department as well as heads of Khorog and Shugnan and Roshtqala districts were also fired.

Tajikistan has also become a key transit point and a destination of weapons and explosives from Afghanistan. The flow of arms to Tajikistan goes together with drug trafficking. Badakhshan is an isolated, mountainous region of southeastern Tajikistan that shares a long and virtually open border with Afghanistan, China and Kyrgyz Republic. The region has considerable mineral wealth and is also a corridor for illegal trafficking in cigarettes, alcohol, and narcotics -- particularly Afghan heroin. Irregular locals have clashed with government forces in the past and do so again when challenged. China also has a growing security presence in the region, why does it matter? GBAO sits at the nexus of security problems including in China's Xinjiang region; Afghanistan's war and opium trafficking; and jihadists' potential return from

Iraq and Syria to China, Central Asia or Russia could provoke further instability in the region.

The Afghan-GBAO border is a source of concern for China, Russia and other foreign powers. Tajikistan is an important transit point for Chinese goods destined for Afghanistan, Pakistan and further afield. Afghan opiates flow freely into Tajikistan and onward to Russia, China and the West. Moscow and Beijing have more clout in Dushanbe and share an interest in Tajikistan's stability. China also should take seriously fears among the local population about its role in GBAO, communicate clearly its interests and strategy in the region, and engage the local labor force in its economic endeavors. China set up a "quadrilateral cooperation and coordination mechanism" with Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan for sharing information and counter-terrorism training. The mechanism focus on decisions by consensus; includes coordination and support in various spheres including study and analysis of counter terrorism situation, intelligence sharing, anti-terrorist capability building, joint anti-terrorist training and personnel training, and that the coordination and cooperation will be exclusive to the four countries. The Tajik-Chinese exercises and quadrilateral mechanism highlights China's interest in regional stability. As Beijing deepens ties to Dushanbe, it could consider communicating to the others more clearly its strategy toward Central Asia, particularly toward sensitive regions like GBAO.

Pertinent to mention here, The GBAO has no major industries to speak of. Unemployment is believed to be well over half of the eligible workforce despite a government figure of around 20 percent. Reports for decades have cited smuggling as a major source of income in the region. With limited resources, Gorno-Badakhshan probably needs whatever support and supplies the Tajik government can offer. Residents of GBAO are looking for ways to eliminate the existing shortcomings yet the organized criminal groups of the Shughnon continue at attempts to smuggle drugs and firearms. The leaders and active members of organized criminal groups carry out meetings in community buildings such as mahallas and restaurants with the involvement of the naive and misguided young people of Khorog and the surrounding areas. In most cases, these meetings are held in the Shugnon, Shomi Badakhshon, Atlant, Marco Polo restaurants, the Murgob and Orzu canteens, and the Tishor hotel. However, the causes of gang violence cannot be solved by enforcement alone.

It is naive to think that tactical enforcement alone will solve the complex causes of violence and stop young people from joining gangs. Even when gang members are in prison, they are not removed from gang culture. Gangs operate inside young offenders institutions and communications are also common with gang members outside on regular basis. Let us not delude ourselves that all over Asia, current policies are making a sustainable impact upon gangs, reality is far from it. When gang

members are imprisoned, a vacuum is created for younger members to step into their shoes, causing an escalation in violence as they vie for position. Families with youngsters live in fear of attack; people are still being seriously wounded, dying and mothers grieving and utterly inconsolable at the deaths of their children. But these days such loss of life seems to attract far less attention from the media and politicians. Media plays a vital role in creating awareness amongst the youth and locals of an area. The youth needs to be educated that service in the ranks of the Armed Forces of their country is the sacred duty of every citizen who values honor. This is a way to convey loyalty to one's nation. Apparently, the youth is under the influence of certain criminal groups and avoid serving in the ranks of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Tajikistan. Tajiks primarily receive outside news and television programming from Russia and are exposed to Russia's increasingly anti-American media. Despite this, Tajiks generally hold positive view toward Westerners, and anti-American behavior is rare.

Reaffirming its support to H.E Rahmon, the world credits him with ending a devastating civil war and maintaining peace in a country otherwise prone to divisiveness on regional and religious bases. He is recognized as having the strength, skill, and experience to balance all sides. Paying acknowledgement to H.E Rahmon for peace keeping efforts, we express our deep concern regarding persistent violence perpetrated by armed groups, in GBAO and in the rest of the country, against civilians,

as well as violations of law, abuses and violations of human rights, including those committed against children and those involving sexual and gender-based violence in conflict, resulting in deaths, injury and displacement. The world is looking towards H.E President Rahmon to cement and broaden national ownership of the peace process and calls for an enhanced coordination of think tanks of the two countries to support peace initiatives. The world notes the various measures taken by leadership of H.E Rahmon and police-contributing to combat sexual exploitation and abuse by the organized gangs, which has led to a reduction in reported cases, but still expresses grave concern over numerous allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse reportedly committed by these gangs in the Tajikistan.

The vain hope that police can sort out gangs on their own resulted in losing focus on what is really required. These young men and women are not born angry, as violent gang members. Family breakdown, poverty, poor housing, addiction, educational failure, crime, violence and unemployment create gang members. These root issues need to be addressed which can offers positive relationships and role-models, and provides alternatives that lead to a long-term, sustainable answer to gangs. Sustainable policies need to be implemented by deepening relationship with the youth. The feedback provided by print newspaper has diminished. The same technologies that connected people with a global audience also shifted advertising

revenues away from news publishers. Approached need to be pursued which would allow journalism to be open and accessible to everyone, regardless of where they live.

It is high time for Tajikistan to enhance techniques and cooperation methods for preventing and countering violent organized crimes. Workshops may be held for the community on risk assessments and identifying early signs of radicalisation in the region, including presentations by experts on identifying the main considerations in developing risk assessments, and on effective assistance in identifying early signs of radicalization in which representatives of the government, civil society and research institutes can play a very active role. This will lay the groundwork for implementation of a community forum program. The forum can function as a periodic municipal- or community-level gathering of local government officials, law enforcement, teachers, psychologists, and other relevant actors, who will coordinate, share information and collaborate to address concerns in their community. The main objectives of which can revolve primarily around safeguarding vulnerable individuals from criminality or violent extremism, and countering the spread of extremist ideologies, all in accordance with international standards and best practices.