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#### OUTSKIRTS OF EMPIRE IN MAELSTROM OF GLOBALIZATION: GORNO-BADAKHSHAN IN 1992-1994

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#### *Abstract*

The article provides an analysis of the military-political situation in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region in 1992-1994. The authors consider the events taking into account synchronous global trends of globalization. The new technological order gave rise to centrifugal and destructive processes on the periphery of the world system. The attempt to form national statehood in Tajikistan was blocked due to the disunity of various ethno-local groups of the population. Various actors were involved in the bloody civil war which lasted from 1992 to 1997. Before the war, their activities were checked by an alternative world development project and effective control over border regions. The policy of democratization, cultural “revival”, promotion of private initiative and foreign investment which began during the “restructuring” era opened the region for criminal-financial flows (drug trafficking) and migrants from neighboring Afghanistan. The attempts to raise status of the GBAO and legitimize the Autonomous Republic of Badakhshan were not successful; participation of a large number of actors aggravated the situation and did not contribute to the unity of the Pamir. The drivers of regionalization of the global era secured the peripheral status of the self-proclaimed republic; the infrastructural dependence on external forces fragmented the Pamir.

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## 1. Introduction

The Pamir mountains are located in the center of Asia in the territory of Tajikistan, China and Afghanistan. The population of the region speaks East-Iranian languages and professes Nizari Ismailism. The most numerous Pamirians (the Shugnans, the Vakhans, the Rushans) live in both Tajikistan and Afghanistan (the Vakhans live in Pakistan and China). In addition, a number of local Farsian groups live in Badakhshan, identifying themselves with the Pamirians and separating themselves from them. There is a community of Yazguliens who profess Sunni Islam but speak the Eastern Iranian languages and consider themselves Pamiris. In the East (Murghab district of GBAO) and Small (Afghan) Pamir, the Kyrgyz nomads live.

The last three decades have been marked by a sharp increase in the studies on the Pamir and its inhabitants. If during the previous seventy years, the remote region attracted only geologists, linguists and religious scholars, after the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, the collapse of the USSR, the beginning of the civil war in Tajikistan, the region became an object of interest for all branches of humanitarian knowledge. A lot of analytical reports, articles and monographs devoted to the past and present of the Pamirs were published. However, Badakhshan remains an unexplored region. Many aspects of recent transformations that have covered this part of Central Asia remain understudied. Archive research made it possible to document the contradictory history of the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region of Tajikistan (GBAO) during the Civil War era (1992-1997). The authors conduct research aimed at filling the historiographic lacuna.

## 2. Problem Statement

History of the GBAO in the 1990s was studied within the history of formation of Tajikistan and the civil war in the republic as part of transitional processes in Central Asia, history of international relations, Islam or the Nizari community (Bushkov & Mikulsky, 1996; Djalili, Grare, & Akiner, 1998; Bliss, 2006; Nourzhanov & Bleuer, 2013; Mastibekov, 2014; Epkenhans, 2016) ... More specialized works focused on the role of Russian border guards and the ethnocultural image of peoples (Emadi, 1998; Bushkov & Monogarova, 2000; Niezov, 2003; Kalandarov, 2004; Middleton, 2016). The common features of these studies were “erosion” of the geographical context, reliance on published sources (local newspapers and reports of international organizations) and absolutization of specific interactions. The dissertation by Khudoerov (2012) devoted to the post-Soviet Pamir was an exception. Nevertheless, one of the main issues remains to be unsolved – analysis of documents from the central and regional archives of the Republic of Tajikistan.

Since the beginning of 2014, the authors have been collecting materials in the funds of the Central State Archive of the Republic of Tajikistan (Dushanbe) and the State Archive of the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (SA of the GBAO, Khorog). The documents contain unknown details of the painful involvement of the GBAO in globalization processes in the post-Soviet space.

### **3. Research Questions**

Our focus is on the growing influence of global trends on the political, socio-economic, cultural image of Gorno-Badakhshan: national and cultural “revival”, disintegration of the socialist economic system, regionalization, “erosion” of state borders, an increasing number of political actors, emergence of new channels of interaction. At the same time, it is important to assess the “share” of each group of phenomena in the history of the GBAO of 1992-1994 (taking into account the dynamics of the processes).

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to identify factors of globalization that influenced the regional political project in the territory of the Autonomous Republic of Badakhshan (ARB) (1991-1994).

### **5. Research Methods**

The methodological basis of the study includes the following methods: an integrated approach to the study of historical sources, a historical critical method used for comparing the data from different sources, a historical typological method. The study of historical phenomena aims at identifying their nature. The historical genetic method is used to identify properties, functions and changes of the phenomena.

While studying the range of phenomena of globalization, the authors use a world-systems approach. According to this approach, after the Second World War, the core of the capitalist system developed dynamically. The government, civil society, mass education limited the capital which restricted the exploitation of the “core” population and intensified capitalism. However, this potential had been exhausted by the 1980s. Therefore, one more condition for globalization was the collapse of the Soviet Union which implemented an alternative program of world development. Acceleration of globalization started after 1991 when former socialist countries were involved in its orbit. For many of them, freedom, a market economy, and open borders turned into four horsemen of the Apocalypse: interstate conflicts, civil wars, low living standards and high death rates (Wallerstein, 2008). Freedom of movement turned into forced migration for social “lower classes”. Thus, from 1975 to 1995, the number of forced emigrants (refugees) who received assistance from the special UN special-purpose commission increased from 2 to 27 million people (Bauman, 2004). The logical continuation of the initially outwardly progressive globalization was the collapse of national states accompanied by de-industrialization and archaization of social relations.

### **6. Findings**

By the beginning of the collapse of the USSR, the GBAO was one of the most economically backward regions of the country. According to the 1989 census, about 161 thousand people lived in the region (Boldyrev, 1990). The GBAO was controlled by the republican government. However, the regional economy was subsidized from Moscow. The Pamir highway (Middleton, 2016) remained the main supply channel. The Soviet border troops ensured security being one of the main economic actors of the region. In addition, the CSS controlling the entire territory of the GBAO suppressed conflicts that erupted in

neighboring areas of Central Asia (Daudov, Shorokhov, & Andreev, 2018). Finally, the assimilation policy of Dushanbe was not successful in the conditions of the geographical isolation of the Pamirs.

Since 1990, during the period of decentralization of the regional government system, political activities were concentrated in the Council of People's Deputies (CPD) of the GBAO. This body was a backbone within the "typical" self-government system of the "perestroika" era. Between the sessions, the executive committee was a governing body which dealt with current issues and implemented decisions of the elected body. In general, the restructuring results were not positive for Badakhshan. The socioeconomic base was shrinking so rapidly that even positive aspects of liberalization (self-government, delegation of economic powers of local authorities, publicity, religious "revival", international contacts) exacerbated the crisis of social expectations. Hopes for financing from Moscow, creating joint ventures, expansion of political rights turned into conflicts with the republican center, generated a crisis of enterprises, aggravated contradictions within the GBAO.

The events of August-November 1991 took place outside the Pamir. The August coup in Moscow, declaration of independence of the Republic of Tajikistan and September confrontation between the authorities and the "demo-Islamists" in Dushanbe did not affect the GBAO. Nonetheless, the majority of the Pamir intelligentsia believed that accelerated reforms would overcome sociopolitical, economic, and cultural discrimination that impeded the development of Soviet Badakhshan. Therefore, people from the GBAO supported the radicals ("Rastokhez", "demoislamists", "Lali Badakhshan"). On the contrary, most of the administrative elite retained old patron-client relations with representatives of the Soviet nomenclature. It seemed that only a miracle could unite them. The first presidential elections (11/24/1991) was that miracle. Despite the unanimous support of the population and the elite of the GBAO, D. Hudonazarov lost (Nourzhanov & Bleuer, 2013). On December 3, 1991, a mass rally began in Khorog. People wanted to create an autonomous republic and change the format of relations with Dushanbe. As a result of the negotiations, the ARB was created on December 9, 1991 (Daudov et al., 2018). This ephemeral political formation became a form of organization of the Pamir population which faced all the challenges of globalization.

If for "natural" globalization processes, economic changes are their core and engine, in isolation from the world economic core and socialist background, Badakhshan faced the political dimension of this phenomenon. The documentary sources record several interrelated synchronous trends that characterized power relations in the Pamirs in 1992-1994.

First, it is an attempt of limited sovereinization of the region on the basis of the Soviet regional administrative structure. Throughout the period under review, the ARB tried to gain recognition of its republican status. In January 1991, the issue was discussed by the Supreme Council of the Republic of Tajikistan. As a result, the leaders of the conservatives R.N. Nabiyeu and S.K. Kenzhaev managed to postpone recognition of the ARB until the next session on the pretext of economic chaos, instructing the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Tajikistan to provide calculations of the consequences of this decision (Khudoerov, 2012).

The regular session of the SC held in March 1992 did not include the issue of the GBAO status on the agenda. This caused new protests and rallies in Khorog. On March 14, people's deputies sent a protest to the parliament by the political movement "La'li Badakhshon" (Khudoerov, 2012, p. 59). On April 10,

the CPD of the GBAO adopted the Declaration on the transformation of the GBAO into the ARB (Karori shuroi Namangoni halki Viloyati Badakhshani Kuhii Chumkhuriya Tochikiston (04/10/1992) (Badakhshon, 6/05/1992, p. 1). However, even the victory of May 11, 1992, when the Interior Ministry and the Foreign Ministry of the coalition government were headed by M. Navjuvonov and H. Kholiknazarov, and the chairman of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Tajikistan A.I. Iskandarov (Nourzhanov & Bleuer, 2013) did not contribute to legitimation of the republican status of Badakhshan. The name “GBAO” was present in all documents of the central government. Since February 1993 (Nourzhanov & Bleuer, 2013), the confrontation became hybrid. The ARB existed until November 1994. In this month, the national Constitution was adopted. Its seventh chapter provided the GBAO with the status of a republic (Khudoerov, 2012). The fiasco of the Pamir sovereignty project was due to disunity of representatives of the “old” party nomenklatura in the regional administration and Dushanbe. Ambivalence of relations with the “post-communist” conservatives from Khujand and Kulyab (as well as maintaining ties with the CPT headed by Sh.D. Shabdolov) was beneficial. Therefore, Khorog became a platform for concluding the Peace Agreement between regional groupings of Tajikistan on July 27, 1992. The central control over the Pamirs was restored in 1994-1997.

The second significant factor of the destructive impact of globalization was an increase in the number of political actors influencing the region.

Illegal armed groups (IAGs) dealing with international drug trafficking and the Islamists of Afghanistan influenced the situation in the GBAO.

After the collapse of the USSR, the border became permeable. In addition, in January 1992, desertion from the Soviet army was legalized at the level of the republic. On May 7, 1992, the head of the ARB garrison was appointed military commissar M. Toshmukhammedov, who had to implement security measures at the border. He decided to legalize voluntary self-defense groups to assist Russian border guards (Khudoerov, 2012). The second stage of formation of illegal armed groups began after the exodus of the Pamiris from other regions of Tajikistan in the second half of 1992. Refugees enhanced the influence of individual field commanders who became the third force in the region (besides the official administration and border guards). As a result, Darvaz, Vancha and Yazguliem were controlled by the militants who were formally considered part of the United Tajik Opposition. Islamist groups supported by the Afghan Mujahideen fought against the Russian border guards and Popular Front groups (US Institute of Peace, 1995). The peak of militant activity was March 1993 when the political council of opposition movements and self-defense units of the Pamirs was created. This body tried to unite regional authorities and opposition groups to prevent escalation of hostilities in Badakhshan. At the same time, the ARB officially legalized the Pamir self-defense group under the leadership of M. Pallaev and A. Aymbekov who pledged to defend the region from militants of the Kulyab Popular Front and restrain the military-political influence of the Islamists. In July 1993, by the decision of the political council, several subunits of the self-defense group were integrated into the administrative structures. It was proposed to include opposition supporters in local authorities. One of the field commanders, B. Zamirov, was elected chairman of the Executive Committee of the CPD of the ARB. In summer, the number of twenty militant groups reached 10 thousand people. In 1995, part of the Pamir self-defense groups under the leadership of H. Holbashev entered the border guard forces of Tajikistan (Khudoerov, 2012). Thus, for at least four years in the GBAO, there were parallel

official power structures of criminal nature. They were supported from outside. In fact, the only force that opposed them was the border contingents. The role of the latter changed after the collapse of the USSR.

From December 1991 to August 1992, the border detachments of the former Red Banner Central Asian Border District were not controlled, lacking personnel. In fact, they guarded their own locations. Then, they acquired the status of an independent subject of military-political and economic relations. Having conducted military operations and concluding agreements with the illegal armed groups, providing and blocking “humanitarian corridors”, recruiting local people and supplying them with food, they determined tactics within the region and exerted an information impact on Moscow. As a result of military operations of 1993-1995, control over the border was restored, and the GBAO (Darvaz, Vanch, Yazgulem) was controlled by the Russian border guards. In 1993, battalions from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan (the total number of all contingents was up to 12 thousand) became part of the grouping of troops (Dubnov, 1996). In fact, the mosaic of actors of the inter-Tajik confrontation demonstrates consequences of the degradation of traditional forms of sovereignty.

The most influential international player was Nizari Imam Aga Khan. The first emissaries of the Ismaili leader visited the GBAO in the summer of 1991, but his fund created in the region in 1993 (Kalandarov, 2004). Focusing on the delivery of humanitarian aid and systematic cultural expansion, Aga Khan secured a neutral status with respect to other actors and the highest level of popularity among the Pamir population. These maneuvers contributed to the monopolization of the cultural and information space of the GBAO by the Ismaili institutions. Aga Khan refused to support the idea of sovereignty of the region.

The influence of globalization on the social and economic development of the region was destructive (Bliss, 2006). Thus, elimination of the centralized supply system and subsidized support, transition to the market economy, sovereignization were a death sentence for a region without energy infrastructure and industry. The beginning of the active phase of the civil war in 1992 brought an economic blockade, cessation of funding from the republican budget and flows of refugees. Trying to act according to the patterns of the restructuring policies, the local authorities adopted a number of legal acts regulating the status of private entrepreneurs and encouraging tourism. In addition, trying to attract foreign investment, the ARB created several foreign trade missions. The only high-profile joint project was an agreement between the ARB and the Russian Financial and Industrial Transcontinental Corporation on investing in the regional industry, financing the Pamir media, lobbying Badakhshan interests in the Russian government, and introducing the Russian banking system in exchange for a license for mining works (Khudoerov, 2012). However, these measures were not implemented. In the spring of 1994, the only major project was the construction of Pamir-1 Power Plant. Thus, international channels used for delivering humanitarian aid was the only positive manifestation of the economic component of globalization for Badakhshan.

## **7. Conclusion**

The influence of globalization was one of the factors that predetermined the fate of the ARB project. Being a product of the Soviet system of national-territorial self-government, Badakhshan, unlike some other territories of the former Soviet Union, had chances to become a sovereign republic only within the USSR. Political and economic drivers of regionalization of the global era were against the self-proclaimed republic,

consolidating its peripheral status. In addition, the infrastructural dependence on heterogeneous external forces did not contribute to the unity of Badakhshan.

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