



**THE OXUS SOCIETY FOR
CENTRAL ASIAN AFFAIRS**



THE ARMED FORCES OF CENTRAL ASIA

CHAPTER VI: TAJIKISTAN

VERSION 1.5

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The following is a single chapter of a wider report examining the armed forces of Central Asia, with each chapter examining one of the five Central Asian republics. For access to the full interactive maps or the accompanying miniseries, links and information are available in the appendix of this chapter.


CONTENTS

CHAPTER VI. TAJIKISTAN

6.1: OVERVIEW	206
6.2: SHAPING THE MODERN DEFENCE POLICY	209
6.2.1: <i>Independence and the Tajik Civil War (1991 - 1997)</i>	209
6.2.2: <i>Rasht (2010)</i>	223
6.2.3: <i>Khorog (2012 - Present)</i>	224
6.2.4: <i>The Battle for Batken (2021 - 2022)</i>	226
6.3: THE COMMAND STRUCTURE	230
6.3.1: <i>Overall Command Structure</i>	230
6.3.2: <i>The President</i>	230
6.3.3: <i>Security Council</i>	231
6.3.4: <i>Cabinet Level Leadership</i>	232
6.4: THE GROUND FORCES	235
6.4.1: <i>Military Districts and Commands</i>	236
6.4.2: <i>Equipment and Unit Types</i>	241
6.4.3: <i>Force Modernisation</i>	245
6.4.4: <i>Weaknesses</i>	247
6.5: THE AIR AND AIR DEFENCE FORCES	250
6.5.1: <i>Operational Capacity</i>	250
6.5.2: <i>Command and Branch Structure</i>	252
6.5.3: <i>Capabilities and Systems</i>	253
6.6: THE MOBILE FORCES	255
6.6.1: <i>Capabilities and Roles</i>	255
6.7: PARAMILITARY AND SPECIAL FORCES	257
6.7.1: <i>Special Forces Units</i>	258
6.7.2: <i>The Internal Troops of Tajikistan</i>	260
6.7.3: <i>The Tajik National Guard</i>	261
6.7.4: <i>The Tajik Border Service</i>	262
6.8: PROCUREMENT AND DEFENCE BUDGETS	263
6.8.1: <i>Defence Budgets</i>	264
6.8.2: <i>Procurement Preferences</i>	267
6.8.3: <i>Vehicles, Platforms, and Ordnance</i>	268
6.9: ALLIANCES AND FOREIGN DEPLOYMENTS	270
6.9.1: <i>Alliances and Partnerships</i>	270
6.9.2: <i>Foreign Deployments into Tajikistan</i>	274
6.9.3: <i>Foreign Deployments by Tajikistan</i>	284

6.10: POTENTIAL FLASHPOINTS	286
<i>6.10.1: Incursion by the Islamic State into Gorno-Badakhshan</i>	286
<i>6.10.2: An Overthrow of the Tajik Administration by the Russian Forces</i>	300
<i>6.10.3: A Tajik Invasion of Batken</i>	315
6.11: CONCLUSION	335
6.12: USEFUL MAPS AND CHARTS	338
APPENDIX	569
1: GLOSSARY	570
2: SYMBOLOGY	582
3: REFERENCES	587

6.1: OVERVIEW



	NUMBER OF PERSONNEL	REGIONAL RANKING
TOTAL FORCE	16,300	5th
GROUND FORCES	7,300	5th
NAVAL FORCES	0	4th
AIR & AIR DEFENCE	1,500	5th
INTERNAL TROOPS	3,800	4th
BORDER TROOPS	2,500	5th
NATIONAL GUARD	1,200	3rd
REGIONAL FIREPOWER RANKING		5th

* = EXPERT ESTIMATE

(Figure 6.1.1: Overview chart of Tajikistan's force totals. The above rankings provide a comparative evaluation of the number of personnel in each branch of the Tajik military relative to the personnel numbers in the corresponding branches of other Central Asian states, positioning Tajikistan between 1st and 5th place among Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan)

Tajikistan's strategic position is among the most complex in Central Asia, with its politics, security, and terrain dominated by the towering Pamir and Alay Mountains. These mountains, and the country's complicated history, create significant economic and security divides across each of the different regions of the country.

Currently, Tajikistan ranks fifth among its Central Asian counterparts in several key military metrics, operating with the region's smallest defence budget and possessing the fewest modern vehicles among the five states. Despite these limitations though, Tajikistan benefits from several key strategic advantages. It hosts Russia's largest military base outside of the Russian Federation, boasts some of the most defensible terrain in the region, and receives substantial financial and military support from China, the European Union, India, Iran, and the United States, with this external assistance primarily aimed at bolstering Tajikistan's border security and counter-terrorism capabilities.



(Figure 6.1.2: Political map of Tajikistan (green) and its surrounding states)

Consistent with its comparatively low military spending, Tajikistan also records the lowest gross domestic product (GDP) and GDP per capita among the five Central Asian states. For decades, the Tajik economy has been heavily dependent on a relatively limited range of industries, including textiles, agricultural products, and mining. However, the most significant economic factor influencing Dushanbe's defence policy and the broader economy is, without a doubt, the inflow of remittances from Tajik workers abroad.

According to the World Bank, remittances now constitute an astounding 51 per cent of Tajikistan's total earnings, with the majority of these originating from Russia. Understandably, this heavy economic reliance on Moscow places Tajikistan in a precarious strategic position; any changes to Russia's visa or banking policies could potentially disrupt over half of Tajikistan's gross earnings. This continuing dependency on remittances not only binds the Tajik economy to the fluctuations of the Russian ruble but also significantly restricts the financial resources available for any potential military modernisation. To further complicate matters, unlike most of the other republics, Tajikistan did not inherit any substantial network of Soviet infrastructure, and the capital, Dushanbe, was notably underdeveloped compared to some of the other republics' capitals.

Tajikistan's geographic makeup also complicates its defence and infrastructural challenges, with 90 per cent of the country's territory covered by highly imposing mountain ranges. These ranges form natural barriers that not only divide the country into four distinct quadrants but also present significant logistical challenges for any transport or logistics operating within the country. While some of these geographic challenges have been addressed through projects such as the Anzob Tunnel, during the Soviet era, Moscow had somewhat neglected to invest in the Tajik SSR, instead directing the majority of its investments towards cities like Tashkent in present-day Uzbekistan and Alma-Ata (now Almaty) in present-day Kazakhstan. The limited funding that Tajikistan did receive from the central planners in Moscow was also primarily directed into the northern Sughd region, rather than into the southern or eastern parts of the country. This uneven allocation of resources between the populations on either side of the Gissar (Hisar) and Zarafshon Ranges has created a complex and challenging foundation for Tajikistan's development in the post-Soviet era.



(Figure 6.1.3: Map of Tajikistan's topography, showing extensive mountain ranges everywhere except in southwest Khatlon and northern Sughd)

Just a year after gaining independence, Tajikistan collapsed into the Tajik Civil War, an all-encompassing conflict that persisted from 1992 until 1997. This devastating war claimed over 100,000 lives and dismantled the majority of the longstanding political power structures that had operated within the country for decades, shifting control away from northern clans towards those in the south. This period of intense conflict would also further strain Tajikistan's capacity for post-Soviet recovery and development, leaving a lasting burden on the country's political and economic landscape. Even today, there are areas of Tajikistan that have still not been restored to their pre-war state.

Additionally, Tajikistan also faces significant security challenges along each of its external borders. To the west is Uzbekistan, a nation with a considerably larger and more advanced military, much of which is stationed in close proximity to Tajikistan's major urban centres. To the north, Tajikistan shares a tense and volatile border with Kyrgyzstan, where relations have worsened in the wake of recent armed conflicts over disputed territories. To the east, Tajikistan borders China's trans-Pamir region in Xinjiang, a geographically isolated area with only a single border crossing. To the south lies Afghanistan, which remains a persistent security concern for Tajikistan and its strategic partners, with the southern border continually affected by transnational threats such as insurgencies, narcotics trafficking, and extremist movements.

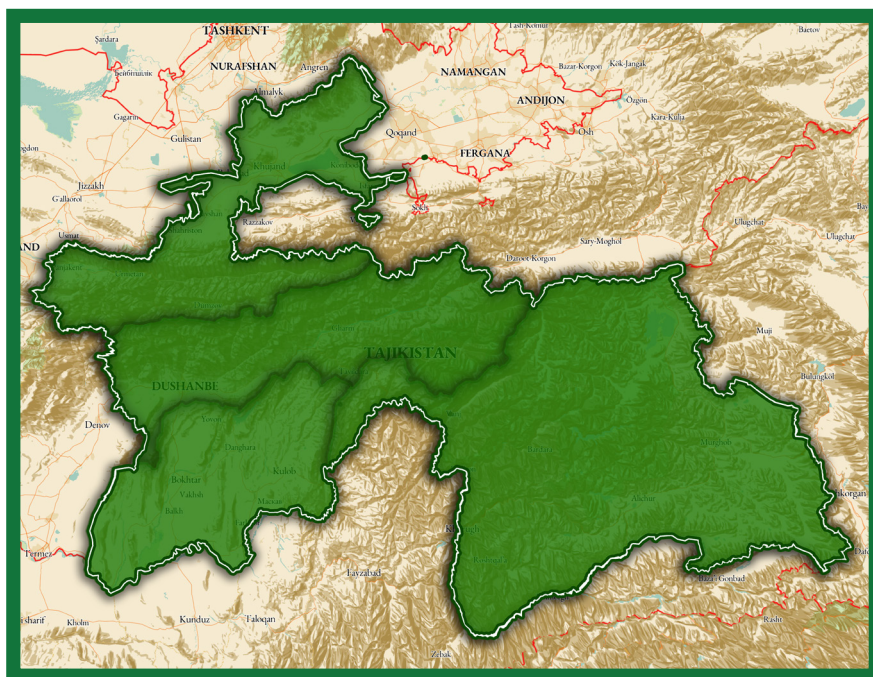
Each of these geographical and infrastructural challenges compels Dushanbe to navigate a series of delicate balancing acts with some of the world's most influential powers, with Tajikistan now even holding the unique position as the only country in the world hosting military facilities from Russia, China, and India, alongside US and EU-supported border security programmes. Balancing all of these diverse and sometimes competing interests, while managing the growing demands of domestic stakeholders, necessitates careful and strategic diplomatic manoeuvring by policymakers in Dushanbe.

6.2: SHAPING THE DEFENCE DOCTRINE

Tajikistan's national defence architecture has been profoundly influenced by a unique series of critical security events, creating the highly inward-focused security doctrine and the increasing centralisation of military power observed today. While numerous external factors have also played a role, four key events have been particularly influential in shaping Dushanbe's modern defence doctrine. These include the immediate post-independence period marked by a debilitating civil war, subsequent government efforts to crack down on Rasht and domestic terror networks, ongoing separatism and flare-ups in the country's eastern oblast, or province, and recent clashes with Kyrgyzstan along Tajikistan's northern flanks. This brings us to the current period, where the president and his inner circle are making concerted efforts to centralise and consolidate power. This section aims to provide an overview of how each of these events has shaped Tajikistan's modern defence doctrine.

6.2.1 - Independence and the Tajik Civil War (1991 - 1997)

Many of the challenges within Tajikistan's current security landscape are deeply rooted in the legacy of its civil war (1992-1997), a conflict that culminated in a faction predominantly from the southern regions overturning the power dynamics established during the late Soviet era. During the later stages of the Tajik SSR, Moscow had favoured the northern clans over those from the south and centre of the republic, with the majority of the country's leadership predominantly hailing from the northern Sughd province. Moscow maintained a semblance of balance between these factions by empowering the northern clans, placing the capital in the south, and granting the eastern clans in Gorno-Badakhshan a high degree of regional autonomy.



(Figure 6.2.1: Map of Tajikistan's modern administrative divisions. Sughd is in the north, Dushanbe and the Districts of Republican Subordination are in the centre, Khatlon is in the southwest, and the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast is in the east. Notably, the state's modern administrative divisions still closely align with the ethnic divisions of the late Tajik SSR)

The Tajik Civil War erupted less than a year into the country's independence and was a devastating conflict, lasting from 1992 until 1997. The war devolved into a complex interplay of regional, ethnic, political, and religious factions, all seeking to establish control over the power vacuum left by the dissolution of the USSR. The opposition, gathered under the United Tajik Opposition (UTO) banner, included Pamiri minorities, Garmis, democrats, liberals, and radical Islamist groups. Other key groups backing the opposition included the nationalist Rastokhez Party, the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT), and the Lali Badakhshon Party, which focused on Pamiri rights.

The Belligerents



United Tajik Opposition (UTO)

*Islamic Renaissance Party
Democratic Party of Tajikistan
Party of People's Unity
Rastokhez Popular Movement
Badakhshan Independence Movement
Hizb ut-Tahrir*

Foreign Supporters

*Islamic State of Afghanistan
Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan*



Popular Front of Tajikistan (PFT)

*Popular Front of Tajikistan
Communist Party of Tajikistan
Socialist Party of Tajikistan*

Foreign Supporters

*Russian Federation
Republic of Uzbekistan
Republic of Kazakhstan
Republic of Kyrgyzstan
Republic of Belarus*

While initially an internal conflict, the Tajik Civil War eventually became heavily influenced by the interventions of various regional actors. Throughout the conflict, the Popular (or People's) Front of Tajikistan (PFT) increasingly relied on support from Uzbekistan and Russia, while the United Tajik Opposition (UTO) established tenuous connections with Afghan forces and attempted to maintain its unreliable supply lines into the undergoverned parts of southern Kyrgyzstan. Russia and Uzbekistan would justify their involvement in the civil war under the pretext of defending their respective states against the growing Islamist threats emanating from Afghanistan and Tajikistan. Ultimately though, the PFT would emerge victorious after five bloody years of fighting, with its leadership still in control of Tajikistan today.

(Figure 6.2.2: The flags of the UTO (left) and the PFT (right))

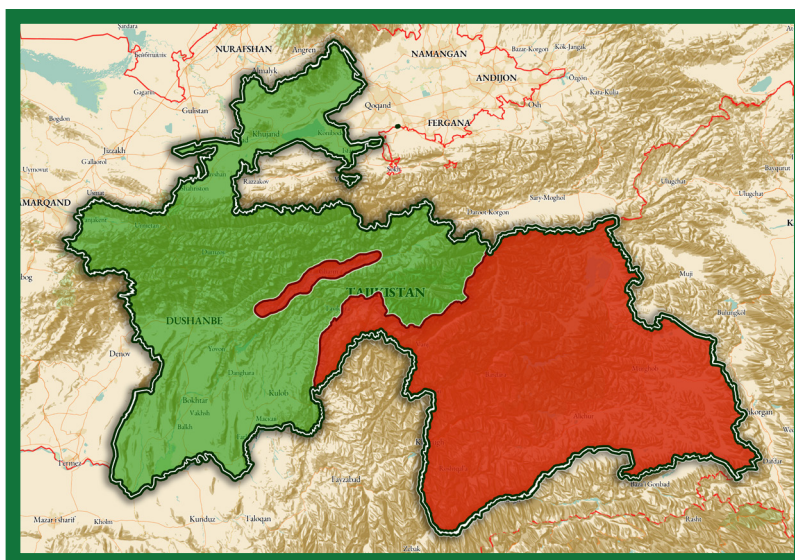
The following section is a chronological timeline of the critical inflection points during the Tajik Civil War:

September 1991 - March 1992

- Rahmon Nabyev, who served as the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Tajikistan from 1982 to 1985, was ousted from his position amid a widespread anti-corruption campaign initiated by Moscow. Despite this setback, Nabyev maintained strong ties with his former networks within the Party, which he leveraged to stage a political comeback in the post-independence power vacuum. In September 1991, Nabyev ascended to the presidency of Tajikistan, albeit briefly stepping down in October. However, he swiftly reasserted his political dominance by winning the first national presidential election in December 1991, securing 60.44 per cent of the vote as the Communist Party's candidate. His return to power, facilitated by his entrenched political connections, and set the stage for the tumultuous events that would soon engulf the newly independent state.
- Facing growing opposition, Nabyev began arming Tajik militias loyal to his government, seeking to secure regional strongholds and counter the rising influence of his adversaries. Simultaneously, the opposition forces, recognising the imbalance in military resources, sought external support. For this, they turned to the Mujahideen in Afghanistan, a battle-hardened group with access to substantial weaponry and experience, to arm their factions. This escalation of external involvement and the militarisation of both sides not only deepened the divisions within Tajikistan but also set the stage for a protracted and bloody civil conflict.

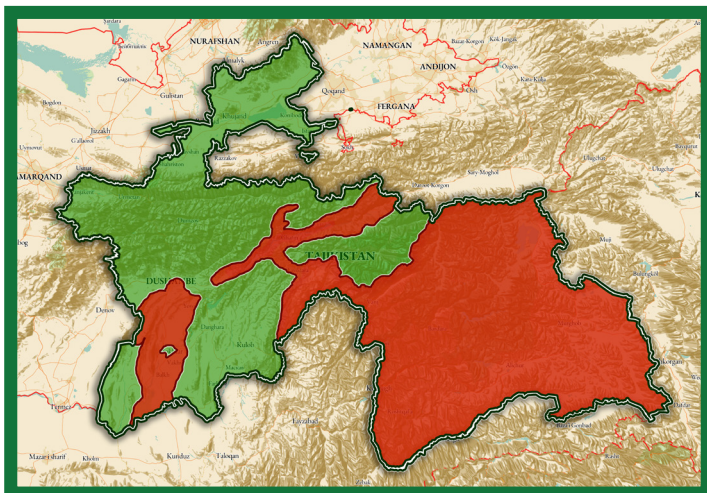
April 1992

- Widespread riots and protests erupted across Tajikistan, further fragmenting the already fragile state. The Pamiris in Badakhshan, citizens of Gharm, and some northern Uzbeks took drastic measures, with each of these groups declaring their regions' independence amidst the escalating turmoil.
- On April 10th, Badakhshan formally declared its independence, followed by Gharm on April 27th, signalling the disintegration of central authority.



(Figure 6.2.3: The frontlines of the Civil War, as of 28th April 1992, with the areas loyal to the government in Dushanbe (green) and the force loyal to the opposition (red))

May 1992



- Tensions escalated sharply between government supporters, predominantly from the Leninabad (Sughd) region and Kulob, and opposition factions, including Islamists, democrats, and regional groups. Massive protests and counter-protests surged through the capital, Dushanbe, with demands ranging from the resignation of President Rahmon Nabiyeu to the dismissal of opposition leaders.
- (May 5-7, 1992): Violence erupted in the capital, resulting in the first fatalities of what would soon spiral into a full-scale civil war. The clashes between pro-government forces and opposition militias marked a significant escalation, with several government buildings coming under attack.
- (May 10, 1992): In an attempt to mitigate the rapidly deteriorating situation, the National Reconciliation Commission was formed, comprising representatives from both the government and the opposition. However, this body proved largely ineffective in curbing the rising tide of violence.
- (May 12, 1992): In response to the escalating unrest and breakdown of order, the government declared a state of emergency, further intensifying the conflict environment.
- (May 13, 1992): Russian military units stationed in Tajikistan intervened to secure key installations and protect Russian nationals. While intended to stabilise the situation, this intervention highlighted the growing complexity of external influences in the conflict.
- (Late May 1992): The coalition government, which had been established to integrate both pro-government and opposition members, began to disintegrate as violence and mutual distrust escalated. The breakdown of this fragile coalition further deepened the crisis, making any prospects for a peaceful resolution increasingly remote, with fighting now erupting all across the country.

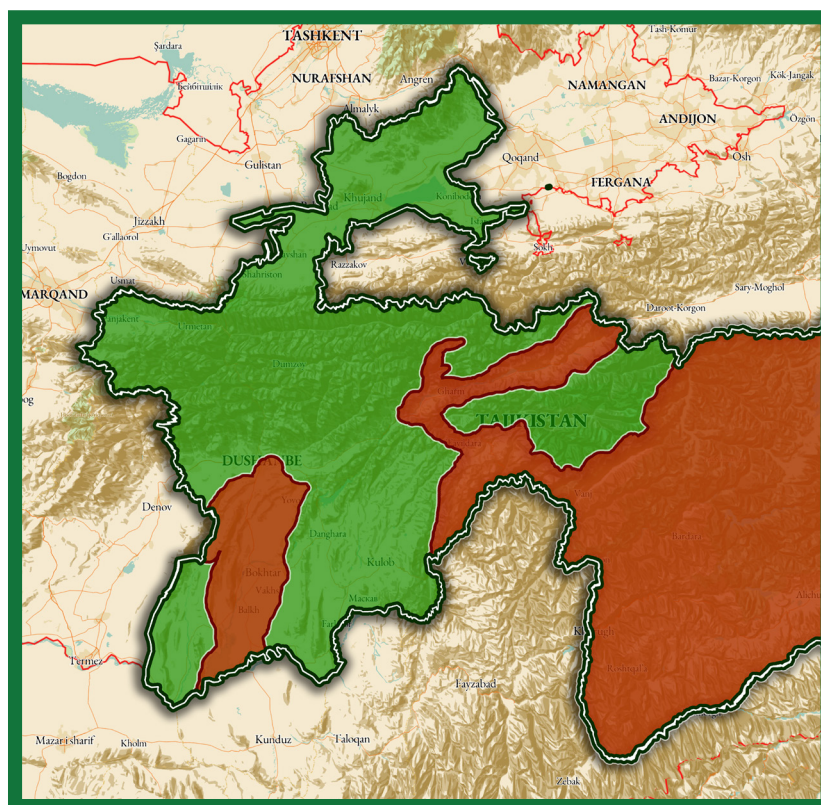
(Figure 6.2.4: The frontlines of the Tajik Civil War, as of the end of May 1992)

June 1992

- Faced with mounting opposition and the disintegration of state control, President Nabiyeu was compelled to further arm southern clans, particularly those from the Kulob and Danghara regions, in order to reinforce the government's defensive capabilities.
- The intensification of violence in Dushanbe led to a near-total collapse of law and order, resulting in widespread looting, anarchy, and chaos. Civilians were also increasingly

caught in the crossfire, significantly worsening the humanitarian crisis in the capital.

- (June 5-10, 1992): In a bid to regain control, government forces, bolstered by militias from the Kulob region, launched coordinated offensives to reclaim key positions in Dushanbe and surrounding areas that had fallen to opposition forces in May. With these efforts including the recapture of government buildings and strategically important locations.



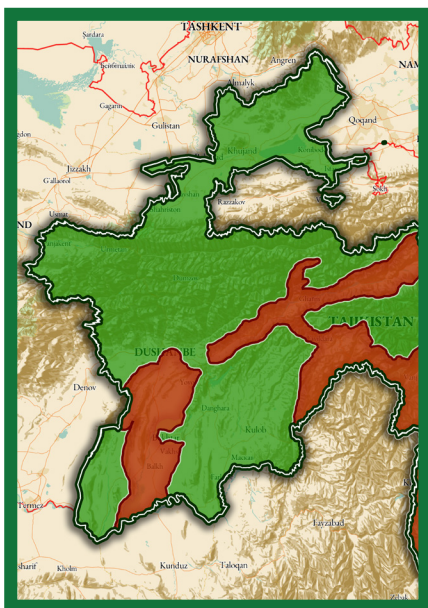
- Quorgonteppa and its surrounding areas fell to opposition forces, marking a significant loss for the government, with this defeat triggering a mass displacement of civilians into Tajikistan's neighbouring countries, subsequently contributing to a rapidly worsening refugee crisis across the wider Central Asian region.
- As the conflict escalated, and central rule deteriorated, various regions across Tajikistan began forming their own militias. The Kulob and Dhangara regions emerged as strongholds of pro-government forces, while opposition forces solidified their presence in regions like Gorno-Badakhshan and parts of Khatlon.

(Figure 6.2.5: The frontlines of the Tajik Civil War, as of the end of June 1992)

July 1992

- The struggle for dominance in the capital intensified as government forces and opposition militias engaged in fierce combat for control of Dushanbe. Although government troops initially held key positions, opposition forces gained significant ground in several districts, creating a highly unstable and unpredictable situation in the city.
- All while the central government's grip on power continued to deteriorate, with vast regions either falling under opposition control or becoming fiercely contested battlegrounds. This weakening of state authority led to rampant lawlessness and the emergence of warlords and local power brokers who exploited the power vacuum across various regions.
- Intense fighting persisted throughout Khatlon, the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO), and the central valleys, further fragmenting the country and entrenching the divisions that fueled the conflict.

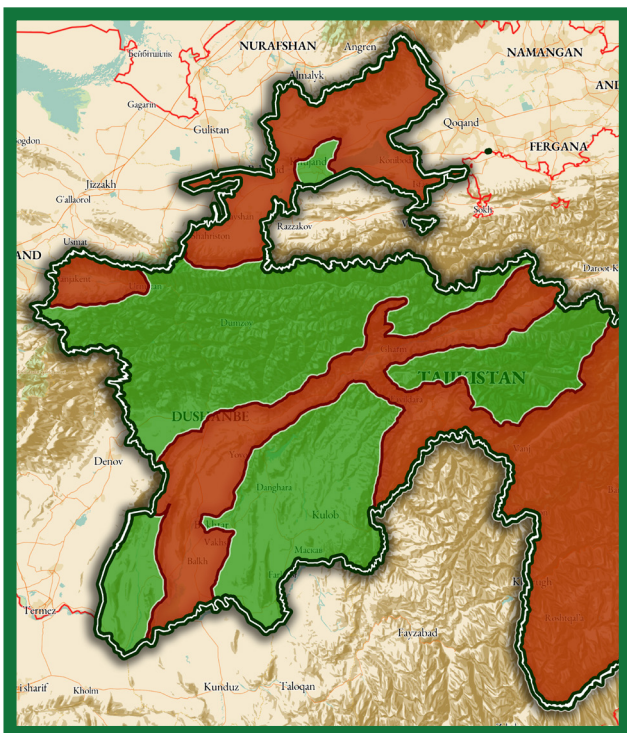
August 1992



- The government launched a focused offensive to reclaim the strategically vital town of Quorgonteppa, making some gains in the south.
- However, despite these southern successes, opposition forces delivered a critical blow by capturing the town of Faizabad, northeast of Dushanbe. With this victory providing the opposition with a strategically significant foothold close to the capital, and further destabilising the government's hold on the region.
- In anticipation of the harsh winter conditions, both government and opposition forces began intensifying their preparations for large-scale military operations, all while the country's worsening refugee crisis continued to escalate.

(Figure 6.2.6: The frontlines of the Tajik Civil War, as of the end of August 1992)

September 1992



- The government launched its first major offensive from Kulob, attempting to push into the rebellious areas of the GBAO. However, the challenging terrain and lack of adequate support led to a disastrous outcome, forcing government forces to retreat back towards Kulob.
- By early September, opposition forces had secured parts of Dushanbe and significant sections of territory to the south.
- Weakened by widespread rebellion and with fighting raging across four of the five national territories, the commander of the Russian garrison in Tajikistan brokered a power-sharing agreement between the central government and

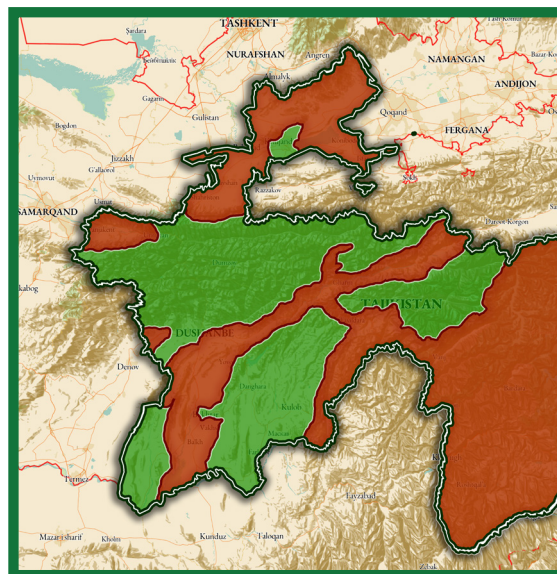
the southern clans in an effort to stabilise the situation. Once the southern clans entered the government, President Nabiyeu was captured, arrested, and forced to resign at gunpoint. The following day, Russia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan formally joined the conflict on the side of the now southern-led Tajik government, signalling a broader regional involvement in the Tajik civil war.

(Figure 6.2.7: The frontlines of the Tajik Civil War, as of the end of September 1992)

Amidst the ongoing battlefield turmoil and the perceived targeting of political leaders from the north, the government began to lose control over the northern Leninabad region. While Khujand remained under government control, other areas became contested or fell under the influence of local militias and warlords. All while political and military factions within both the government and opposition continued to fragment ideologically, with regional and ethnic loyalties increasingly dictating allegiances.

October 1992

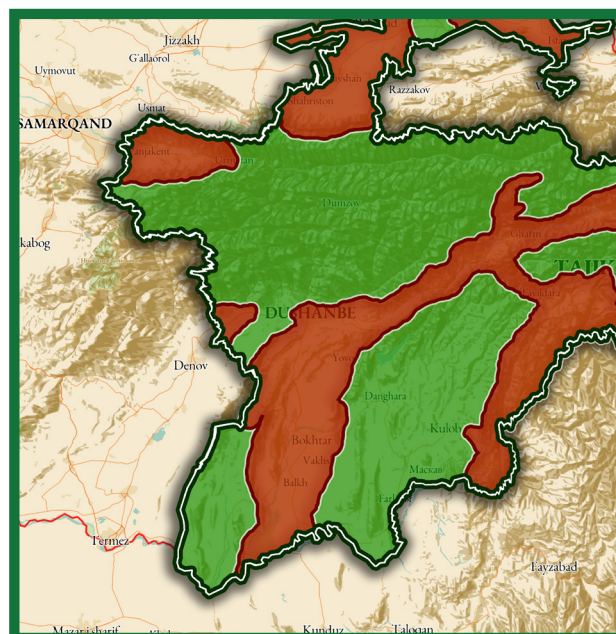
- In early October, opposition forces captured the city of Tursunzoda, located west of Dushanbe, near the border with Uzbekistan. Tursunzoda was an important industrial center, home to the largest Tajik Aluminum Plant, and its capture by the opposition was a significant strategic gain. With the loss of Tursunzoda further weakening the government's control in the region.
- Dushanbe also remained a major battleground throughout October, with government forces and opposition militias continuing to engage in fierce urban combat, with both sides attempting to gain or maintain control over key districts in the city.
- There were also smaller clashes erupting around Kulob, within the GBAO, in the Rasht Valley and along the Afghan border in the south, with both sides sustaining heavy casualties.



(Figure 6.2.8: (above) The frontlines of the Tajik Civil War, as of the end of October 1992)
(Figure 6.2.9: (below) The frontlines of the Tajik Civil War, as of the end of November 1992)

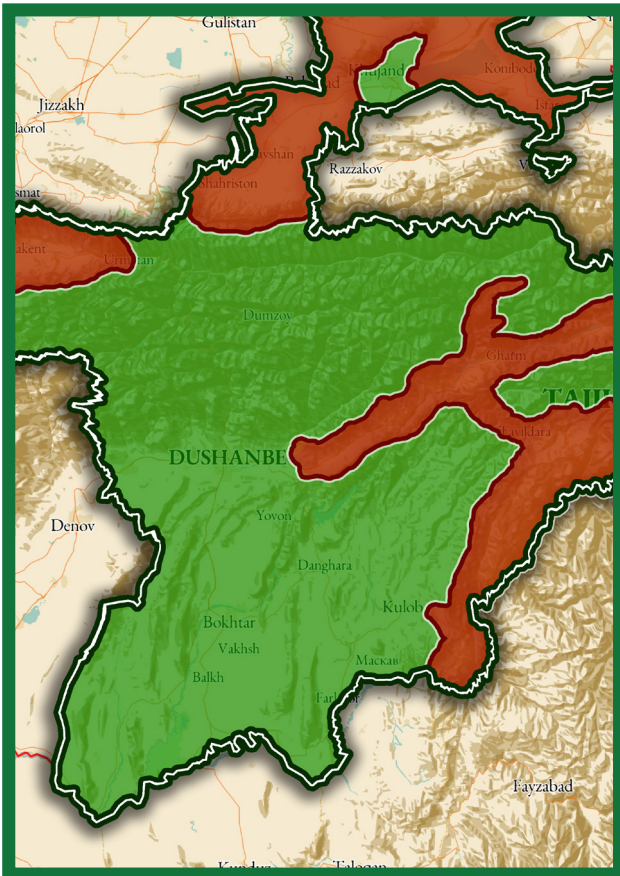
November 1992

- In early November, after weeks of intense combat, opposition forces, consisting of Islamist groups and regional factions, finally succeeded in capturing Dushanbe, with the fall of the capital plunging the remaining government-controlled cities into rapid and widespread chaos.
- By mid-November, and emboldened by their success in Dushanbe, opposition forces launched a renewed offensive against Qurghonteppa. Where Despite determined resistance, the city was ultimately overwhelmed, forcing government forces to retreat towards Kulob and Dangara.



- Following the loss of both Dushanbe and Qurghonteppa, and under mounting pressure from the north and east, pro-government forces retreated to their strongholds in Kulob and Danghara. However, despite the seemingly dire situation for the government, this would ultimately prove to be the high-water mark for the opposition.

December 1992



- Concerned about the potentially destabilising effects of an Islamist-driven government in Tajikistan, Russia, along with other regional states, spearheaded a multinational intervention under the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) banner. These forces entered Tajikistan with a primary mission to secure the capital, Dushanbe, and close the southern border, successfully routing opposition forces from Dushanbe and its surrounds.
- In mid-december, bolstered by Uzbek air support and Russian military backing, pro-government forces launched a decisive counteroffensive to recapture Qurghonteppa and the southern Khatlon region. The successful retaking of the city allowed government forces to reestablish some control over the region, though the overall situation remained precarious and fluid.

- Following the loss of Dushanbe and Qurghonteppa, and with CIS forces asserting dominance on key battlefields in the west, many opposition fighters withdrew into the central valleys, the GBAO, or across the border into Afghanistan to regroup and plan for future offensives.

(Figure 6.2.10: The frontlines of the Tajik Civil War, as of the end of December 1992)

January 1993

- In mid-January, opposition forces launched a determined counteroffensive to retake the strategically vital town of Faizabad, resulting in both sides sustaining heavy casualties over the month. However, by the end of January, government forces had successfully retained control of the town, with the opposition only able to respond with lighter probing attacks.
- This was particularly significant, as it occurred just as the worst of winter began to subside, offering the government forces a far better position from which to launch their renewed military campaigns in the spring.

February 1993 - May 1993

- The following months were marked by a persistent series of small-scale skirmishes and insurgent attacks by the opposition, predominantly targeting the government's recently liberated cities. While intermittent skirmishes occurred along various mountain roads and in the outskirts of Kulob, Qurghonteppa, and Dushanbe, the most intense fighting was concentrated around the town of Faizabad. The fighting saw control of the town shifting multiple times between government and opposition forces, with both sides aware of the town's importance as the gateway toward Gharm and Tavildara.
- With the opposition expelled from most of Tajikistan's major cities and facing increasing difficulties in acquiring weapons through the traditional smuggling routes into Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, the opposition found themselves compelled to strengthen their ties with Islamic groups in Afghanistan. While this alliance did provide the group with some of the much-needed arms in the short term, it also intensified the fears of Moscow, Tashkent, and Bishkek regarding the potential makeup of a future UTO government.

June 1993 - August 1993

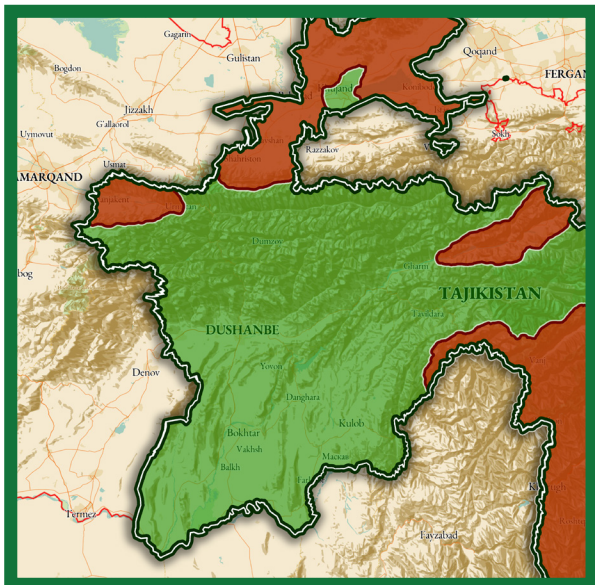
- Over the following month, the opposition concentrated on regrouping and stockpiling weapons across the border in Afghanistan, in preparation for a major offensive towards the southwestern city of Kulob. Despite these efforts, the government's fortified defensive positions, reinforced by ongoing Russian support, proved too formidable. However, the assault on Kulob ultimately failed, compelling the opposition forces to retreat back into Afghanistan.



- In early July, government forces launched a counteroffensive to capture the strategically vital town of Tavildara, pushing further into the Rasht Valley, and despite heavy casualties on both sides, the government successfully seized control of the town, severing the direct road links between opposition forces in Gharm and their counterparts in the GBAO. In an effort to reconnect the two fronts, opposition forces launched several counterattacks towards Tavildara, with the town occasionally changing hands. However, each opposition counterattack resulted in disproportionate losses in both manpower and material, eventually rendering their efforts unproductive.
- Following their increasing defensive successes around Kulob, government forces sought to shift the narrative, capitalise on their momentum, and attempt an advance into the GBAO. However, the campaign into the GBAO proved far less successful than the operation in Tavildara, with the government's efforts being significantly impeded by the region's challenging terrain and the inadequate logistical infrastructure available to its forces at the time. As the difficult terrain in the region gave the opposition substantial defensive advantages, and as a result, the government's campaign ultimately failed to make any significant progress, and forced the majority of their units to retreat back towards Kulob.

(Figure 6.2.11: The frontlines of the Tajik Civil War, as of the end of August 1993)

September 1993 - March 1994



- In mid-September, government forces launched a major offensive to retake the town of Garm in the Rasht Valley, a key stronghold for opposition forces. The capture of Garm was crucial to the government's efforts to reassert control over the region. The battle was intense, with both sides committing substantial resources to the fight. By late September, government forces successfully recaptured Garm, delivering a significant blow to the opposition in the Rasht Valley. However, the opposition would continue to contest control of the town, launching further attacks in the months that followed.

Sporadic fighting persisted over the following months across the southern and central countryside, but the frontlines remained relatively static, with the war now appearing to have decisively shifted in favour of the government.

(Figure 6.2.12: The frontlines of the Tajik Civil War, as of the end of March 1994)

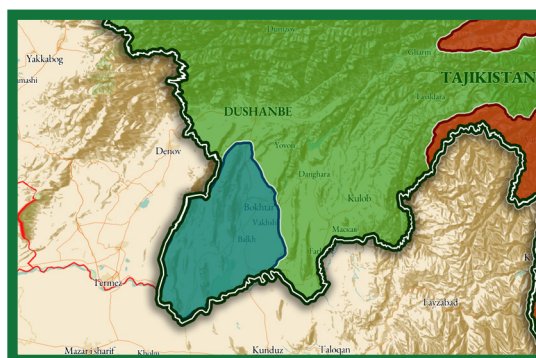
April 1994 - December 1995

- In April 1994, ethnic tensions escalated along the Afghan-Tajik border in the Uzbek-majority city of Panj, when Tajik authorities initiated efforts to disarm the ethnic Uzbek population. In response, the Uzbek community responded with protests against the local authorities, expressing grievances over poor living conditions and inadequate communal security. Additionally, some protesters went even further, now also demanding greater representation and higher-ranking positions within the local government. The Tajik government was eventually able to contain the situation through the use of local police crackdowns, but the government's actions arguably initiated a rift between Dushanbe and some of the Uzbek communities residing in the south.
- After the tensions in Panj, in early May, opposition forces launched their long-anticipated offensive to retake the strategically vital town of Tavildara. Although the opposition would briefly succeed in capturing parts of the town, the government would reinforce the area, and reassert control over the city. This offensive, while temporarily successful for the opposition, came at a considerable cost, depleting a significant portion of their already limited military resources and reducing their capacity to launch additional large offensives in the future.
- By June, the government had reasserted control over the majority of Tajikistan's major cities, with the opposition confined to scattered pockets of territory and the GBAO. However, its control over the northern region remained somewhat tenuous. While there was little active resistance against the government in Khujand, the outer areas of the oblast were effectively being administered by local ethnic and administrative leaders.

Recognising the challenges of reasserting Dushanbe's rule over these towns by force, particularly while the country's military supply system was still being rebuilt, the government opted to pursue political means to bring the northern areas back under full control, rather than risk a potentially dangerous military campaign that could unify the north against them. For the remainder of 1994 and into 1995, the government would participate in sporadic battles over key frontline towns such as Garm and Tavildara, and while the government would occasionally lose ground in these areas, it would regain control of these areas each time. Over the following year, and as the intensity of the conflict began to wane, Dushanbe, under pressure from external powers, started to actively pursue peace negotiations with the UTO, with discussions even beginning to include proposals for a joint government and some level of regional devolution as potential solutions to the ongoing conflict.

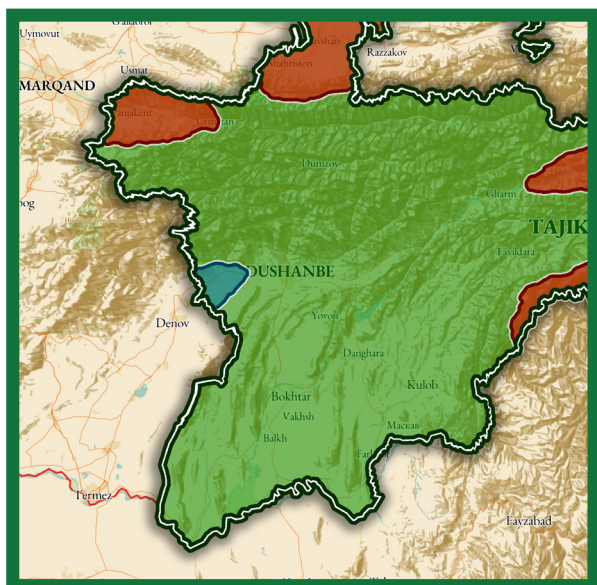
January 1996 - October 1996

- Opposing the inclusion of the UTO into the future Tajik government, Makhmud Khudoiberdiyev, commander of the 1st Brigade, led a rebellion against the government, seizing territory around Qurghonteppa. This rebellion quickly gained traction among some Uzbek communities in southwestern Tajikistan, many of whom were already discontented with the government's handling of recent events in Panj. By February 1996, large parts of the southern Khatlon region had shifted their allegiance away from the fledgling government in Dushanbe and began aligning themselves with Khudoiberdiyev. Now positioning himself as a regional powerbroker, Khudoiberdiyev was increasingly viewed by Dushanbe as a proxy for Uzbekistan. Concerned that Khudoiberdiyev might attempt to further expand his influence within Tajikistan, the government had little choice but to initiate negotiations with him. During talks with officials in Dushanbe, Khudoiberdiyev issued a series of demands, including the dismissal of Ubaidulloev as deputy prime minister. With limited options open to him, Rahmon complied, dismissing Ubaidulloev. Khudoiberdiyev then ordered his supporters to stand down and realigned himself with the government. However, this reconciliation was short-lived, as once Khudoiberdiyev ended his rebellion and Dushanbe reasserted control over the area, Rahmon appointed the recently dismissed Ubaidulloev as the new mayor of Dushanbe. This move infuriated Khudoiberdiyev and set the stage for further conflict between the two.
- For the time being though, Rahmon appeared to be making good progress in the war, having brought the south back into alignment and benefitting from the opposition's continued fracturing. By this point, several of the UTO's supporting groups, such as Jamiat-e-Islami and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, had begun to significantly reduce their material contributions or had withdrawn their support for the war entirely. These shifts likely being the result of the UTO's lack of strategic progress, the financial and logistical constraints faced by these organisations due to external sanctions, and a gradual shift in their strategic focus away from the deteriorating battlefields in Tajikistan towards the increasingly critical theatres in Afghanistan and Uzbekistan.



(Figure 6.2.13: The frontlines of the Tajik Civil War, as of the end of January 1996, with Khudoiberdiyev's area of influence highlighted in blue)

November 1996 - June 1997



- In November 1996, Khudoiberdiyev would launch a more aggressive rebellion against the Tajik government, targeting the industrial town of Tursunzoda, a key aluminium-producing area. His forces briefly seized control of the town, but this time the Tajik government opted for a military response rather than yielding to Khudoiberdiyev's demands. After intense fighting, government forces successfully regained control of Tursunzoda.

- As the weather improved coming into the spring of 1997, and negotiations entered their final stages, both sides sought to strengthen their bargaining positions on

the battlefield. This led to renewed fighting along the edges of the GBAO and in the Rasht Valley, with the government even deploying heavy artillery against some of the UTO in these cities. However, despite the escalation and the additional loss of life, very little territory would actually change hands between the two sides.

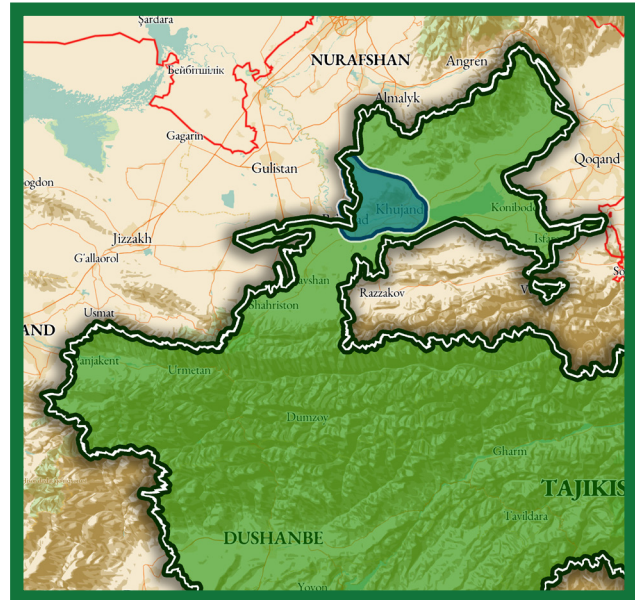
- By the beginning of June, the majority of the fighting had subsided, with both sides finally reaching an agreement to end the war. On an invitation from Russia, the leaders of the two sides would travel to Moscow, and on the 27 June 1997, would sign the National Reconciliation Agreement. The agreement, brokered by the United Nations, Russia, and Iran, included provisions for a ceasefire, the disarmament of opposition forces, and the integration of opposition members into the government. However, while this peace agreement laid the groundwork for ending the civil war, the implementation of its terms would prove challenging in the months that followed.

(Figure 6.2.14: The frontlines of the Tajik Civil War, after Khudoiberdiyev's seizure of Tursunzoda)

July 1997 - November 1998

- As part of the peace process, measures were implemented to integrate opposition members into government structures. This involved the establishment of joint committees and commissions, comprising both government and opposition representatives, to oversee the implementation of the peace agreement, manage the disarmament process, and address issues related to political and economic reconstruction.
- Dissatisfied with the final terms of the peace agreement, Khudoiberdiyev's forces launched another rebellion in August 1997, this time in the northern Sughd region around Khujand. This uprising was relatively minor compared to the previous ones, and the government, with support from Russian and loyalist forces, was able to suppress it relatively quickly. Shortly thereafter, allegations began to surface that Karimov and Uzbekistan had supported Khudoiberdiyev by providing encouragement and supplies to the rebelling forces.

- By March 1998, mass trials of former government officials associated with Khudoiberdiyev commenced, culminating in the sentencing of the former prime minister's brother to death. This sparked riots and unrest in several suburbs of Dushanbe, with these disturbances being subsequently suppressed by Internal Troops. These convictions did little to ease the tensions between Dushanbe and Tashkent, with relations between the two reaching an all-time low in 1998. The situation became so dire that Russian Defence Minister Igor Sergeyev was forced to intervene, attempting to mediate and prevent further escalation between the two states.
- It was at this critical low point, with both sides riling up nationalist sentiment against the other, Khudoiberdiyev launched his final, and by far most significant, offensive into the northern region of Tajikistan. This incursion, which occurred between the 4th and 8th of November 1998, saw Khudoiberdiyev's forces execute a surprise attack on Khujand, swiftly capturing the city and several surrounding areas. His objective was to establish control over northern Tajikistan by challenging the central government's authority and rallying the predominantly Uzbek communities in the region to his cause. However, with most of the population likely exhausted after so many years of war, very few of the northern residents were willing to join Khudoiberdiyev for his latest rebellion, and as a result, it took only a few days of intense fighting for government forces, supported by Russian troops stationed in Tajikistan, to recapture Khujand and push what remained of Khudoiberdiyev's forces back into Uzbekistan.
- Following the failure of the November 1998 rebellion, what remained of Khudoiberdiyev's forces were either arrested or disbanded, and his influence in Tajik politics was effectively eliminated. Although the Tajik government continued to accuse him and his supporters of plotting further rebellions from exile in Uzbekistan, he ultimately did not launch any additional significant military actions.



(Figure 6.2.15: The frontlines after Khudoiberdiyev's forces (blue) seizure of Khujand)

The war left Tajikistan's economy in ruins and caused substantial human suffering, with some estimates indicating that up to 50,000 people were killed and over 10 per cent of the population displaced as a result of the conflict. In the end, Rahmonov, who later changed his name to Rahmon, emerged as the undisputed leader of Tajikistan, and over the course of the 2000s and 2010s, would use his newly solidified powerbase to systematically eliminate his political rivals from the civil war era, a process that would eventually culminate in the banning of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) in 2015. However, throughout the post-war period, Tajikistan grappled with persistent instability, exacerbated by threats from drug trafficking, organised crime, and unreconciled fighters, with all of these challenges then being further compounded by the country's now shattered economy and crumbling infrastructure.



*(Figure 6.2.16: Government soldiers manning a roadblock in the Pamirs, 1996.
Source: Anthony Suau)*

The war intensified and widened regional divisions, with both sides committing horrific crimes against each other. This distrust subsequently led parts of society, as well as the government, to become highly paranoid about other groups, with jobs, loans, and wealth often being given only to people from clans or networks the leadership felt they could trust. Consequently, wealth quickly became increasingly concentrated in the hands of individuals from Kulob and Danghara, while Soviet-era elites and individuals from the northern regions saw their influence and resources wane.

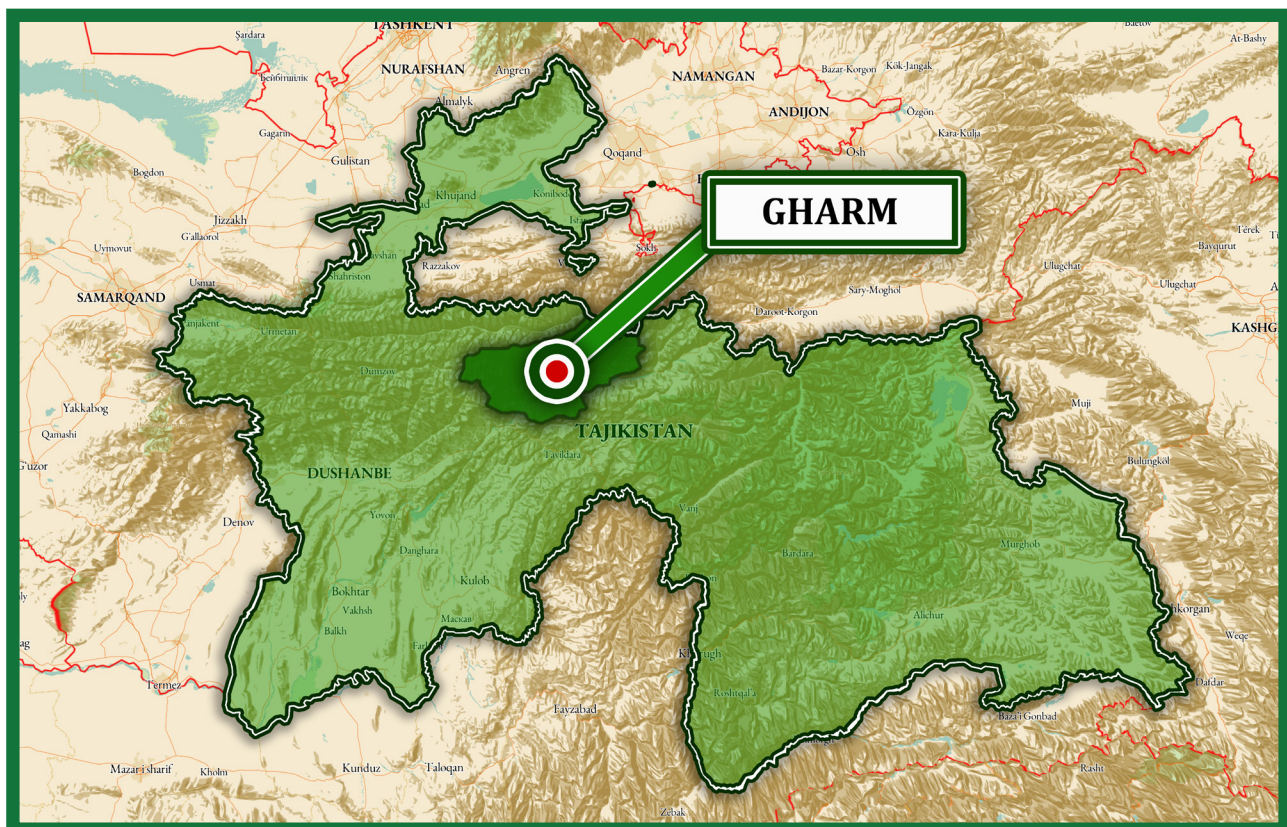
The country found itself in desperate need of building a modern and professional economy, infrastructure, and military, as much of the pre-war infrastructure and military equipment had either been destroyed or handed over to gangs and militias for combat. Rebuilding all of this would be a long, complex, and costly process, heavily reliant on foreign support. This reliance, particularly in the early stages, pushed Dushanbe to closely adhere to the peace terms negotiated by Moscow. A key part of these agreements, set down as one of the opposition's primary demands, was the integration of units from the government forces and former opposition factions into a single national army. While this diluted the military's familial ties to Rahmon and the southern clans, it also almost immediately created one of the most battle-hardened and experienced fighting forces in Central Asia.

The government also began integrating the opposition into it. According to the peace terms signed by both sides, 30 per cent of posts in power branches and 25 per cent of seats in the Central Electoral Commission would be automatically allocated to the opposition. This power-sharing agreement initially resulted in leaders from both the IRPT and the People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan (PDPT) being appointed to key positions within the local police, security services, and border control force across the country.

In the years following independence, the integration of these opposition forces into a government that exhibited very little trust towards them meant that the government continued to prioritise certain parts of the military over others. With the first substantial military-wide reforms were not introduced until 2005, by which time the promises of the 1997 peace deal had largely been abandoned, as Rahmon increasingly began to repeal various provisions of the 1997 agreement. By 2005, Rahmon had consolidated his control over the Tajik government and military, subsequently introducing his new military doctrine to the joint Supreme Assembly (the Majlisi Oli), later that year. The 2005 Military Doctrine established much of the segmented and inwardly focused military structure that remains in place today. Laying the groundwork for the creation of the Tajik Mobile Forces, unifying command over the Air and Air Defence Forces, and establishing the National Guard and security forces as distinct entities under the national military command structure. All of which are major pillars of the Tajik armed forces today.

6.2.2 - Rasht (2010)

Between 2008 and 2011, the Tajik central government initiated a campaign to reassert control over the population in the Rasht and Central Valleys, and although there had been resistance throughout the 2000s, the 2010 crackdown marked a turning point in the region's unrest.



(Figure 6.2.17: A map of Tajikistan highlighting the Rasht District and the city of Gharm)

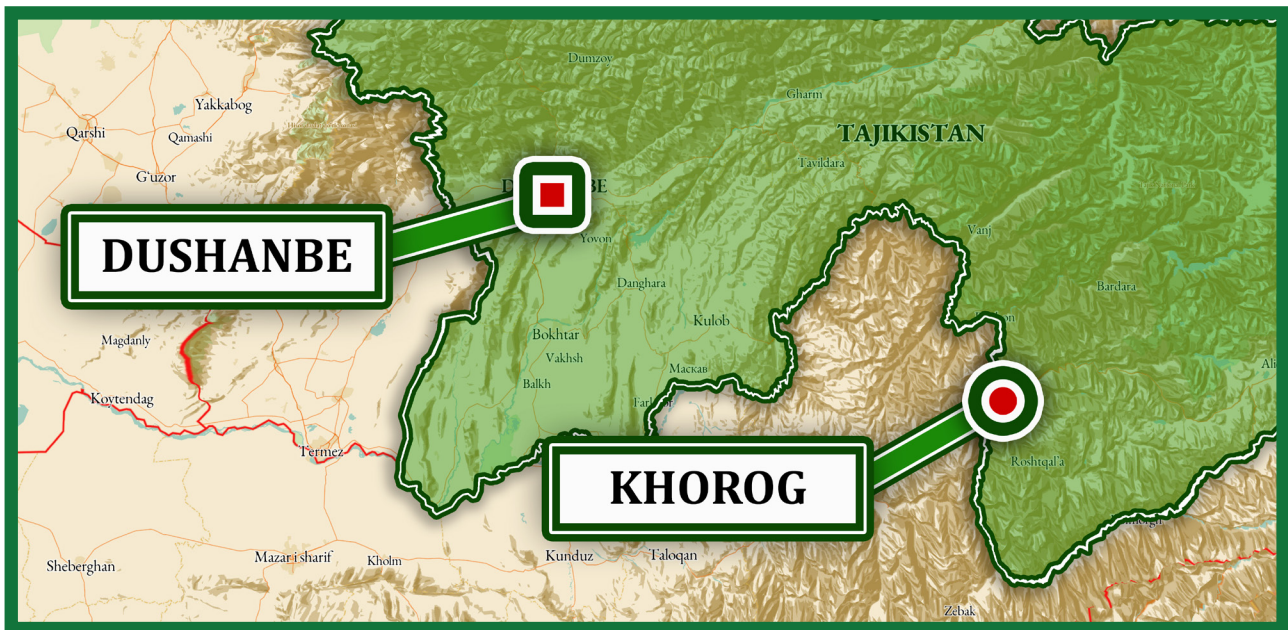
The key incident that compelled the Tajik government to escalate its involvement in the Central Valley was a prison break in 2010. Where after a raid on a Dushanbe prison, six guards were killed, and 25 high-value Islamist and civil war-era militants escaped, fleeing back into the Rasht Valley. Having had one of its maximum-security prisons come under direct attack, and in an effort to reassure the public of the state's ability to maintain security and law and order, the Tajik government launched a large-scale military operation in the Rasht Valley. With these actions involving extensive search-and-destroy missions aimed at neutralising insurgents and reestablishing government control. The crackdown triggered a series of intense engagements between government forces and insurgents, further inflaming tensions in a region historically resistant to centralised authority. The government used the prison escape as a pretext to deploy additional military forces into the valley to recapture the fugitives, but the prolonged presence of troops into the valley only exacerbated hostilities between the local population and the newly stationed military units.

This would all culminate in a deadly insurgent ambush in the Kamarob Gorge, where a convoy of Tajik troops was attacked by militants near the village of Kamarob, resulting in the deaths of at least 25 soldiers, and the downing of an Mi-8 helicopter carrying several members of the State Committee for National Security's (SCNS) "Alpha" special forces unit. In response to the ambush, Dushanbe deployed thousands more troops to the region, while also granting local commanders broad authority to conduct reprisals as they deemed necessary. However, even after this surge in personnel, the campaign proved far more challenging and costly than Dushanbe had anticipated, with nearly a full year passing before the government was able to finally dislodge the insurgent forces from the area. By 2011, the majority of opposition fighters had either been killed or captured, including notable figures such as Abdulo Rahimov (aka Mullo Abdullo) and Allovuddin Davlatov (aka Ali Bedaki).

The string of failures during this campaign exposed significant deficiencies in the military's coordination and operational planning, highlighting the challenges Dushanbe faced in conducting operations in mountainous terrain. It also led to a broader militarisation of domestic police and law enforcement agencies, with organisations such as the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) and the SCNS gaining significantly more power in the following years. Additionally, the government's strategy of intensifying efforts to neutralise individuals perceived as threats to the regime raised further concerns. As the exhibited reliance on military intervention over police action in quelling uprisings, such as the use of heavy artillery against civilian areas, also triggered serious alarm among some Tajik analysts, warning that if a similar indiscriminate operations were conducted against a more unified opposition, it could result in a larger portion of the population turning against the government.

6.2.3 - Unrest in Khorog and the GBAO (2012 - Present)

After finally regaining control over the Central Valley, In 2012, the Tajik government launched a strategic campaign to consolidate control over the resource deposits, growing political separatism, and drug trafficking routes in the GBAO, a mountainous province in the east of the country that is ethnically, linguistically, and culturally distinct from the rest of Tajikistan. The assassination of General Major Abdullo Nazarov, head of the security services in Mountainous Badakhshan would catalyse this newfound urgency surrounding GBAO. Following his death, there were numerous allegations that Nazarov was involved in disputes over smuggling operations or protection bribes. While reports of Nazarov's involvement in smuggling were widespread, the exact cause of his death remains speculative.

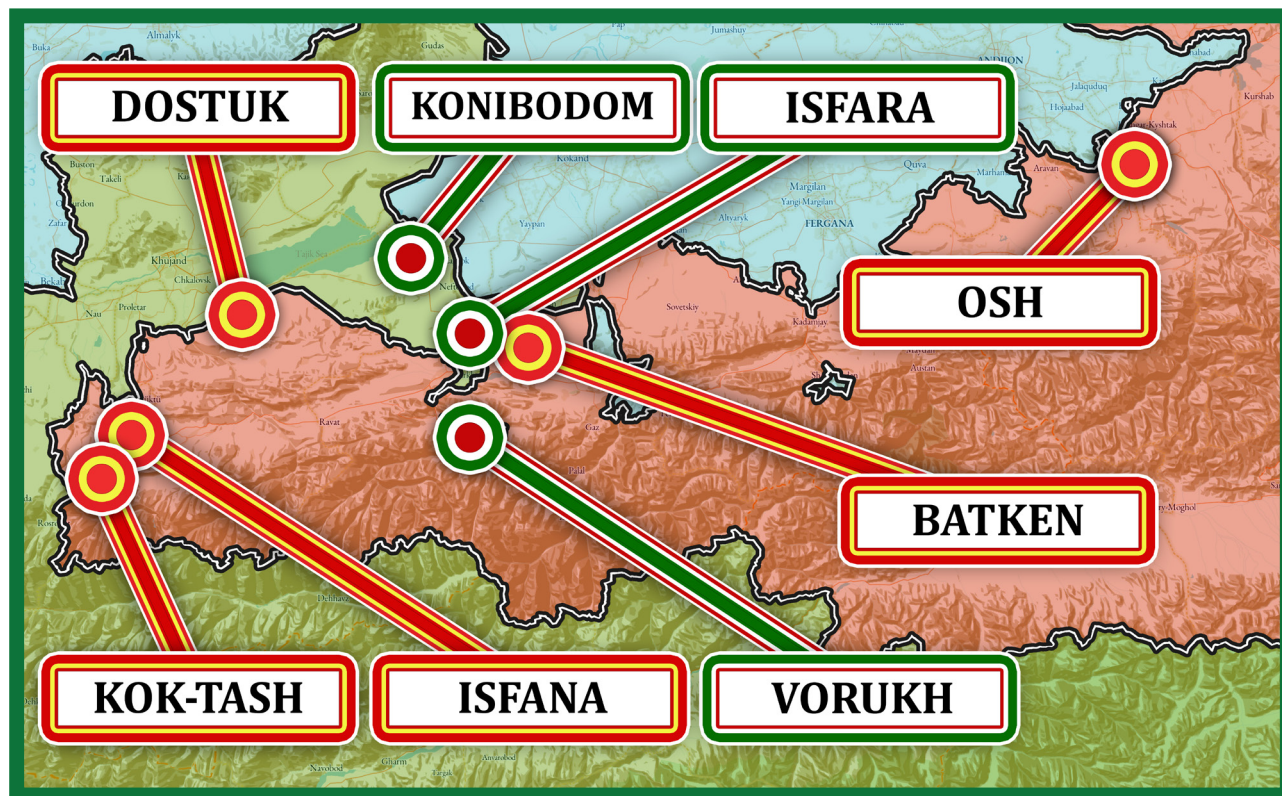


(Figure 6.2.18: A map of Tajikistan highlighting the locations to Dushanbe (the capital), and Khorog (the capital of the GBAO))

The Tajik government used Nazarov’s assassination as a pretext to dismantle the region’s influential crime lords and political figures that don’t have ties to the ruling clans. However, much like the Rasht campaign, operations in the GBAO proved to be far more challenging than the government had anticipated. As despite implementing some reforms after the Rasht campaign, the initial offensive into the GBAO was fraught with difficulties, with government forces repeatedly being repelled by the comparatively lightly armed locals entrenched in fortified positions overlooking the narrow valley approaches. Having witnessed the GBAO declare independence during the early days of the civil war, the Tajik government feared that its inability to suppress rebellion in this region could embolden other areas to rise against Dushanbe. So in response to the military’s failure to secure a victory on the ground, Dushanbe began to pivot away from relying on the Ground Forces here in the GBAO and toward a reliance on the security services instead.

This shift in approach was informed by the logistical and tactical failures of the Rasht offensive and today, Dushanbe’s strategy now employs a combination of compromise, proxy governance, and, when necessary, the targeted elimination of local elites through the security services, rather than relying on the Ground Forces to simply blast their way into the region. While this increased dependence on security services has reduced the need for deploying large numbers of conventional forces into the oblast, it has also resulted in arbitrary arrests becoming commonplace throughout the region, and a significant undercurrent of distrust between the government and certain sections of the GBAO population. For Dushanbe, this change in approach has produced mixed results. As while the government may argue that the GBAO is now quieter than it once was, the absence of heavy weaponry and air assets permanently deployed with the region does pose some vulnerabilities if Dushanbe were to face an invasion by a foreign power or a coordinated insurgent force, as the security forces currently stationed within the area are currently better suited to border patrol and targeted arrests. As a result, the government appears to have become a little more willing to make political concessions to the region, now going to great efforts to avoid any level of rebellion above what could be locally contained by the security services.

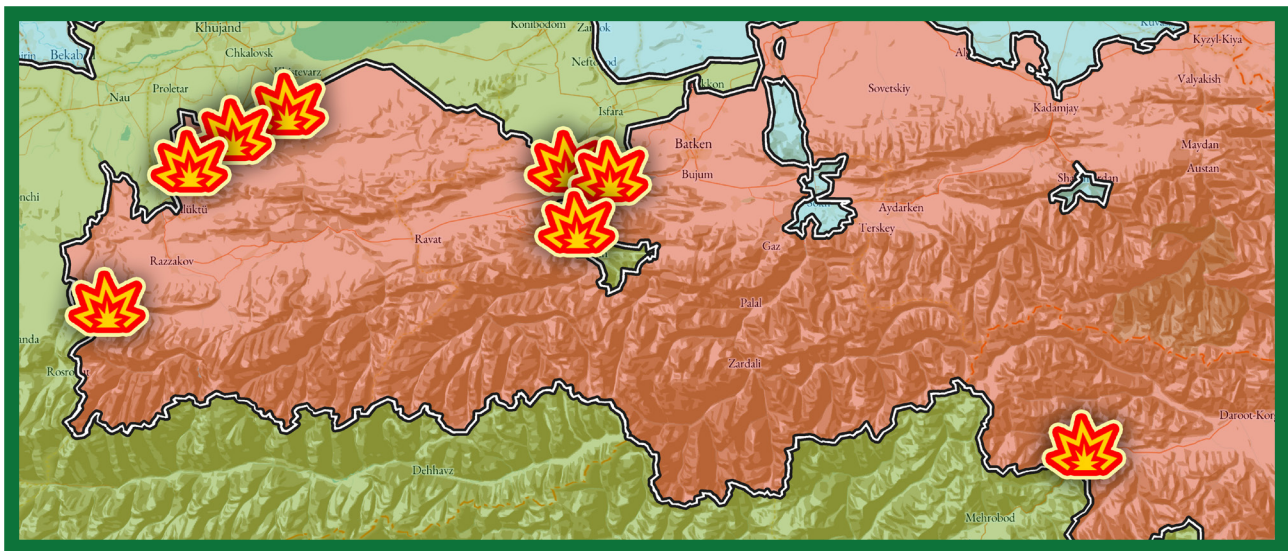
6.2.4 - The Battle for Batken (2021 - 2022)



(Figure 6.2.19: A Map of southern Kyrgyzstan (red), northern Tajikistan (green) and Uzbekistan (cyan), With the locations of Kyrgyz cities mentioned in this section illustrated in red and yellow, and the locations of Tajik cities mentioned in this section illustrated in green and maroon)

In 2021, Tajikistan witnessed a significant escalation in border tensions with its neighbour Kyrgyzstan. The conflict was triggered by long-standing disputes over access to and control of a water supply facility near the village of Kok-Tash. Tensions between the Tajik and Kyrgyz populations residing in the region steadily increased in both intensity and frequency throughout 2021 and 2022, eventually culminating in a major engagement in September 2022. This confrontation led to a realignment of military doctrine for both nations going forward. In the initial stages of these escalations, the skirmishes were localised to small clashes, often being fought with just sticks and rocks, as semi-nomadic herders from both sides crossed national borders with their flocks to graze, subsequently prompting aggressive responses from each nation's border forces, who sought to drive the herders back. These minor incidents would then continue to escalate into wider, broader disputes over access to pastures, water rights, and transportation routes, and over time, the involvement of military and police units from both sides increased, leading to direct confrontations between Kyrgyz and Tajik border forces. With neither side appearing to be willing to de-escalate, by late 2021, tensions between the two states culminated in the first of several major clashes.

After a multi-day conflict in 2021 that resulted in the deaths of around sixty Tajik and Kyrgyz soldiers, followed by a clash near Vorukh in January 2022 and a third skirmish near Teskey in March 2022, neither side appeared to be pursuing a peaceful resolution, with both countries instead choosing to respond by increasing their troop presence within the region.



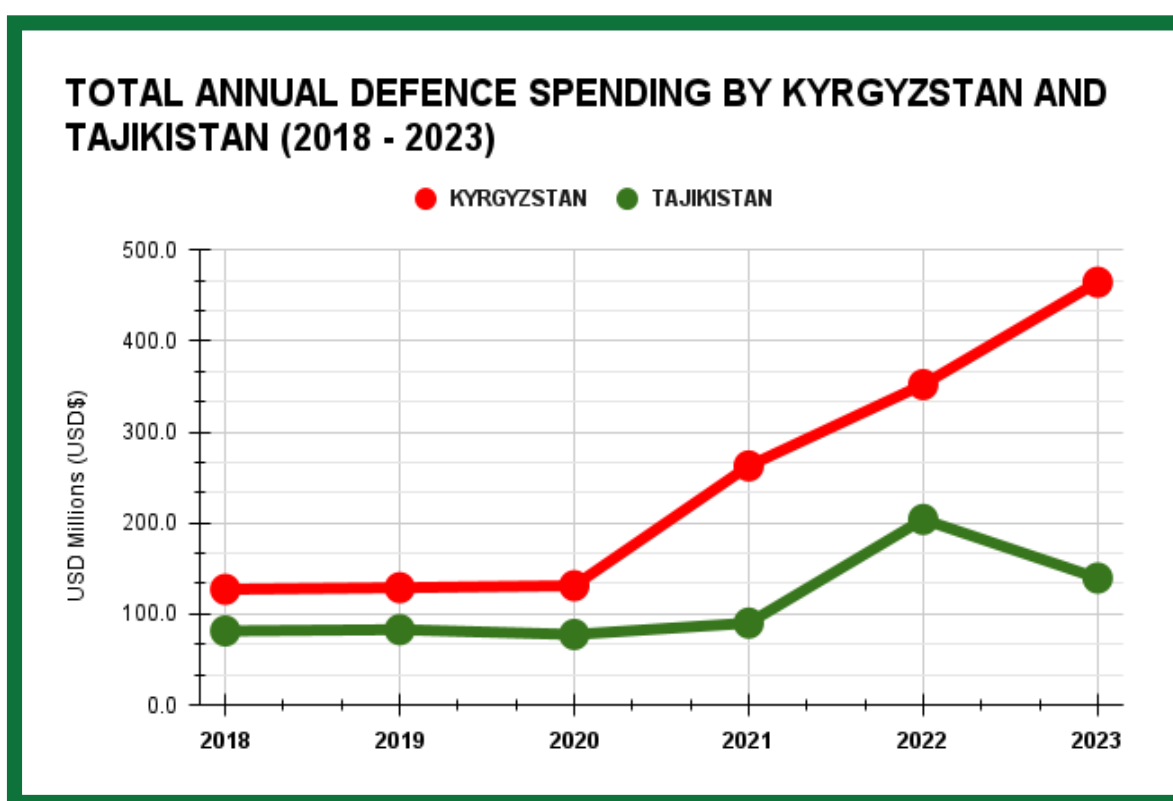
(Figure 6.2.20: A Map of southern Kyrgyzstan (red), eastern Uzbekistan (cyan) and northern Tajikistan (green), illustrating the locations of the 2021 - July 2022 clashes)

The steady increase of incidents along this shared frontier culminated in the major clashes of September 2022. While it remains somewhat unclear which side fired first, on 14th September, Kyrgyz sources reported that Tajik forces had attacked several Kyrgyz border outposts. In response, the Kyrgyz military launched a series of retaliatory strikes along the Tajik frontier, primarily in the Batken area but also further west around the Kyrgyz city of Isfana. Regardless of who initiated the attack or whether it was coordinated by either government, what initially seemed like yet another border skirmish quickly escalated into full-scale hostilities between the two states. Where both Tajik and Kyrgyz forces began targeting military and government installations across the region. The intensity of the fighting far exceeded previous skirmishes from the past 18 months, leading it to be described as “the most severe conflict the region has witnessed since the conclusion of the Tajik Civil War.”

This marked the first significant conventional conflict either army had engaged in as an independent force, with both sides employing tanks, artillery, rockets, and mortars against their opponent. Notably, Kyrgyzstan also entered the conflict with a newly acquired fleet of Turkish-made drones, which the Kyrgyz border troops effectively utilised to target Tajik vehicles and key assets in Isfara and along the border. These strikes, which all went largely unchallenged by the Tajiks, even included interdiction missions far behind the national frontline, with strikes even being carried out on the town centre of Ovchi Kalacha, where Turkish-made MAM-L fragmentation warheads were deployed against key regional infrastructure. Aside from Bishkek’s employment of drones, both sides were initially quite slow to react to this latest outbreak of fighting, with neither Bishkek nor Dushanbe able to rapidly deploy any significant number of personnel or materiel into the region within the first 24 hours, exposing deep-rooted deficiencies in the military and logistical capabilities of both nations. Much of the destruction that took place during the conflict, against both civilian and military targets, actually occurring as a result of insufficient training and the inaccuracy of artillery, mortar fire, and drone strikes, with this damage then being further exacerbated by looting and arson, perpetrated by undisciplined soldiers and opportunistic civilians. With no significant troop surge to stabilise the situation, tens of thousands of civilians from nearby border villages were forced to flee their homes temporarily, seeking refuge in safer locations such as Osh or Konibodom, with many of those displaced by the fighting, later returning to find their homes burned or destroyed.

Since these clashes in September 2022, on the diplomatic front there have been some initial announcements made regarding Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan's efforts to better demarcate their disputed frontier, with the heads of both state's security services meeting to begin the process of better demarcating the border. It should be said though, that the specifics on how the border will be divided, or how either side will convince their legislatures to agree to the terms remain scarce.

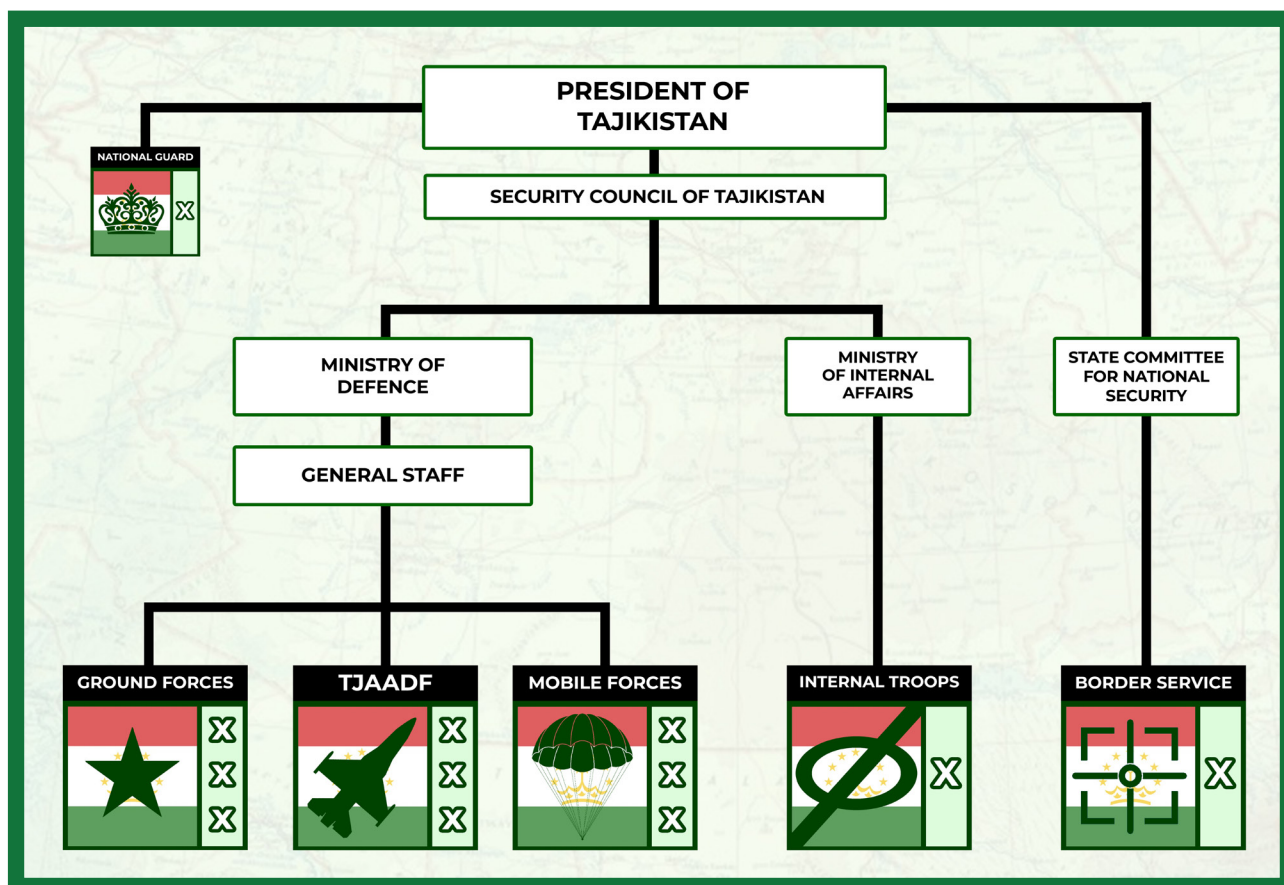
Since the clashes in September 2022, there have been some initial announcements regarding Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan's efforts to better demarcate their disputed frontier, with the heads of both states' security services even meeting to begin this process. However, it should be noted that specifics on how the border will be divided, or how either side will secure legislative approval for the terms agreed upon by these agencies remain scarce. With both sides instead choosing to continue negotiations on the one hand, while also rapidly rearming and increasing their local fighting capacity on the other.



(Figure 6.2.22: A chart of total national defence spending by Kyrgyzstan (red) and Tajikistan (green) between 2018 and 2023)

So with these ongoing tensions between the local populations, and the underlying border issues that provided the justifications for the previous conflict still being unresolved, the risk of renewed hostilities here in Batken remains a significant flashpoint for all those involved, with several key regional analysts already expressing concern regarding the subsequent arms race taking place between Bishkek and Dushanbe. As since the clashes in Batken, both nations have increased their procurement of drones and new air defence systems, provided additional funding and military support for the commanders based along this frontier, and have also begun deploying additional troops to the region, all in preparation for the possibility of another escalation.

6.3: THE COMMAND STRUCTURE



(Figure 6.3.1: Organisation chart for the Tajik chain of command)

6.3.1 - Overall Command Structure

The command architecture of the Tajik military and security services is a quintessential example of centralised governance with a direct reporting line to the president. This structure being a calculated strategy designed to mitigate the risk of insurrections manifesting from within the military ranks. Additionally, it also fosters a competitive environment for resource allocation among the competing military and security branches, reinforcing the central government’s control over military strategy and national security policy.

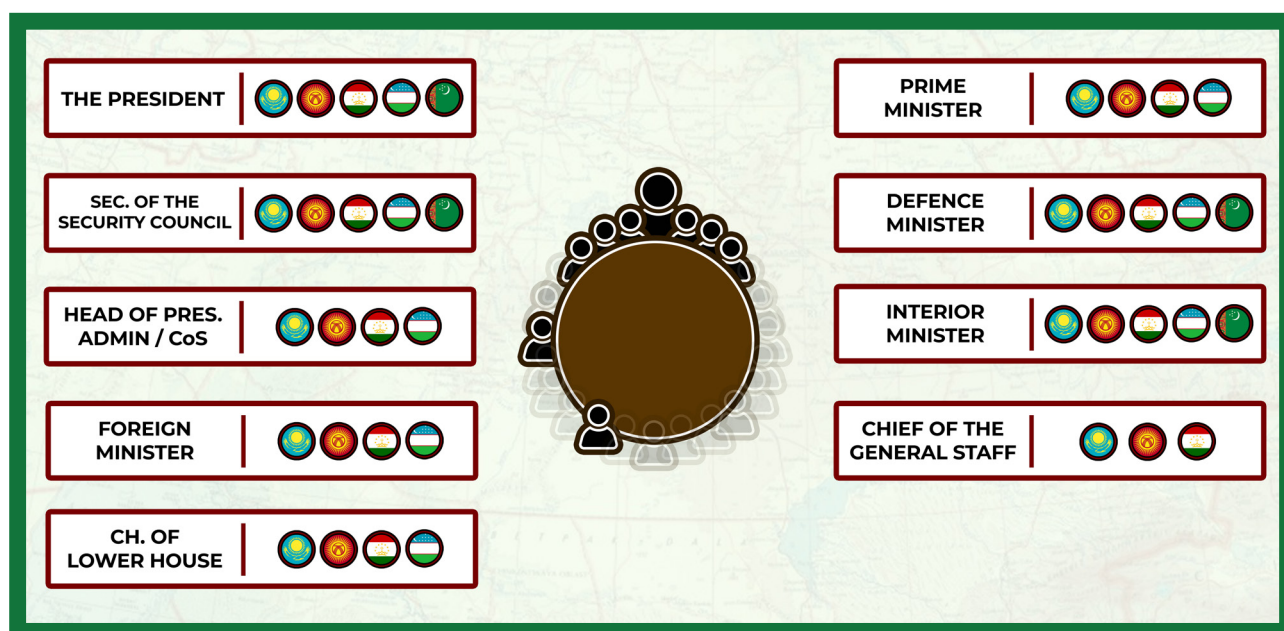
6.3.2 - The President

President Rahmon’s authority over this system was further solidified by a nationwide referendum in 2016, which designated him as the “Leader of the Nation” (Peshvoi Millat) and “Founder of Peace and National Unity”, while also granting him lifelong immunity. This additional consolidation of power extends into the legislative domain, where the People’s Democratic

Party, closely aligned with Rahmon, dominates the Assembly of Representatives (Majlisi Namoyandagon). This influence over both the executive and legislative branches effectively creates a centralised one-party system within the country, lacking any substantial opposition or political guardrails for the president. As a result, the president retains substantial power and influence over the Security Council of Tajikistan (SCT), the budgets of the military branches, and the commissioning of senior officers, giving each of these actors an obvious incentive to maintain positive relations with the president.

This concentration of authority underscores the centralisation of control within the executive branch, limiting transparency and accountability in Tajikistan’s security and defence sectors. In practice, the president effectively has the final word on all national security and defence decisions within Tajikistan, with some branches, like the National Guard and the State Committee for National Security, completely lacking any outside accountability. However, when strategic decisions need to be made, the president will still consult with his national security council.

6.3.3 - The Security Council of Tajikistan



(Figure 6.3.2: A chart showing which government officials hold seats on the National Security Council of Tajikistan, as well as which other Central Asian states also grant seats for those roles on their national security councils)

The National Security Council of Tajikistan (SCT) serves as a primary security advisory body within the Tajik governmental framework, operating directly under the auspices of the President’s Executive Office. The council’s primary mandate is to provide strategic counsel to the president on a broad spectrum of national security concerns, both domestic and international. Initially created to function as an independent entity, the Security Council underwent a significant structural realignment in June 2018 that resulted in its direct integration into the presidential hierarchy. This strategic reorganisation was allegedly undertaken to enhance the efficiency and responsiveness of the council to the region’s evolving security landscape. However, the more plausible reality is that this was a further consolidation of power within the executive branch, as under the current structure, regardless of how the council advises, the final decisions remain at the president’s discretion.

The Tajik Security Council also holds the distinction of being the smallest of the region's security councils, with the Tajik's Security Council being limited to just the Supreme Commander in Chief, the Prime Minister, the Secretary of the Security Council, the Chairman of the Majlisi Oli, the ministers of foreign affairs, defence, and internal affairs, and the chief of the general staff, (as illustrated in figure 6.3.2). Notably for Tajikistan, their council forgoes many actors seen on the other regional councils, with important offices such as the chairman of the SCNS (the primary domestic intelligence organisation) uniquely absent from Tajikistan's council.

6.3.4 - Cabinet Level Leadership

Once directives are approved by the SCT and ratified by the president, they are conveyed to each ministry, committee, or department of the Tajik military for execution. Tajikistan's national military structure includes the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the State Committee for National Security, with each of these entities jointly managing a variety of essential operations:

i) - The Ministry of Defence



The Tajik Ministry of Defence (EN:MOD/TJ:VMCT/RU:MOT) is the principal governmental department responsible for the defence portfolio of the state. The MOD is tasked with the overarching management of Tajikistan's military branches, including the Ground Forces, Air and Air Defence Forces, and the Mobile Forces. In addition to these three primary military branches, the MOD is also responsible for administering a range of specialised military entities, including military lyceums, military academies, command centres, and a limited number of specialised units.

The MOD's role within the Tajik military structure is highly administrative, handling most of the armed forces funding allocations, procurements, and national programs. While the MOD receives its strategic directions from the SCT, the implementation of operational plans and all associated tactical decisions are delegated to the Tajik General Staff. Within this arrangement, the MOD provides the General Staff with the necessary funding and strategic objectives, while the General Staff retains autonomy over the tactical execution of these plans and the operational leadership of the subordinate military forces. However, it should also be noted that this dynamic reverses during wartime, with the Chief of the General Staff instead issuing orders to the Minister of Defence.

(Figure 6.3.3: Emblem of the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Tajikistan)

ii) - The General Staff

The General Staff of the Tajik armed forces plays a central role in providing operational and tactical leadership across the Ground Forces, Air and Air Defence Forces, and Mobile Forces. The staff comprises the heads of each of the service arms, the heads of the main directorates, and a handful of selected senior advisors and specialists who have been selected by the Chief of the General Staff (COGS) or the president. The General Staff as a whole is led by the COGS, who typically also serves as the first deputy minister of the MOD.

The COGS serves as the final decisionmaker for the rest of the staff, working to centralise decisionmaking between each of the service arms.

iii) - The Ministry of Internal Affairs



The Ministry of Internal Affairs (EN:MIA/TJ:VKD/RU:MVD) of the Republic of Tajikistan is the primary organisation responsible for domestic law and order and maintaining stability within the country's borders. While the organisation's structure is built around the national federal police forces, the MIA also commands a wide range of federal departments, including the Departments of Transport, Capital Construction, Communications, and the State Fire Service, among others.

However, the cornerstone of the ministry's responsibilities is the leadership of the Internal Troops. This domestically focused force, commanding approximately 3,800 personnel is dedicated to internal security operations within Tajikistan and ensuring the safety of the administration. The Internal Troops not only include special-purpose operational brigades and several specialised squads, but also function both as a primary reserve force for the national military and a significant counterbalance to the nation's Ground Forces. These Internal Troops have direct oversight of a few special-purpose units, such as the OMON force, with the MIA able to deploy these units for counter-terrorism, riot suppression, and law enforcement operations as required, with specialised units deployed every oblast in the country.

While the MIA commands one of the largest armed forces in Tajikistan, its responsibilities have been progressively reduced over time. The first major reduction occurred in 2001 when the Tajik National Guard (TNG) was transferred out of MIA control and into the MOD, before being reassigned again a few years later. More recently, several rural airfields and related facilities have also been transferred from the MIA to either the MOD or the State Committee for National Security, in a further reduction of the MIA's domestic responsibilities. However, these changes more likely reflect Dushanbe's perception of growing external threats and the need for a more centralised command structure, than any sort of reduction in support from the administration toward the MIA

(Figure 6.3.4: Emblem of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan)

iv) - The State Committee for National Security



The State Committee for National Security (EN:SCNS/TJ:KDAM/RU:GKNB) is the principal security agency within the Tajik government, fulfilling a dual role as both the premier intelligence service and the primary counterintelligence entity tasked with safeguarding national and state security. The SCNS serves as the modern successor to the State Security Committee of the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic, often referred to as the "Tajik KGB."

(Figure 6.3.5: Emblem of the State Committee for National Security)

Many of the practices and operational philosophies from the Soviet era continue to influence the SCNS today, resulting in continuity of its approach to national security and intelligence operations, despite its cooperation with Western partners that might hope for new standards and practices.

At present, the SCNS has the authority to conduct pretrial investigations, inquiries, and intelligence gathering, while solely operating at the discretion of the president, allowing the president to use the SNCS to carry out investigations on whoever he might want to, including members of other branches. The agency is also empowered to establish operational units across the nation's regions, cities, and localities, working in tandem with security and law enforcement divisions.

However, the majority of the SCNS's manpower is primarily concentrated within the Tajik Border Service (TBS), which operates under the leadership of an SCNS deputy chair through the Central Office for Border Security Troops. This force is tasked with patrolling the country's external frontiers and possesses a level of localised authority unmatched by any other branch of the military. While most border troops are equipped with comparatively simple weaponry and stationed at outposts that often lack armour or heavy weaponry, the SCNS also retains jurisdiction over some very well-armed units as well. These would include units like the elite Alpha Group unit, who are not only far better equipped than the majority of the Border Service troops, but can also be deployed for a far wider range of highly specific missions across the country.

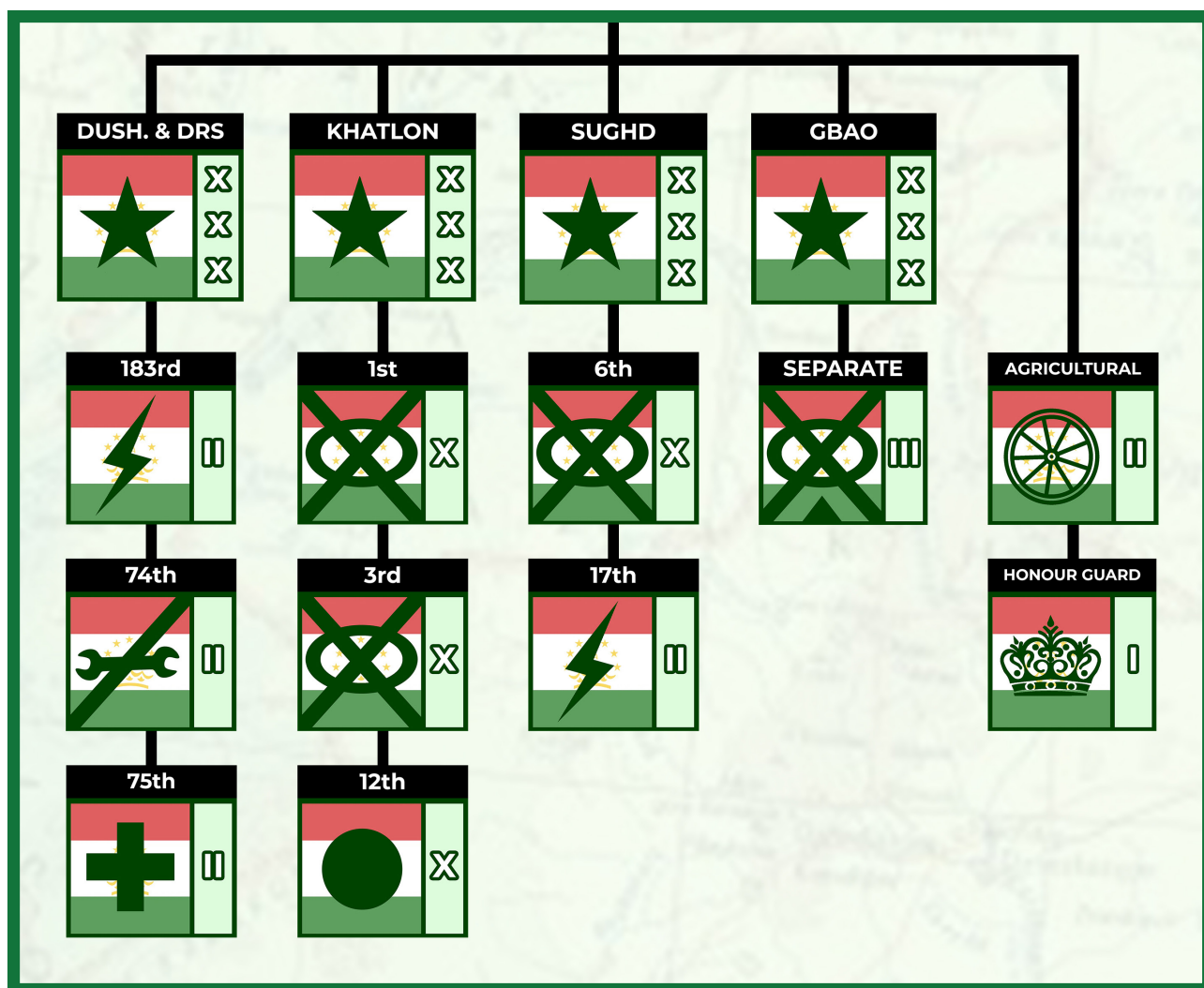
It should also be mentioned though, that the SCNS's activities and methods have not been without controversy, as the organisation has faced ongoing accusations of human rights abuses and a lack of adherence to due process over the years. Susan Corke, the Director of Eurasia Programs at Freedom House, has even critiqued the SCNS as "a notoriously corrupt and repressive institution" that is allegedly complicit in drug trafficking and the suppression of legitimate political dissent. In addition to these accusations, there have also been repeated allegations of torture, deaths in custody, and extrajudicial killings levelled at the SCNS over the years, further tarnishing the organisation's internal and external reputation.



(Figure 6.3.6: The Tajik Border Service Unit conducting a routine inspection at a border crossing with Afghanistan. Source: Nozim Kalandarov / TASS)

6.4: THE GROUND FORCES

The Tajik Ground Forces, while modest in size, are the foundational component of Tajikistan's national defence strategy. Although they likely lack the mechanical capacity to seize or occupy any of their surrounding states, the force is relatively capable of carrying out its primary strategic goals.



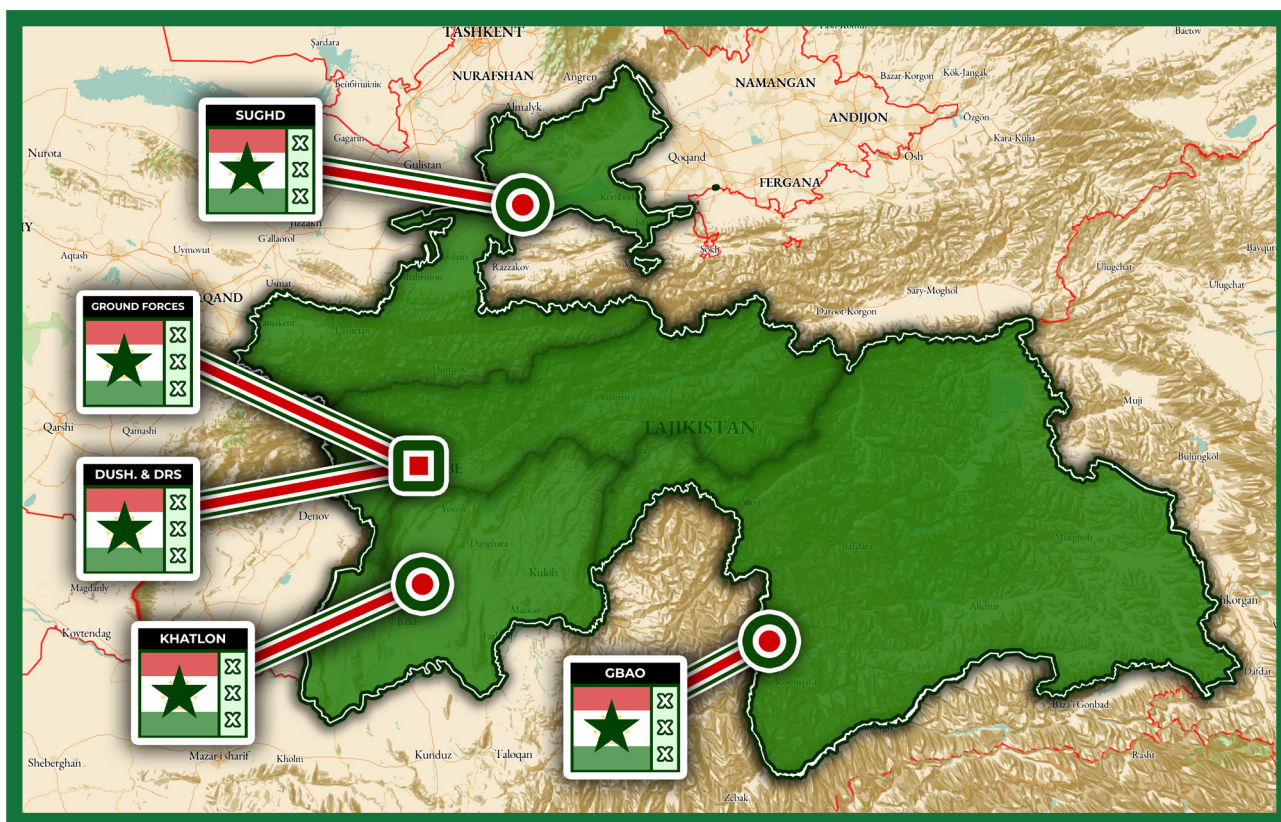
(Figure 6.4.1: Order of battle for the Ground Forces of Tajikistan)

Having initially inherited Soviet-era military assets and doctrines, Tajikistan's Ground Forces still maintain some of the same territorial command structures and geographical delineations that existed during the Tajik SSR era. With these delineations also mirroring the modern civilian administration jurisdictions today.

6.4.1 - Military Districts and Commands

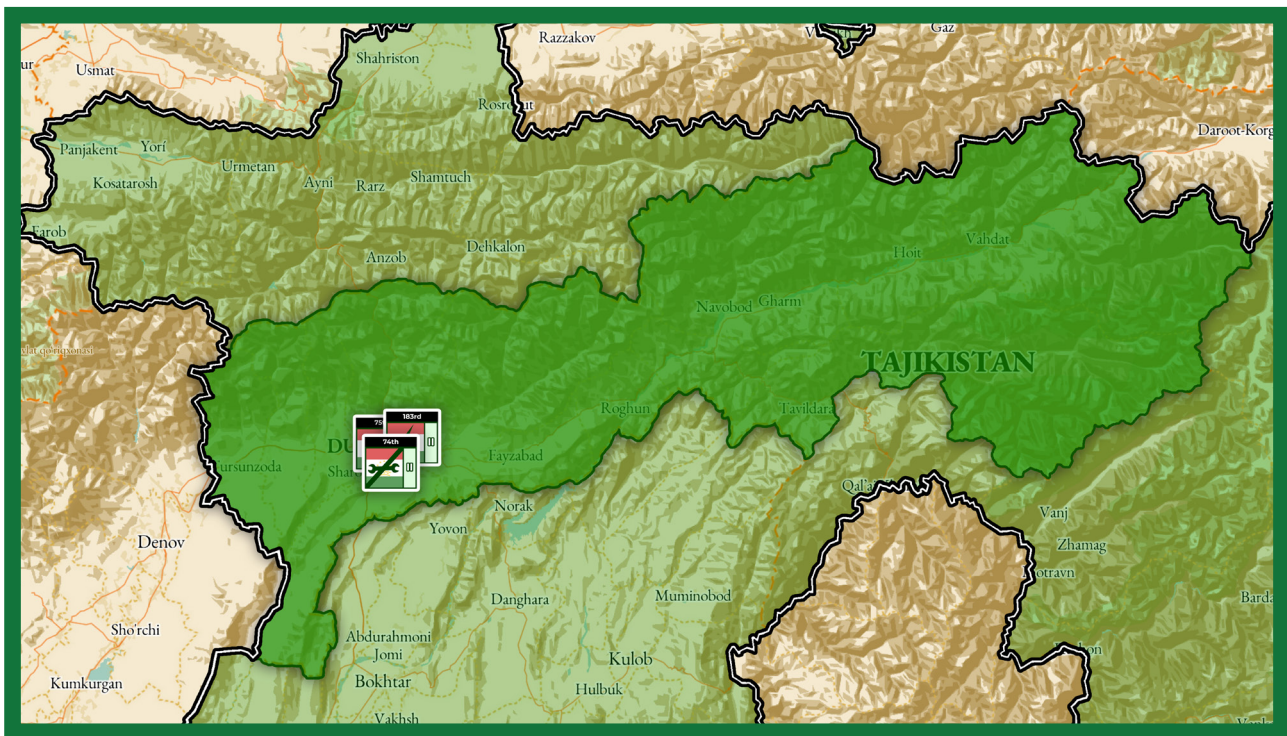
Moving down the chain of command from the General Staff into the individual branches, the largest of the three MOD branches is the Tajik Ground Forces, which consist of approximately 7,300 troops organised across four Territorial Defence Zones (TDZ) and five military commands. Each of the four defence zones within the Ground Forces is overseen by its own commander and staff, responsible for the operational management of all Ground Forces units within their respective TDZ. A notable exception is the Districts of Republican Subordination (DRS), which reports directly to the head of the Dushanbe command. Additionally, certain specialised units, such as the Tajik Agricultural Battalion, report directly to the commander of the Ground Forces.

However, each of these TDZ is distinctly different from the others, with some of these TDZs being granted far greater autonomy and capacity. As an example, while the Dushanbe, DRS, and Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO) commands maintain a very close operational relationship with the central command in Dushanbe, the Khatlon and Sughd commands operate with significantly more autonomy, with their commanders functioning in roles akin to divisional commanders. In most day-to-day operations though, each of these commanders possess a considerable amount of operational discretion, allowing them to make decisions tailored to the unique geopolitical and logistical challenges of their respective regions.



(Figure 6.4.2: A map of Tajikistan, indicating the locations of the Ground Forces headquarters, as well as the four Territorial Defence Zones)

i) - Territorial Defence Zone #1 - The Districts of Republican Subordination and the city of Dushanbe

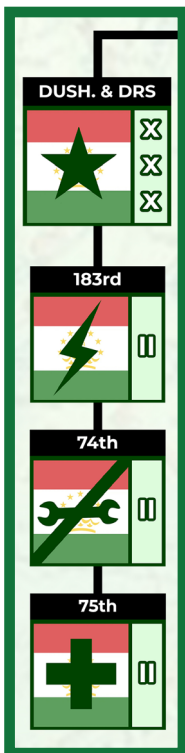


(Figure 6.4.3: Map of the Dushanbe region and the Districts of Republican Subordination)

Headquarters: Dushanbe

Commanded by: Prime Minister of Tajikistan

Territory covered: Dushanbe and the Districts of Republican Subordination

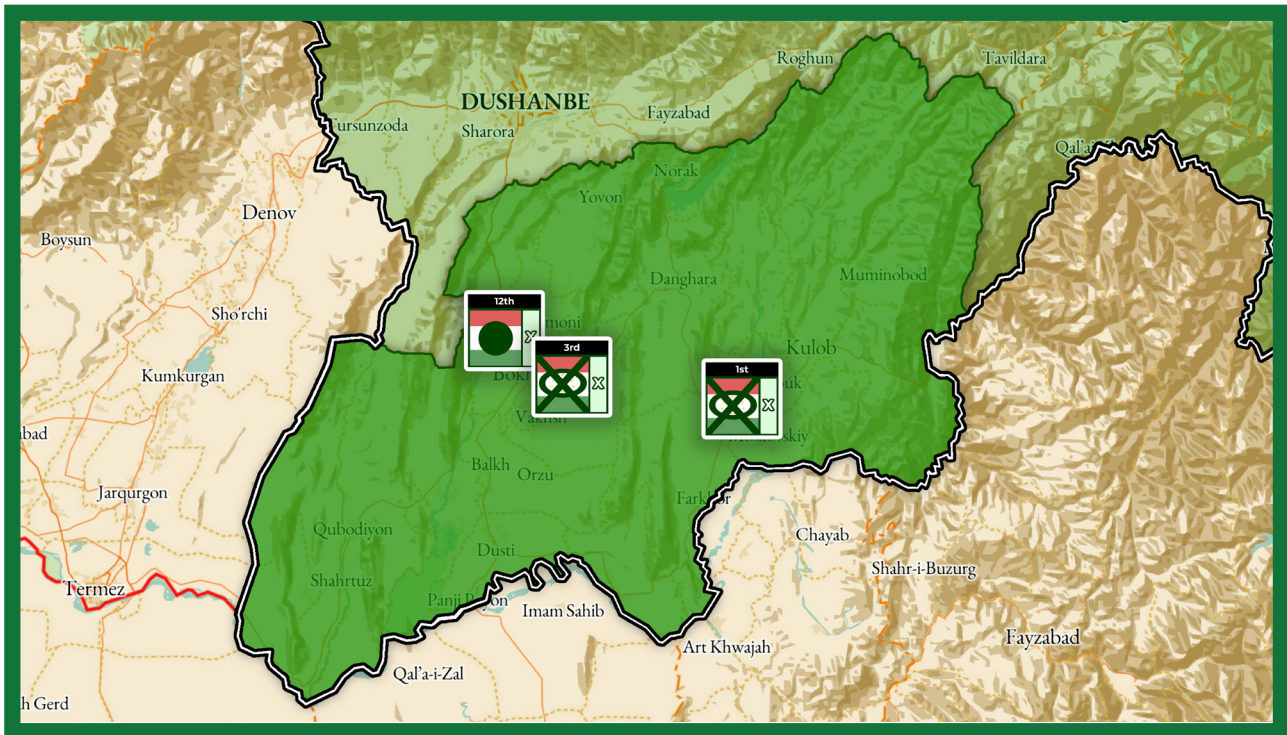


Headquartered in Dushanbe, this TDZ covers both the capital and the Districts of Republican Subordination, stretching all the way from the Uzbek border in the west to the southern border of Kyrgyzstan in the north. As the TDZ contains the national capital, it holds a position of critical importance within Tajikistan's defence strategy, economic health, and governance framework.

This area is not only the location of most military central command hubs but also functions as a geographic crossroads for the country's constrained national highway and railway infrastructure, with all forces transiting between Sughd and Khatlon having to pass through this central zone during that journey. However, for the Ground Forces, this district contains only a small portion of the nation's ground-based armed capacity, with the primary defence forces of the region instead being managed by the Mobile Forces, the Tajik Air and Air Defence Forces (TJAADF), and the large Russian garrison operation within the region.

(Figure 6.4.4: Order of battle for the Dushanbe Region and the Districts of Republican Subordination)

ii) - Territorial Defence Zone #2 - Khatlon Region

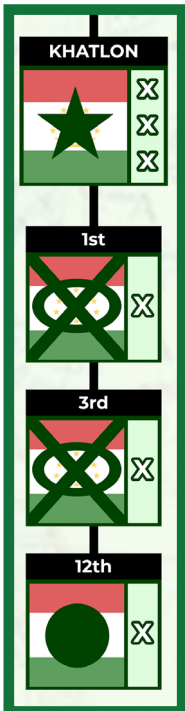


(Figure 6.4.5: Map of the Khatlon Territorial Defence Zone)

Headquarters: Bokhtar

Commanded by: Chairman of the Khatlon Region

Territory covered: Khatlon

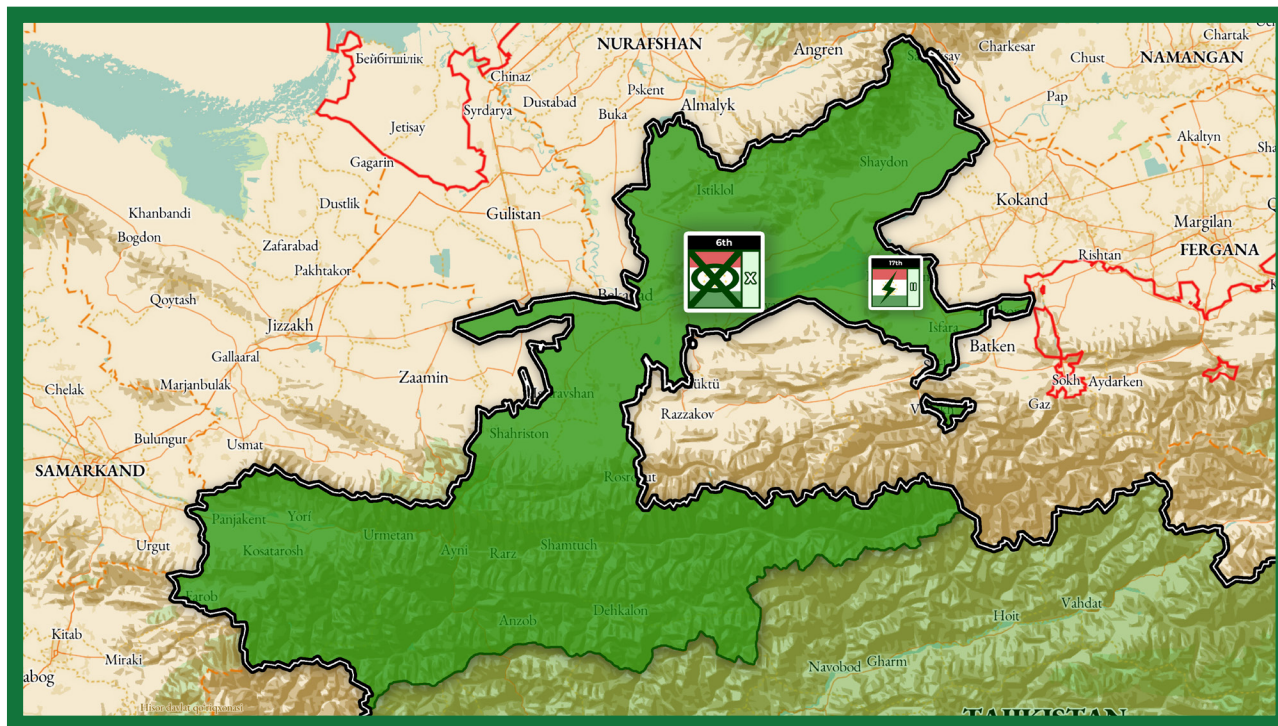


Headquartered in Bokhtar (previously known as Qurghonteppa), the Khatlon Territorial Defence Zone is Tajikistan’s most densely populated administrative area and a stronghold of President Rahmon’s familial clan. This strategically vital region, nestled between the Gissar Range to the north and the Panj River to the south, borders Uzbekistan to the west and Afghanistan to the south and southeast, with the region also serving as the primary entry point for transit into and out of Afghanistan.

The eastern sector of the oblast, also being the president’s birthplace, has benefited from considerable political and financial favouritism over the years, with this favouritism resulting in the Ground Forces troops stationed in Khatlon being comparatively well-equipped compared to forces based in other regions such as Sughd or the GBAO. In addition to the extra military funding, the oblast also boasts some of the nation’s most modern highways and rail infrastructure, alongside the largest Russian military base outside of Dushanbe, all of which would be significant assets during any potential invasion.

(Figure 6.4.6: Order of battle for the Ground Forces of the Khatlon Territorial Defence Zone)

iii) - Territorial Defence Zone #3 - Sughd Region

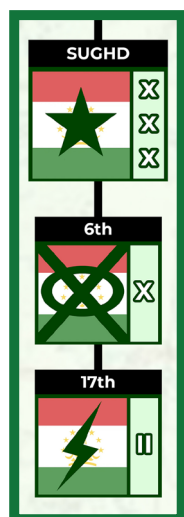


(Figure 6.4.7: Map of the Sughd Territorial Defence Zone)

Headquarters: Khujand

Commanded by: Chairman of the Sughd Region

Territory covered: Sughd

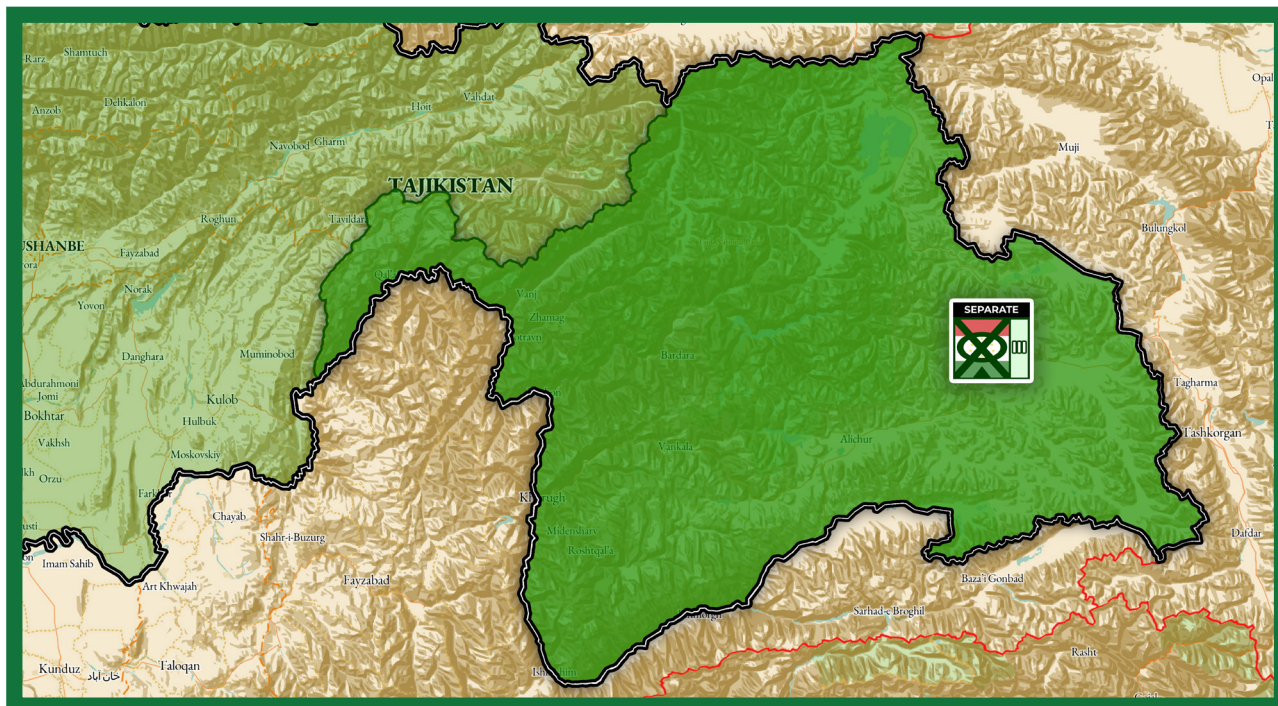


Headquartered in Khujand, the Sughd TDZ presents a significant strategic challenge for the government in Dushanbe due to its geographical isolation from the rest of Tajikistan by the formidable Gissar Range. This isolation means Sughd relies almost entirely on the Anzob Tunnel and a few small mountain passes for connectivity between its headquarters in Khujand and Dushanbe, with these narrow passes occasionally being rendered impassable by winter storms, rockslides, and deteriorating infrastructure, further complicating year-round access.

The geographic isolation of Sughd would likely pose significant logistical and defence challenges in the event of a large-scale international conflict, as evidenced by recent tensions with Kyrgyzstan along the oblast's eastern periphery (detailed in section 10.3). Despite its isolation though, the province is of great economic importance to Dushanbe. Although it contains only 29 per cent of Tajikistan's overall population, Sughd possesses about one-third of the nation's arable land and generates two-thirds of its domestically produced GDP. This economic significance makes the defence of Sughd both challenging and essential to Tajikistan's security and economic stability.

(Figure 6.4.8: Order of battle for the Ground Forces of the Sughd Defence Zone)

iv) - Territorial Defence Zone #4 - Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast

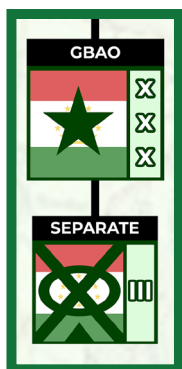


(Figure 6.4.9: Map of the Gorno-Badakhshan Territorial Defence Zone)

Headquarters: Khorog

Commanded by: Chairman of the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast

Territory covered: Gorno-Badakhshan

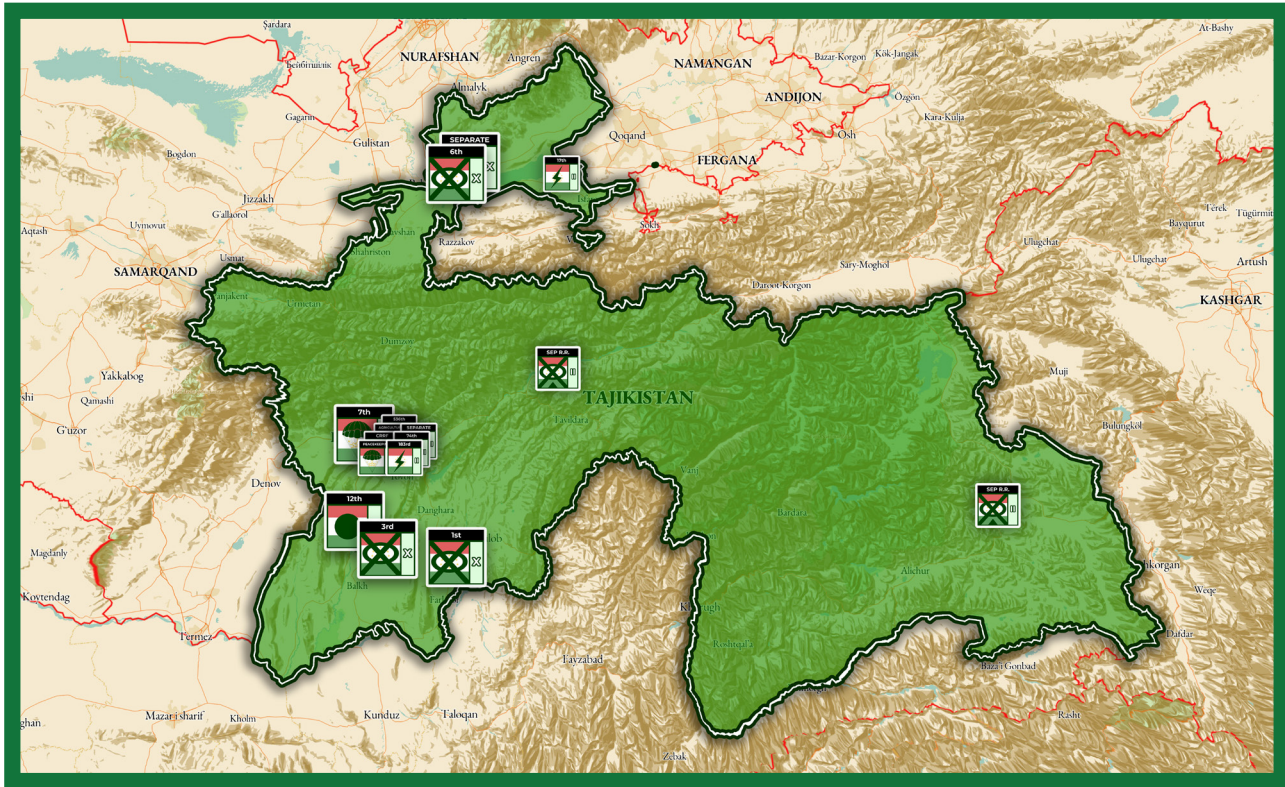


Headquartered in Khorog, the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBO) TDZ operates with a comparatively light footprint of MOD forces relative to other commands, with the command here instead primarily leveraging the capabilities of the MIA and the SCNS to maintain and enforce order within the region. This deployment structure is likely indicative of Dushanbe's strategic preference toward using its intelligence and internal security forces stationed within the region, partly due to their ability to operate with a high degree of autonomy and partly due to the reality that the majority of the region's small population are already concentrated close to the borders anyway.

Geographically, while this oblast encompasses over 40 per cent of Tajikistan's land area, it is home to only around 2.4 per cent of the population, allowing Dushanbe to maintain a relatively high ratio of security forces to population, with a numerically small garrison. It should be noted though, that despite that small population, the GBO hold significant strategic importance, as the region not only holds a large portion of the nation's resource wealth, but also Tajikistan's only border crossing with China. However, as outlined in section 10.1 of this report, the geography of this area poses significant challenges for Dushanbe, as in the event of war or civil unrest, providing resupply and support from Dushanbe is often difficult and delayed by the poor logistical infrastructure in place between GBO and the rest of the country.

(Figure 6.4.10: Order of battle for the Ground Forces of the GBO TDZ)

6.4.2 - Equipment and Unit Types



(Figure 6.4.11: Map of the Tajik Ground Forces and Mobile Forces deployments)

While being the largest branch in terms of personnel, the Tajik Ground Forces often experience significant delays in receiving budget increases, new procurements, and platform modernisations compared to the other services. Some speculate that this disparity may stem from the Ground Forces lacking direct contact with the executive branch, unlike the National Guard or Border Forces, with others interviewed for this project suggesting it may be due to the Ground Forces' overly broad operational scope relative to other branches. As while the government looks to the Border Forces to manage external security, to the Internal Troops and National Guard for internal security, and to the Mobile Forces in the event of a serious foreign invasion, this leaves the Ground Forces in an unusual position within the Tajik military structure. As an example, even during the recent skirmish with Kyrgyzstan in 2022, the Ground Forces played no significant role in the fight, with the majority of the combat instead being conducted by soldiers from the Tajik Border Service, the MIA, and the SCNS.

Nevertheless, the Ground Forces must still maintain a level of readiness to fulfil their primary functions. On paper, these functions would include serving as the main defensive force in the event of a significant invasion of Tajikistan by a neighbouring state, or providing the bulk of the logistical infrastructure and manpower for any potential large-scale expeditionary missions. However, both scenarios appear unlikely in the near future, and there would be some doubt as to the Tajik Ground Force's ability to sustain any sort of large-scale military campaign. In terms of hardware, the Tajik military is mostly equipped with limited quantities of early Russian- or late Soviet-era equipment. This includes small arms, armoured fighting vehicles, and an assortment of rudimentary artillery systems, largely integrated within a few core motor rifle brigades. With each of these brigades comprised of smaller units and designations, and each of those fulfilling specific roles within Tajikistan's wider defence strategy.

i) - Standard infantry



Tajikistan's military hardware inventory, issued to both contract soldiers and conscripts, predominantly consists of systems and platforms from the late Soviet period, often equipment that had already seen service in other theatres before being donated to the Tajik armed forces. This equipment is also supplemented by donations and repurposed materials from a small handful of cooperative nations, including states like Russia, China, and Czechia. While historically, Moscow has been the principal supplier of Tajikistan's standard military hardware, in recent years, the Ground Forces have seen a notable increase in the integration of small arms manufactured in China into the standard kit.

The standard issue for infantry soldiers in the Tajik military includes the Russian-made AK-74 or the Chinese-manufactured Type 81 rifles, alongside domestically licensed productions of Russian machine guns like the heavier DShK or the lighter RPD. Some infantry units are also equipped with personal hand grenades and grenade launchers, such as the RPG-2 and RPG-7, affording them additional capabilities for direct combat engagements against vehicles and light armour. Despite these additions being provided to some Tajik soldiers, the bulk of the Tajik infantry remains modestly armed compared to a neighbouring state like China or Uzbekistan.

(Figure 6.4.12: Symbology for the former 7th Separate Rifle Battalion, based in Vose. Now operating as the 1st Motor Rifle Brigade)

ii) - Motor rifle and mountain motor rifle units



Tajikistan, in a similar manner to the other four Central Asian states, maintains some of its Soviet military structuring by prioritising motorised/motor rifle units as the backbone of its armed forces. These units are utilised for their ability to rapidly mobilise and deploy into combat zones without having to completely rely on guaranteed rail or air support.

Defensively, they are responsible for maintaining control over territories, repelling adversarial assaults, and neutralising enemy forces through the use of tanks, IFVs, and other armoured vehicles.

Offensively, they aim to penetrate enemy defences, dismantle opposing military units, secure strategic locations, and potentially engage in pursuit operations against retreating forces. For Tajikistan's motorised rifle units, they predominantly rely on a combination of somewhat modernised T-72 tanks (the Ural A, AV, and B variants), alongside an ageing inventory of BTR-60, BTR-70 and BTR-80 armoured personnel carriers, as well as some BRDM combat reconnaissance vehicles to provide the necessary motorised platforms.

However, from descriptions provided by interviewed operators of these vehicles, at present, many of Tajikistan's motorised assets are operating well beyond their intended service life.

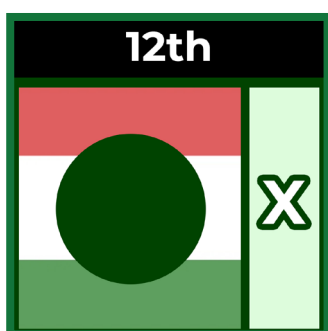
(Figure 6.4.13: Symbology for the 6th Motor Rifle Brigade, based in Chkalovsk)

Our source also suggested that a significant amount of the ground forces' vehicle stock is being continuously cannibalised in order to refurbish other more repairable vehicles. While this sort of cannibalisation does lower military spending, its widespread practice within the Tajik fleet underscores the pressing need for Dushanbe to expedite their modernisation and replacement programmes.



(Figure 6.4.14: A Group of Tajik T-72Bs. Source: The Tajik Ministry of Defence)

iii) - Artillery and rocket units



While most major units within the Tajik Armed Forces have their own small allotments of mortar and artillery support, the Tajiks tend to use their specialised dedicated artillery brigades, such as the 12th Artillery Brigade, predominantly as defensive or support units. These brigades either function as area denial forces at the country's many geographic chokepoints or provide heavy indirect fire support for other forward units.

At present, the artillery forces are also facing significant limitations in both modernised shells and systems, with the country still primarily reliant on D-30 howitzers that were produced from the 1960s through the 1980s for the bulk of its towed artillery, as well as some ageing 2S3 Akatsiya self-propelled guns for its self-propelled artillery needs. In terms of rocket artillery, Tajikistan's stockpiles are also somewhat dated, primarily relying on platforms such as the BM-21 and TOS-1A. However, these models are still fairly comparable across the states in the region.

(Figure 6.4.15: Symbol for the 12th Artillery Brigade, based in Pushkin)

However, as part of this analysis, we were also informed that the operational readiness of these artillery units is becoming increasingly compromised, and training on these platforms is increasingly infrequent. These changes are being implemented due to many of the nation's artillery platforms suffering from damaged internals and overused barrels. Additionally, limited ammunition stockpiles and minimally trained personnel further diminish the potential combat effectiveness of Tajikistan's artillery units. However, with little immediate risk of a conflict with neighbouring Uzbekistan, these artillery units are unlikely to play a primary role within the Tajik forces anyway.

iv) - Special forces and rapid response units



Tajikistan's rapid response battalions are specifically designed for swift deployment into critical situations across various terrains and operational scenarios. These units are also equipped with comparatively modern weaponry and benefit from enhanced tactical training, often maintaining a higher level of operational readiness than most other units within the Tajik armed forces. Their roles extend beyond traditional military engagements to include the suppression of domestic disturbances, intervention against organised crime, and the rapid stabilisation or offensive exploitation of enemy vulnerabilities during conflict scenarios.

Consequently, they are often deployed to politically sensitive areas such as Khujand and Dushanbe. Notably, these units are predominantly trained and equipped for operations within urban environments, where engagement protocols are typically more tightly regulated.

(Figure 6.4.16: Symbology for the Tajik 17th Rapid Response Battalion, based in Konibodom)

Within the Tajik armed forces, there are also several specialised units that are sometimes not aligned with any specific regional command or military branch. Instead, these units operate under the direct jurisdiction of the MOD. This organisational structure allows for centralised command and control over units that often perform unique roles.

v) - Agricultural battalion



Tajikistan's Agricultural Battalion is tasked with cultivating a steady and reliable provision of nutritional resources for military supply. The battalion is equipped with specialised enterprises focused on processing agricultural products and is expected to only play a minor role during future conflicts.

(Figure 6.4.17: Symbology for the Tajik Agricultural Battalion)

vi) - Separate medical units



During peacetime, these medical units operate out of the nation's military hospitals. However, in a combat scenario, they are deployable to areas where conventional hospitals are either too far from the frontline, or civilian healthcare infrastructure is unable to meet the demand.

(Figure 6.4.18: Symbology for the 75th Separate Medical Battalion)

vii) - Presidential Honour Guard and ceremonial units



The Tajik Presidential Honour Guard, as well as other smaller ceremonial units and bands, are tasked with representing the Tajik armed forces at various state ceremonies, official events, and military parades. While these units pose little strategic benefit to the Ground Forces, they do play a key role in upholding the national image and fostering military pride within the nation.

(Figure 6.4.19: Symbology for the Tajik Honour Guard Company)

viii) - Engineering and Sapper Units



Engineering and Sapper Units within the Tajik Ground Forces are responsible for constructing fortifications, clearing minefields, and conducting demolition operations to support both defensive and offensive operations. These units work closely with infantry and mechanised forces, providing critical battlefield mobility, infrastructure development, and counter-mobility measures.

(Figure 6.4.20: Symbology for the Tajik 74th Separate Engineer Sapper Battalion)

6.4.3 - Force Modernisation

As things stand, the state's military modernisation trajectory is still profoundly dependent on international support, with the state highly reliant on Russia and China for subsidised or discounted equipment. Without significant reforms, the Tajik government will likely face several challenges in its efforts to modernise, with the force burdened by spiralling maintenance and operational expenditures and growing procurement obstacles exacerbated by the war in Ukraine. These challenges underscore the immediate need for a strategic reevaluation, with key considerations including the acquisition of new ordnance, additional transport vehicles, and modernised light weaponry.

However, there are some areas in which the Tajik Ground Forces can work towards modernisation without the requirement of significant capital investment.

i) - Conscription policy

While the likelihood of Tajikistan needing to independently repel a significant invasion by an external power remains minimal, the nation continues to adhere to its Soviet-era conscription model, maintaining a high turnover of new recruits to sustain an extensive reserve pool theoretically capable of full national mobilisation. While the other four republics are making significant strides towards a more professionalised fighting force, Tajikistan largely maintains its current course. This approach raises doubts about the true feasibility of its touted mobilisation capacity. Where despite having the smallest standing force in the region, with just 7,300 personnel within the Ground Forces, Dushanbe claims it can call upon a military reserve of over 600,000 men, approximately 42 per cent of all fighting-age males in the country, in a time of crisis.

In 2021, Dushanbe called for the mobilisation of 100,000 active service personnel and 130,000 reservists from both the military and law enforcement sectors, marking the largest nationwide mobilisation since Tajikistan's independence. However, the effectiveness of this mobilisation raised questions about the actual capacity of Tajikistan to mobilise its declared reserve forces. As of the purported 230,000 individuals summoned for the exercise, only about 20,000 were reportedly deployed to reinforce the border. This figure is subject to scrutiny, as "reinforcing the border" might have merely involved these reserves deploying to a southern training area like Harbmaidon, and then subsequently disbanding. Understandably, this event casts doubt on the accuracy of Tajikistan's reported mobilisation capabilities.

Several additional factors also cast doubt on the accuracy of the mobilisation figures reported by Dushanbe. First, many of the mobilised soldiers likely did little more than "check in", meaning they simply telephoned their local military commissions to let them know they were still in the country, resulting in them being counted as mobilised. Additionally, there is a high chance that some Tajik officers may have falsified their units' mobilisation data to avoid punitive measures, as commanders were incentivised to report higher numbers during the exercise. While these issues are concerning in their own right, the lack of equipment possessed by Tajikistan would likely be the most serious issue if a large-scale mobilisation were required.

As given Dushanbe's ongoing struggles to adequately outfit its existing standing force of fewer than 10,000 personnel, there are serious doubts about Tajikistan's ability to sustain a larger force, even for a brief period. Tajikistan's reliance on its current recruitment strategy largely stems from the high turnover rate within its Ground Forces. Annually, approximately 15,000 to 16,000 men are inducted into the armed forces and reserves, with a similar number being discharged. In April 2022, Dushanbe sought to address these issues by enacting a new law aimed at reducing draft evasion, with this legislation removing many previous exemptions and imposed fees for draft evasion, aiming to ensure a steady influx of recruits for the Ground Forces. Under these new regulations, draftees are required to serve 2 years or 1 year if they have higher education.

However, this conscription model, along with reports of widespread hazing within these conscript units, has likely negatively impacted the morale and effectiveness of the Tajik Ground Forces and exacerbated existing resentments toward service among the younger population. In a combat scenario, Tajikistan could face significant challenges if it continues to rely on these conscripts, as one of the more recent studies on the Tajik Ground Forces, conducted in 2006, revealed that only approximately 46 per cent of the nation's conscripts were deemed unfit for service.



(Figure 6.4.21: Image of young Tajik soldiers in 2005. Source: RFE/RL Tajik Service)

6.4.4 - Weaknesses

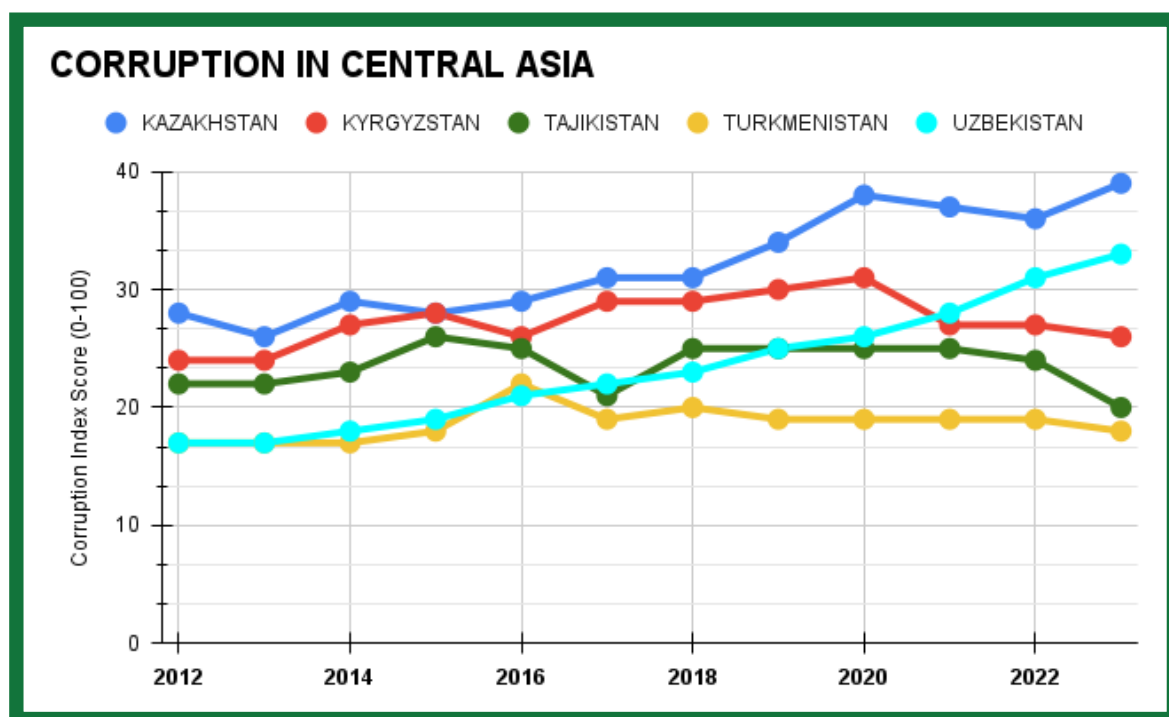
The Tajik Ground Forces are currently grappling with a multitude of challenges across various areas of the branch, some of which are already adversely impacting operational effectiveness, while others are likely to manifest more acutely in the medium to long term, or in the event of a large-scale conflict. Some of the key issues are:

i) - Overreliance on Russia and China for procurement

While the Tajik Ground Forces currently benefit from the discounted military procurement offered by Russia and China, long-term sustainability and overreliance on these sources could pose strategic risks in the future. Over the past two years, the ongoing conflict in Ukraine has exacerbated the difficulty of obtaining Russian parts and munitions, as Russia faces unprecedented domestic demand for these materials. Over this period, the MOD has struggled to secure sufficient supplies for basic replenishment and training needs, while also lacking the capital reserves to procure supplementary supplies from alternative markets.

ii) - Corruption

The spectre of corruption also persists within Tajikistan, as evidenced by the country's corruption index score of just 24/150. In the Ground Forces in particular, vertical corruption pervades various aspects of military life, including wealthier citizens being able to bribe their way out of conscription, incentivised career advancements, favouritism in deployment locations, and officers exploiting their units for revenue-generating activities. These corrupt practices not only erode trust and integrity within the ranks but also undermine the meritocratic principles essential for effective military appointments and promotions.



(Figure 6.4.22: Chart of the Corruption Perceptions Index for Central Asian states (2012 – 2023), with 0/150 being the most corrupt and 150/150 being the least.

Source: Transparency International)

iii) - Poor morale and recruit retention

Poor morale within the Tajik Ground Forces also remains a critical and pervasive vulnerability. Interviews conducted for this report revealed widespread dissatisfaction among personnel, attributed to several systemic issues, including inadequate pay, prolonged and stagnant deployments, substandard equipment, and inconsistent training quality. Additionally, rampant abuse, mistreatment, hazing, and the exploitation of conscripts for manual labour have exacerbated these grievances. These factors undermine unit effectiveness and cohesion and risk eroding trust and commitment to the national armed forces. The situation has become so pronounced that some personnel now openly express their grievances on online forums. In some of these posts, recruits detail issues such as poor funding and the perception that other branches of the military, like the National Guard and Mobile Forces, receive better benefits and postings.

iv) - Poor quality equipment

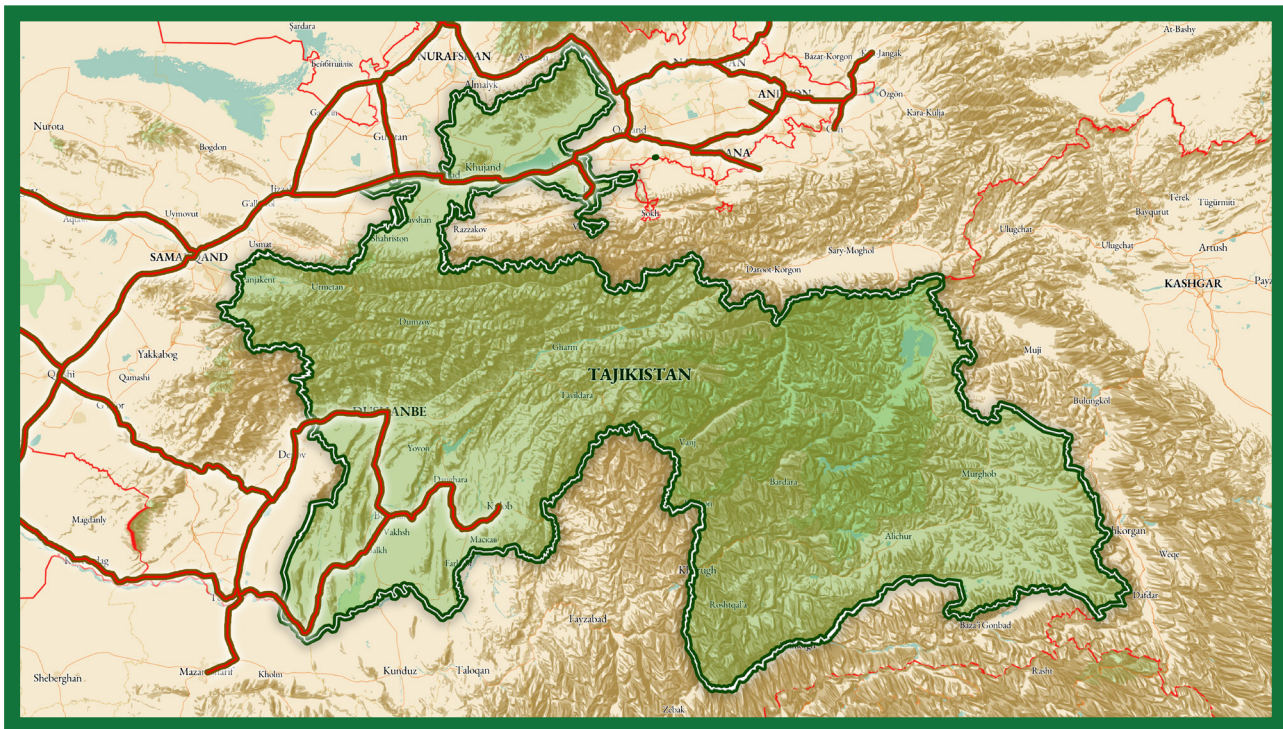
These problems also extend to equipment issues, with some estimates suggesting that as little as 65 per cent of the Ground Forces' vehicle fleet remains operationally functional, starkly underscoring the force's current logistical and mechanical challenges. Moreover, there is an additional concern that the remaining inoperable equipment may not be evenly distributed across branches and units. Historically, newer equipment has been prioritised for separate outfits like the National Guard and the Mobile Forces, as well as for soldiers based in politically favoured areas in the southern part of the country, particularly in Kulob and Danghara. This policy of unequal distribution could potentially lead to situations where the capital and southern regions have the vast majority of the country's equipment in operational condition, while those in the north and east are left to operate with whatever remains. If true, this would greatly hamper the defensive capabilities of the Tajik forces in the north and, in the event of a conflict, possibly force Tajikistan to attempt to redeploy forces from the south across its poor north-south infrastructure within a limited timeframe.

v) - Logistics and transportation

In addition to these equipment deficiencies, there is also a lack of logistical support units within the overall force. This force structure (discussed in more detail in sections 10.1 and 10.3) presents a deep strategic vulnerability within the Tajik military infrastructure. This reality is particularly concerning when considering the pace of military modernisation among Tajikistan's neighbouring states, including recent adversary Kyrgyzstan.

These Ground Forces troops face significant geographical constraints that not only impede their operational mobility but also enhance their vulnerability to logistical isolation in times of conflict. The strategic difficulties posed by the state's dependence on a limited number of tunnels and mountain passes, coupled with the lack of adequate logistical support units, airlift capacity, and supply infrastructure, cannot be overstated. In the event of a conflict or uprising outside of the capital or south, these deficiencies would effectively sever the military's direct lines of communication and supply. The logistical challenges faced by the Tajik Ground Forces are further exacerbated by the state's limited domestic railway infrastructure. Of the railway network that Tajikistan possesses, only 28 kilometres (km) are double-tracked, and none of the railways are electrified, imposing significant limitations on scaling two-way freight along these lines. As illustrated in the accompanying map, these rail lines also fail to provide any

north-south rail connections and the reliance on Uzbek-controlled lines undermine Tajikistan's logistical flexibility and strategic autonomy. In a conflict scenario, the inability to rapidly move forces and supplies across the country would become a severe disadvantage.



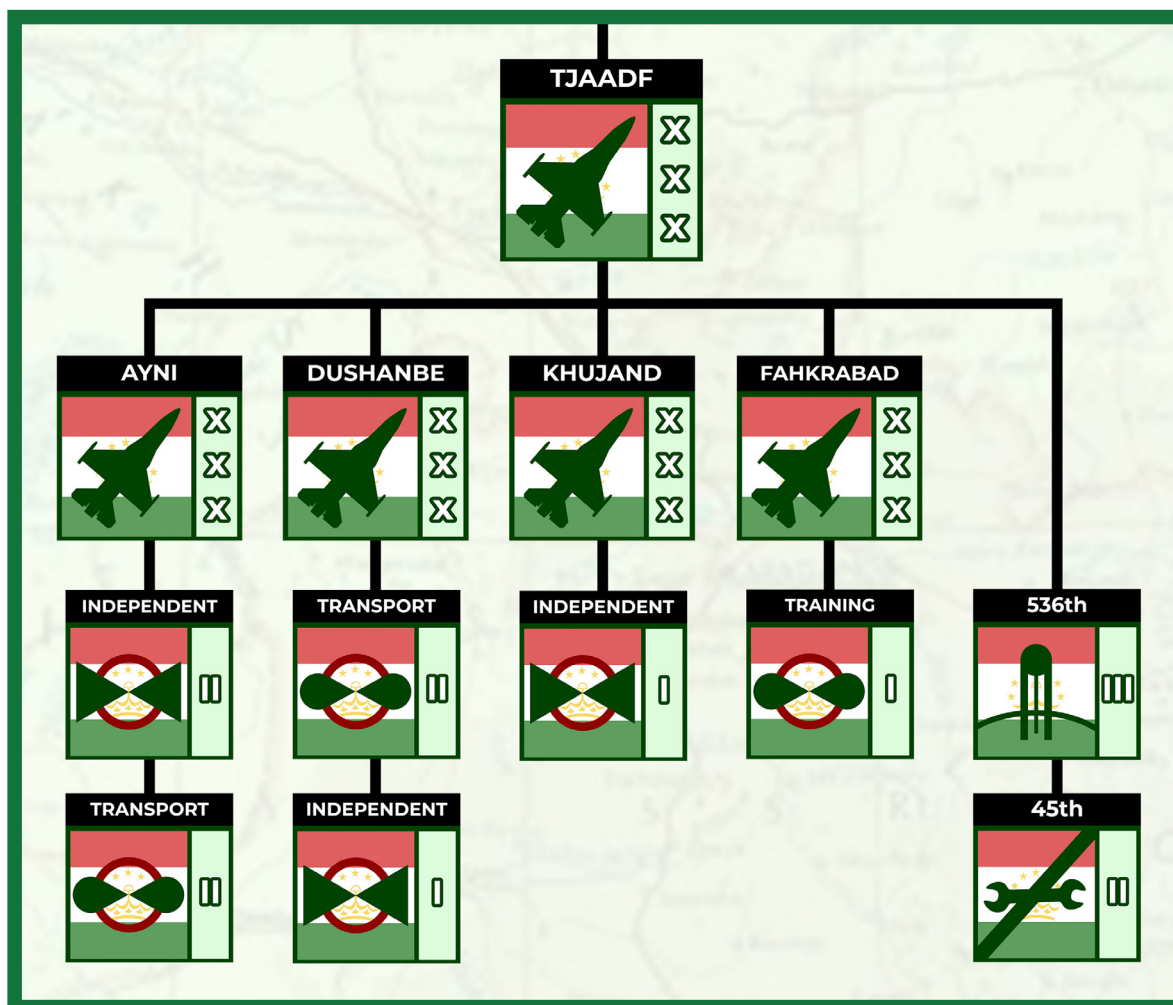
(Figure 6.4.23: Map showing how rail lines (red) depend on links transiting through Uzbekistan)

vi) - Financial constraints

The most persistent and significant challenge for the Tajik Ground Forces is the scarcity of financial resources, which severely hampers the branch's development and modernisation efforts. This chronic lack of capital has multifaceted and far-reaching effects on the operational capability and strategic readiness of the military. At present, a substantial portion of the defence budget is allocated to personnel wages, which, while necessary, significantly reduces the funds available for the essential procurement, maintenance, and modernisation of ongoing platforms. Compounding this issue is the Tajik military's overreliance on imports for its defence procurement needs, with the country having only exported roughly \$2,400 (costs are always shown in US dollars unless otherwise noted) worth of defence materials in 2023. Such dependence exposes the forces to potential supply chain disruptions or embargoes during times of conflict, particularly from states with competing interests within the region.

Furthermore, this overreliance on defence purchases from external sources also creates potential foreign exchange issues. In the event of a potential devaluation of the Tajik somoni during periods of crisis, coupled with the need for dollars or roubles for purchases, the cost of importing the necessary military supplies will sharply escalate, placing additional strain on an already limited defence budget and further complicating efforts to sustain or modernise the forces. The combination of internal budgetary constraints and external economic pressures critically undermines the Tajik Ground Forces' ability to maintain operational readiness and respond effectively to the security challenges along its borders. Addressing these financial and logistical issues would require significant strategic investments, fiscal reforms, and diversification of procurement sources in order to mitigate these vulnerabilities.

6.5: THE AIR AND AIR DEFENCE FORCES

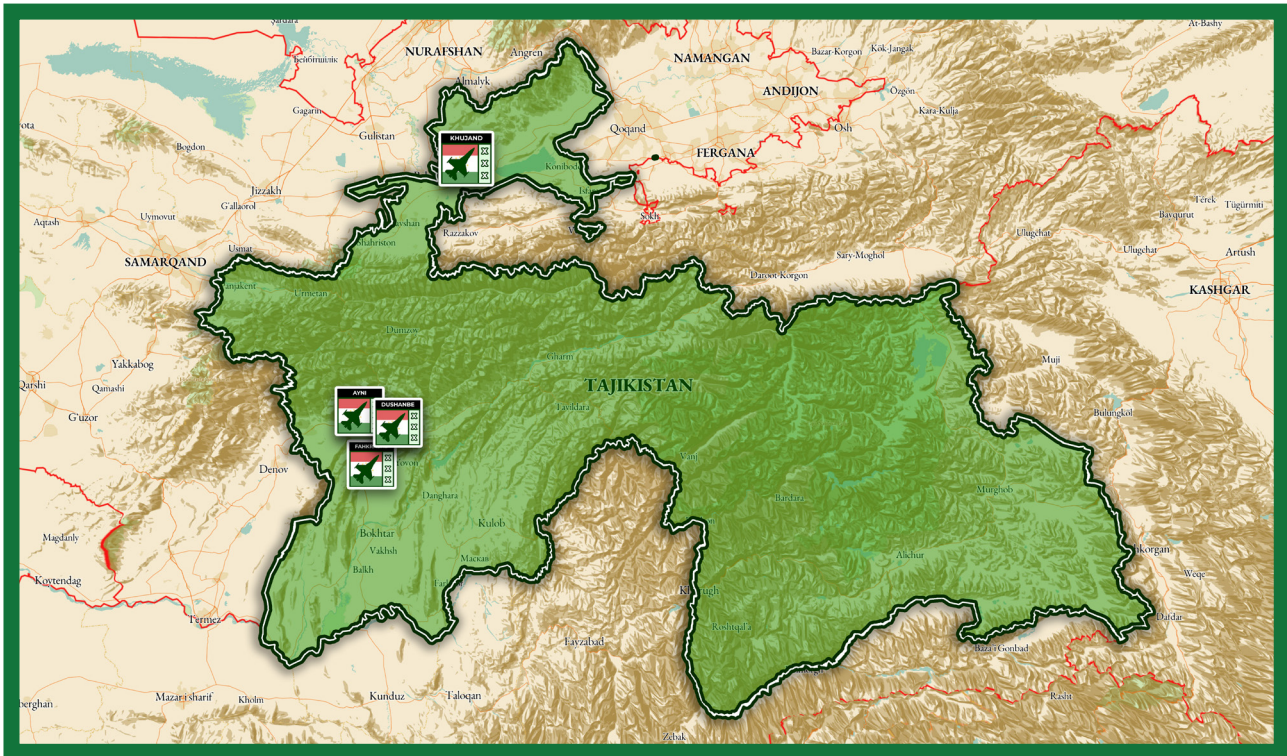


(Figure 6.5.1: Order of battle for the Tajik Air and Air Defence Forces)

6.5.1 - Operational Capacity

The Tajik Air and Air Defence Forces (TJAADF) have historically relied on Russia for the majority of their aerial support needs, which this proving to be sufficient enough to meet the minimal air needs of the Tajik state. The Tajik airspace has been supplementary to outside forces for many years now, as even during the civil war, Russia and Uzbekistan were key providers of air cover in support of the government's military operations. Even today, with the state being a participant in the de facto Unified Air Defence System of the CSTO (JADS), Tajikistan's airspace is effectively subject to Russian surveillance and defence protocols. While some within the Tajik defence community may disagree with this decision, this arrangement allows Tajikistan to redirect essential capital funds toward other segments of the armed forces, rather than having to spend large sums of capital to sustain an obsolete fleet of Soviet-era fighters.

The current composition of the Tajik Air Force is characterised by a relatively small fleet, primarily consisting of L-39 training aircraft and a handful of Russian and Soviet-era helicopters. These assets are strategically positioned across three principal airfields within the nation, with the largest of these airfields (Ayni) located just west of Dushanbe. The primary operational focus of these aerial capabilities is directed towards search and rescue missions and providing intermittent support during counterinsurgency operations.



(Figure 6.5.2: Map of Tajikistan's operational airbases)

While there was considerable speculation regarding Tajikistan's interest in acquiring secondhand fighter aircraft to modernise and expand its air force, reports suggest a high degree of reluctance from Russia to provide these units. This hesitation more likely stems from Tajikistan's insufficient indigenous maintenance infrastructure and the limited strategic utility of such aircraft for operations beyond engagements with neighbouring Kyrgyzstan. Instead, Moscow's strategic approach appears to favour maintaining its place as the key airpower in the skies above both actors, through its air wing at Ayni in Tajikistan and its air wing at Kant in Kyrgyzstan. However, the absence of fixed-wing aircraft, coupled with the country's rapidly ageing fleet of rotary aircraft, presents a significant concern if Tajikistan were ever to find itself at war without the support of Russia. In the event of a conflict with Kyrgyzstan, Dushanbe would enter such a conflict with minimal, if any, aerial support or attack capacity. Given what we have observed in other campaigns and the shrinking cost of drones and shoulder-fired anti-air weapons, it is unlikely that Tajikistan's older helicopters would be capable of providing much close air support (CAS) on the battlefield. The 2022 border conflict with Kyrgyzstan starkly highlighted the tactical advantage conferred by UAVs, and now that Kyrgyzstan has sharply increased its deployment of Bayraktar TB2 drones into the south, this imbalance has accelerated Tajikistan's efforts to integrate UAV systems into its own force. TJAADF commanders are aware of the increasing importance of maintaining anti-access/area denial (A2AD) defence over a modern battlefield. In recognition of these challenges, Tajikistan is increasingly committed to the integration of UAVs into its armed forces.

While still exploring various options on which drones to import, in 2022, Rahmon travelled to Tehran to sign a deal with Iran to produce Iranian Ababil-2 and Ababil-2T drones in Tajikistan, with the first factory opening in Dushanbe later that year. Tajikistan also expanded on that by signing a military assistance agreement with Turkey, allowing them to purchase Turkish-made TB2s. However, as of the time of writing, we have yet to see them used publicly by the TJAADF.



(Figure 6.5.3: Defence Minister Sherali Mirzo of Tajikistan (left) and Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Bagheri (right), inaugurating the Tajik drone factory in Dushanbe in 2022)

6.5.2 - Command and Branch Structure

While the bulk of Tajikistan’s air assets are controlled by the TJAADF, there are additional aerial assets operating under the command of two additional ranches.

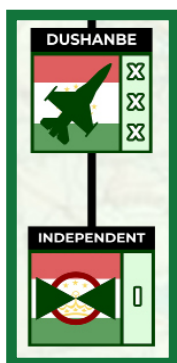
i) - The Air and Air Defence Forces



While the branch as a whole is commanded by the General Staff and coordinated from its central headquarters in Dushanbe, its air platforms primarily operate from three airbases in the west of the country. The first two, Dushanbe and Ayni, serve as the branch’s primary operational hubs, with both bases hosting Mi-8Ms and Mi-24s. However, with Dushanbe’s airbase also sharing the runway with Dushanbe International Airport, most of the branch’s fixed-wing assets, like their L-39s and An-26Bs, operate out of the military runway at Ayni airbase. In addition to these two, the TJAADF also operates a small handful of Mi-8s and Mi-24s out of Khujand and some An-2s and Yak-52s used as training aircraft down at Fakhrabad airbase.

(Figure 6.5.4: Emblem of the Tajik Air and Air Defence Forces)

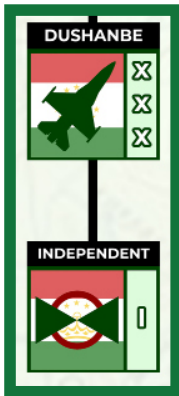
ii) - The Border Service



The Tajik Border Service (TBS) operates a handful of older Mi-8MTV helicopters. These helicopters are utilised by the border troops for the rapid transportation of goods, equipment, and ammunition to various, often remote, locations along the country’s borders. While these helicopters are based at Dushanbe Airport, it is not uncommon for them to be deployed to one of the country’s smaller regional airfields for prolonged periods.

(Figure 6.5.5: Chain of command for the Border Service Air Wing)

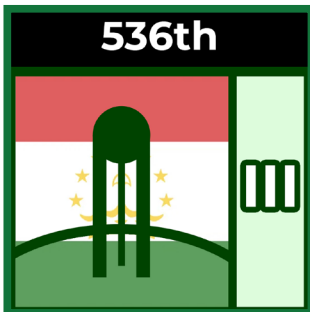
iii) - The National Guard



The Tajik National Guard has also been allocated a small number of Mi-8MTV helicopters to assist with transportation and support when required. Similar to the Border Service, the National Guard bases its helicopters at the civilian airport in Dushanbe or the National Guard base in the West of Dushanbe. While it is generally standard practice for National Guard units to have access to more modern equipment, in this case, the helicopters utilised by the National Guard are reportedly in a state of disrepair that rivals, if not exceeds, the poor condition of those currently in service with the Tajik Air Force.

(Figure 6.5.6: Chain of command for the National Guard's Air Wing)

6.5.3 - Capabilities and Systems



Tajikistan's air defence capabilities are critical for safeguarding the country's airfields and essential infrastructure. As of the latest assessments, Tajikistan has decommissioned its obsolete S-75M3 systems and replaced them with two S-125 Pechora-2M air defence systems, positioned to the around Dushanbe as part of the 536th Antiaircraft Missile Regiment.

(Figure 6.5.7: Symbology for the Tajik 536th Antiair Missile Regiment based around Dushanbe)



(Figure 6.5.8: Satellite photography of Tajik air defence batteries just west of Dushanbe)

In addition to those S-125s, the Tajiks also have access to P-19, P-37, and 5N84A radars that Russia has donated to them in the past. These low-altitude systems near Dushanbe, though limited in number, substantially enhance the overall combat effectiveness of the JADS by providing protection across its southern periphery. In particular, the surveillance radar data provided by these systems will be of significant use to both Dushanbe and Moscow for monitoring the airspace across Tajikistan and Afghanistan.

Beyond these air defence systems, the Tajik military also utilises ZU-23 anti-aircraft guns and various MANPADS (man-portable air-defence systems), both of which are much more mobile than the main systems the TJAADF deploys around Dushanbe. As a unique oddity of Tajikistan, there is some ambiguity regarding the specifics of the models of MANPADS they currently have in service, as there have been unverified reports suggesting the use of both the 9K32 (Strela-2) and the inclusion of American FIM-92 Stingers. The Stingers, if true, were likely attained through the capture of Mujahideen stockpiles during the Soviet-Afghan war, raising some doubts as to their operational readiness and the quantity available. Tajikistan's participation in the CSTO and the JADS also significantly augments its air defence capabilities. This affiliation not only facilitates access to advanced air defence systems in the event of a war but also enables regular practical testing and live-fire exercises. The Russian Air Defence contingent based within Tajikistan also possesses considerably superior air defence resources compared to the national forces.

The Russians currently have access to Osa-AKM (SA-8 Gecko) and Strela-10 (SA-13 Gopher) surface-to-air missile systems, as well as ZU-23 anti-aircraft artillery and Iгла MANPADS. However, the largest recent deployment came in 2023, when Russia established 12 mobile S-300 (SA-10 Grumble) missile launchers in Tajikistan as part of the CSTO's joint air defence system. In addition to the S-300s, Russia has been discussing the upgrade of its ageing Osa-AKM and Strela-10 systems to the more modern Tor-M2 (SA-15 Gauntlet) air defence systems, with the expectation that these older systems would eventually be passed down to the TJADDF. It was also anticipated that Tajikistan may eventually take directly ownership of some of these Russian systems stationed in the country. In December 2019, Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu reportedly mentioned the possibility of transferring several S-300PS (SA-10B Grumble B) air defence systems to Tajik jurisdiction. However, with the expansion of the joint air defence network and Russia's increasing domestic demand for air defence assets, this timeline is almost certain to be delayed in the near future.

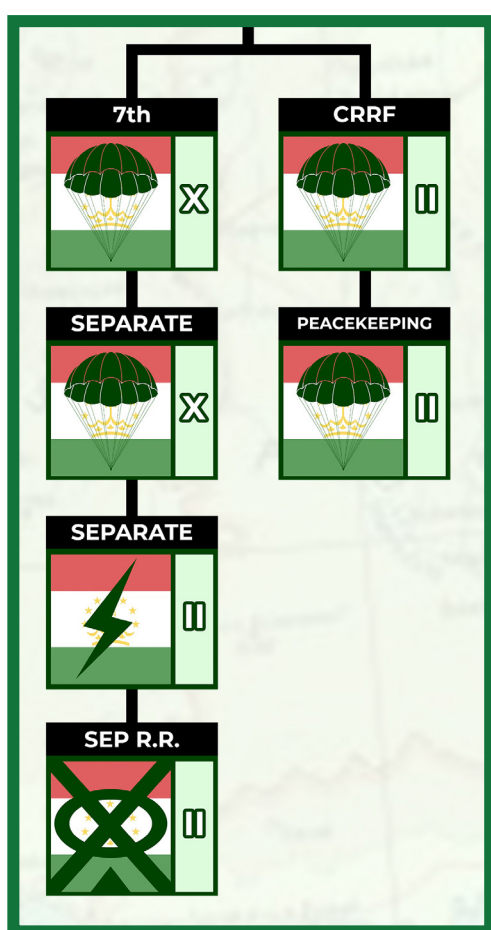


(Figure 6.5.9: A satellite imagery timelapse of Russia establishing their deployments of S-300's in Western Tajikistan)

6.6: THE MOBILE FORCES

Tajikistan's Mobile Forces have been described as some of the most capable formations, man-for-man, anywhere inside Central Asia, with the majority of this branches units being purposely structured for swift and adaptable responses to a broad spectrum of threats ranging from foreign invasion to protecting the capital itself.

6.6.1 - Capabilities and Roles



Tajikistan's Mobile Forces, the spearhead of the nation's military capabilities, are structured to provide rapid and versatile responses to both conventional and asymmetrical threats. These forces are composed of rapid reaction units, air-assault units, motorised mountain troops, as well as their accompanying specialised engineering and support teams. Within these forces, a significant emphasis has been placed on the training and professional development of its personnel, with the branch containing much higher ratios of longer-term professional soldiers than any of the larger Ground Forces or SCNS formations.

The principal elements of the Mobile Forces' operational structure are centred around an air assault brigade (7th), a separate rapid reaction brigade, several well-equipped battalions deployed throughout the country's interior and central valley, as well as a number of special purpose forces focused toward working in collaboration with other international groups like the U.S. or the CSTO's Collective Rapid Deployment Forces (CRDF).

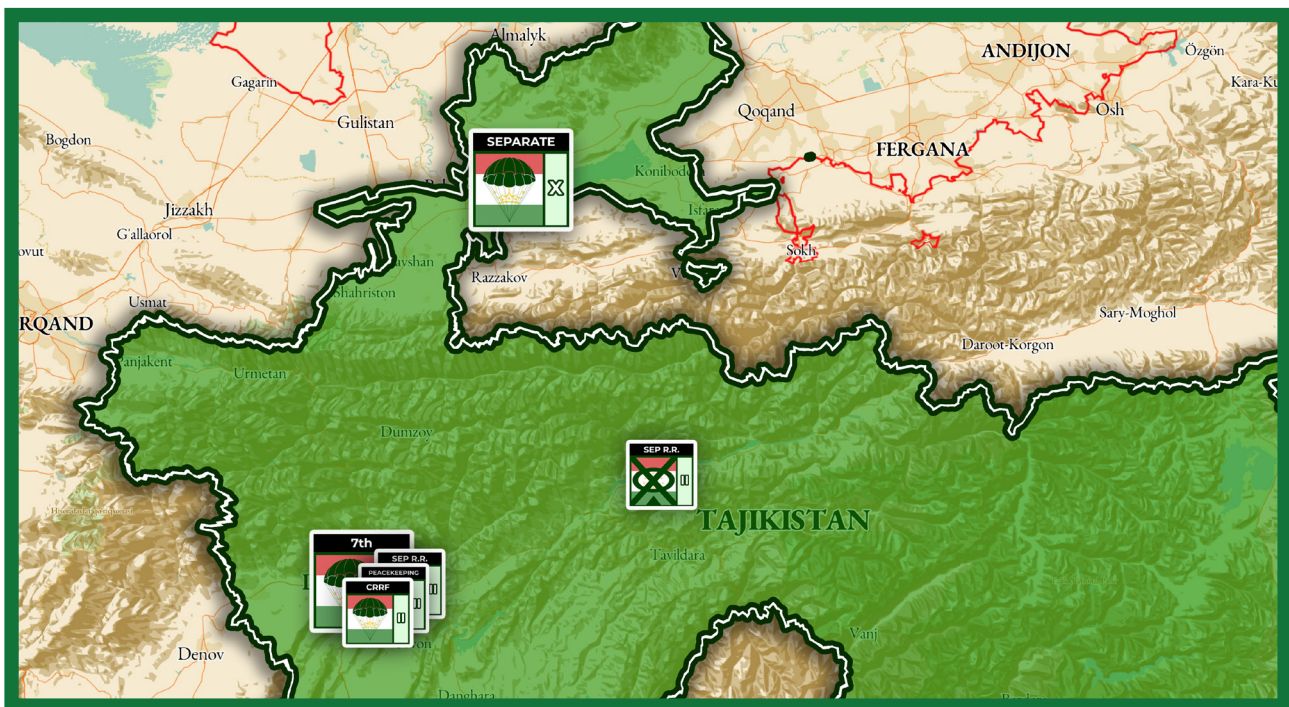
The operational doctrine of the Mobile Forces is closely modelled on the Russian VDV, placing a strong emphasis on rapid deployment, concentrated firepower, and manoeuvre warfare. However, what also sets these units apart from any of the standard MOD formations is the greater degree of autonomy reportedly afforded to mid- and lower-level officers, with commanders opting for this increased devolution so as to enable the Mobile Forces to respond with increased flexibility and adaptability in both conventional and asymmetric operations.

(Figure 6.6.1: Order of battle for the Tajik Mobile Forces)

As noted earlier, the Mobile Forces operate under a distinct chain of command, separate from the Ground Forces, and as such, also enjoy different remuneration to the soldiers of the Ground Forces. These Mobile units not only benefit from superior pay, accommodation, and equipment compared to their Ground Forces counterparts, but additionally, members of the Mobile Forces also enjoy much higher social standing and greater public recognition than the average Ground Forces conscript will. Whether a consequence of their prominence in media clips, or the government's regular showcasing of these units during national celebrations, the increased pay and social status are all likely encouraged by Dushanbe in hopes that it may reinforce the branches' loyalty toward the administration.

This perceived loyalty and independence from the other forces likely explains why Dushanbe feels confident in entrusting the Mobile Forces to be the most heavily armed units in three politically sensitive areas, including the northern city of Khujand, the central Rasht Valley, and the capital itself. As in addition to their role as a fast-moving strike force, the Mobile Forces also hold another critical, albeit less visible, function within the Tajik system: securing the administration in the event of a coup led by elements of other military branches. As if any of the other major formations within the Tajik forces decided to make a move toward Dushanbe, in efforts to overthrow the state, the Mobile Forces, particularly the garrisons stationed just to the east of Dushanbe, are strategically positioned to be able to not only secure the roads leading toward the capital, and prevent any attacking force from being able to reach the city, but they also possess enough firepower and capacity to be able to counter any National Guard elements already stationed within the city, with one force theoretically serving as a deterrent or counterbalance to the other.

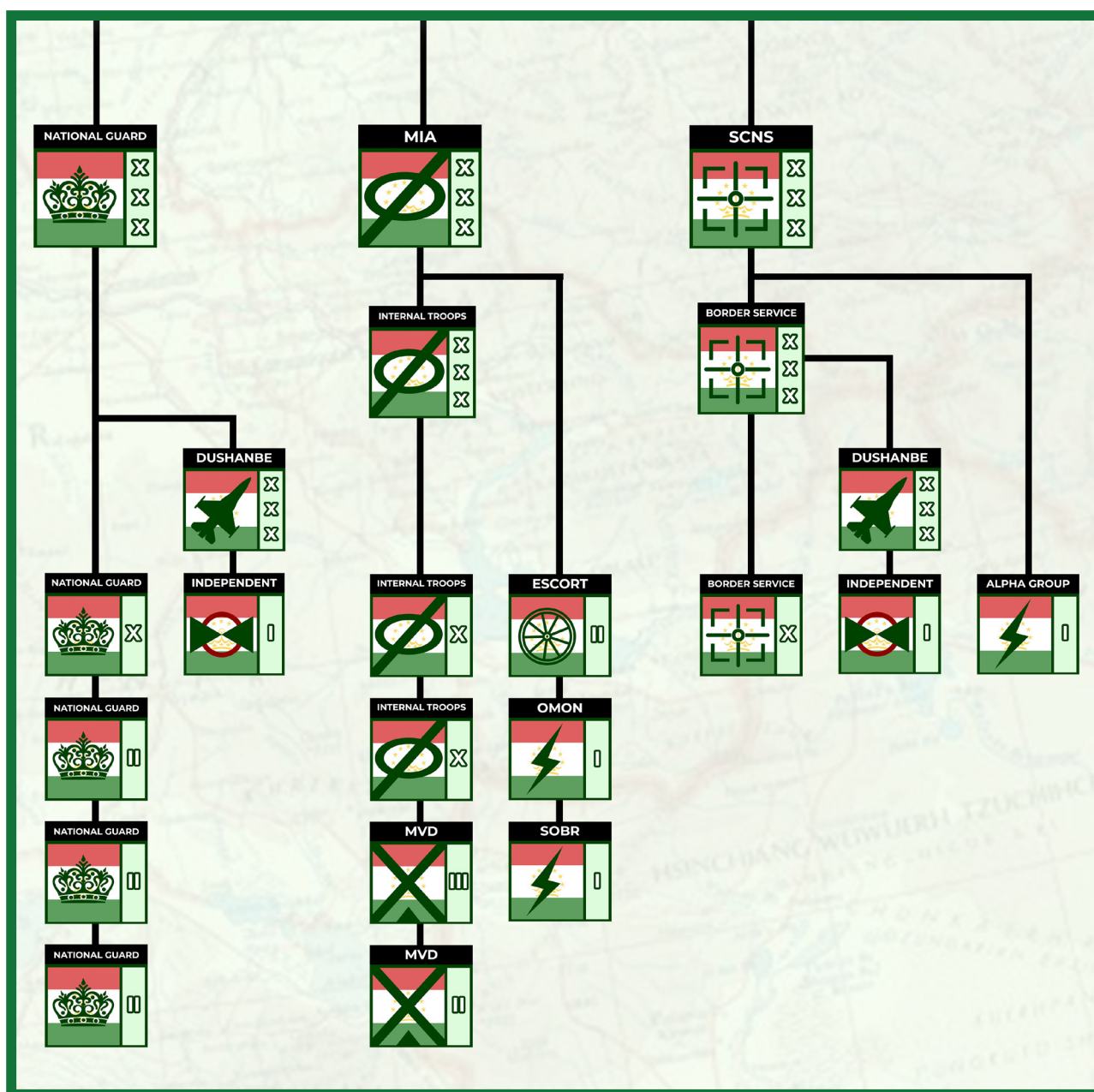
In the eyes of the government, this combination of capabilities likely positions the Mobile Forces as not just a critical offensive asset that would serve as the primary defence of the city if ever under invasion from the west, but also a strategic insurance policy for the administration, in case either Russia, the MIA or the National Guard, attempted to seize the capital by force.



(Figure 6.6.2: Map of Tajikistan's Mobile Forces' bases)

6.7: PARAMILITARY AND SPECIAL FORCES

Outside of the Ground Forces, the TJAADF and the Mobile Forces, Tajikistan also has other branches and services that serve to protect the country. Some of these units operate under the command of the Ministry of the Interior, while others answer to the SCNS. These paramilitary forces not only provide a significant armed counterweight to the Ministry of Defence's forces, but also usually have more specialised roles and tasks within the Tajik system.



(Figure 6.7.1: Order of battle for paramilitary and special forces)

Tajikistan's current defence structure is notably augmented by three large paramilitary organisations: the Tajik National Guard (TNG), the Internal Troops of Tajikistan (ITT), and the Tajik Border Service (TBS), with each of these entities operating under completely separate chains of command and departments. In Tajikistan, the concept of a "parallel force structure" is not a recent development, having its roots in the era of the Tajik SSR, with this kind of structure mirroring many of the political frameworks that existed within the Soviet Socialist Republic during that period. However, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Tajikistan faced significant resource constraints, forcing a reprioritisation of the funding allocations being directed toward each of these organisations.

6.7.1 - Special Forces Units



Initially, Dushanbe attempted to address budgetary constraints by creating "Potemkin" units, designated as Tajik Special Forces but largely composed of Russian soldiers posing as Tajik government forces. These units aimed to deter opposition activities through intimidation and form well-trained, fast-moving military units to maintain security within Tajikistan during the early years of independence. As early as the 1990s, decrees were issued to authorise the formation of specialised forces, such as the Interior Ministry Special Mission Battalion, now designated as Military Unit (M/U) 3571 of the MIA. While this unit is still in operation today, the actual establishment of

this battalion under direct Tajik control was deferred until the latter half of the decade due to limited access to funds.

(Figure 6.7.2: Symbology for the Alpha Group, now under the command of the SCNS)

Tajikistan's financial constraints during the early years of independence led to the formation of initial military units devolving into the hands of various factions. Consequently, some of the most effective special units in the 1990s, both during and after the civil war, were formed as personal militias or armed gangs. For instance, in 1993, Mahmud Khudoiberdiyev's aligned units, who obtained weapons from the Russian 201st Division, played a crucial role in supporting Kulobi forces to break opposition lines, shifting the war's momentum back toward Dushanbe. In recognition of their efforts, these units were rewarded by President Rahmon, who later appointed Khudoiberdiyev to head the 1st Rapid Reaction Brigade in Qurghonteppa (now Boktar).

However, from that point onward, Khudoiberdiyev's forces periodically clashed with Rahmon's forces over control of everything from military equipment allotments and key government appointments, eventually even turning against Rahmon later in the civil war. Fearing the military power that had been consolidated within these units, and their perceived "dual loyalties", Rahmon's post-war consolidation of power saw him move against such leaders and their personalised military forces. By the summer of 1997, Khudoiberdiyev was defeated in a direct confrontation with the government in Khujand during a failed coup attempt. The administration then moved to dissolve any units that were not directly loyal to the president or his clan. By 1997, a more tangible military presence was established in the country. This included stationing four units of the Presidential Guard in strategically important cities such as Chkalovsk (now Buston) in Sughd, Kalinin in the Dushanbe district, and Obigarm in Roghun city.

The primary objective of these deployments to bolster existing units and enhance state control over strategically important areas through formations directly controlled by the president.

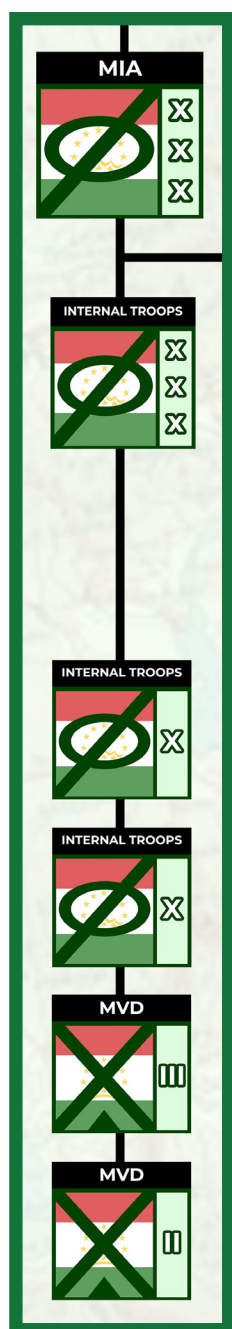
The structure of these units proved successful, with commanders of many key formations showing high loyalty to the president personally. In response, Dushanbe further strengthened these units, leading to the current Tajik model and balance of forces. These special groups and branches enjoy the favour of President Rahmon while also receiving equipment from donor states and partner militaries. For example, SCNS Alpha forces, although much smaller and less logistically robust than the 7th Air Assault Brigade, are considered by some to be the preeminent armed special force in the country.

In addition to the Alpha Group, the Ministry of Internal Affairs also maintains its own specialised units for combating organised crime and internal dissent. These include a special operations unit, a unit dedicated to the protection of dignitaries and the head of state, and even a unit tasked with organising the other special units. Among these, the OMON special purpose troops are particularly notable. Both Alpha and OMON regularly receive foreign aid, assistance, training, and equipment. For instance, OMON (which is still commonly referred to by its Russian acronym) has trained directly with the US embassy on several occasions for counterterror operations, and both units receive training from US special forces and other experts. Their training encompasses reconnaissance skills, sniper operations, raids and ambushes, close-quarters battle, and other counterterrorism tactics. Collectively, these relatively small units receive millions in annual funding, along with arms and ammunition from the state and foreign donors.



(Figure 6.7.3: Tajik special forces participating in joint training with the US Army Special Operations Command. Source: US Army, 3rd Psychological Operations Battalion)

6.7.2 - The Internal Troops of Tajikistan



Headquarters: Dushanbe

Commanded by: Ministry of Internal Affairs

Force number: 3,800

The Internal Troops of Tajikistan (ITT) operate under the command of the MIA, represent an important pillar of the nation's internal security mechanism. These troops fulfil a dual role as both the primary reserve force for the Tajik armed forces and the mainstay for domestic defence initiatives and public order maintenance. More importantly, in the event of a large-scale domestic uprising that escalates beyond the capacity of the local police, these internal troops would be the units called upon to attempt to curb the protests.

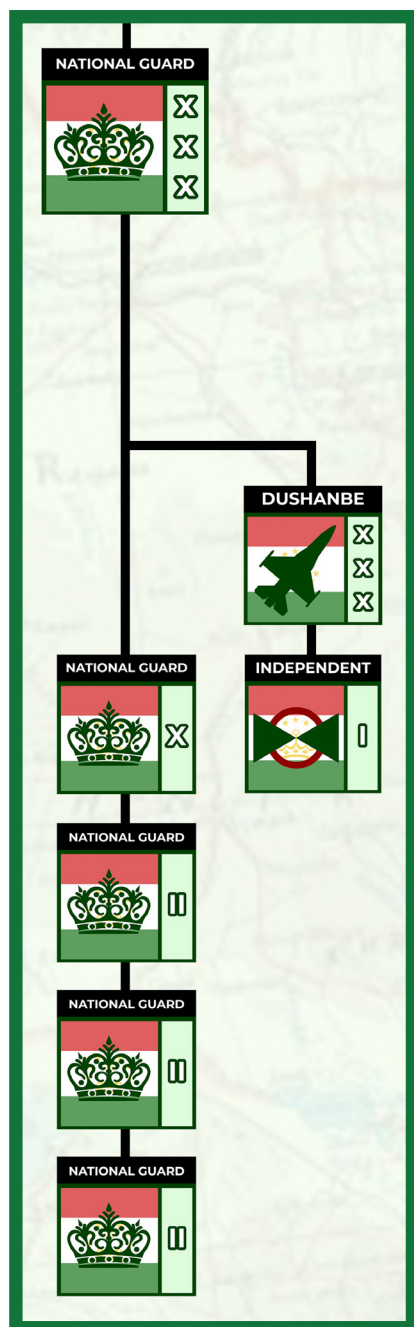
Like most of the states of the other Central Asian republics, their operational framework is completely isolated from other branches of the traditional armed forces, with a separate command structure and a much broader deployment footprint across the country. As while the MOD's forces are often grouped into larger formations and deployed across only a small number of concentrated bases, the Internal Forces are deployed in much smaller numbers but across many more locations. In almost every large city across Tajikistan, there is likely to be at least some small presence by the internal forces, allowing them to respond quickly to any crisis or uprising, wherever it may occur in the country.

At the time of writing, the ITT maintains a permanent strength of just 3,800 personnel, with the majority of its units, aside from some of its more specialised battalions, being comparatively less equipped than the MIA's other special forces units or the Mobile Forces. This is somewhat understandable, as while the ITT suffers from a lack of tanks and heavy artillery found in other branches of the armed forces, these units primarily operate with equipment tailored for managing civil unrest rather than engaging in high-intensity conflicts. The ITT is a force that is almost entirely focused on domestic operations, with their duties instead encompassing the protection of public order, ensuring the security and integrity of critical national infrastructure, assisting local and national law enforcement, and contributing to the country's territorial defence efforts, with their mandate

also extends to counterterrorism activities, safeguarding the Interior Ministry's logistical assets, and providing immediate response and support in the aftermath of natural disasters, significant accidents, and other emergencies. Additionally, the ITT also actively works to curb organised crime and terrorism throughout the country, particularly through the 6th Department, also known as the Bureau for Organized Crime Control. This department, a vestige of the Soviet era, is tasked with selectively thwarting organised criminal activities and subversive terrorist operations, further stretching the already extensive list of tasks assigned to the Internal Troops over the years.

(Figure 6.7.4: Order of battle for the Internal Troops)

6.7.3 - The Tajik National Guard



Headquarters: Dushanbe

Commanded by: President of Tajikistan

Force number: 1,200

The Tajik National Guard (TNG) is an elite force of approximately 1,200 soldiers, all of whom are under the direct command of the President. This is one of the best-equipped and trained segments of the nation's military apparatus and is often called upon for national celebrations and demonstrations. The National Guard in Tajikistan has been likened to a praetorian guard, in that the officers of the branch often have personal loyalties to the President, with many of them having even come from the same hometown. While the President still has the final word on all TNG decisions, their operational leadership and day-to-day activities are executed by the unit commander who is selected by the President.

With the TNG being tasked with guaranteeing the personal security of the President and senior administration, it is imperative that this force cannot be reassigned away from its role overseeing the protection of the executive. This likely explains President Rahmon's decision to keep the National Guard's chain of command completely separate from any other ministries or committees, ensuring that only he has the authority to select the commanders, reassign or forward deploy the unit.

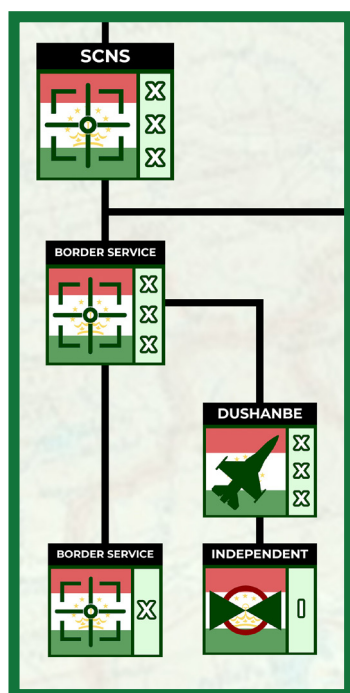
However, in another unique oddity of the Tajik military, the TNG, despite the unit's close ties to the president, does not have a representative on the Security Council, further distancing them from the other branches. This may be to maintain compartmentalisation within the armed forces' commands, but it could also be driven by a desire to prevent internal tensions between the TNG commanders and the other conventional armed forces, who reportedly

envy the branch's often unaccountable access to the funds and materials. With these conclusions around the inter-service rivalries being outlined in a series of documents and diplomatic cables released by WikiLeaks in 2007.

Overall, with its broad legal powers, better weaponry, and close access to the president, the National Guard acts as a final safeguard against both external threats and internal destabilisation efforts, wherever the president will be.

(Figure 6.7.5: Order of battle for the National Guard)

6.7.4 - The Tajik Border Service



Headquarters: Dushanbe

Commanded by: State Committee for National Security

Force number: 2,500

The Tajik Border Service (TBS) operates under the command of the SCNS and consists of a contingent of approximately 2,500 personnel stationed at key points along the nation's borders and airports. These forces serve as the initial line of defence against incursions by foreign nations, organised crime, traffickers, and terrorists.

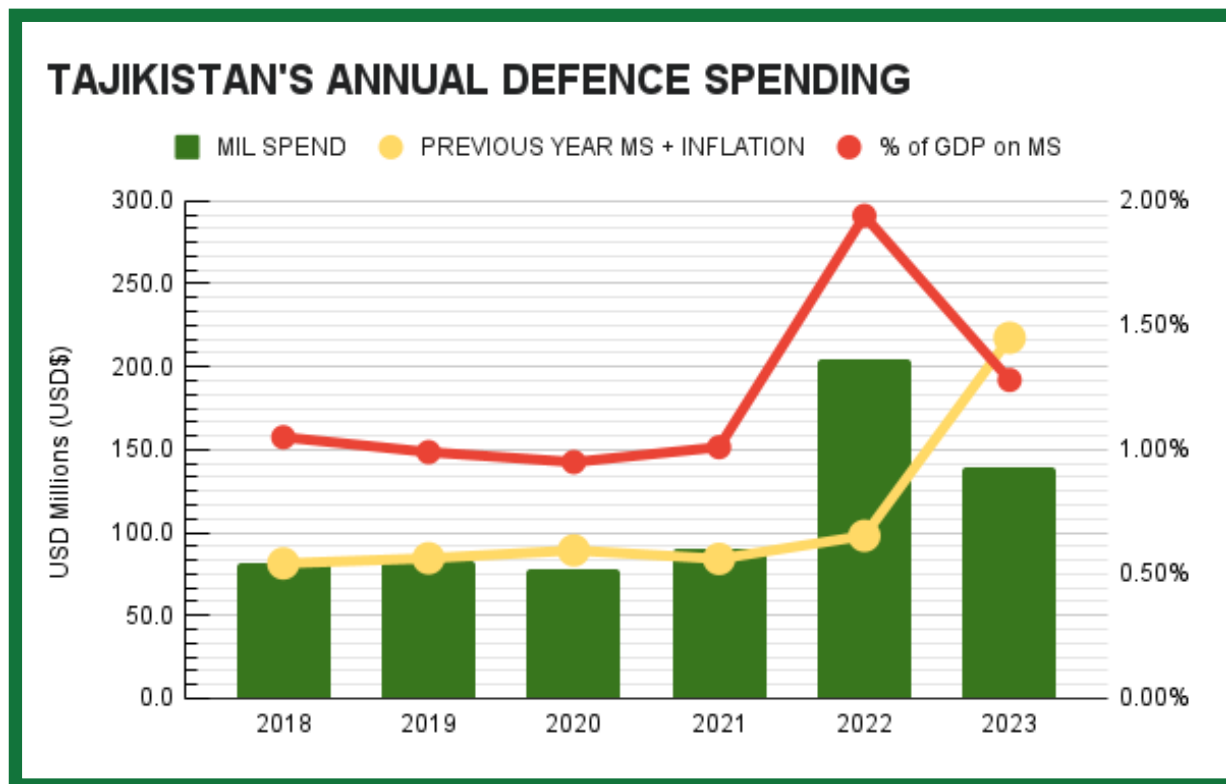
In recent history, the Border Service has frequently engaged in direct combat with one of Tajikistan's neighbouring states. The Border SCNS clashed with Kyrgyz troops on the border in 2011, 2014, 2021, and 2022. These incidents initially erupted between the two nations' border services and then escalated to involve each country's conventional militaries. The border forces of both sides operate under less stringent rules of engagement compared to the ground or internal

forces, allowing them to immediately engage any enemy force or insurgent group attempting to cross the border without waiting for Dushanbe's permission. However, this also increases the risk of encounters between Tajik and Kyrgyz border forces escalating into firefights during patrols.

Currently, the majority of the Border Service's personnel are conscripts, equipped with somewhat substandard weaponry, also often being deployed far away from their homes or any other large city. Yet, despite these equipment and location challenges, the Border Service remains an attractive assignment for many Tajiks, due to the fact that these positions can be easily exploited for personal gain through unauthorised cooperation with smuggling rings, taking bribes to allow selective illegal goods or people into the country. From reports and interviews with members of the Tajik armed forces, the border forces stationed along the crossing points into Afghanistan are usually particularly well off compared to the average Tajik soldier, with border guards along that border able to make significant amounts of money by facilitating the lucrative heroin trade coming out of Afghanistan and into Tajikistan. The problems are arguably exacerbated by the Border Service's operational autonomy, which allows for minimal oversight with respect to how the organisation operates both at the border and internally, with even their parent organisation (the SCNS) also answering directly to the president. Due to this autonomy, border troops are equipped to function independently and are structured to fulfil their objectives with minimal dependence on or oversight from any of the other military branches. Organisationally, the branch is divided into three regional administrations, 17 border detachments, two special purpose (often referred to by the Russian acronym, Spetsnaz) units, and an independent air squadron operating out of Dushanbe. While some argue that this strategic independence is crucial for the execution of this branch's very specialised missions, it can create obvious inefficiencies and corruption and could make cross-service coordination during times of war or emergency more challenging.

(Figure 6.7.6: Simplified order of battle for the Border Service)

6.8: PROCUREMENT AND DEFENCE BUDGETS



(Figure 6.8.1: A graph of Tajik defence budgets over time (in millions of US dollars). The green columns represent Tajikistan's total annual defence budget, the red line indicates defence spending as a percentage of GDP, and the yellow line illustrates the amount of spending required to counter real losses due to inflation, assuming the same level of military spending as the previous year is maintained)

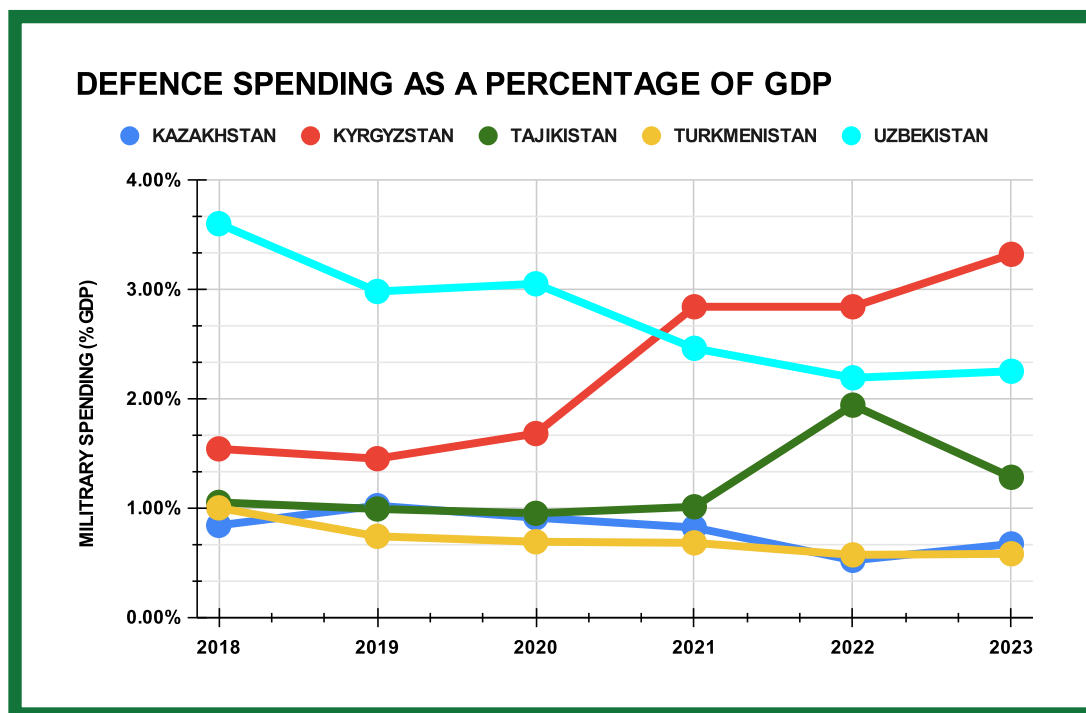
Given Tajikistan's low Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the smallest among the five Central Asian states, it is unsurprising that it consistently ranks at the bottom in terms of defence expenditure in the region. However, while Tajikistan's defence spending has in the past been relatively comparable to Kyrgyzstan's, this dynamic now appears to be shifting. Kyrgyzstan has increased its defence spending to new record levels, whereas Tajikistan's defence budget has declined over 2022–2023. As a result, Dushanbe now possesses a defence budget that is less than half of Kyrgyzstan's, and less than 10 per cent of Uzbekistan's. With that said though, these raw numbers only tell a small part of the story, as, despite its limited defence budget, Tajikistan has been able to compensate

A SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR PARTNERS AT FORECAST INTERNATIONAL FOR THEIR INVALUABLE ASSISTANCE IN SOURCING FINANCIAL DATA AND OFFICIAL BUDGETARY FIGURES FOR THIS CHAPTER.

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for many of these shortfalls by leveraging international partnerships and securing foreign military assistance from countries such as Russia, China, India, the United States, Iran, and even the European Union. Much of this support being provided to Dushanbe because of its strategic proximity to Afghanistan, an increasingly critical area for regional security. Tajikistan’s position along Afghanistan’s northern frontier has made it a key partner for these external powers, with states willing to offer Dushanbe funding to help maintain control over their southern borders. Particularly in more recent years, security leaders in Dushanbe have been able to successfully appeal to the strategic interests and priorities of donor states, and secure substantial support for the Tajik Armed Forces, with multiple states having now invested capital or military support into the country’s security and border services. The result of all of this being that the funds Dushanbe would have otherwise spent on the TBS can instead be saved, redirected toward domestic programs or potentially into the pockets of key decision-makers. Wherever the funds do end up though, this strategy of working closely with a number of key security partners, allows Tajikistan to continuously seek foreign support for its external security needs, while focusing the majority of its actual defence budget towards its internal security needs.

6.8.1 - Defence Budgets



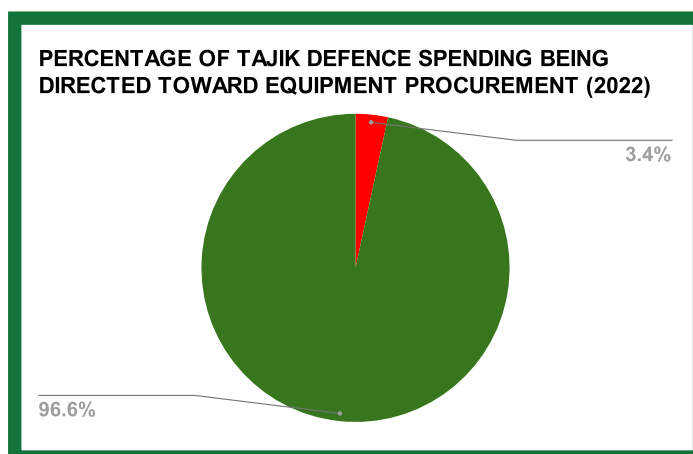
(Figure 6.8.2: A comparative graph of defence spending as a percentage of national GDP for the five Central Asian states from 2018 to 2023)

While Tajikistan’s official defence expenditure figures remain highly opaque, with the government even occasionally altering the categorisation of what is included under “defence spending,” it is generally understood that the nation’s defence expenditures typically fluctuate between 1 and 1.5 per cent of its GDP. Among the five Central Asian republics, this positions Tajikistan fifth in terms of absolute defence spending, but usually third or fourth when measured as a percentage of GDP. However, 2022 marked a significant shift in this dynamic, driven by a combination of external and internal factors that reshaped Tajikistan’s defence priorities and spending patterns.

Historically, Tajikistan has maintained a relatively stable level of military spending, typically increasing its defence budget in line with overall GDP growth. However, in 2022, following an 8 per cent rise in national GDP, Dushanbe significantly increased its defence spending by an unprecedented 126 per cent. While there had been calls within Dushanbe for a substantial infusion of capital into the armed forces, this sharp rise was more likely driven by external factors rather than internal decision-making processes. The first of these factors likely being the conflict in Batken, which exposed significant deficiencies in Tajikistan’s military capabilities and prompted urgent efforts to recapitalise and modernise key elements of the state’s ageing equipment, with the majority of these upgrades subsequently carried out through the acquisition of modernisation kits supplied by Russia and China. The other external factor influencing Tajikistan’s defence expenditure being Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine and the subsequent imposition of sanctions on Russia. Where as a result of these events, Russia was compelled to redirect the majority of its arms production toward meeting its domestic needs, thereby reducing the overall availability and increasing the cost of Russian military equipment and ammunition on the open market. These supply shortages would then end up forcing Tajikistan to temporarily seek alternative defence suppliers, as it was increasingly priced out of the market by wealthier nations like India, China, Egypt, and Kazakhstan, which continue to rely on Russian parts and ammunition to sustain their own military forces.

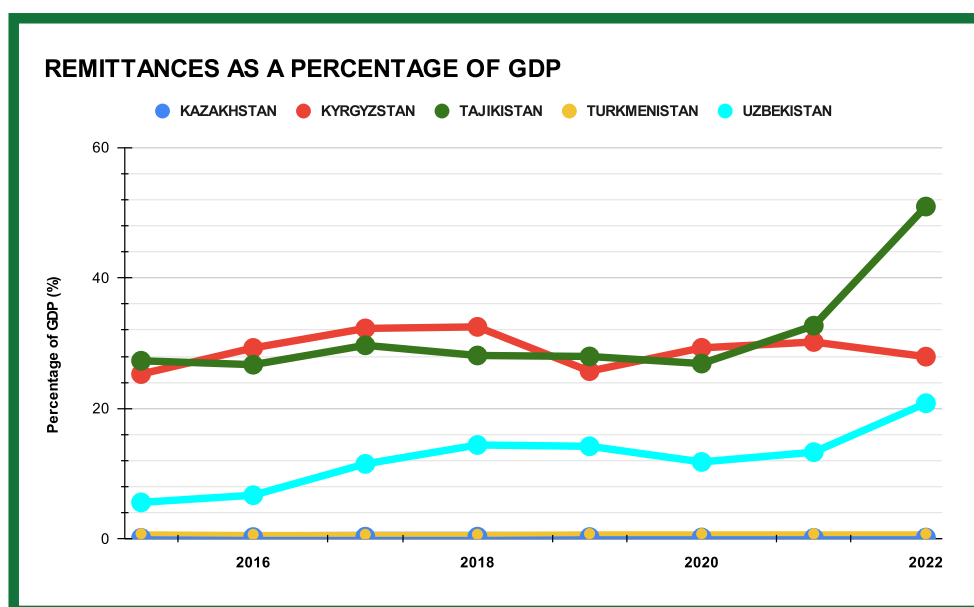
Additionally, the subsequent sanctions then introduced an entirely new dynamic to the Central Asian defence market, as imports of arms and dual-use technologies from Western states into Central Asia surged to unprecedented levels following their implementation. While the additional imports coming into Tajikistan were nowhere near the levels seen in Kyrgyzstan, and the majority of these imports into Tajikistan likely did represent legitimate efforts to acquire spare parts and equipment from the open market, a portion of these transactions appear to have been made with the intention of either donating or reselling these goods onto Russia. If this is the case, it would help explain the sharp increase in military sales into Central Asia during 2022, when Russia’s defence industry faced severe production shortages and was in desperate need of everything from metal lathes to GPS systems, as well as why this trend began to ease by late 2023, as Russia’s defence production gradually rose to meet its basic domestic requirements, and more streamlined routes had been established elsewhere to facilitate Moscow’s needs for otherwise unattainable dual-use equipment. However, with Russia’s defence sector now more capable of meeting its domestic requirements and Russian defence exports gradually reappearing on the open market, we are likely to gain a much clearer understanding of the long-term defence spending trajectories of both Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan moving forward. However, for now, an analysis of Tajikistan’s available defence expenditure data reveals that, in most years, only a small portion of the national defence budget is allocated towards new procurements. The majority of the budget is instead being consumed by the maintainance and operation of Tajikistan’s numerous military bases and outposts, as well as personnel costs, wages, and the ongoing sustainment of its forces.

(Figure 6.8.3: A pie chart illustrating the allocation of the Tajik military budget towards acquiring new technologies and platforms in 2022. Procurement spending is highlighted in red, while other expenditures, such as personnel costs and maintenance, are shown in green)



However, with Russia’s defence sector now more capable of meeting its domestic requirements and Russian defence exports gradually reappearing on the open market, we are likely to gain a much clearer understanding of the long-term defence spending trajectories of both Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan moving forward. However, for now, an analysis of Tajikistan’s available defence expenditure data reveals that, in most years, only a small portion of the national defence budget is allocated towards new procurements. The majority of the budget is instead being consumed by the maintenance and operation of Tajikistan’s numerous military bases and outposts, as well as personnel costs, wages, and the ongoing sustainment of its forces.

A closer examination of the type of new equipment being acquired by the armed forces of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan since 2022 suggests that both countries are now allocating most of their procurement resources towards assets such as UAVs, portable air-defence systems, anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) systems, and modernisation packages for their existing legacy Soviet-era vehicles, with the majority of these newer acquisitions likely being directed toward enhancing their respective defensive capabilities along the Batken frontier. Assuming regional politics continue along their current trajectory, most regional military analysts consider the 2026–2028 period crucial to monitor. As by this time, both Tajik and Kyrgyz forces are expected to have procured their UAV fleets and rebuilt the military capabilities that were either depleted or revealed to be inadequate during the 2022 skirmishes. By then, the two nations may either settle into a comfortable status quo and revert back to pre-2022 levels of military spending, or, if still concerned about the other, may continue escalating their arms race in preparation for another potential skirmish over the Batken region. Regardless of which strategic path Dushanbe pursues though, Tajikistan faces significant economic risks if security conditions in either Tajikistan or Russia deteriorate over the next few years. As in just 2022, remittances from Tajik workers in Russia accounted for 51% of Tajikistan’s GDP, the highest remittance dependency rate of any nation globally. This means that any shock to the Russian economy, whether positive or negative, will have immediate and severe impacts on Tajikistan’s financial stability. This extreme financial reliance on Russia not only ties the strength of the Tajik somoni closely to the Russian ruble, but also places Dushanbe in a position where it really cannot afford to oppose Moscow’s demands, as doing so could result in significant damage to its GDP almost overnight if Moscow were to amend its visa laws or halt the flow of remittances back toward Tajikistan.



(Figure 6.8.4: A comparative graph illustrating the level of remittances as a percentage of GDP across the five Central Asian republics from 2015 to 2022)

6.8.2 - Procurement Preferences

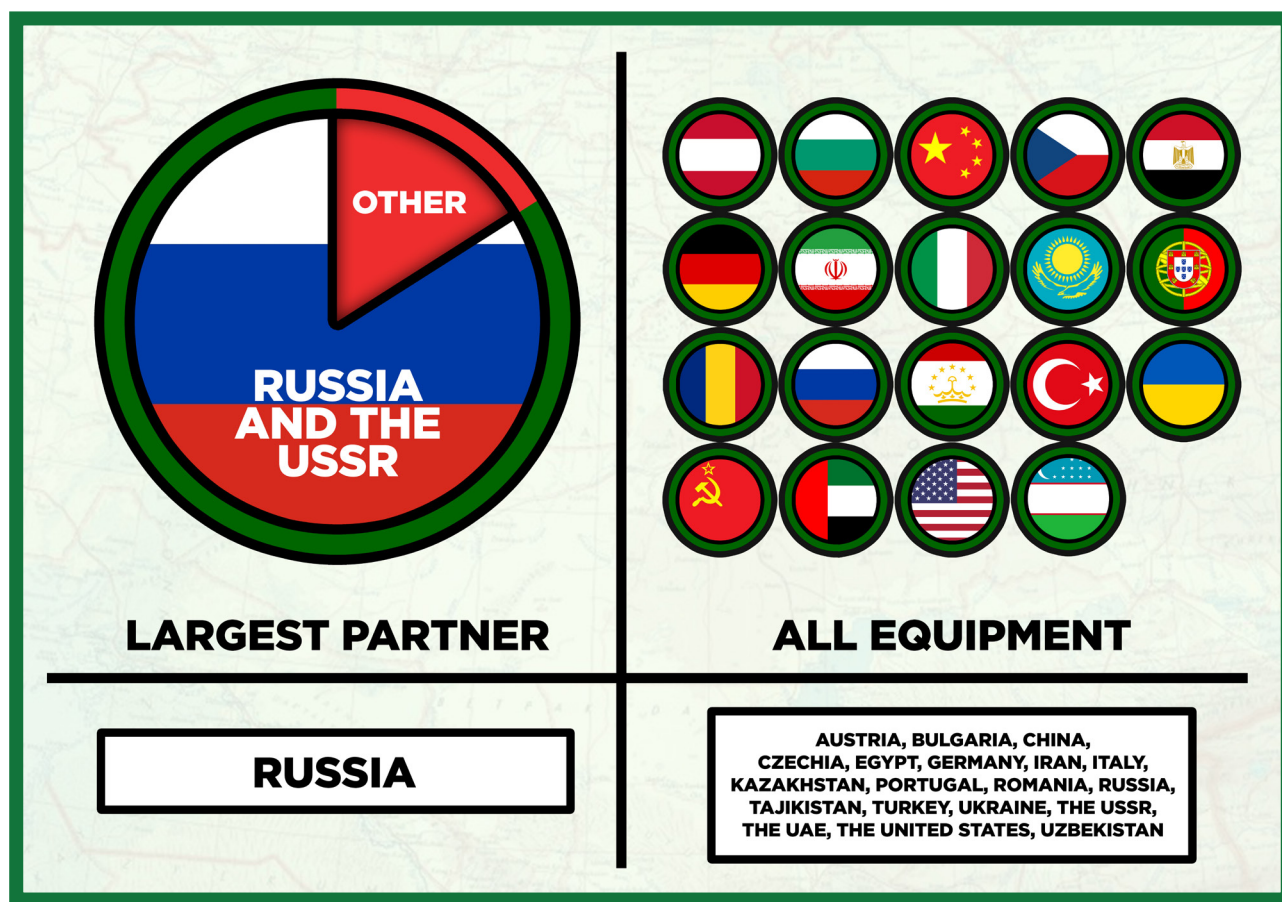
Outside of 2022, Tajikistan's primary partner for arms, ammunition, weapons systems, and other military supplies is still undoubtedly Russia, as Moscow not only provides Dushanbe with much of the weaponry that the Tajik military uses on a daily basis, but also offers Tajikistan significant price discounts and favourable loan terms compared to those available in other markets. Additionally, Tajikistan also heavily relies on Russian support for maintaining and managing its large fleet of legacy vehicles and weapons systems, with this dependence also extending to Russian repair services, as well as the provision of ammunition and modernisation packages necessary to keep these systems operational. While China temporarily supplanted Russia as Tajikistan's largest source of arms in 2022, Russia has since regained its dominant position within the Tajik arms market. What is notable though, is that China's role in the Tajik arms market has not merely returned to its pre-2022 levels, and instead, China has emerged as a significantly stronger secondary supplier to the Tajik state, particularly in the provision of armoured vehicles and small arms. While China will likely be happy with its improved position here in the Tajik market, China may face growing competition in this secondary role, as nations such as Iran and Turkey have also been making notable inroads into Tajikistan's defence market. For now though, Tajikistan seems to be falling in line with a pattern currently being seen right across Central Asia, where the state is reliant upon Russia for its essential sustainment needs and modernisation packages, but actively seeking outside partners for the procurement of drones and specialised military equipment, with Russia now falling well behind actors in Iran, Turkey and China in this sector of the market.

On the export front, Tajikistan still remains a very minor player, even by regional standards, although Dushanbe is attempting to address these challenges by developing a domestic market for loitering munitions, drones, light armoured vehicles, and armoured personnel carriers, as well as other trucks and support vehicles. However, most regional trade experts are sceptical as to the economic feasibility of this plan due to the persistent challenges within the Tajik economy, such as inefficient transport routes to Russia, underdeveloped industrial capacity, and a lack of specially skilled human capital to meet production demands. Despite all of that though, Tajikistan has been having some successes in its export programs, particularly when it comes to the manufacturing and export of Iranian drones.

*(Figure 6.8.5:
A Tajik-made
Ababil-2,
manufactured
in Dushanbe in
2022. Source:
AIJ News)*



6.8.3 - Vehicles, Platforms, and Ordnance

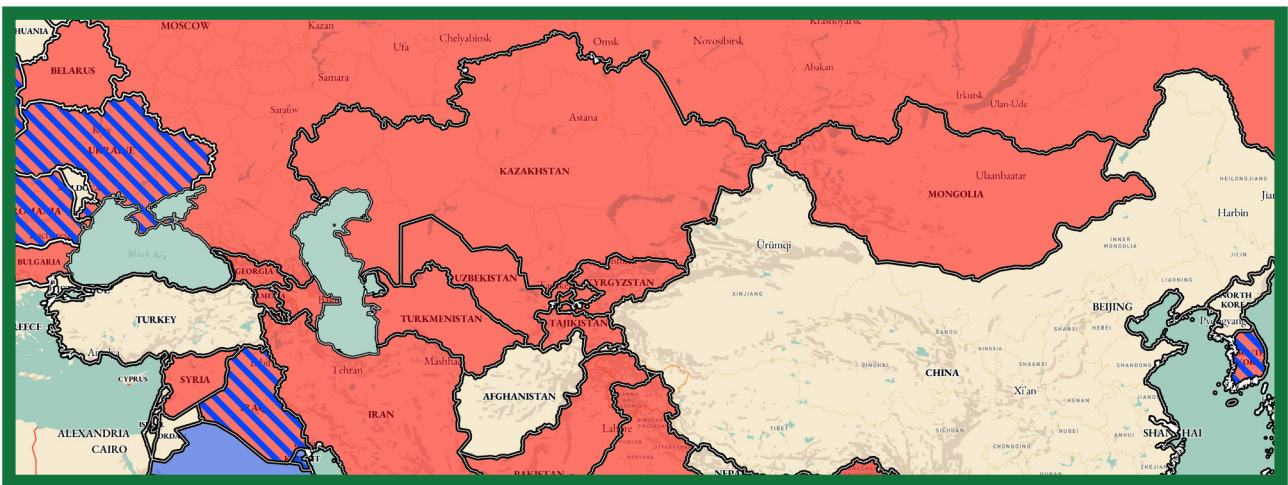


(Figure 6.8.6: A chart illustrating the countries from which Tajikistan's military platforms have been procured or manufactured (right), alongside a pie chart showing the proportion of these platforms produced in Russia or the former Soviet Union (left))

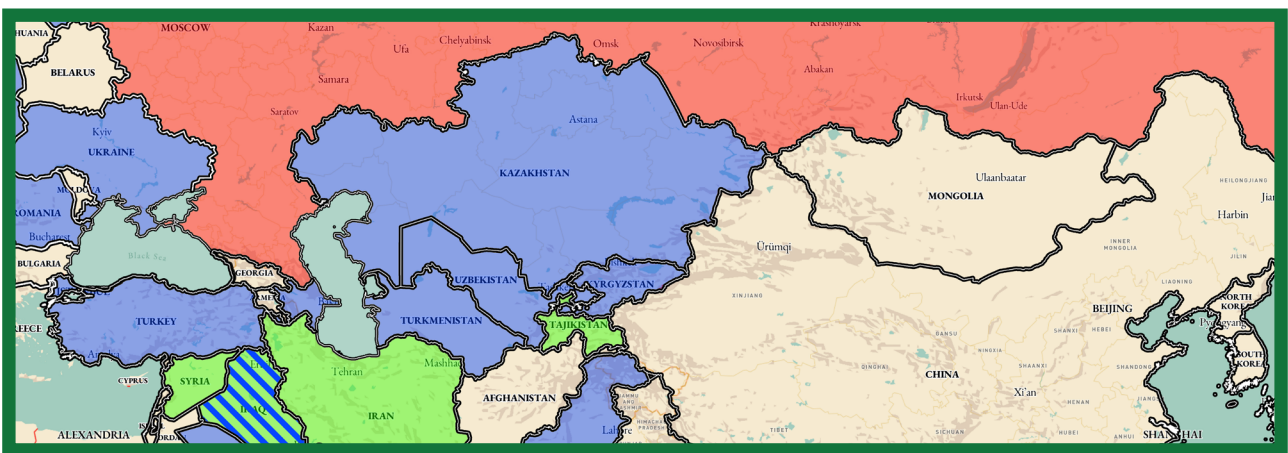
While Tajikistan is unlikely to completely sever its dependence on Russian and Chinese defence industries in the foreseeable future, there are growing efforts from Dushanbe aimed at diversifying its military procurement, with a significant part of this revolving around the development of domestic production for armoured vehicles. As part of these efforts, In 2023, the president attended the inauguration of the Sipar Group (or Shield Group), the first Tajik national company to manufacture armoured vehicles, with Sipar's production plant in Tursunzoda having already launched several models based on Emirati, Ukrainian, and Turkish designs. However, while these factories were promoted as domestic manufacturing ventures and championed by the government, in reality, their manufacturing could more accurately be described as vehicle assembly plants. As at present, these Tajik facilities still rely almost entirely on parts manufactured by the Streit Group in the UAE, which are then subsequently shipped to Tajikistan for final assembly.

As previously mentioned, Dushanbe has also turned to Tehran to strengthen its military capabilities, where in 2022, Iran inaugurated a drone manufacturing facility in Tajikistan, marking the first instance of Iranian defence production being established abroad. The factory, located in Dushanbe, produces and exports the Iranian-designed Ababil-2 drone, with the Ababil-2 now serving multiple roles for both the Tajik and Iranian militaries, including functioning as a targetdrone for training air defence crews, as a cost-effective short-range surveillance drone,

and, when equipped with lethal payloads, as a basic combat drone. Currently, Tajikistan is the only Central Asian country to host an Iranian drone factory, with the other four republics opting to work more closely with Turkey for their drone production. While Tajikistan may seem like an outlier in this regard, its decision aligns with a broader regional trend observed across all five Central Asian republics. As each of these states generally follows the same pattern of relying on Russia and China for traditional military platforms such as tanks, aircraft, artillery, and heavy weaponry, while also sourcing the majority of their drones and unmanned systems from a diverse range of countries, including Turkey, Iran, China, Israel, Pakistan, Belarus, and the United States. This trend offers an interesting insight into the Central Asian Republic's underlying attitude towards Russian arms manufacturing. As while there is an understandable preference for working with Russia, largely due to the cost savings associated with upgrading Soviet-era tanks and equipment rather than purchasing entirely new systems, when it comes to adopting newer weapons systems like drones, where establishment costs are not the driving factor in the decisionmaking, all five Central Asian states are instead choosing to diversify their supply chains away from Moscow. While just one isolated example, this shift away from Russia for the procurement of new systems could be an early indication of where the five Central Asian republics' long-term procurement preferences may be headed.

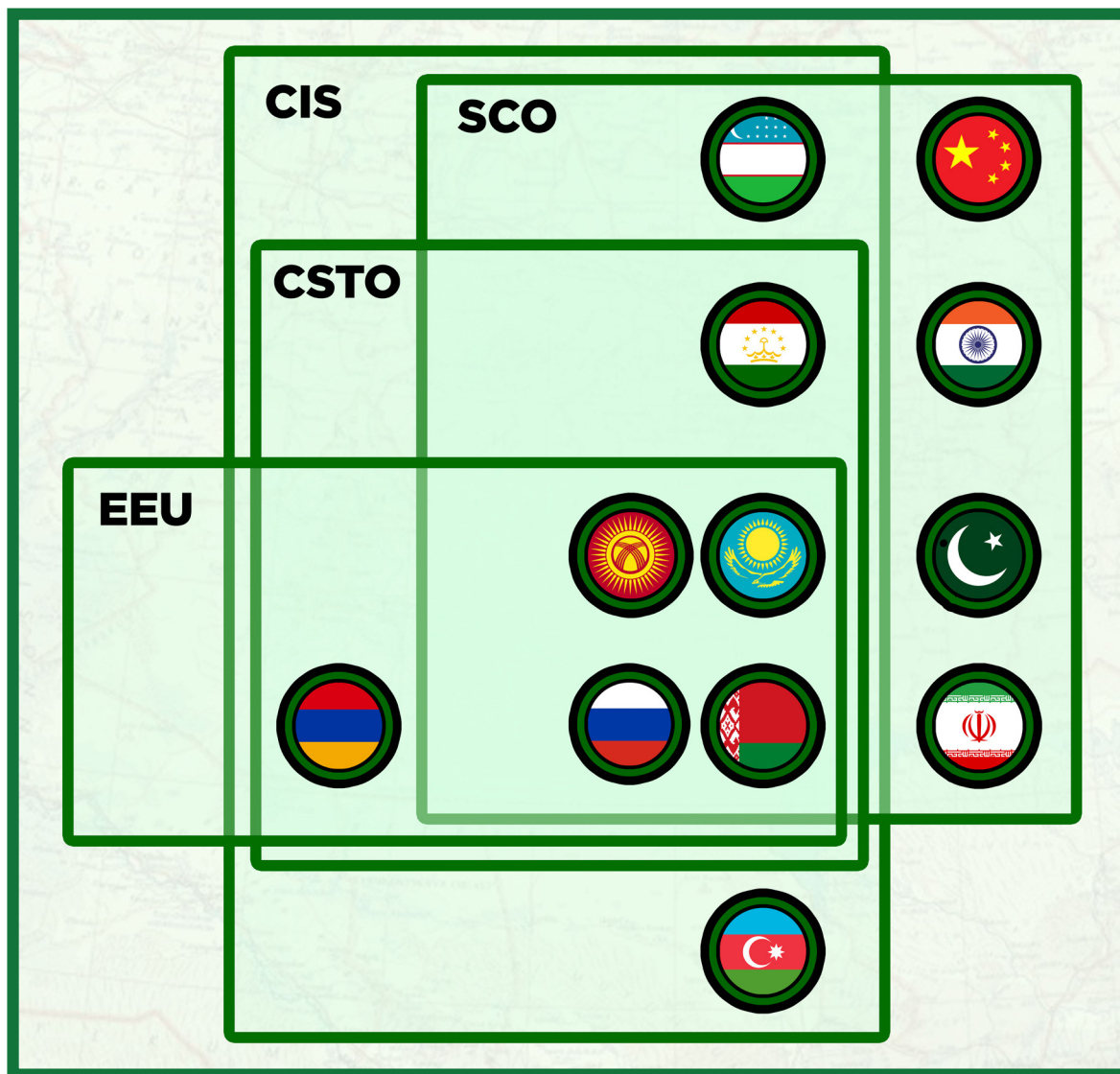


(Figure 6.8.7: A map highlighting global tank sales, with countries using Russian/Soviet-made T-72 tanks marked in red, and those using US-made M1A1 Abrams tanks marked in blue)



(Figure 6.8.8: A map highlighting drone sales, with countries using the Russian-made Orion-E UAV marked in red, countries using the Turkish-made Bayraktar TB2 marked in blue, and countries using the Iranian/Tajik-made Ababil-2 marked in green)

6.9: ALLIANCES AND FOREIGN DEPLOYMENTS

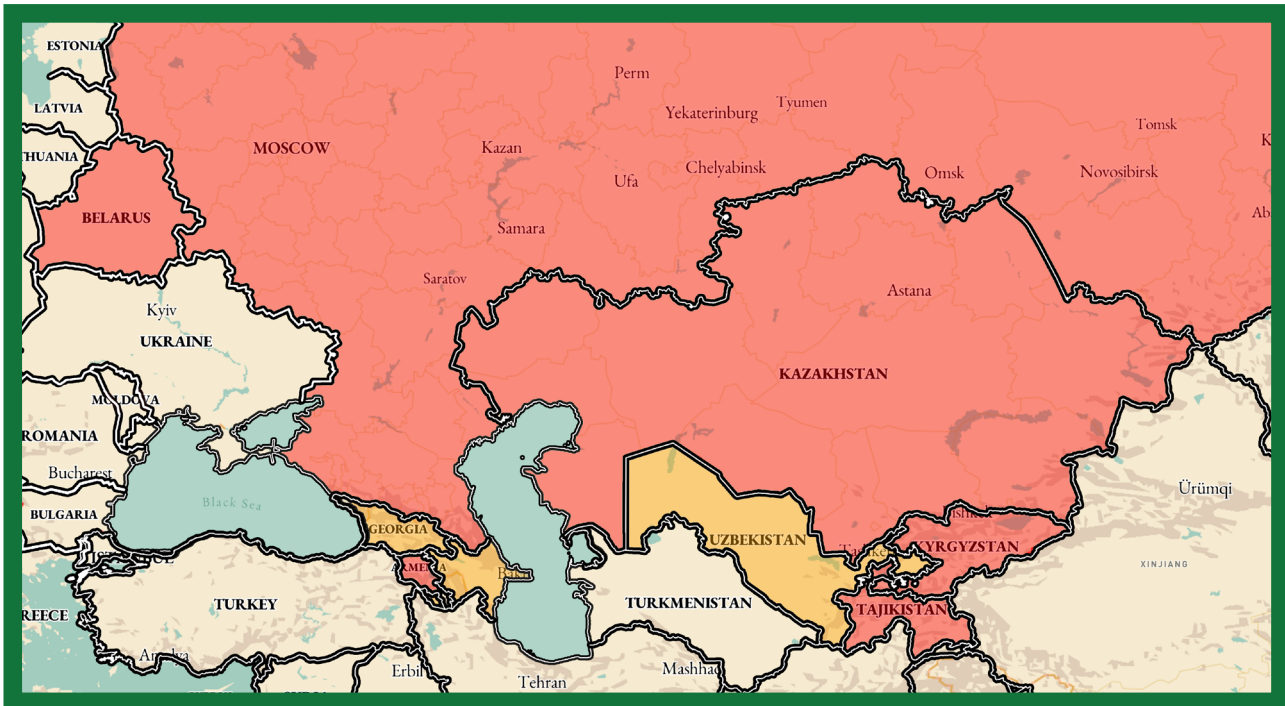


(Figure 6.9.1: A diagram of the organisational overlaps for Tajikistan, outlining the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), and the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU))

6.9.1 - Vehicles, Platforms, and Ordnance

As a smaller republic in this region, Tajikistan relies heavily on international alliances and partnerships to maintain its security and stability. Notably, Tajikistan is the only country in the world to simultaneously host military facilities for Russia, China, and India, a strong indicator of its strategic importance. Despite being somewhat less integrated into Central Asian networks during the Soviet era compared to its northern neighbours (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan), Tajikistan has since become a key geopolitical focal point for external powers.

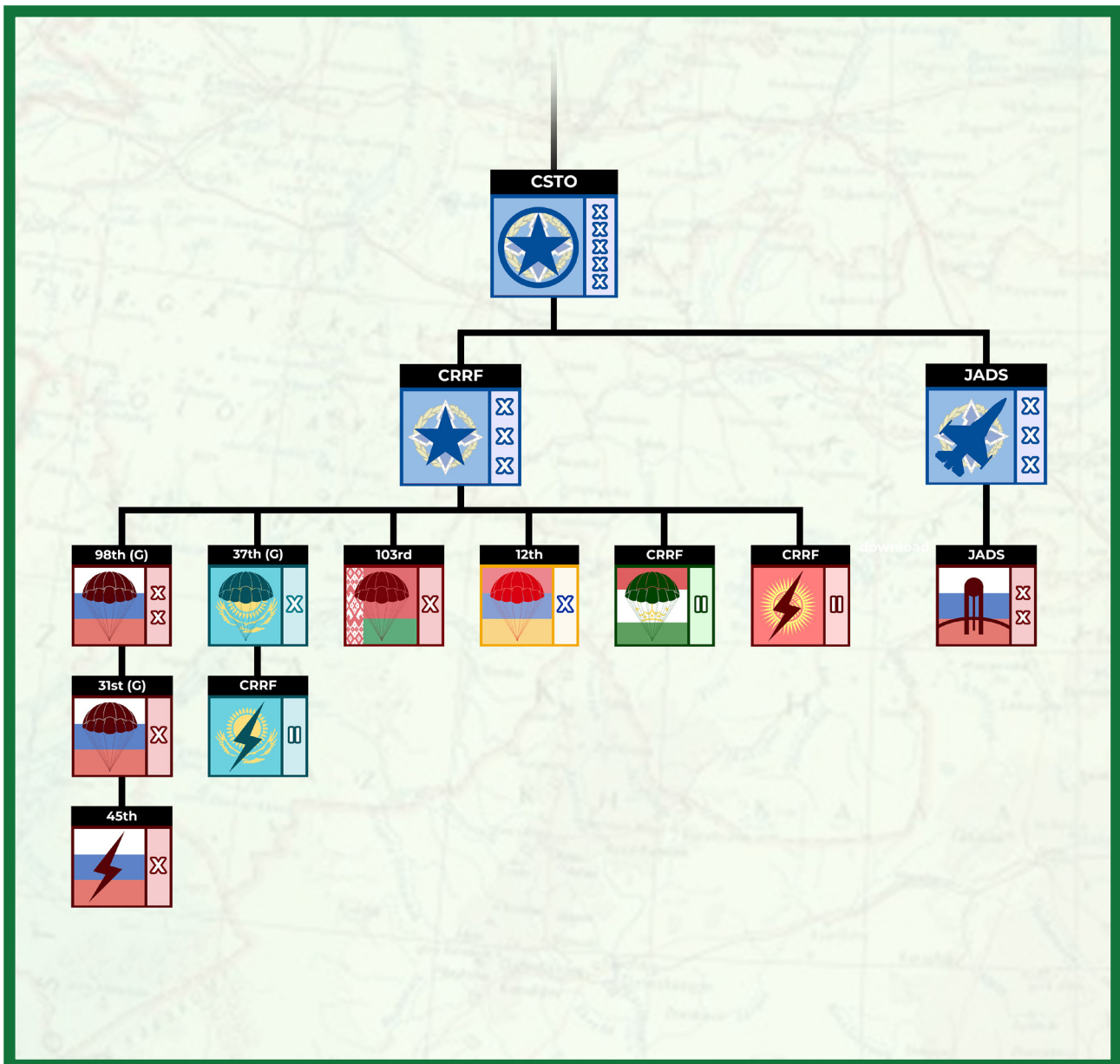
i) - Collective Security Treaty Organisation



(Figure 6.9.2: A map highlighting the current CSTO member states Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan (red), and the organisation's former members Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Uzbekistan (orange). However, Armenia's continuing participation within the organisation has been brought into question recently, with Yerevan announcing intentions to leave the alliance)

Tajikistan was one of the founding members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and has been an active participant since its establishment in 2002, as well as its predecessor, the Collective Security Treaty, formed a decade earlier. While some argue that the CSTO was initially envisioned as a “Russian version of NATO,” it has long been perceived more as a political project than a fully functioning military alliance, with most member states showing limited willingness to engage in conflicts on behalf of other members. However, the organisation's involvement in suppressing the uprising in Kazakhstan in 2022 probably ended up being the high-water mark for the CSTO, as the intervention demonstrated a previously unexpected level of operational unity among the six member states. During this deployment, Russia provided the largest contingent, while Tajikistan contributed elements of the 7th Air Assault Brigade, part of its Mobile Forces, to serve as peacekeepers.

Tajikistan deployed approximately 200 troops during the operation, primarily tasked with safeguarding key facilities and supporting Astana's troops as needed. While Tajikistan was a willing participant, it relied on Russian Il-76 aircraft for transport, as it lacked the military airlift capability to deploy 200 soldiers and their equipment internationally. In Kazakhstan, Tajik troops were stationed around Almaty with two primary objectives. Militarily, they were tasked with guarding fuel and hydrocarbon-related facilities. While politically, their presence supported Russia and the concept of interregional connections, a unity that Moscow would significantly undermine with their full-scale invasion of Ukraine a month later. For the alliance and the leadership in Dushanbe, the intervention in Kazakhstan was widely regarded as a success, with no Tajik soldiers lost and Kazakh President Tokayev remaining in power.



(Figure 6.9.3: Order of battle for the Collective Rapid Reaction Force of the CSTO)

As part of its CSTO commitments, Tajikistan also regularly participates in various multilateral exercises, such as the *Vzaimodeystvie* (Interaction) exercises, with these drills being designed to familiarise CSTO-designated forces with joint command and combined arms operations. The exercises typically simulate joint operations training to neutralise a hypothetical group of militants across multiple geographic theatres, simulating an insurgency threat similar to what Moscow fought against in Afghanistan and Chechnya.

Despite the current turbulence within the CSTO, marked by open conflict between two member states, Russia's preoccupation with the war in Ukraine, and Armenia's declared intention to leave, Dushanbe will almost certainly maintain its membership in the organisation. For Tajikistan, the CSTO offers the leadership in Tajikistan a theoretical promise of protection if Dushanbe were to experience the same sort of uprising that Kazakhstan did back in 2022, substantial discounts on Russian weapons and ammunition, as well as ongoing contributions of vehicles, arms, training, and equipment from foreign partners.

ii) - The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation



(Figure 6.9.4: A map highlighting the current SCO member states (green), including Belarus, China, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan)

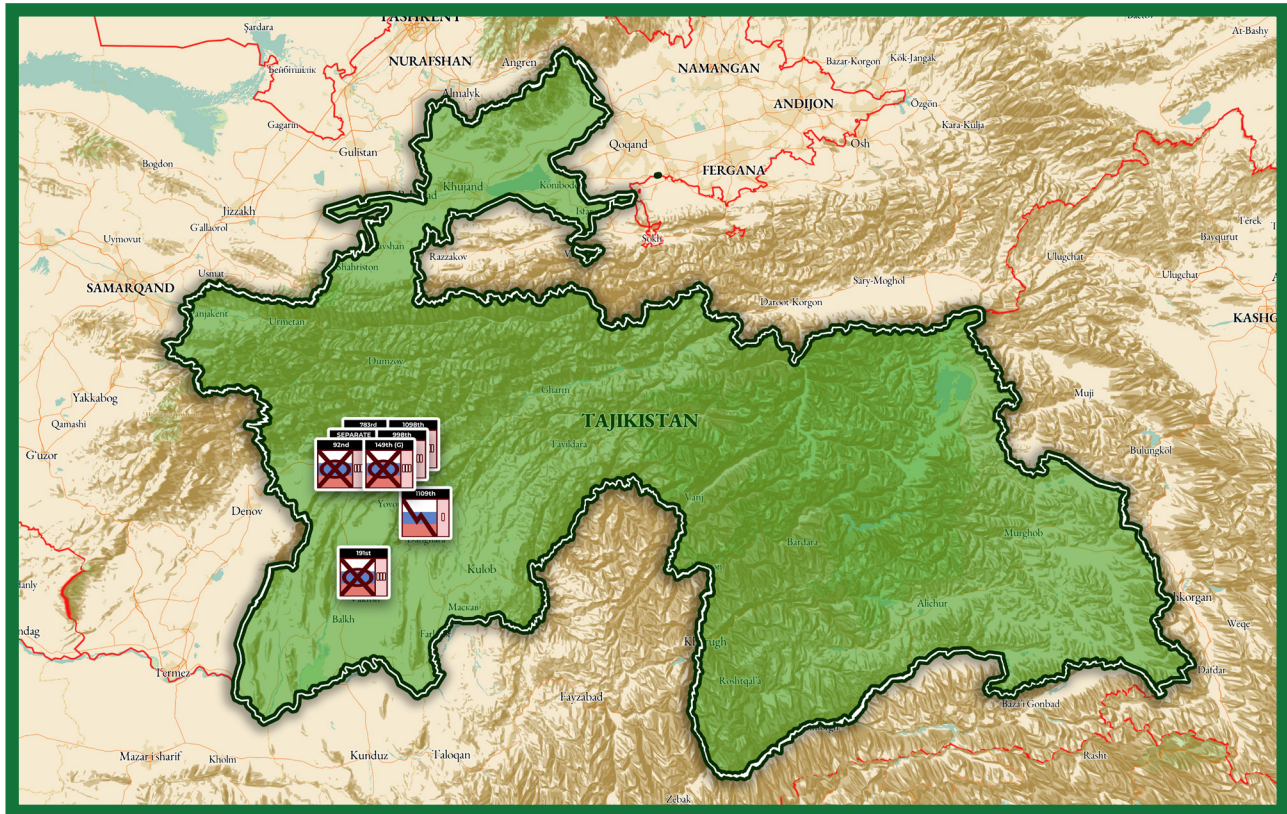
Established in 2001, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) has seen significant evolution since its inception, with Tajikistan joining as a founding member following the earlier establishment of the Shanghai Five in 1996, which focused on confidence-building and border security. While the SCO has successfully expanded its membership, the implementation of political and security measures within the organisation continues to face challenges due to members like India, Pakistan and Iran all having contradictory security objectives. As a founding member though, Tajikistan benefits from various bilateral projects, often spearheaded and funded by China, as well as multilateral security collaboration, which strengthens its efforts to combat terrorism and extremism within its borders.

However, Tajikistan's involvement in the SCO is not without its challenges, as while the organisation offers enhanced security and economic advantages, there have also been allegations that some member states have exploited the SCO's Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) to conduct surveillance on political dissidents living outside their borders, raising concerns about human rights and political freedoms within Tajikistan. Despite these challenges though, Dushanbe continues to value its membership in the SCO, recognising the strategic benefits it provides in terms of maintaining regional stability and supporting economic development.

6.9.2 - Foreign Deployments

While Tajikistan has engaged in military exchanges and economic partnerships with numerous countries over the years, only a select few nations are currently authorised by Dushanbe to maintain a permanent or near-permanent military presence within its borders.

i) - Russia

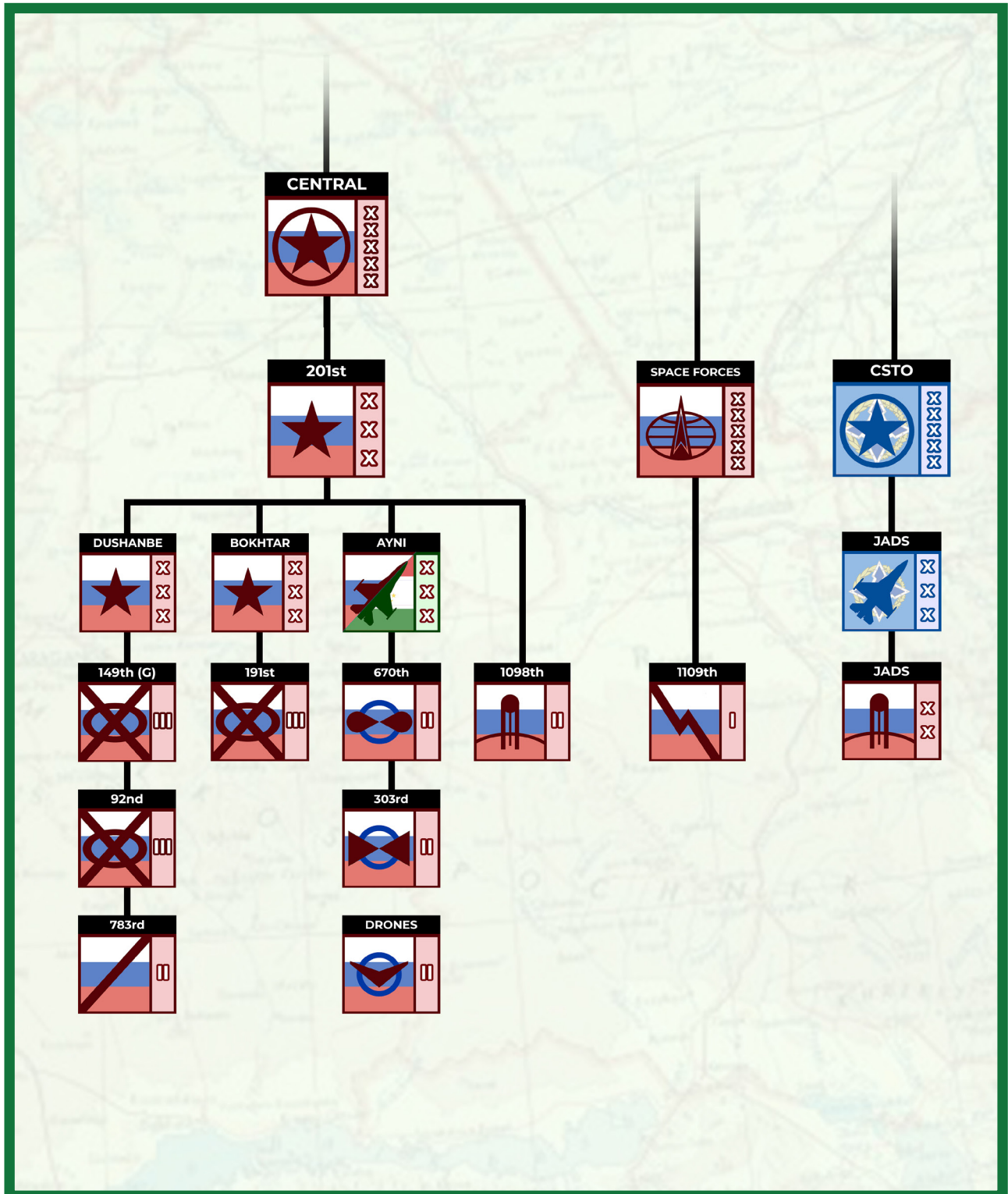


(Figure 6.9.5: A map of Russian bases and airfields inside Tajikistan)

The Russian military presence in Tajikistan is primarily centred around the 201st Military Base (MIB), which, before the 2022 Ukraine conflict, housed between 5,000 and 7,000 personnel. However, due to the redeployment of Russian forces to the Ukrainian front, current estimates suggest this number has now been reduced to approximately 3,000 troops.

Russia's military presence in Tajikistan extends across several bases, cities, and branches of the Armed Forces, with the 201st Military Base operating facilities in Dushanbe, Bokhtar, and Ayni, coordinating the activities of Russian Ground Forces, Rocket Forces, Air Forces, and Air Defense units, all under the jurisdiction of the Russian Central Military District headquartered in Novosibirsk. Additionally, the Russian Space Forces, headquartered in Moscow, command the 1109th Separate Optoelectronic Unit located in Nurek. Beyond these primary facilities in the western regions of Tajikistan, Russian garrisons make use of multiple training and proving grounds across the country for both Russian and joint exercises. Prior to 2015, Russia did maintain a much more expansive larger military presence in Tajikistan, including a facility in Kulob. However, under the 2012 agreement between Dushanbe and Moscow, the Russian military presence was reduced to its current bases, while the agreement extended the deployment of Russian troops in Tajikistan until 2042.

Following the signing of this agreement, new equipment was delivered to the 201st Military Base, including T-72B1 tanks and BTR-82A armoured personnel carriers. This reinforcement has made the Russian garrison in Tajikistan the largest Russian military presence outside the Russian Federation, and it is now better armed and equipped than most units within the Tajik Armed Forces.



(Figure 6.9.6: Order of battle for the Russian Forces in Tajikistan)



(Figure 6.9.7: Satellite imagery of the Russian 201st Military Base in Dushanbe)



(Figure 6.9.8: Satellite imagery of the Russian 201st Military Base in Bokhtar)



(Figure 6.9.9: Satellite imagery of the Russian Airbase at Ayni)



(Figure 6.9.10: (left) Satellite imagery of the Lyaur Proving Grounds. A frequent site for CSTO training exercises)

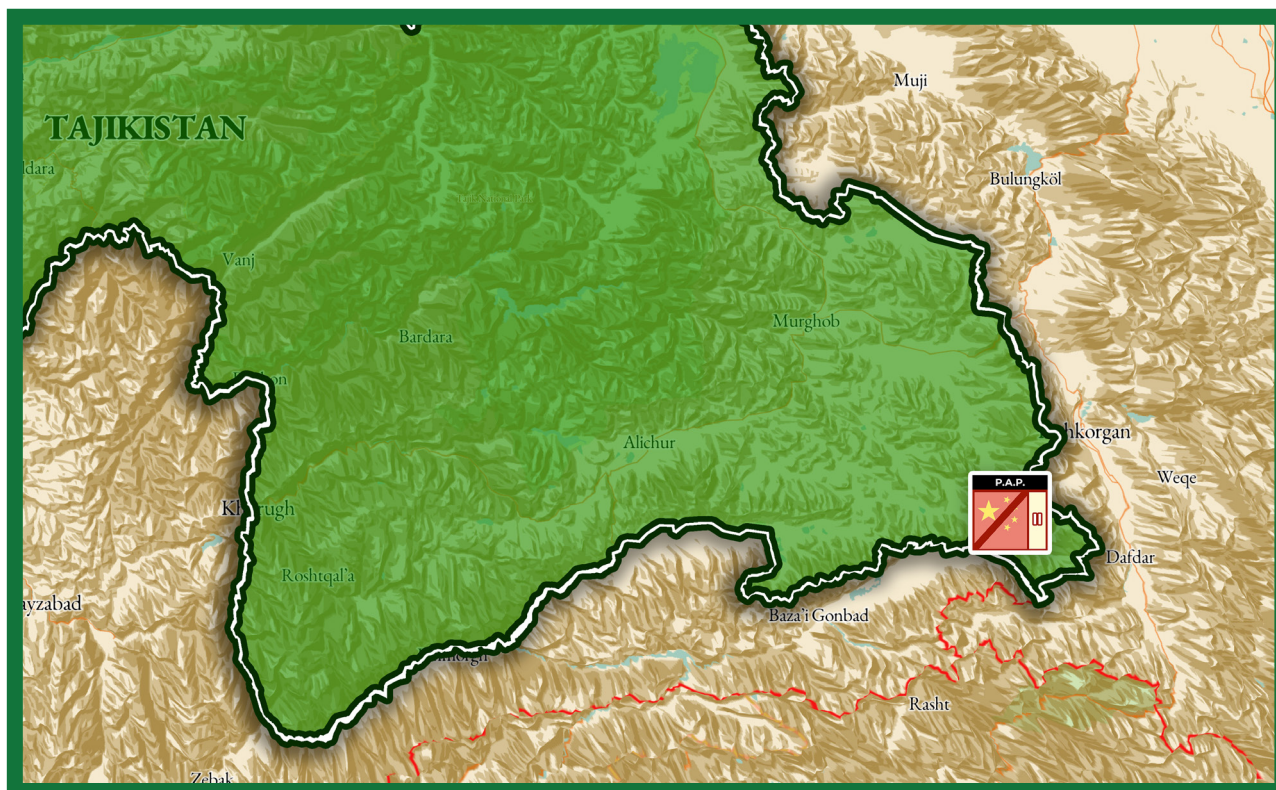
(Figure 6.9.11: (right) Satellite imagery of the Russian Okno Space Surveillance Station, currently being run by the 1109th Separate Optoelectronic Unit)



(Figure 6.9.12: (below) Satellite imagery of Russia's battalion of S-300 missile systems, alongside their accompanying mobile radar units)



ii) - China



(Figure 6.9.13: A map of Chinese military outposts inside Tajikistan)

Over the past decade, China's influence in Tajikistan has grown increasingly prominent across military, economic, and diplomatic spheres. However, this deepening economic engagement did not truly take hold until 2011, when Dushanbe and Beijing finally resolved their long-standing border dispute along Tajikistan's eastern frontier. As part of the settlement, Tajikistan ceded approximately 1,000 square kilometres of territory to China, a move that, while controversial at the time, laid the foundation for the strong relationship the two states enjoy today. The resolution of this border issue paved the way for substantial Chinese infrastructure investments in the country, allowing China's economic presence in Tajikistan to finally expand to levels comparable to its investments in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

Since the signing, China has significantly strengthened its economic foothold in Tajikistan, becoming the country's largest investor and creditor, and by 2018, Dushanbe's debt to China had reached as high as USD 1.2 billion, representing nearly half of Tajikistan's total external debt. However, this Chinese financing has been instrumental in numerous major infrastructure projects, including the expansion of the country's national highway systems, the construction of Dushanbe's Thermal Power Plant No. 2, the extension of the Vahdat-Yavan railway lines, and the oil refinery in Dangara, all of which have been economically beneficial for the Tajik state. As an additional result of this increased connectivity and trade between the two states, Chinese goods now dominate Tajikistan's consumer markets, with China accounting for 32.8 per cent of Tajikistan's imports and 16.8 per cent of its exports in 2022, and when comparing Tajikistan to the rest of the region, Tajikistan only trails Kyrgyzstan in terms of the percentage of national imports sourced from China. However, geographical and political constraints limit China's broader infrastructural ambitions in Tajikistan, as while Tajikistan poses little economic threat to China, its proximity to Afghanistan raises concerns in Beijing.

In response to these concerns, China has been establishing a forward security presence within the borders of Tajikistan. The most overt indicator of this presence being established in 2015, after the Chinese People's Armed Police (PAP) quietly constructed two permanent facilities located between Kyzylrabot and Shaymak in southeastern Tajikistan, with additional, approvals also being granted for a new Chinese-funded facility in Vakhon. While these installations lack heavy military vehicles or weaponry, they are equipped with advanced surveillance technologies and house a garrison of approximately 300 counterterrorism personnel. However, the day-to-day activities of PAP soldiers deployed out here in Gorno-Badakhshan region remain somewhat shrouded in secrecy, with reports that foreign individuals even attempting to approach these facilities are being either turned away or detained by local Tajik authorities, illustrating the political sensitivity around these facilities.



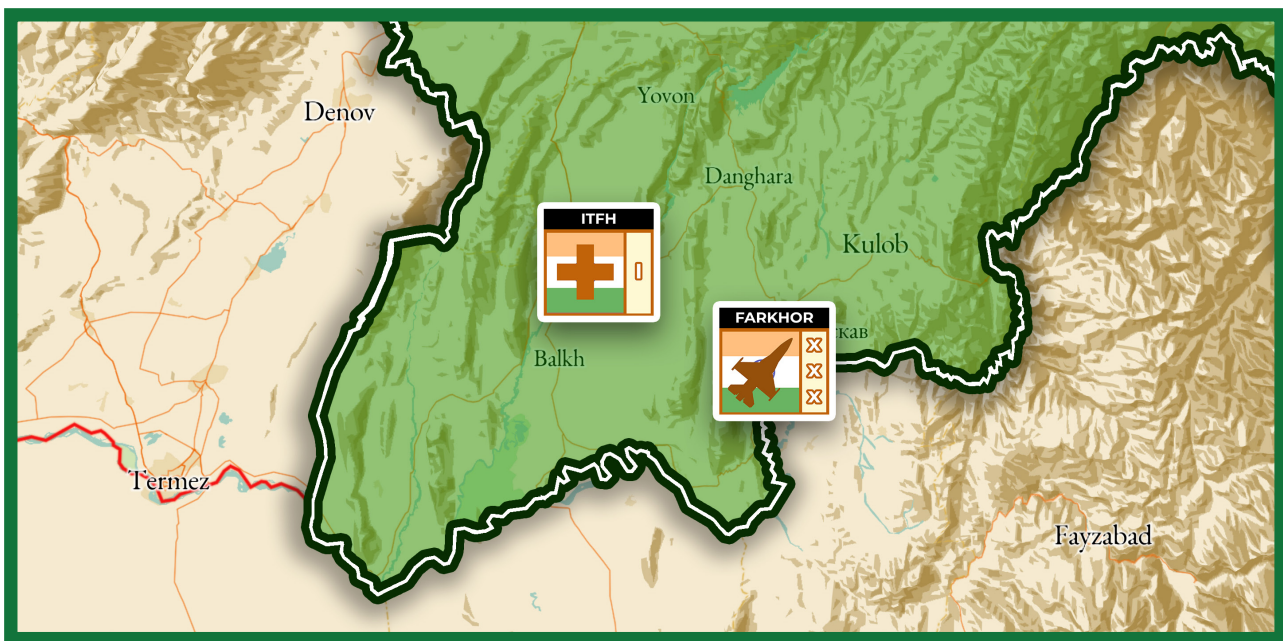
(Figure 6.9.14: Satellite imagery of the Chinese Outpost south of Shaymak)

While these facilities have received a lot of media attention since 2015, they actually represent only a small part of China's overall security presence in Tajikistan, with intelligence sources interviewed as a part of this project explaining that China's military footprint in eastern Tajikistan is set to expand significantly in the coming years. However, this expansion is unlikely to involve the construction of additional or enlarged Chinese-operated facilities in the far east of the country, and instead, under a joint security agreement with Dushanbe, Beijing is expected to fund the construction of new facilities and finance an increased presence of MIA and TBS units in the region. With this approach allowing China to enhance the security of its western frontier without the need to deploy its own troops into potentially dangerous or politically sensitive situations, thereby mitigating risks while maintaining strategic influence.

As part of this risk mitigation strategy, reports indicate that China has been avoiding deploying its own PLA troops, and instead choosing to expand its presence of Chinese Private Military Companies (PMCs) and Private Security Companies (PSCs) within Tajikistan. Utilising these private, but still state-aligned, entities to manage various facilities across Central Asia. One such example being an observation station located in Shahrtuz, which our intelligence source identified as a possible “dual-use facility”. As while officially, these facilities are classified as just “Observation Stations,” they can be very easily be repurposed for surveillance and intelligence-gathering operations.

There are also several reports suggesting that Beijing has leveraged its connections with state-aligned firms, such as Jing’an Import and Export Corporation, to establish and operate its own anti-drug trafficking facilities in southwestern Tajikistan. With the aim of these facilities being to provide China with direct insight into the regional drug trade throughout the western regions of Tajikistan. However, it is also important to note that despite all of these additional avenues seemingly available to Beijing, the overall presence of Chinese PMCs and PSCs in Tajikistan remains significantly smaller than the pre-existing Russian military deployments in the country, or even the PSC presence China currently maintains to the north in neighbouring Kyrgyzstan. That for at least the time being, China appears to be focusing on arming and equipping Dushanbe to handle its own security, rather than seek to fight those battles themselves.

iii) - India



(Figure 6.9.15: A map of Indian military facilities operating inside Tajikistan)

India’s military involvement in Tajikistan dates back to the early 1990s and early 2000s, beginning with the refurbishment of Tajikistan’s Ayni Airbase. Where in partnership with Tajikistan and Russia, India undertook a \$70 million renovation of the base, which included the construction of an air-traffic control tower, several aircraft hangars, a perimeter fence, and the extension of the runway to accommodate the larger cargo aircraft used by both the Russian and Indian air forces. Publicly, India had envisioned Ayni as its first military installation outside the subcontinent, with plans to station MiG-29 fighters and Mi-17 helicopters at the base in Tajikistan.

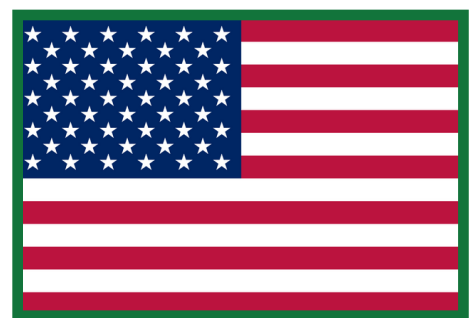
However, despite the significant investment, the original plan to station Indian military assets at Ayni never materialised, and amid suspected Russian pressure, Tajikistan altered the arrangement with India, reneging on its understanding that Ayni would become a joint Tajik-Indian base. This meant that by the time the refurbishment was complete, India's presence at Ayni was limited to just two officers overseeing the last of the refurbishments before the base was then officially transferred back to Tajik authorities. With the Indians no longer operating out of Ayni, Dushanbe turned back to Russia, reaching an agreement between Dushanbe and Moscow to allow Russian forces to use the base jointly, and by 2015, Russia began deploying air units to Ayni under the banner of the Russian 201st.

In contrast, India found far more success to the south at the Farkhor Airbase, located just a few kilometres north of the Afghan border, with Indian operations at Farkhor beginning from as early as 2002, with the base being established primarily as a strategic response to Pakistan's decision to ban Indian overflights. While New Delhi never permanently stationed fighter jets or military helicopters at the base, Farkhor provided India with a vital logistical lifeline to Afghanistan, with the base's strategic location enabling larger transport aircraft to bypass Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran, flying directly into southern Tajikistan, where goods could be unloaded at Farkhor and transported directly into Afghanistan via truck.

However, with Afghanistan now far more accessible to commercial air transport, India has significantly less need for the facility, and as a result, Farkhor Airbase, along with its attached military hospital, appears to have been closed down. Today, India's military footprint in Tajikistan is relatively minimal, with the most tangible aspect of its presence being the India-Tajikistan Friendship Hospital (ITFH), located near Bokhtar. Originally inaugurated in 2014 and then subsequently expanded in 2022, the 50-bed facility is staffed by Indian doctors and provides medical care to both Tajik and Indian personnel. Although military cooperation between India and Tajikistan has somewhat cooled in recent years, the hospital highlights India's ongoing interest in maintaining some level of strategic presence within the country.

iv) - United States

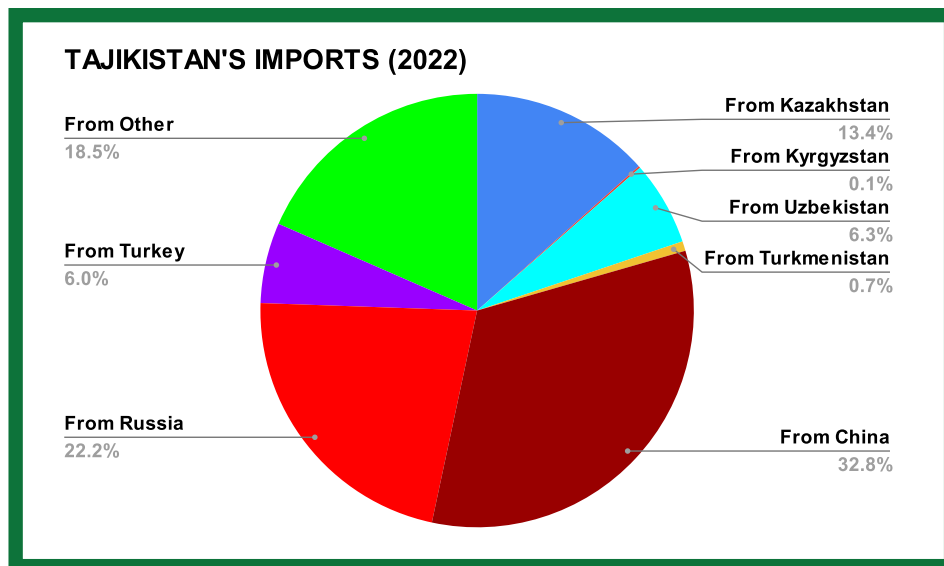
While the United States does not maintain a permanent presence in Tajikistan, it has conducted numerous deployments into the country since 2001, including at one point operating aircraft out of Kulob airfield for operations in Afghanistan. However, since 1992, the United States has allocated over \$330 million in security sector assistance to Tajikistan. This aid encompasses training, equipment, and infrastructure development, enhancing Tajikistan's border security and threat detection capabilities. Since the onset of the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, Tajikistan has been a valuable ally for US operations in the region throughout the Global War on Terror (GWOT). With Tajikistan receiving substantial US funding and training for anticipated yet unrealised, US-led peacekeeping operations overseas. This training encompassed in-country exercises and trips to Germany, the United States, and other locations. Notably, Dushanbe even established an international peacekeeping battalion in 2010 in anticipation of being a part of these operations, and in response, the US would deploy support for this battalion, including constructing a Peace Operations Training Centre at Shamsi Base and donating military vehicles worth nearly \$7 million.



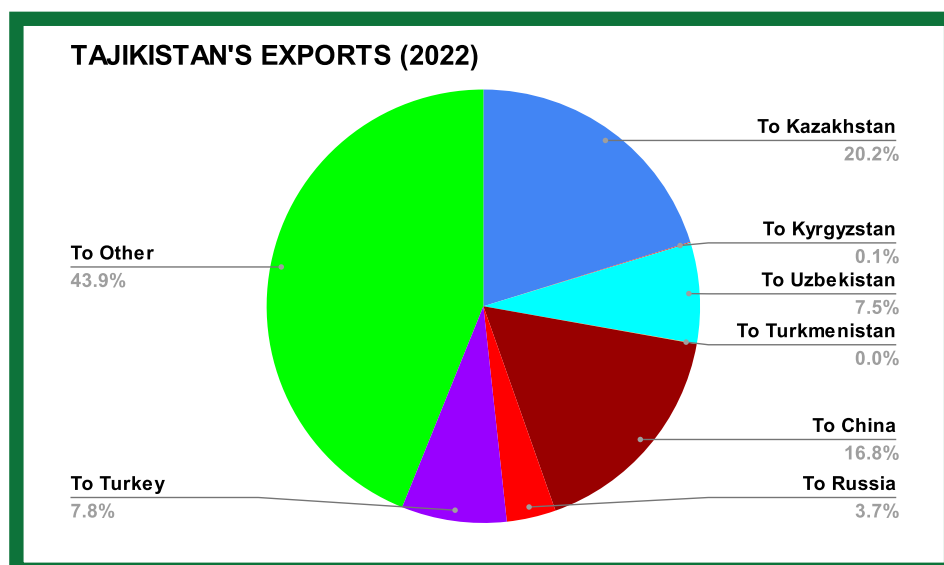
As the US began its withdrawal from Afghanistan, it also went further by donating nearly 1,700 night vision devices and approximately 5,000 communication and radio systems, as well as providing training for over 10,000 Tajik soldiers and assisting in the construction of 27 border facilities along Tajikistan's border with Afghanistan. However, since the US withdrawal, much of this investment and engagement has now slowed down, with the US passing the majority of the financial responsibility for the border off to the Russians and Chinese.

6.9.3 - Foreign Deployments by Tajikistan

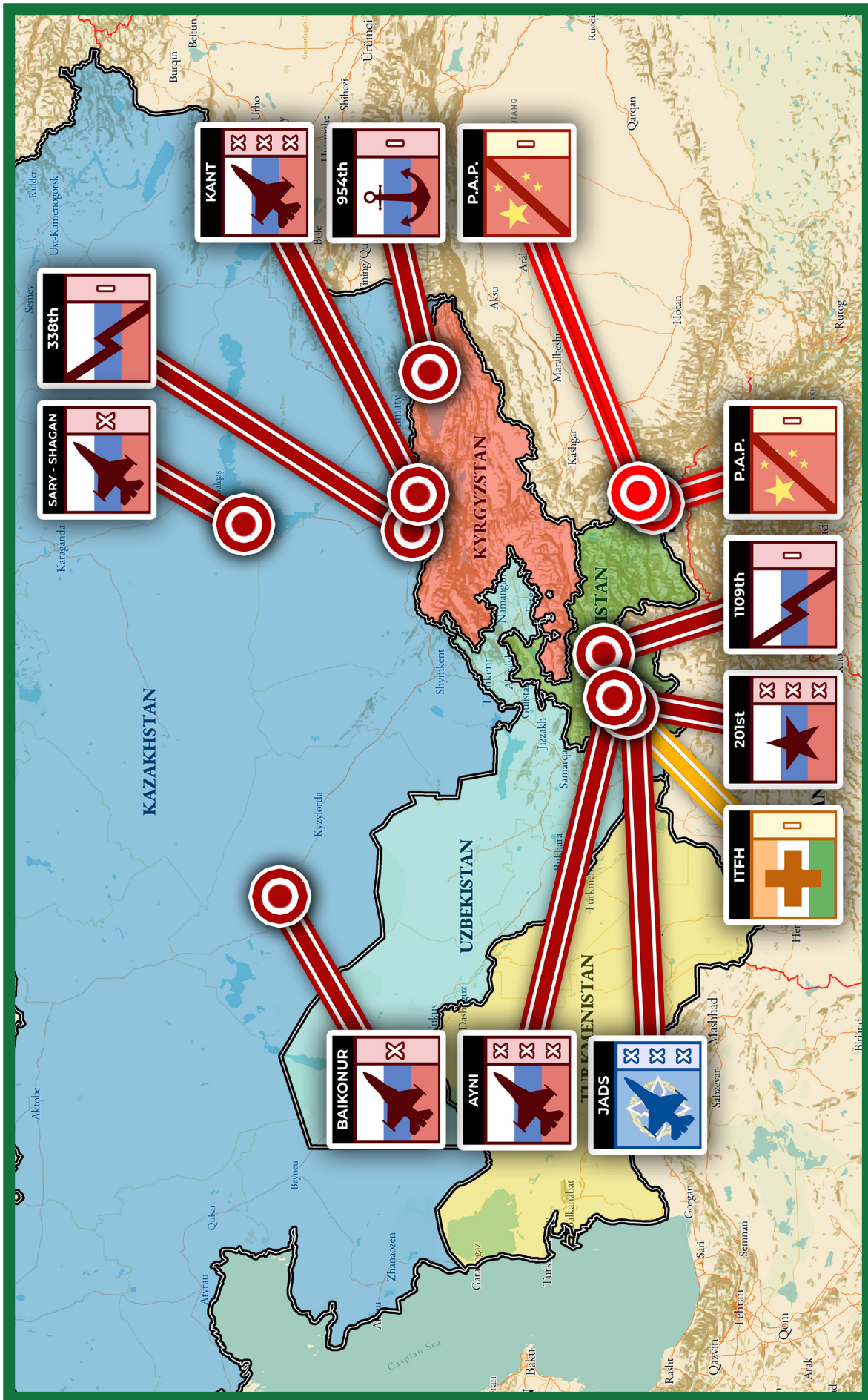
Historically, Tajikistan has neither possessed the capacity nor the strategic inclination to station its troops abroad, and with all overseas deployments requiring the personal approval of the President, Tajikistan's military operations beyond its national borders have always been limited to participating in UN peacekeeping missions, such as those in Sudan and South Sudan, or as part of the CSTO peacekeeping forces, like the deployment into Kazakhstan mentioned above. Given Tajikistan's heavy reliance on regional imports and financial assistance, coupled with the government's focus on domestic security priorities, it is unlikely that the nation will pursue any permanent overseas deployments for the foreseeable future.



(Figure 6.9.16: A Pie chart illustrating Tajikistan's national imports from 2022)



(Figure 6.9.17: A Pie chart illustrating Tajikistan's national exports from 2022)



(Figure 6.9.18: A map of Central Asia, marking the locations of major foreign airbases and formations)

6.10: POTENTIAL FLASHPOINTS

Although we consider the likelihood of a major interstate conflict within this region to be relatively low, analysing possible military flashpoints and the results of wargaming exercises can provide valuable insights into the capabilities and vulnerabilities of the Tajik armed forces. This report identified three hypothetical scenarios that may pose challenges to Tajikistan's military capabilities. The aim of this analysis is not to suggest these scenarios are likely to occur imminently but to explore how the Tajik military might respond or prepare for such situations.

6.10.1 - Incursion by Islamic State into Gorno-Badakhshan

In the first of three scenarios analysed, we examine the events following an attack by insurgents on the eastern Tajik city of Khorog, instigated by forces aligned with the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP). This scenario explores an escalation from conventional insurgent tactics, which have typically been limited to small-scale attacks by one or two gunmen, to a more organised assault launched from across the river in Afghanistan.

To date, ISKP has shown limited success in assaulting, occupying, or defending urban areas. Therefore, we will use the tactics and methods employed by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) as a general framework for ISKP's tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs). The scale and sophistication of this insurgent group represent a significant deviation from previous local insurgencies, allowing for a thorough examination of the logistical and geographical challenges in combating a more conventional threat operating in this region.



(Figure 6.10.1: A map illustrating the locations of the cities involved in the ISKP scenario)

i) - Gorno-Badakhshan

The Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (GBAO) occupies an expansive area of 64,200 square kilometres, representing nearly half of Tajikistan's total landmass, yet it is home to just 225,000 residents (2.5 per cent of its total national population). The majority of that small population is primarily concentrated in a handful of key urban centres, most of which are situated along the east bank of the Panj River. This region also holds increased political significance for the Tajik government, as it simultaneously contains all of Tajikistan's overland crossings into China, but also contains a concentrated presence of the Pamiri and other ethnic minorities who have historically shown resistance to the central authority of Dushanbe, with the region having undergone significant protests and escalations in the years 2012, 2014, 2018, and more recently in 2021 and 2022.

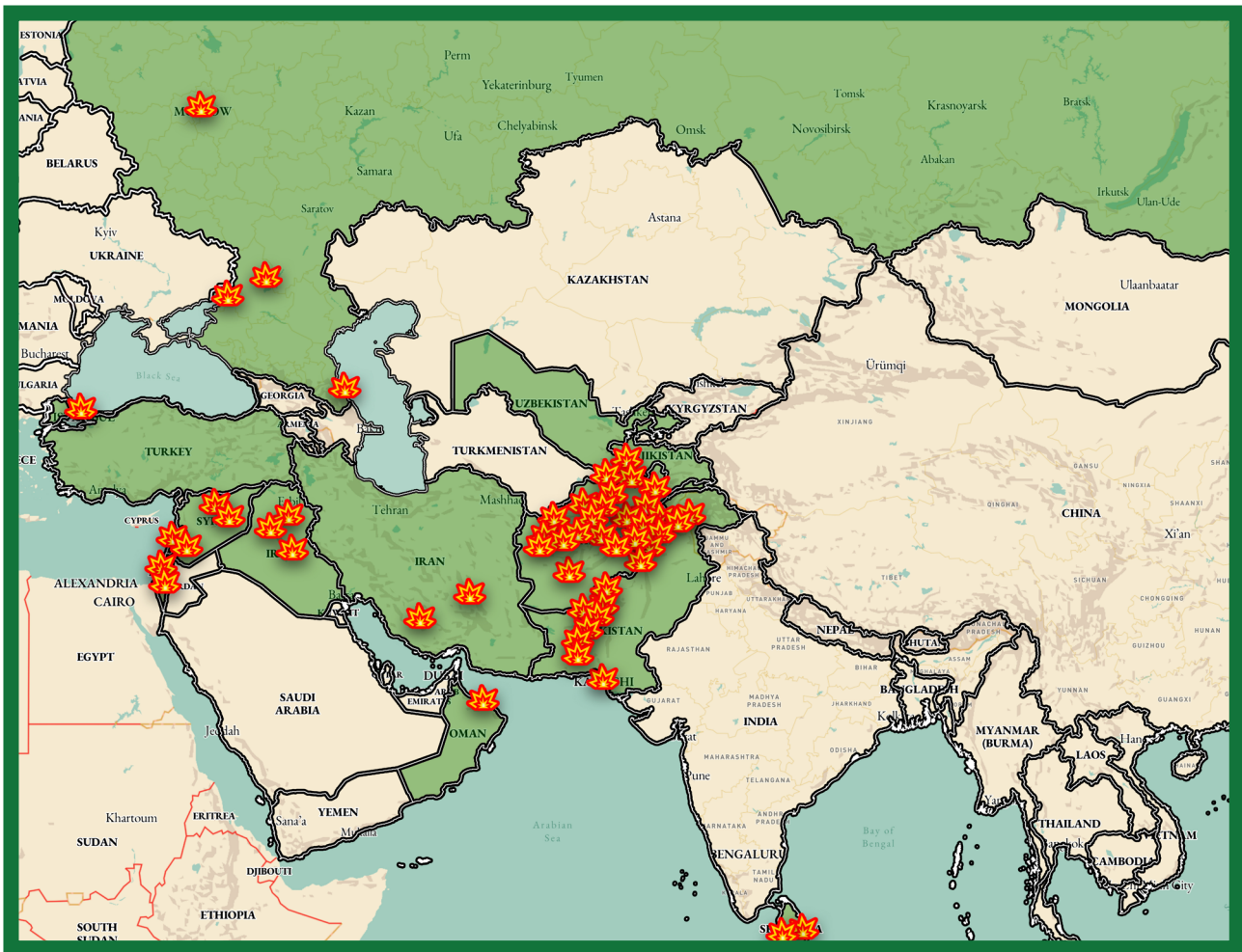
The primary hotspots for this dissent within GBAO have historically been the towns of Khorog and Rushan, both situated along the border with Afghanistan. Both of these areas have expressed pronounced dissatisfaction with Dushanbe's policies, leading to recurrent confrontations and challenges to state authority. Dushanbe has attempted to reduce tensions within this region of the country by not stationing any significant garrison of MOD troops within either of these cities, as MOD troops have been combative toward the local population in the past. While the lack of MOD troops has somewhat lessened the potential for domestic unrest, it has reduced the capacity of the MOD to respond in the event that a foreign force invades one of these eastern cities. Examining the Tajik Civil War for precedent, the UTO regularly leveraged safe havens just over the border in Afghanistan to stockpile and secure resources before then launching their attacks over the river into Tajikistan. The remote and inaccessible nature of most of these villages along both sides of the river enhances their potential for use as staging grounds by enemy forces, with the invading side likely aware that Dushanbe will probably experience significant delays and logistical hurdles in order to respond to any incursion within this region.

The concerns around oppositional groups forming across the river are also compounded by the current lack of coordination between the government in Dushanbe and the administration in Kabul. This disconnection between the two security apparatuses could hinder Tajikistan's ability to obtain timely intelligence or warnings regarding any potential upcoming cross-border attacks and prevent the two security services from being able to piece together crucial bits of information. Moreover, the absence of any cooperative framework between the two, may prevent Tajikistan from receiving assistance or authorisation to pursue these threats back toward their operational bases within Afghanistan, thus allowing these forces to retreat, regroup and strike again at a later date. Such constraints complicate the security landscape in the GBAO.

ii) - Terrorist groups operating in the GBAO

Currently, Dushanbe's principal security concerns stem from IS-affiliated groups such as IS, ISIL, and ISKP, all of which appear to be regaining momentum in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Central Asia after experiencing a comparative lull during the 2010s. Non-state actors, including ISKP, IS, and previously the IMU, remain a significant concern for defence planners across Central Asian capitals. As while IS-affiliated groups have been active in the region since 2015, recent months have seen an escalation in the scale and intensity of their operations, particularly in northwestern Afghanistan. Since 2015, these groups have carried out hundreds of attacks across the region, including high-profile strikes in Russia, Turkey and Iran. However, contrary to popular reporting, the majority of ISKP's activities have actually been relatively contained

within Afghanistan, Pakistan and Central Asia, with the group instead increasingly claiming responsibility for attacks executed by other IS affiliates. Regardless of who actually carried out the attacks though, this has raised the alarm among Eurasian defence planners, as ISKP's prominence appears to be expanding both in terms of media presence and operational reach.



(Figure 6.10.2: A map depicting the locations of IS, ISIL, and ISKP attacks across mainland Asia since 2019, illustrating a concentrated pattern of activity in Afghanistan and Pakistan, while also highlighting the groups' expanded capability to strike beyond these borders. Within the map, countries affected by attacks are shaded in green, and each explosion icon marks a new city targeted during this period)

With the attacks inside of Central Asia taking place on:

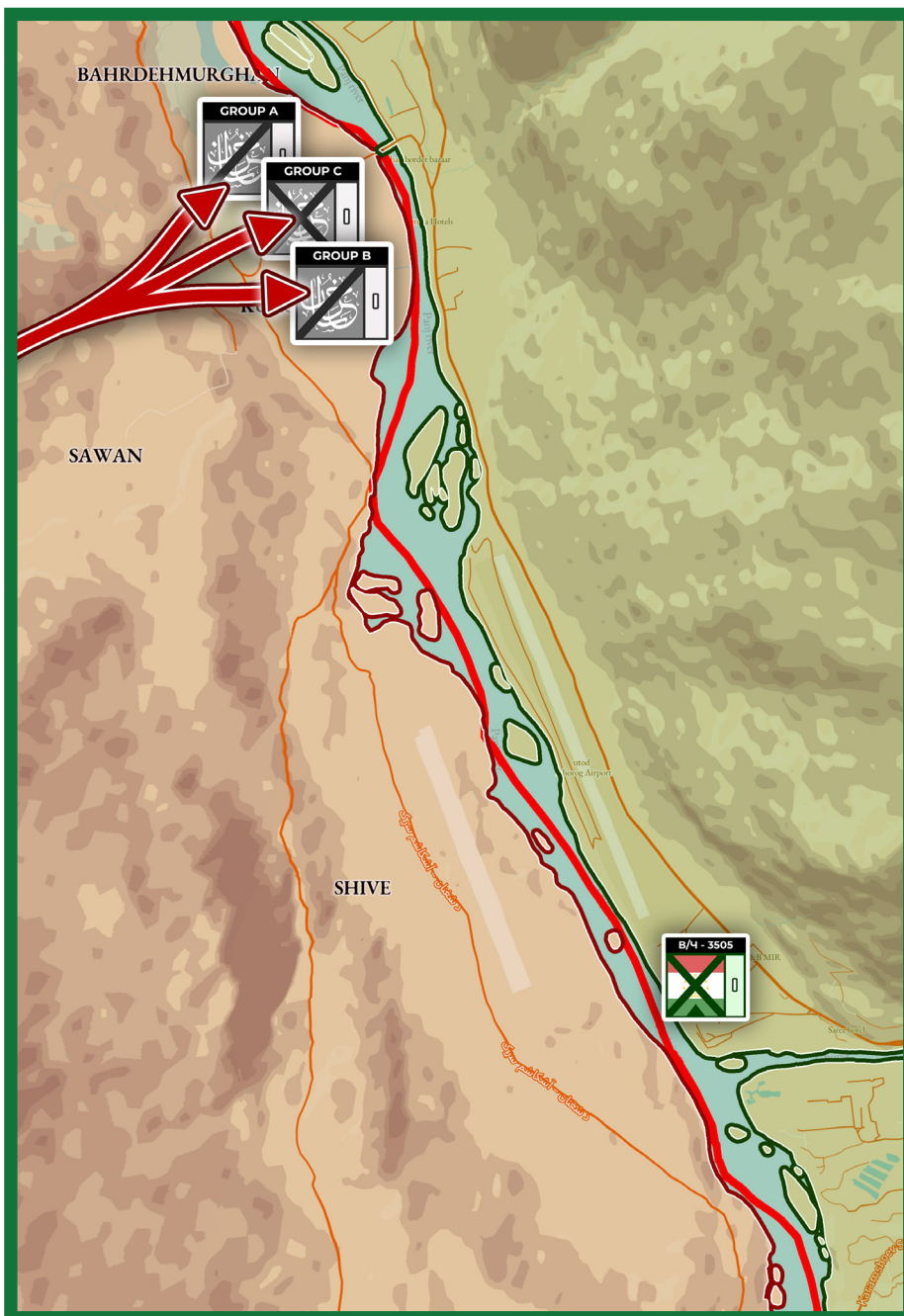
- Rudaki, Tajikistan (6 November, 2019)
- Termez, from Afghanistan into Uzbekistan (18 April 2022)
- Saryk, from Afghanistan into Tajikistan (7 May 2022)

The Tajik component of ISKP has become increasingly active within Tajikistan, reportedly concentrating its current efforts on mobilising young Tajiks against national authorities and other perceived enemies of IS and its affiliates. As part of this recruitment strategy, ISKP has recently launched its first Tajik-language publication, *“The Voice of Khorasan”*, with the publication openly calling for armed resistance against the Tajik state, subsequently amplifying concerns currently already existing within Dushanbe.

These developments, coupled with high-profile incidents such as the recent Crocus Hall attack, underscore the expanding operational reach of these IS-affiliated groups and highlight the gravity of their continued efforts to recruit and deploy Central Asian nationals for international terrorist operations. With these recruitment efforts targeting individuals both within Central Asia and across Russia and the wider Eurasian region.

iii) - Conflict scenario

For this analysis, we modelled an attack being carried out by ISKP; however, whether it is ISKP, IS, or merely a local uprising, the logistical challenges and limitations outlined in this section will remain largely the same. With ISKP acting as the attacking force, the scenario begins with the group launching an expeditionary assault from across the river in Afghanistan into Tajikistan, aiming to capture Khorog and inspire sympathetic uprisings across the region.

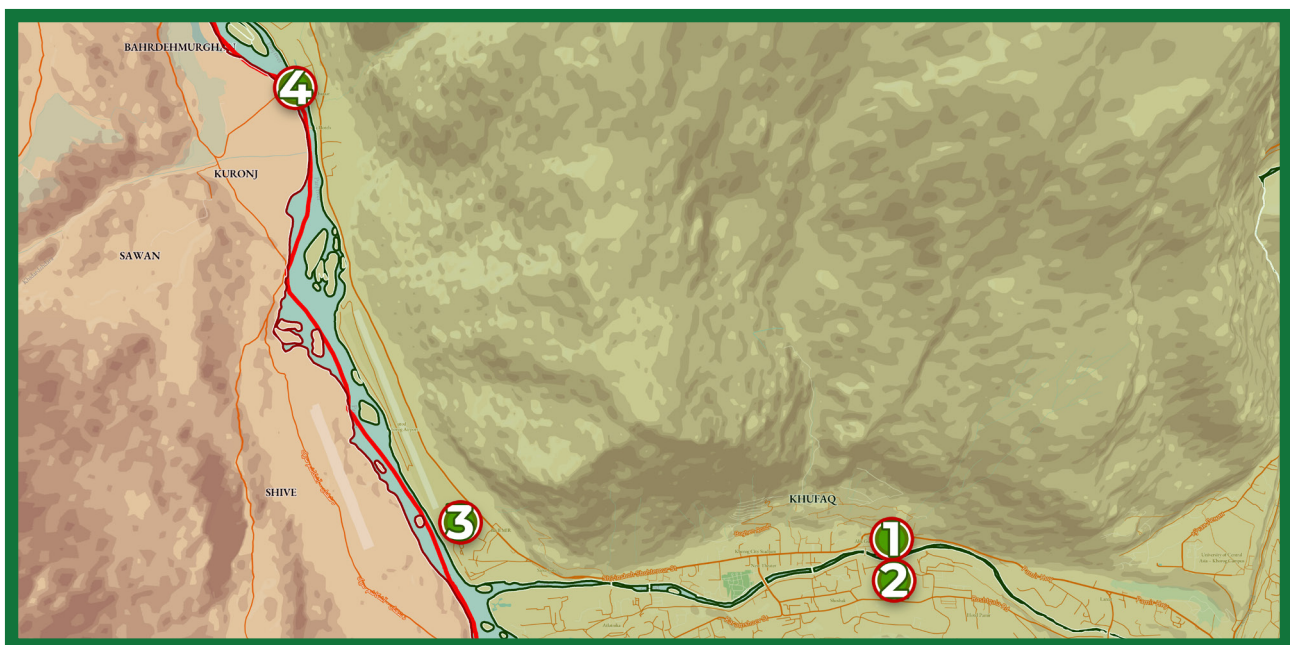


(Figure 6.10.3: A map of southern Tajikistan, 1km west of the city of Khorog, with Afghan territory coloured in red and Tajik territory coloured in green. Prior to the assault, ISKP insurgents have assembled in the town of Shiveh, located on the western bank of the Panj River)

Given the constraints posed by the river and limited bridge access, it is unlikely that the ISKP groups will be able to bring vehicles with them for the assault into Tajikistan, and will instead have to proceed over the bridge on foot. As due to the fast flow of the river and the unreliability of it freezing to a usable level, insurgents attempting to cross will either need to prioritise the use of the bridge north of Khorog or travel 170km further north to the bridge crossing near the city of Vanj.

In preparation for the assault, it is plausible that some combatants may covertly cross the border via legitimate crossing points or through one of the less monitored river crossings much further south of Khorog, before then regrouping on the Tajik side of the river prior to launching the attack. In a worst-case scenario, these forward elements could even work to position themselves at key infrastructure sites to execute an attack on the city's northern dams ahead of the main forces crossing the river. If successful, such an attack would cause significant infrastructural damage throughout the downstream cities and into the city of Khorog, overstressing the government's already scarce resources. However, for the sake of simplicity, this analysis chose to limit our focus solely on the insurgents crossing the river north of Khorog.

For the ISKP groups, their primary targets within Khorog are likely to include strategically significant sites such as the key communications centres located within the government quarter, the main SCNS facility, and the Border Service Training School situated in the city centre, the MIA outpost and airfield to the west in Dashtitem, as well as the aforementioned bridge across the river, as the bridge will serve as their primary route for retreat if the attack is unsuccessful. This prioritisation of key administrative and strategic sites aligns closely with the historical patterns observed from previous Islamic State operations in Iraq and Syria, where capturing administrative centres has been a high priority for the groups seeking to capture and occupy territory.



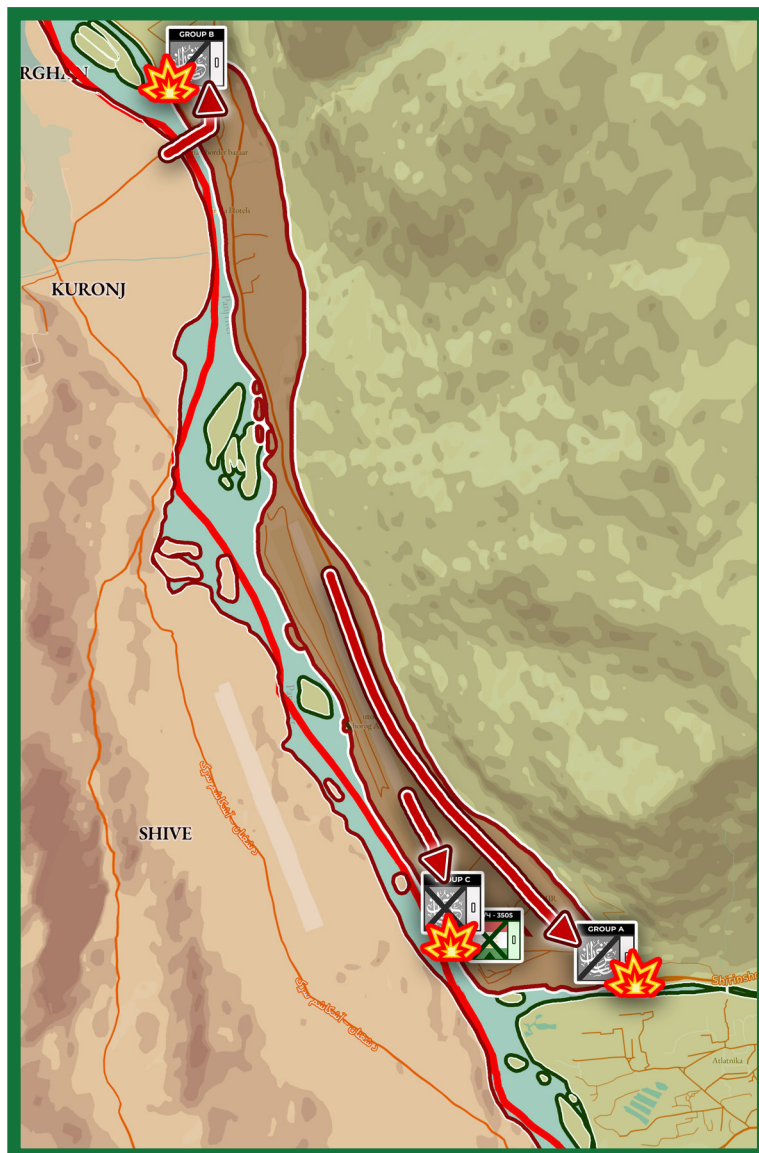
(Figure 6.10.4: A map of Khorog and its surroundings, marking the locations of the aforementioned key strategic points within the city. "1" highlighting the location of the Government Quarter, "2" marking the location of the SCNS base and Border Guard Training School, "3" marking the location of the MIA facility in Dashtitem, and "4" being the location of the bridge across the river from Shiveh into northwest Khorog)

For this scenario, we have assumed that the local Tajik garrison is unaware of ISKP's movements, allowing the majority of ISKP insurgents to successfully force their way across the bridge and begin moving southward with little to no resistance. This being an important caveat as if the Tajik garrison had been aware of the ISKP forces assembling on the opposite side of the river, they could have easily established a better defensive position on the eastern bank and utilised their comparatively superior armaments to maintain control of the bridge.



(Figure 6.10.5: Satellite imagery of the footbridge connecting Shiveh in Afghanistan to Khorog in Tajikistan. Marked as Location "4" in Figure 6.10.4)

(Figure 6.10.6: ISKP insurgents force their way across the bridge, with Group C, the best-armed and trained of the insurgent groups, utilising the element of surprise to attack the disorganised MIA garrison, overwhelming the facility, and seizing their weapons and supply caches. While Group C engages the MIA facility, Group A will attempt to push past Dashtitem and advance straight into the western suburbs of the city, aiming to penetrate as far into the urban centre as possible before the TBS forces can mobilise and coordinate a defensive response. Group B, meanwhile, will remain in position north of Khorog, establishing defensive positions just north of the bridge. With Group B responsible for maintaining an open avenue for retreat back across the river)

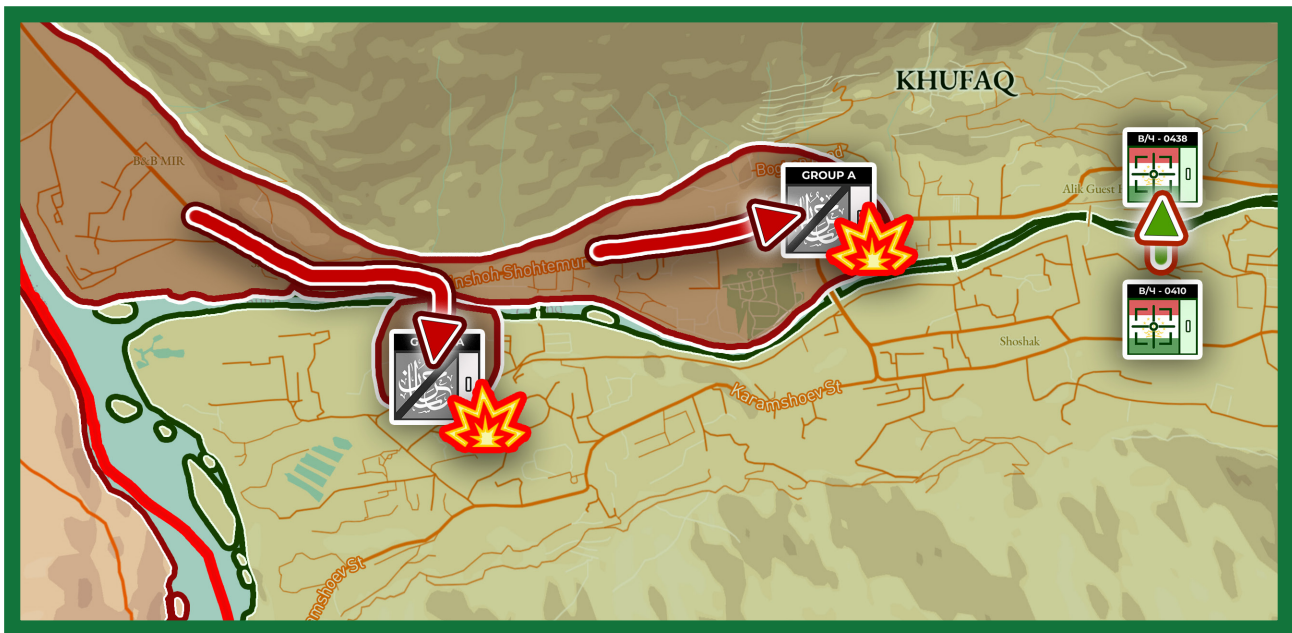




(Figure 6.10.7: Satellite imagery of Dashtitem and Khorog)

In the unlikely event that the attackers were able to successfully capture the MIA facility by surprise, and seize part of the facility's weapons and supplies, this would significantly improve their standing for the remainder of the campaign. As if the attackers were unable to capture any Tajik weaponry, the insurgents would likely have to retreat back over the river relatively quickly, as without access to vehicles, the insurgents will only be equipped with the ammunition they were able to carry across the river with them.

This being a significant limitation for any insurgent force attempting to seize a city on foot, as most untrained insurgents tend to expend all of their ammunition within just a few minutes of heavy fighting. Even in a best-case scenario for the attackers, where the MIA garrison was unable to contact either Dushanbe or the TBS facility to the east for support, the outpost's proximity to the rest of the town means that the sporadic gunfire emanating from the assault would likely alert all of the remaining city garrisons to the engagement occurring to the west. Meaning that by this point in the scenario, even under the most optimal conditions, the remaining garrisons would all begin moving to counter the insurgents. However, while this gunfire would compromise the attacker's element of surprise, it does also offer one advantage, as the gunfire is likely to prompt large numbers of local civilians residing in the west of the city to begin fleeing eastward towards the central and eastern areas of Khorog. As a result, this civilian movement would temporarily impede any efforts by TBS forces to move westward toward the insurgents, creating a brief tactical advantage for the attackers.



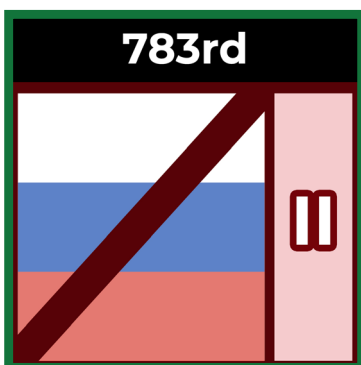
(Figure 6.10.8: A Map of Western Khorog. Having captured the TBS outpost at Dashtitem, Group C now begins moving eastward along the north bank of the river toward the government quarter. Meanwhile, the comparatively less well-armed Group A crosses the bridge southward onto the southern bank of the river, intending to force the defenders to split their forces. From here, the TBS will likely be instructed to take up defensible positions in the city, aiming to hold off the insurgent forces until reinforcements can arrive from Dushanbe)

In Khorog, the initial responsibility for local defence would fall to the Chairman of the GBAO, headquartered in the government quarter. However, under these circumstances, where insurgents have advanced quite far into the city, the chairman may be relocated to the Border Guard Training School, situated just south of the government quarter (locations “1” and “2”, respectively, in Figure 6.10.4). Also faced with uncertainty regarding the strength and capabilities of the attacking force, the Tajik Border Service would likely seek immediate support and direction from senior commanders in Dushanbe. In response, Dushanbe would initiate communications with the commanders of the Tajik motor rifle regiment stationed in Murghob, the commanders of the 7th Air Assault Brigade, as well as the head of the Russian garrison in Tajikistan, requesting additional troops and support to regain control of the situation.

However, given the state of the roads between Khorog and Murghob, and the distances involved, it is unlikely that Murghob-based units would be able to provide any reinforcements during these initial stages of the conflict, with an estimated arrival time of 48-72 hours. As any response from Murghob would require operational vehicles, as well as sufficient fuel and favourable road conditions, all of which may take time to secure. Furthermore, while not modelled in this scenario, these reinforcements could also face even further delays if ISKP insurgents chose to divert forces away from the city, to instead establish defensive positions among the numerous narrow chokepoints along the highway between Khorog and Murghob. These tactics having been used successfully against Dushanbe by anti-government protestors in the past. While in reality, groups like IS or ISKP rarely conduct attacks on this scale, for the purposes of this analysis, the insurgent forces are assumed to have struck the city with sufficient strength that the local TBS garrisons would be unable to expel them independently. Given this situation, TBS forces, which lack the heavy weapons and vehicles available to other branches, would likely struggle to take on the insurgents alone.

In such a scenario, Tajik training manuals acquired by our research team suggest that these TBS forces would adopt defensive positions within the city, work to prevent the insurgents from moving any further east, and await better-armed reinforcements from other garrisons to arrive in Khorog. However, as observed during the 2022 conflict in Batken, the movement of large numbers of troops and equipment from one TDZ to another remains a significant challenge for the Tajik military's logistical infrastructure. In wargaming this scenario, reinforcements from Dushanbe would typically not arrive in force in Khorog for at least 2-3 days. This timeframe could be further extended if highways are contested or if adverse weather conditions impede their progress. Regardless of the conditions though, if an external insurgent force were able to pose this significant threat to Khorog, Dushanbe would likely turn to external partners for assistance, maintaining direct communication with Moscow, Beijing, and Kabul throughout the operation. However, while Kabul also views IS as a direct threat, it is highly unlikely that it could coordinate or conduct any large-scale military response in its remote northeastern regions, given its current capacity. Beijing may also be of little help in this situation, as despite already having PAP outposts built here in southeastern Tajikistan, Beijing has shown little appetite for direct involvement in combat operations in the Pamirs. As Having observed the fallout from decades of previous U.S., Russian, and Uzbek counterterror operations in this region, Beijing appears hesitant to deploy heavier forces due to concerns that footage of Chinese personnel directly engaging Muslim fighters could provoke both additional security concerns for Chinese contractors operating elsewhere in Afghanistan, as well as heightening the risk for domestic reprisal attacks in Xinjiang. Even if Beijing were willing to take that risk, the equipment currently stationed at its outposts, 280km to the east in Kyzylrabot, is predominantly limited to basic MRAPs and lightly armoured vehicles, lacking the heavier weaponry and support equipment that Dushanbe would require in a situation like this.

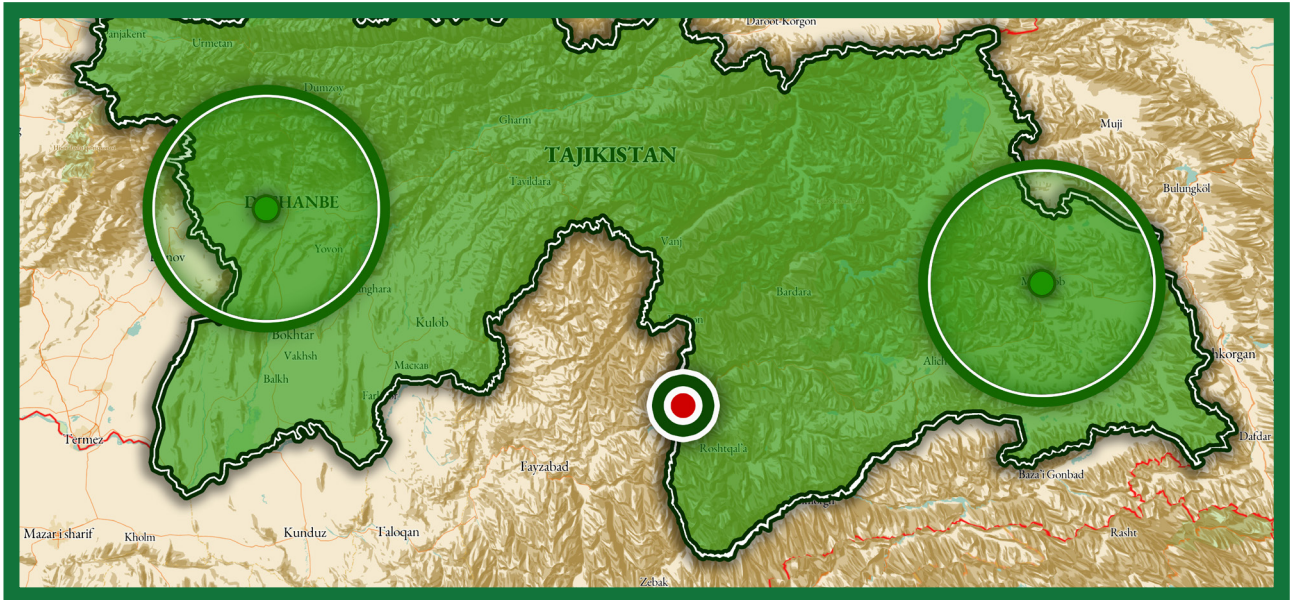
Instead, the Tajiks are far more likely to turn to Russia for direct military support during the operation. In the past, the Russian garrison in Tajikistan would have been more than capable of handling such a task; however, with the retreat of Russian forces back from Kulob towards Dushanbe in 2015, and with the war in Ukraine continuing to force Moscow to divert additional resources and manpower away from Tajikistan, the local Russian garrison is not as robust as it once was. Nevertheless, given that ISKP groups are unlikely to have access to heavier weapons or vehicles, and with the operation expected to be short, it is still probable that Russia would commit some resources to assist the Tajiks in this situation. As assisting in such an operation would not only serve to bolster its credentials as a reliable security partner in Central Asia, but also help to prevent the further spread of extremism into more sensitive regions of Russia. For Russia, its military assistance would likely come from the deployment of either the 783rd



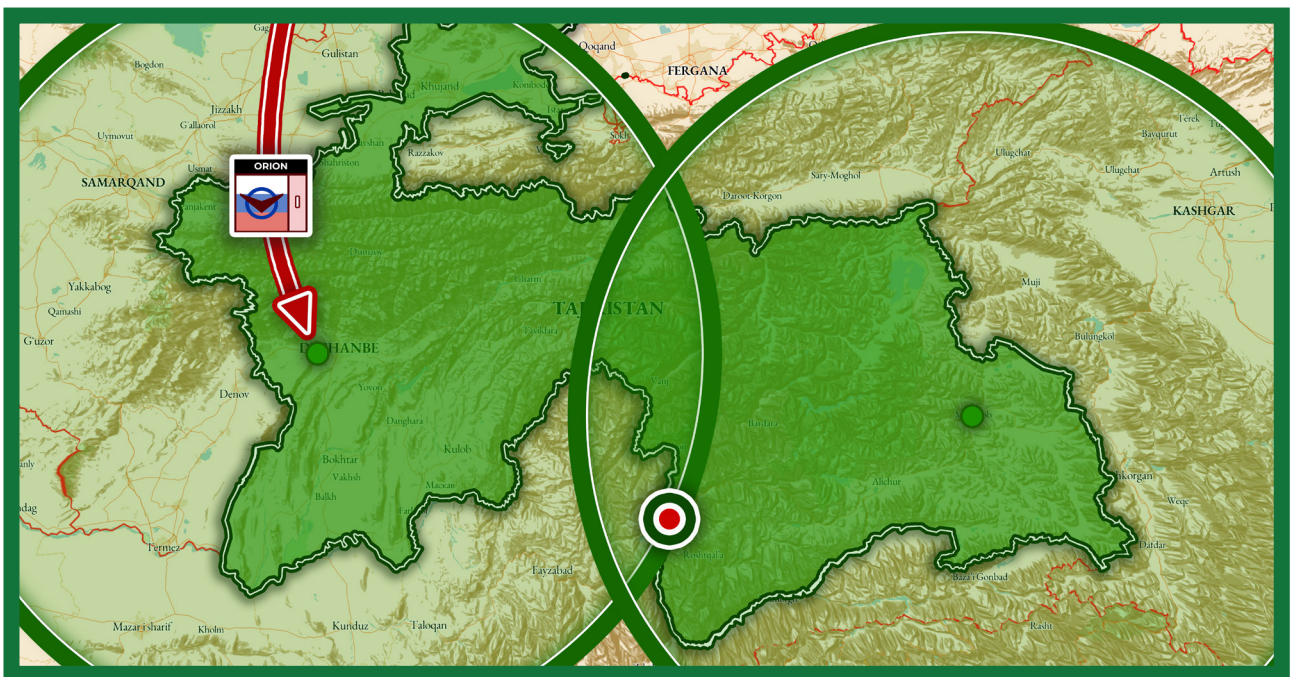
Reconnaissance Battalion or the 149th Guards Motor Rifle Regiment, both of which are currently based in Dushanbe. Alternatively, if Russia instead opts to deploy more specialised mountain warfare units, it could turn to one of its special purpose brigades, such as the 24th Guards Special Purpose Brigade, based north of Novosibirsk, or the 31st Guards Air Assault Brigade in Ulyanovsk, flying them into Dushanbe within a few days. However, the ongoing war in Ukraine does raise some doubts as to the availability of these formations for such an operation.

(Figure 6.10.9: Symbolology for the 783rd Separate Reconnaissance Battalion, based with the 201st in Dushanbe)

While the redeployment of forces from Dushanbe to Khorog via the highway system already presents logistical difficulties for both the Russian and Tajik commands, there are also challenges for the deployment of aerial vehicles. As while Russia may want to utilise its helicopter and UAV fleets based at Ayni airbase, all of these platforms lack the range to be able to reach Khorog from Ayni. With the Orlan-10 UAV systems currently stationed in the country only having an effective combat range of approximately 110km and the Mi-24 attack helicopters also limited to approximately 200km.

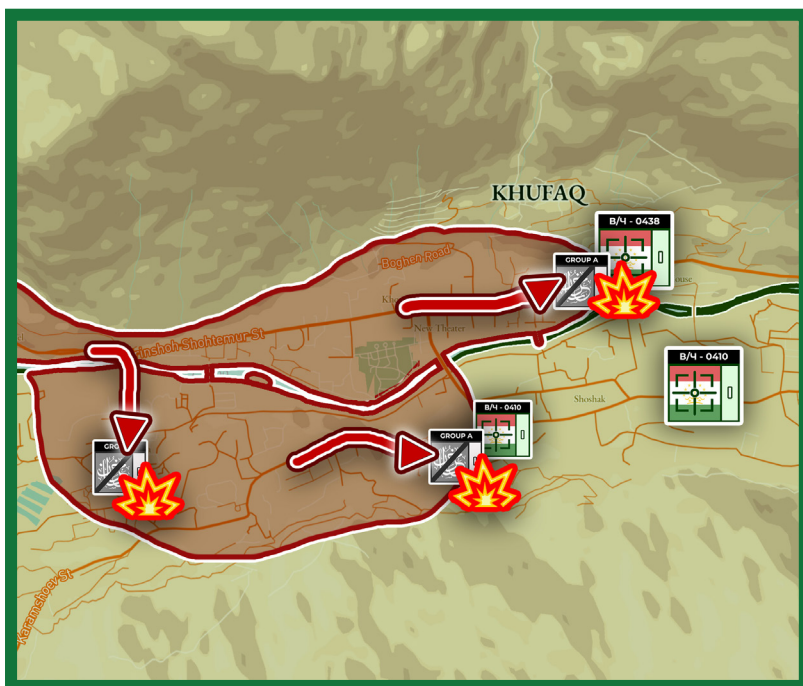


(Figure 6.10.10: A map of Tajikistan, illustrating the effective combat range of a Russian Orlan-10 UAV operating out of Ayni or Murghob, with the maximum operating distance depicted by the green circle)



(Figure 6.10.11: A map of Tajikistan, illustrating the effective combat range of a Russian Orion UAV operating out of Ayni or Murghob, with the maximum operating distance depicted by the green circle)

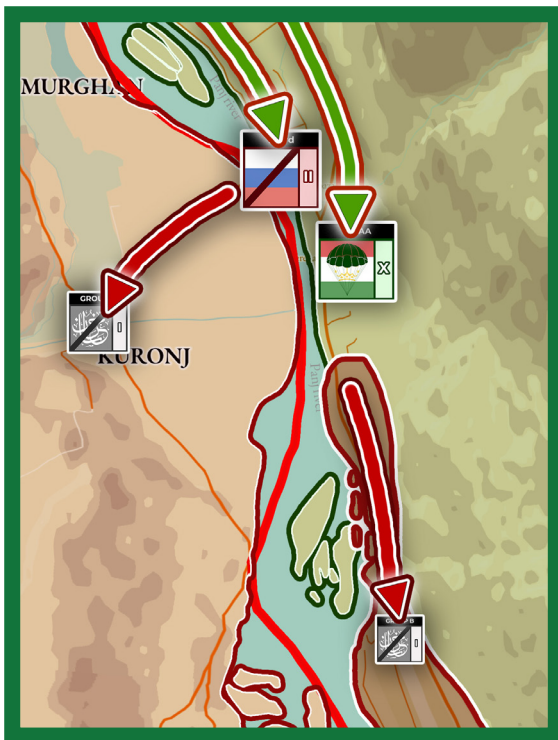
For Russia, unless they are willing to go through the effort of establishing a Forward Operating Location closer to Khorog, they would likely need to divert or commit some of their limited Orion UAVs from within Russia to Tajikistan. As given the significant distance from Ayni to Khorog, even the longer-ranged Orion drones would consume more than half of their flight time capacity in transit between the airfield and Khorog, leaving minimal time for loitering over the target before needing to return to Ayni. Russia could attempt to mitigate this issue by operating from a closer airfield, such as Murghob, 270 km to the northeast, although this would require Russia to establish substantial Forward Arming and Refuelling Point (FARP) facilities in the city, as well as redeploying the required personnel and equipment from across other airbases in Russia, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, as Murghob currently lacks almost all of the infrastructure required to carry out these sorts of missions. Pursuing this option would demand significant time and resources, and even if successfully implemented, it would only marginally increase loiter time over the target due to the remaining distance from Khorog.



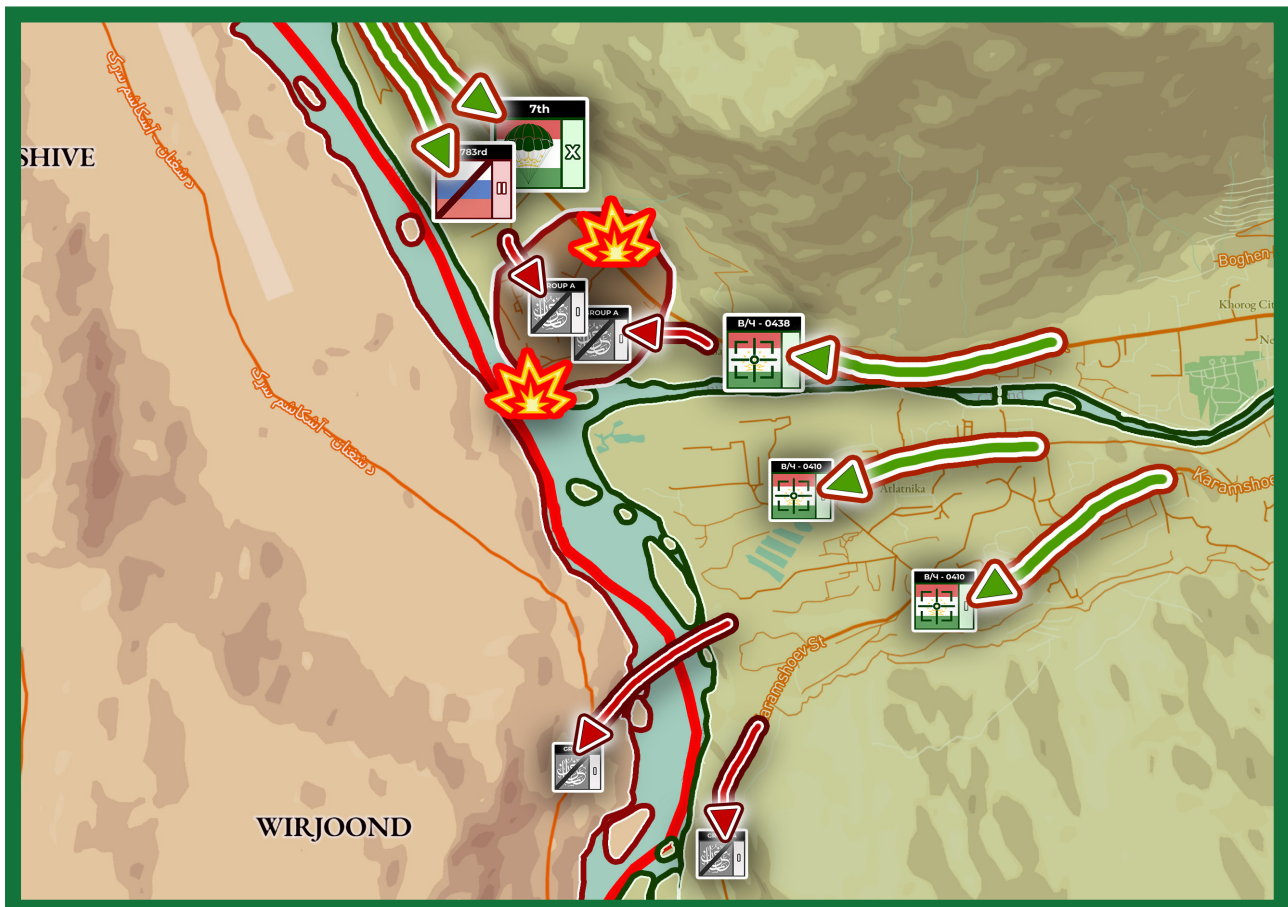
(Figure 6.10.12: Map centred on western Khorog: As ISKP forces continue to deplete their limited stock of ammunition and supplies, they will likely face increasing difficulty in executing any successful assaults against the now well-established urban strongpoints around the government district. As a result, ISKP's advance will likely be limited to the western outskirts of the city)

By the start of the third day of fighting, elements of the Tajik 7th and Russian 783rd are expected to enter the operational area from the north. Group B, which has been deployed as the rearguard near the bridge, is likely to come under heavy fire from Tajik armoured vehicles and other advanced weaponry. Given their proximity to the bridge and the intensity of the attack, the majority of Group B's forces are expected to retreat over the bridge, withdrawing back into Afghan territory. The remaining forces are likely to fall back southward, regrouping with the larger ISKP contingent in preparation for further resistance.

The Tajik forces advancing from the north, in coordination with the TBS garrison now pushing out from their defensive positions in the east, will begin their efforts to progressively reduce the amount of territory still held by ISKP forces. Their strategy will likely focus on compelling the remaining fighters to either surrender to the authorities or withdraw from the city southward into the valley, with this approach aiming to minimise collateral damage during the remaining stages of combat. After a few days of continued operations, Tajik forces are expected to fully re-establish control over the city, at which point the government will likely strengthen defensive positions to deter any future assaults from Afghanistan.



(Figure 6.10.13: A map of northern Khorog. By the start of the third day of fighting, elements of the Tajik 7th Air Assault Brigade and the Russian 783rd Reconnaissance Battalion are expected to enter the operational area from the north. With Group B, having been previously deployed as the ISKP rearguard near the bridge, likely to come under fire from the Tajik's mortars, armoured vehicles and mobile light artillery. Given their proximity to the bridge and the comparative intensity of the attack, the majority of Group B's forces would be expected to retreat back over the bridge into Afghan territory. With those remaining fighters otherwise falling back toward the rest of the ISKP soldiers in the south)



(Figure 6.10.14: A map of western Khorog. Tajik and Russian forces begin eliminating the last of the ISKP insurgents still fighting in the west of the city, restoring full control to the government. With minimal logistical vehicles available to the Tajik forces, these units will likely be forced to commandeer food, fuel, and supplies from within the city if the fighting were to drag on for any extended period of time)

iv) - Key findings

Based on the wargaming and analysis of the above scenario, here are our three key findings:

1) - Logistical Vulnerabilities in GBAO's Terrain and Infrastructure

The Tajik government faces severe logistical constraints in conducting military operations here in Khorog, primarily due to the region's geographical isolation and the reliance on a single route for resupply and reinforcement, that being the M41 highway. In an event like the one analysed here, the M41 represents a critical vulnerability for the Tajik armed forces, as insurgents could easily exploit chokepoints and terrain along this route to ambush government forces or disrupt supply convoys as they undergo the long journey from Dushanbe to Khorog.

The absence of alternative supply routes also means that any ambush or disruption along this route would then effectively cut off any units operating further up the M41, severely compromising Dushanbe's ability to sustain these units. Additionally, the relative lack of forward operating bases FOBs between Kulob and Khorog, also makes it much more difficult for Dushanbe to pre-position larger forces or establish any redundancy or refuelling points for mechanized units and rotary-wing assets closer to the front. With the Tajik forces in this scenario instead forced to rely on long-range supply lines and understocked local caches in places like Vanj and Rushan to supplement any of their inevitable material shortfalls. For the Tajik government, all of these logistical challenges together represent a significant set of operational constraints, many of which could be easily exploited by insurgents who possess workable knowledge of the local terrain, or are well-versed in leveraging such terrain to better target enemy supply lines and rear forces.

2) - Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) Limitations

Tajikistan's limited aerial infrastructure and absence of forward-deployed UAVs in GBAO are likely to hinder its ability to effectively monitor or target insurgent activities in Khorog, with the lack of long-range drones and modern intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) platforms significantly reducing the military's capability to track insurgent movements or preempt attacks. This shortage also severely impacts situational awareness for both the commanders on the ground and the policymakers in Dushanbe, making it difficult to effectively make decisions or tactically respond to threats in the region.

The redeployment of some of Tajikistan's older rotary-wing assets into the theatre, such as its Mi-8 and Mi-24 helicopters, while potentially addressing some of the ISR shortfalls, is also likely to provide only a fraction of the real-time information and capability that commanders in this region would require to properly combat a scenario like the one analysed here. These older Soviet-era platforms, like their Mi-24, suffer from significant limitations in range, endurance, and payload capacity, with the highly mountainous terrain in GBAO also further impacting their performance and safety. As even if Dushanbe were to overlook the risks associated with operating 40-year-old helicopters in an area where cities like Khorog are already located 2,200 metres above sea level, GBAO additionally lacks the permanent air infrastructure

needed to support sustained rotary-wing or fixed-wing ISR operations here in the region. This means that unless Dushanbe is willing to establish dedicated repair and replenishment facilities here in the GBAO or have its operators endure weeks-long delays for parts to arrive from Dushanbe every time repairs are needed, Tajik helicopter forces stationed within the region will likely either fly minimal sorties or remain reliant on assets deployed from distant bases.

In a combat scenario, this lack of ground strike capabilities and the ISR deficit would force Dushanbe to regularly operate with incomplete or outdated tactical information, placing its forces in the region at a distinct disadvantage compared to their counterparts in Dushanbe or Khujand. While procuring field-deployable UAVs, such as the Orlan-10 or Bayraktar TB2, could help mitigate some of these shortfalls, the prohibitive acquisition costs and the expenses associated with maintaining local operations would likely prove too costly for either TJAADF or the TBS.

3) - The Importance of Local Economic Development

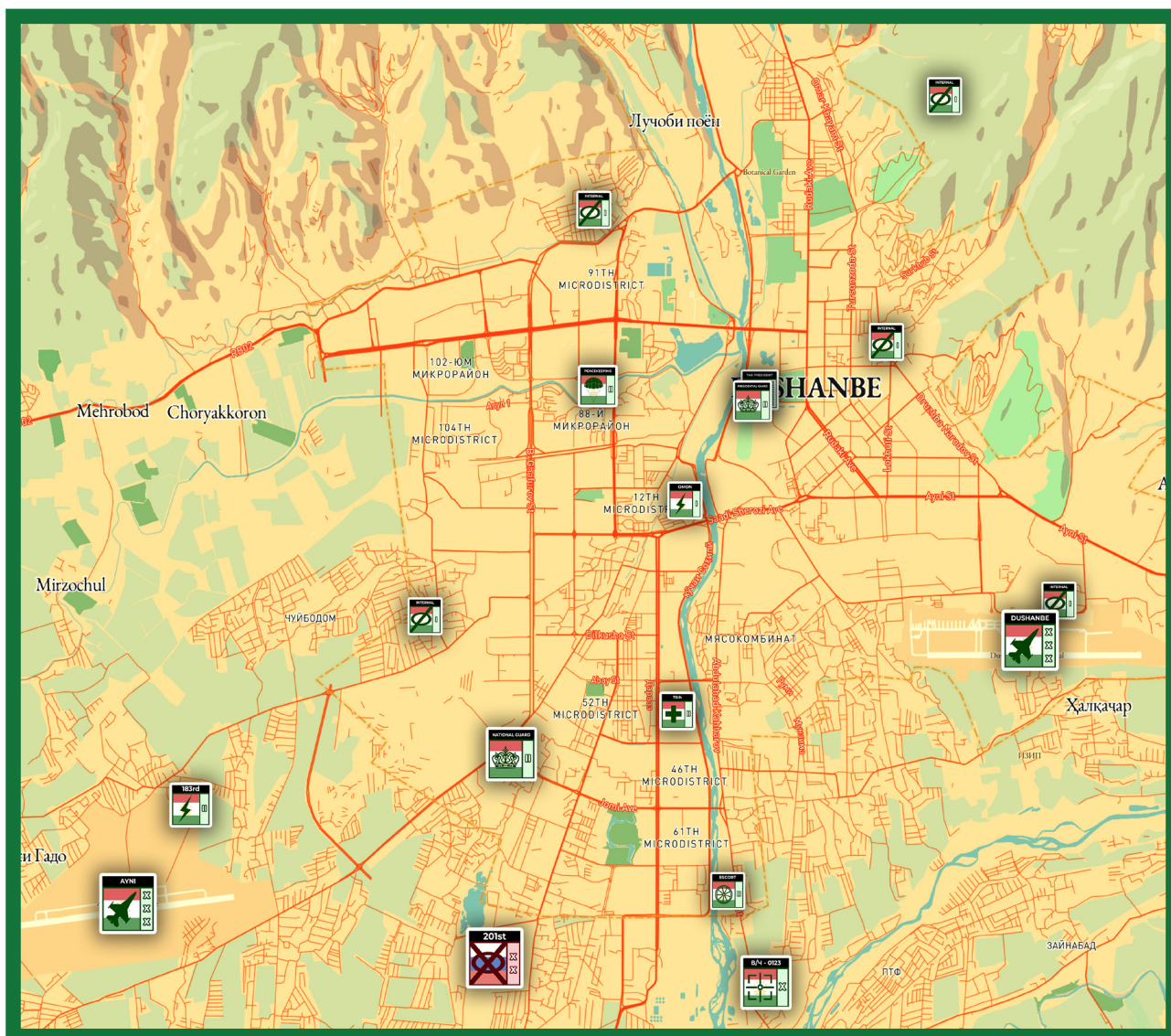
The Tajik government's primary challenge in Khorog likely revolves around preventing insurgent groups from being able to recruit or manipulate the local population. Groups like ISKP, or more regionally-focused insurgent movements, are often quite skilled at exploiting the political and socioeconomic grievances of isolated communities and harnessing those grievances for their own political means. GBAO's geographic remoteness, economic marginalisation, and lack of employment opportunities all make it particularly vulnerable to such efforts, meaning that addressing these grievances should be viewed by Dushanbe as not just a matter of domestic policy, but also as a critical security policy. As without proactive measures to improve the financial well-being and political inclusion of the GBAO population, the government risks further alienating these communities.

If the state were to make significant efforts to combat some of these grievances, prioritising economic development, infrastructure investment, and political engagement, Dushanbe could foster an environment where insurgent movements not only struggle to gain traction but local communities are also more likely to share key bits of intelligence with the local government and law enforcement. Populations that are more invested in their government's success are almost always more inclined to report insurgent activity. For Dushanbe, failure to address these underlying issues does risk setting the stage for a drawn-out and costly military or counter-insurgency campaign in the future, where the operational costs tomorrow would far exceed the investments required for preventative socio-political engagement today.

6.10.2 - An Overthrow of the Tajik Administration by Russian Forces

In our second scenario, we explore a hypothetical situation in which the Kremlin decides to orchestrate a coup against the Tajik administration, with the aim of installing a government more aligned with Russian foreign policy objectives. While this analysis examines the potential mechanics of such an operation and highlights vulnerabilities within Tajikistan's security infrastructure, it is important to note that experts widely agree the likelihood of this scenario materialising is very low, particularly given Russia's ongoing military commitments in Ukraine.

For Moscow, an operation aimed at initiating a leadership transition in Dushanbe would be not only highly complex and resource-intensive, but also fraught with significant risks to both Moscow and Dushanbe. As if Moscow were to launch the operation, and it not be successful, it could not only result in widespread civil unrest throughout Tajikistan but also jeopardise the Kremlin's broader strategic interests throughout the region. However, if the Kremlin were to ignore these risks and instead push forward with the coup, it would likely follow the playbook of previously successful operations in order to minimise uncertainty and leave as little as possible to chance.



(Figure 6.10.15: Map of Dushanbe illustrating the locations of the major Russian and Tajik deployments across the city)

i) - Background

In Dushanbe, Moscow holds several strategic advantages, the first being their pre-established relationships with numerous high-ranking Tajik commanders and politicians, and the second being their substantial presence of Russian military personnel stationed in the southwest of the capital. While the military will obviously be leant on to help physically carry out the coup, the more amenable Tajik officials would be crucial in the moments following the coup, assisting Moscow to facilitate a smooth transition of power. With many of these politicians likely willing to work with Moscow under the assumption that they may either retain or improve their current roles and perks, or even that they may be bolstered into higher positions within the new administration, as a lot of the administration's most senior roles are currently being taken up by members of the presidents family. This dynamic works well for Moscow, as they would be going into this exercise hoping to retain most of the current government's mid and senior level leaders, as it is always far easier to replace one or two individuals at the top, rather than attempt an overhaul of the entire government at once. For Russia, the other key factor for success would be speed, as in a slow or unsuccessful coup, or the eruption of widespread hostilities, would force local commanders to abandon neutrality and choose between the old and new leadership. Such a division would not only drastically reduce Russia's chances of success but also exponentially increase the risk of the situation devolving into another civil war. In any operation to change government leadership, it is preferable that the coup be executed without bloodshed and at a pace rapid enough to prevent any meaningful reaction or counteraction, and so once the coup is launched, all of the following events, if carried out correctly, should be completed within the space of just 4 - 12 hours.

ii) - Covert preparations

In this scenario, the Kremlin would likely turn to three key actors in the Russian government for assistance with the coup, enlisting the GRU (Russia's military intelligence agency), who have previously been responsible for coup-related activities in foreign countries. The SVR (Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service), who specialise in espionage and foreign influence operations, including the cultivation of political elites or dissidents who could be leveraged in a coup. As well as the 201st Military Base in Dushanbe, who would provide the majority of the manpower for the operation.



(Figure: 6.10.16: The emblems of the Russian agencies most likely to be involved in coordinating and participating in the coup. These include the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) (left), the Russian Main Intelligence Directorate (GU) (centre), and the Russian Central Military District, which commands the Russian 201st Military Base (right))

However, while the Russian deployments in Dushanbe are generally better equipped than the majority of their Tajik counterparts, executing such a large-scale operation at the necessary pace would likely require a level of additional resources beyond those currently available to the 201st. For this endeavour, Moscow would almost certainly require additional manpower, procurement of more secure communications equipment, and possibly the involvement of some small specialised teams of PMCs.

However, more critical than these factors would be Moscow's reliance on cooperation with some Tajik forces during the final stages of the coup. As these units would not only provide the necessary manpower but also help frame the entire operation as a domestically driven change in government, enhancing the coups legitimacy and reducing the risk of domestic backlash. While the ideal scenario would entail securing the full cooperation of the entire Tajik military, the Kremlin must exercise precise and calculated discretion in its selection of which units to approach for participation in the coup. As while the success of the operation hinges on the defection of key Tajik military elements to support the Russian-endorsed regime change, with each additional Tajik commander or military leader Moscow involves, the risk of exposure escalates significantly. As the possibility of operational details being leaked to the President or intercepted by the Tajik security services grows with every new participant, with a single leak having the capability to compromise the entire mission.

To achieve a reasonable probability of success, it is imperative that Russia ensures the support of three key entities, those three being:



a) - The Commander of the 7th Airborne Assault Brigade:

As the most capable and mobile unit already stationed within the area, it is not only better equipped and more heavily armed than most of the internal formations, but the brigade is also held in high opinion with the Tajik public, making them ideal to serve the ideal face of the coup.

(Figure: 6.10.17: Symbology for the 7th Airborne Assault Brigade, based in Tezgar)

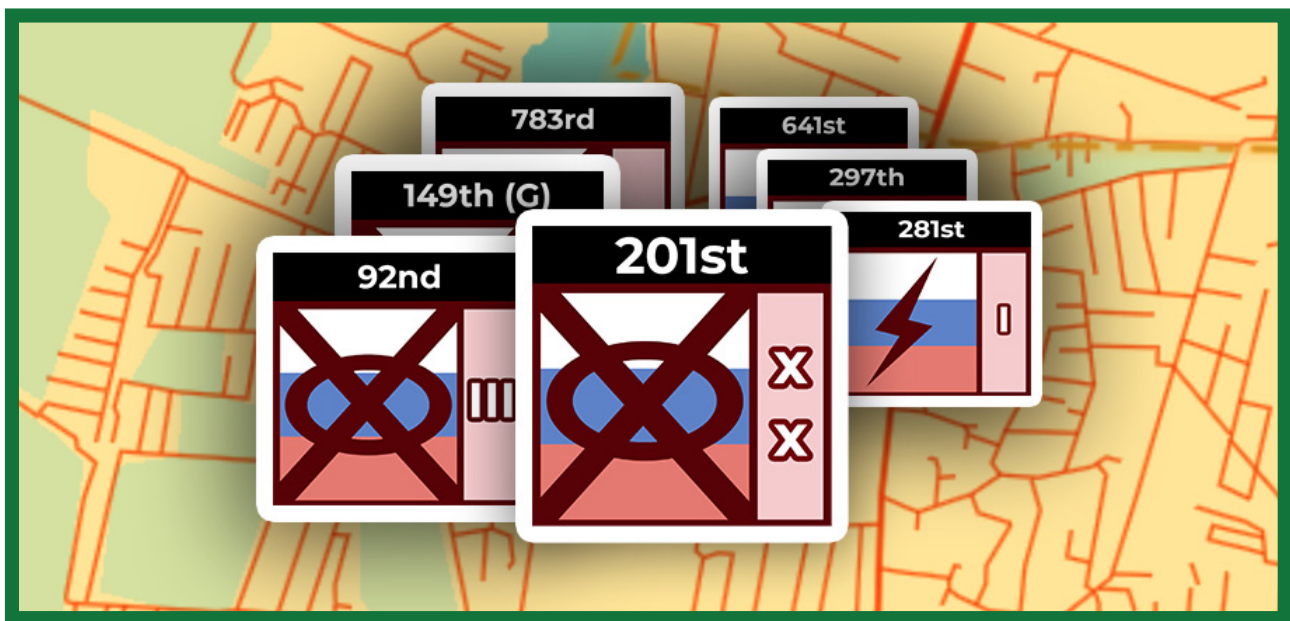
b) - The Commanders of Two Dushanbe-based battalions of MIA Internal Troops:

While Moscow can rely on Russian forces to secure external routes and strategic points such as bridge crossings, the Tajik Internal Troops, positioned in Dushanbe, are better suited to lock down key government districts in the early stages of the operation. Optically, it is also far more advantageous to have Tajik soldiers performing these duties rather than Russian troops, as it enhances the perception of the operation being a domestically driven initiative.

c) - One of the following government officials: The Chairman of the Constitutional Court, Prosecutor General, Minister of Internal Affairs, or a district-level judge:

In the aftermath of the coup, it will be crucial to present the operation as lawful and legitimate. While the constitutional provisions for arresting the President may be vague, having one of the prominent legal individuals listed above issue the arrest warrant, would provide some retroactive legal cover for the plotters' actions and lend much-needed legitimacy to the regime change. Even though cooperation from other elements such as the National Guard or SCNS would be ideal, their proximity and loyalty to the President render them likely too risky to approach for such a mission, as any premature leak would jeopardise the entire operation.

To maximise the chances of success, Moscow may also opt to bolster the number of Russian troops available for the operation. The simplest method for Russia being just to fly additional personnel into Dushanbe under the guise of a “standard training exercise.” However, with Russia already scaling back the number of exercises it has been conducting in Central Asia, and most of these exercises usually being scheduled months in advance, the sudden influx of additional troops on such short notice is likely to raise some suspicions in Dushanbe. A more subtle approach would instead involve utilising the standard personnel rotation process, whereby Moscow would rotate in a fresh set of troops and then find a reason to temporarily delay the outgoing rotation. By framing this delay as a logistical or administrative issue, Moscow could temporarily increase the number of Russian forces on the ground without attracting undue attention. If required, the Russians could also employ private military contractors (PMCs) to assist with the operation, with these operators able to enter Tajikistan discreetly through standard border checkpoints.

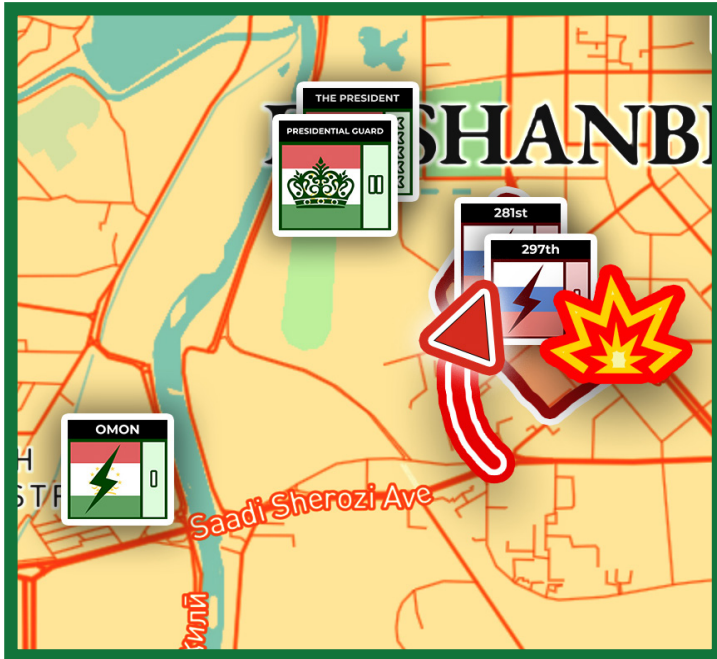


(Figure 6.10.18: A Map of southwestern Dushanbe where the 201st Military Base begins mobilising its permanently stationed units, including the 149th Guards Motor Rifle Regiment, the 92nd Motor Rifle Regiment, and the 783rd Separate Reconnaissance Battalion. Alongside three specialised GU units rotated into Tajikistan from Novosibirsk, these being the 281st Special Purpose Detachment, the 297th Special Purpose Detachment and the 641st Special Purpose Detachment. With the Russian formations at Ayni Airbase also being put on alert)

iii) - The Coup d’etat

A few hours before dawn on the day of the operation, the first Russian operators leave their base and begin making their way toward central Dushanbe. The first task for the plotters being to disable Dushanbe’s critical communications infrastructure, aiming to make any coordination or call for reinforcement by the Tajik defenders much more difficult. At approximately 0400 the 281st will open the day’s events by seizing the Unified Electronic Communications Switching Centre (EKT), located in central Dushanbe. This building takes top priority as the EKT handles the majority of all non-satellite telecommunications and internet services transiting in and out of the country, as well as many domestic internet providers’ web filters. By seizing and occupying this building in the opening stages, the potential for public mobilisation or the broadcasting of subsequent events has now been significantly reduced.

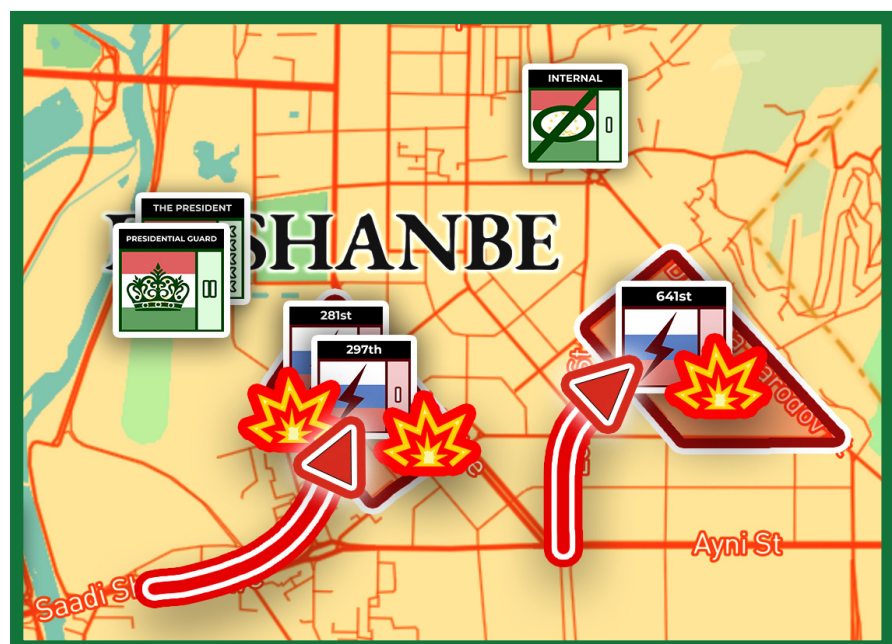
As an additional advantage, shutting down the EKT would offer Russian operators a significant strategic edge. As with Russian commanders equipped with satellite communication systems and dedicated, secure communications infrastructure, they will be able to maintain contact with their officers, while the local Tajik garrisons and law enforcement units, reliant on the now compromised EKT network, would face severe disruptions. This technological disparity being likely to impair the Tajik garrisons ability to organise any effective counteraction.



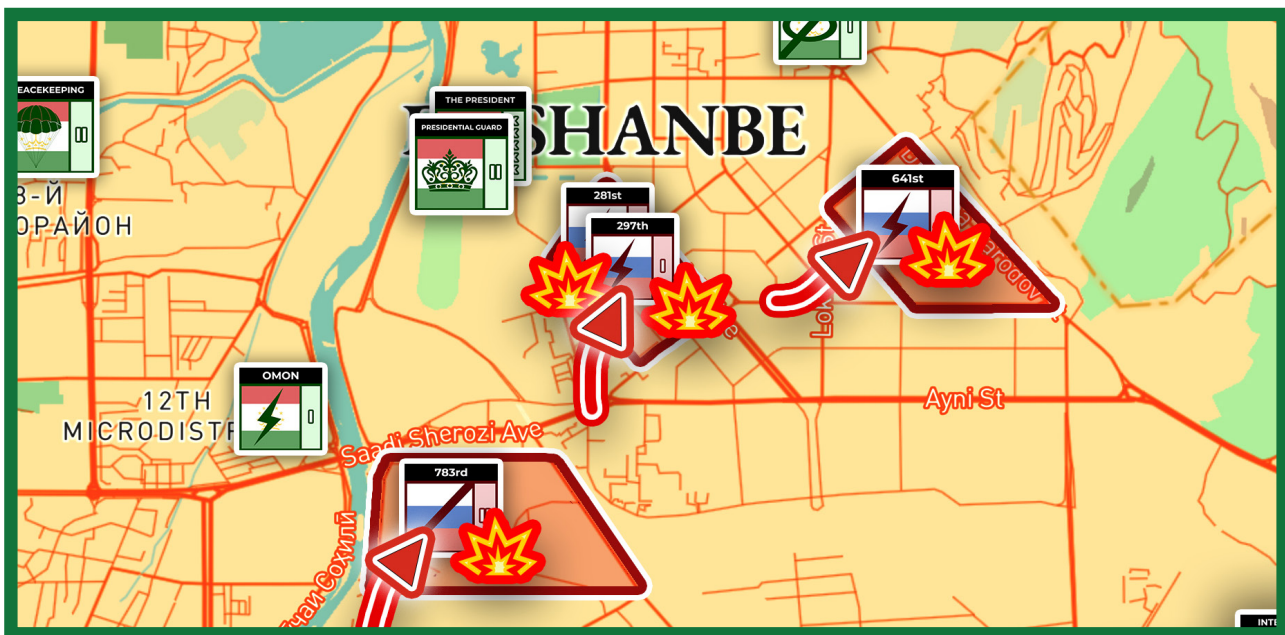
(Figure 6.10.19: A Map of Central Dushanbe. After removing all Russian identifiers and insignias from their uniforms, the 281st Detachment breaches and seizes the EKT building in Central Dushanbe, while the 297th Detachment simultaneously seizes the nearby Telephone Exchange Building. These operations being conducted simultaneously, with the objective of severing the majority of the local population's communication services, and thereby limiting their ability to coordinate counteractions or post footage of the ongoing coup online)

Simultaneously, the 641st Special Purpose Detachment, positioned a few kilometres east of the EKT installation, initiates the seizure of the national broadcaster, *Televizioni Tojikiston*. This move is a critical component of the broader operation, as by securing control of the national broadcaster, Russian forces not only silence any potential governmental counter-narratives but also ensure the dissemination of controlled messaging to the population, while also reinforcing the perception of the operation's legitimacy later on.

*(Figure 6.10.20: A Map of Central Dushanbe. The 641st Detachment breaches the national broadcaster, *Televizioni Tojikiston*, and once inside, switches the broadcasts over to rerun programming until the coup is complete. This action prevents the government from broadcasting or coordinating counter-coup messaging)*



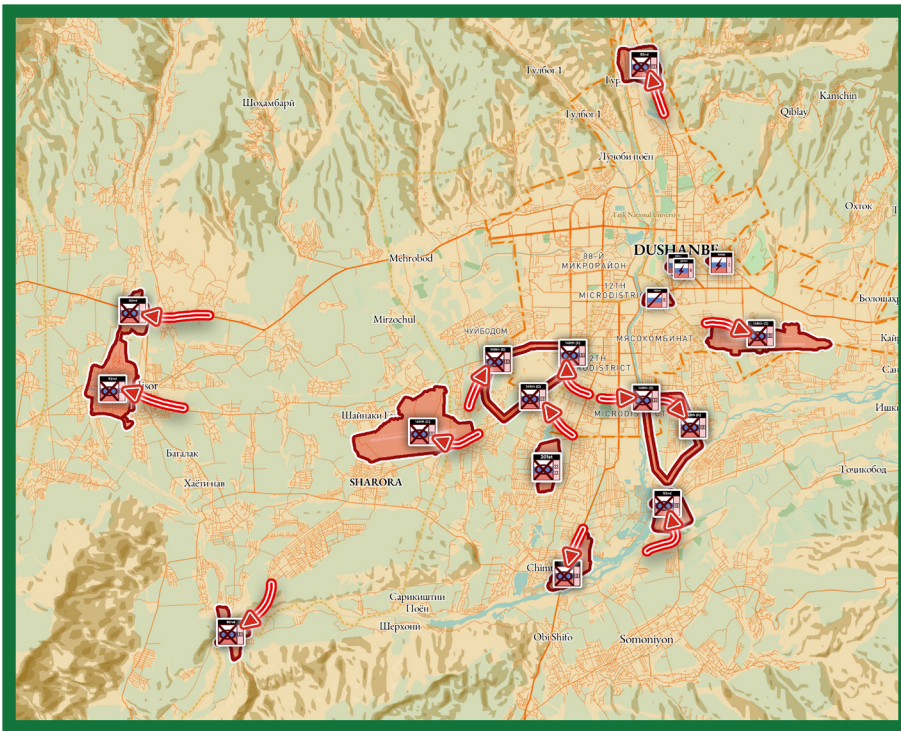
If the Kremlin harbored significant concerns about the coup's outcome, it might also opt to deploy the 783rd Separate Reconnaissance Battalion to the southern sector of the city, with the objective of temporarily shutting down Dushanbe Power Station-1. This power station is a critical infrastructure asset for the Tajik government, as it supplies electricity to most of the government's key installations across the city. By securing control of the power station, Russian forces would gain the capability to cut electricity to all central government institutions, including critical sites such as the presidential palace, the SCNS and MIA headquarters, as well as the military barracks and training facilities south of the plant. This action would even further cripple the Tajik government's already limited command and control capabilities, and render most of their key installations inoperable. Given the relatively low security presence typically stationed at this facility it is also likely to come under Russian control relatively quickly and present minimal resistance.



(Figure 6.10.21: A map of central Dushanbe. The Russian 783rd Reconnaissance Battalion seizes Dushanbe Power Station-1, which supplies power to the city's central and southern districts. If disabled, the Ismail Somoni and Shohmansur districts would lose all power, with a high probability that the resulting grid overload on the northern sectors would also cause Dushanbe Power Station-2 to temporarily shut down, cutting power to the northern districts of the city as well)

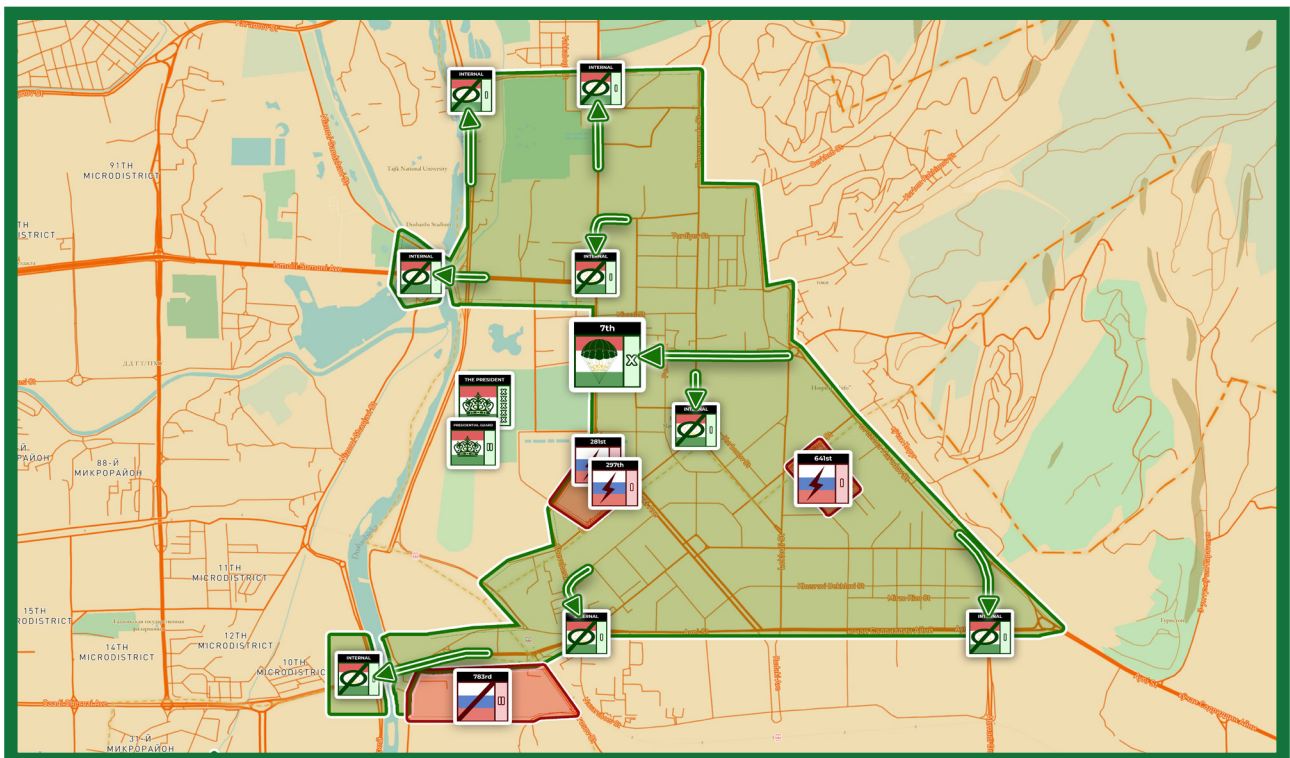
If the preceding steps unfold as planned, the 92nd Motor Rifle Regiment will have departed from its base in southwestern Dushanbe to establish strategic checkpoints along key highways connecting Dushanbe with Bokhtar, Tursunzoda, and Varzob. Once Russian forces have secured control of these critical bridges and chokepoints, the Russians would effectively control all of the main arteries into and out of the city.

This maneuver serves a dual purpose: first, it prevents external reinforcements, such as the Tajik 3rd Motor Rifle Brigade or the larger MIA garrisons stationed to the north and west, from reaching Dushanbe and coming to the aid of the government if they become aware of the coup. Second, it blocks key members of the government, including the President, from escaping the city, as should the President manage to flee the capital and re-establish a command center in another city, the coup would be compromised, rendering the entire operation a failure.



(Figure 6.10.22: A map of Dushanbe. The 92nd Motor Rifle Regiment begins establishing roadblocks across all of the major roadways and chokepoints leading into and out of the city, while the 149th Guards Motor Rifle Regiment moves to prevent any other military units stationed in Dushanbe from being able to leave their bases and come to the President's aid)

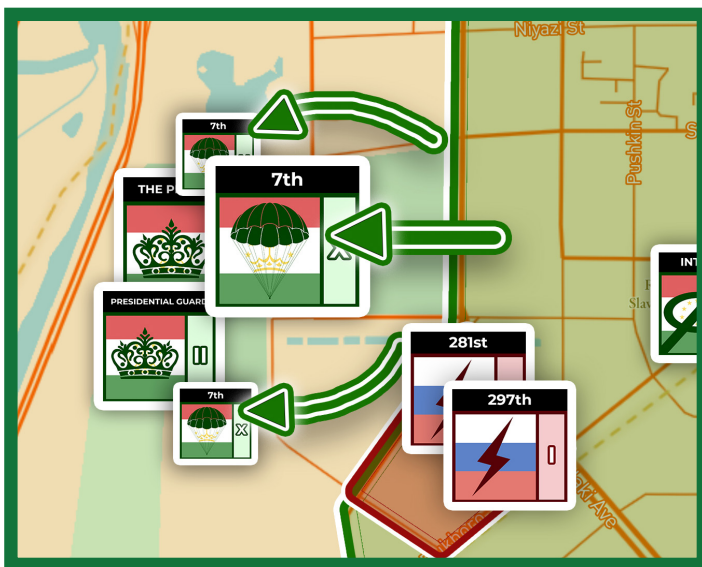
As Russia continues to secure the outer rings of the city, the defecting Tajik forces will start moving into position around the government quarter and presidential palace. The 7th Air Assault Brigade, advancing in with tanks, IFVs and armoured vehicles, approaching from their bases in the east, will head directly towards the presidential palace.



(Figure 6.10.23: Map of Central Dushanbe. The president remains in place as the 7th Brigade takes up positions surrounding the palace. Major intersections and routes in and out of the government quarter have now also all been locked down, preventing any police or external forces not associated with the coup from entering the area)

Once there, they will surround the palace and further isolate the president and the garrison inside. Simultaneously, defecting MIA units will be working to lock down the government quarter by establishing roadblocks and checkpoints throughout the area, their actions being undertaken to prevent government staff and personnel within the quarter from leaving their buildings or observing the unfolding events.

By 0730 hours, the electronic warfare units of the 7th Air Assault Brigade activate signal jammers to disrupt any remaining outbound communications from the palace. With the 7th now positioned at the palace gates, they use loudspeakers to inform the occupants, including the National Guard troops inside, of the arrest warrant. The TNG troops inside the palace are presented with two options: surrender immediately, with assurances of amnesty, or resist and face inevitable defeat, along with the moral repercussions of engaging in fratricide. Faced with this choice, it is anticipated that a significant portion of the TNG would choose to surrender. Following this, the 7th will breach the gates and advance into the palace. The TNG soldiers stationed here are typically not equipped with the same level of heavy weaponry as the 7th, and so are likely to be pushed aside by the better-armed force. Given the highly centralised nature of the Tajik legal system and the strong likelihood that any subsequent trial would result in the president's release, it is crucial that, during the chaos of the palace seizure, the president "takes his own life", rather than be captured, with this course of action having been pre-determined by Russia as a means of preventing him from becoming a rallying figure for loyalist forces



(Figure 6.10.24: A map of central Dushanbe. After announcing their intention to arrest the president, the 7th Air Assault Brigade breaches the palace gates and storms the palace)

For the sake of optics, any of the president's staff still remaining within the palace should be detained by the 7th, taken in for questioning and later released if they appear supportive of the subsequent change in power. After these events, the incoming leadership will likely seek to avoid direct confrontation with the president's familial clans, and thus,

leading members of the coup would likely provide assurances of safety and amnesty to the president's family, along with guarantees that they will have continued ownership of their wealth and status.

While members of the family who appear supportive of the new arrangement will be allowed to remain, dissenting members will be offered arrangements allowing them to retain their wealth in exchange for immediate exile overseas, a proposal many are likely to accept. For Moscow, this concession is designed to both prevent conflict between the old and new government, while also depopulating the political landscape of potential opposition figures in the short term. The new government would also be extending these offers, knowing that they still technically have the option to issue arrest warrants for these exiled family members later on, should it become politically advantageous or necessary.

For the time being though, Russian forces will maintain temporary roadblocks at key entry and exit points around the city, conducting thorough searches of individuals attempting to leave the city so as to intercept any administration officials attempting to flee. The presence of Russian troops on the outer roadblocks, and the MIA forces on the central roadblocks, will serve not only as a strong deterrent to potential protestors, but also plainly assert that the new government has control on the ground. These security protocols will likely remain in place until the success of the coup is fully assured, with the new government expected to impose a temporary curfew on the city and swiftly disperse any protests that may arise in the following days. Once the new administration has effectively consolidated control of the government and secured the support of all key military and security agencies, the Russian units will then begin dismantling these checkpoints and return to their respective garrisons in Novosibirsk and Dushanbe.

iv) - Post-coup actions

Upon the successful capture of the presidential palace, the Russian units currently controlling the power station, EKT, and national broadcaster will begin restoring power and communications throughout the city, making sure that the first images being broadcasted from *Televizioni Tojikiston*, are of a Russia-friendly newsreader, presenting the Kremlin's preferred version of events. With very little information having reached the outside world before this, the SVR will be working to make sure that the Russia-backed Tajik-language telegram channels are sharing and amplifying the Kremlin's preferred narrative of events. With information shared here in these threads likely to disseminate out onto social media and English-language news stations over the following hours. The fact that power and communications are only just now being restored for the city also affords these Russia-backed accounts to get a head start on setting the narrative of events. With the city now regaining power and internet access, Russia's preferred candidate and the leadership of the 7th Air Assault Brigade will arrive for a press conference at one of the nation's key political venues, the most likely being the Supreme Assembly in Central Dushanbe. Now that the national broadcaster is broadcasting and operational, they will transition over to streaming the arrival of these officials, and the subsequent press conference, these first broadcasts likely being the first seen by the outside world regarding the morning's events. At the conference, Russia's preferred candidate for president will likely step up to the podium flanked by the commander of the 7th, a senior member of the MIA or judiciary and a few high-ranking members of the previous administration, this being an overt way of informing the audience that the new administration has the backing of the armed forces, the judiciary and the previous administration.

To maintain the appearance of the coup as a purely domestic affair, Moscow will ensure that no Russian soldiers are visible in these broadcasts, with the Russian president only offering his support for the new leader after the press conference has finished. With this approach being designed to reinforce the illusion that the transition of power has been a legally sound intervention and purely internal matter within the Tajik government. For the press conference, broadcast from the podium at the Supreme Assembly, Russia's preferred candidate must deliver a speech that not only justifies the decisive actions taken earlier that morning, but also reassures both the domestic population and the international community that the situation on the ground has been fully stabilised. As with the city now under lockdown and in control of the new administration, the speech must strike a careful balance and project a message of stability, continuity, and national cohesion. The following is a rough concept for the type of speech that would need to be delivered by Russia's preferred candidate, with all of the text contained within square brackets explaining the rationale for the preceding section:

Post Coup Speech

"Good morning, people of Dushanbe and Tajikistan.
I address you today with crucial information regarding the events of the last few hours. I want to begin by acknowledging that our dear president has been a great leader for this Nation for a very long time. He guided our Nation through the darkest periods of the Civil War, built an efficient and robust national government, and helped create the great country we live in today.

[This helps lay the narrative that none of this was premeditated and also assures other Tajik politicians that this coup will be limited solely to the president, and that they will have the option of retaining their positions in the government, if they choose to comply]

However, as many of you are likely aware, recent developments here in Dushanbe, such as the president's recent crackdowns and the violence against citizens, have cast a long shadow over this illustrious legacy. Many, both inside the halls of power and on the streets of our cities, have recently expressed concerns about this change in his character and the alarming trend of authoritarian overreach from the president in recent months.

[This helps to avoid alienating the audience who may still have positive feelings towards the president and helps to establish an internal permission structure for them to change their feelings toward him]

With these crackdowns being ordered solely by the president, his actions stood in direct opposition to the democratic principles and collective welfare that he himself once championed for this nation.

[This helps isolate the president from the rest of the government and distinguishes his current actions from any positive memories citizens may have of his previous leadership]

In light of these events, and with a heavy heart, this morning we were compelled to confront this harrowing reality. After the intelligence we had received yesterday afternoon, we knew that if the president continued to force the country down this path, there would be significant potential for the Nation to once again fall into the darkness and conflict we all endured in 1992.

[This helps to establish that the president was planning further harmful actions, but that information cannot be shared at this time, that these actions the president was planning to undertake were the catalyst forcing the military to intervene, and that the politician speaking is presenting himself as a "protector of the people", something he will likely take into his subsequent presidential campaign. The tail end of the statement also serves as a veiled threat of what could happen if any groups attempt to resist the coup]

In response, late last night, the Supreme Court of Tajikistan and the Prosecutor General's Office issued an arrest warrant for the president.

[The plotters would hope to bring either the Office of the Prosecutor General, Supreme Court, or Constitutional Court on board prior to the proceeding, but whether the plotters managed to bring them on their side beforehand will not matter much. Once there has been a change in executive, using emergency powers, members of the court can be replaced with those willing to corroborate the plotters' version of events. The important part of this statement is just to make the actions previously undertaken sound legal, assuring the public there is still a continuation of the rule of law]

In these extraordinary circumstances, the brave soldiers of the Mobile Forces, bound by their oath to defend our nation and uphold the sanctity of our Constitution, were forced to choose between our leader and our countrymen. Honouring their oath to the people of Tajikistan, emergency actions were carried out this morning to protect the citizens of our country. This morning, at 0600, following all due legal processes and upon the orders of the Prosecutor General's Office, the men of the 7th Air Assault Brigade executed an arrest warrant issued by the people of Tajikistan against the president. The operation was conducted at 0830, adhering to standard law enforcement practices.

[Providing very specific details about timings and numbers will help distract the general public from other specifics that have been deliberately left out of the speech, such as who exactly issued the orders to arrest the president. This approach helps to spread the responsibility for these actions broadly, also making it harder for the general public to pinpoint blame]

However, upon the entry of the Mobile Forces into the palace, it was discovered that the president, sometime before our soldiers could present him with the legal decision, had regrettably chosen to take his own life. His decision to do so, shocks and deeply saddens all of us. Our sympathies go out to his family, and those closest to him.

[This is likely a lie, but helps to further diffuse responsibility]

There will be a state funeral held in the near future, with more details to be announced later this week.

[A national event where Russia's preferred candidate will oversee the proceedings and further position himself as a leader in front of the nation]

Yet, in this moment of national transition, we, as a Nation, must remain steadfast in our resolve to ensure the unity, governance, and well-being of the Tajik people. Even in these extraordinary times, it is imperative that we do not allow the country and the well-being of its citizens to be brought to a halt. So, for the sake of the Nation, we must immediately begin the transition towards new leadership, one capable of guiding us back to the principles originally championed by the president.

[The speaker should outline a clear and positive vision for the future of the country, always emphasising unity to avoid any civil war or breakaway factions]

To this end, the Supreme Court is expected to authorise a provisional arrangement today, lasting precisely four weeks. During this period, for the sake of stability and unity, those who have stepped forward to defend our country in this crucial hour will temporarily oversee the Nation's order and security.

[This effectively grants unchecked emergency powers to the plotters. However, by imposing a four-week limit on these powers, it will help to avoid alarming the private sector and citizens. This period will provide the plotters with the opportunity to establish their control and influence the upcoming elections]

We firmly believe that the power of this Nation lies in the hands of its citizens. Therefore, as part of these emergency transitional measures, national elections, for eligible registered candidates, will be held right across Tajikistan in just 21 days time. Upon reaching a national consensus, we promise that all emergency powers currently assumed by myself and the Mobile Forces will be relinquished to the winner of the election, restoring the full authority of the presidency and legislature.

[Holding an election will be incredibly important, as winning an election will lend legitimacy to the new government both at home and abroad. However, by stipulating "registered" candidates, the interim government can decide who is eligible to run. Also to the plotter's advantage, in a nation like Tajikistan, which lacks strong, preexisting multiparty democratic frameworks, the very tight timeframe of 21 days will be far too short for any cohesive opposition to coordinate and mount a national campaign, further limiting the opposition running against the plotters]

For now though, we must use these emergency powers in the country's best interest, to keep our citizens safe from looters and bandits who would seek to exploit this tragedy, to loot, pillage and attack innocent civilians. Therefore, for the next three days, we will be implementing a curfew from 6 pm to 6 am across all of Tajikistan. This will allow our brave police and law enforcement officers to better protect our citizens, businesses and cities from being ransacked and taken advantage of by these destructive anti-Tajik elements.

[The curfew is crucial as it demonstrates to external audiences that you are in control of the police and law enforcement. It also helps prevent organised resistance, restricts movement and communication among dissidents, and allows more time for the new regime to secure key installations and consolidate its control]

Delivering this message today comes with a heavy heart, but also with a hopeful spirit. However, we firmly believe that through these measures, we can navigate our way out of the shadows of today and into a bright future for our Republic.

Thank you, and long live Tajikistan!

The crafted narrative of the speech aims to achieve three key objectives. First, it signals to the international community that the coup has been successfully completed, indicating that any external intervention at this point would be futile. Second, it presents the coup as a purely internal matter to the domestic audience, minimising the risk of provoking divisions between Russia and the elites of other Central Asian republics. Third, it outlines the key parameters for the coming days and weeks, setting the stage for the transition of power. An example of this strategy is the decision to hold an election within a three-week timeframe, as announced in the speech. This compressed election cycle is a calculated move designed to limit the time available for external or independent challengers to organise and launch meaningful campaigns. Having an election cycle this short, in a country that does not have a history of open political parties, also favours the existing political institutions, as these groups already possess the organisational infrastructure needed to control or manipulate the election. Consequently, this approach is likely to benefit a candidate with institutional backing and controls of the military and election process, such as Russia's preferred candidate.

In the aftermath of the election, key figures involved in the coup, such as the commander of the 7th Air Assault Brigade and the head of the MIA, will likely be rewarded with prominent roles in the new administration, ensuring that they have a vested interest in maintaining the narrative surrounding the events. While the new leadership will avoid direct combatting the heads of the security services before being sworn into power, it is likely that once the government feels secure, significant internal security reforms will be implemented at the highest levels. In typical cases, these usually include dismissing generals viewed with suspicion by Russia and appointing loyalists to head key security organisations, such as the SCNS, the Tax Service, and the Ministry

of Communications. These manoeuvres would serve as a clear warning to other senior figures within the administration: that any opposition or dissent against the new government could have personal repercussions, particularly now that the new administration has access to all compromising information previously collected by the SCNS and the Tax Service.

v) - Key findings

Based on the wargaming and analysis of the above scenario, here are our three key findings:

1) - Weaknesses within the state's command and control infrastructure:

Part of the Tajik government's vulnerability to coups stems from significant weaknesses in its command and control (C2) infrastructure, leaving the administration exposed to rapid destabilisation efforts similar to those outlined in the analysis above. Tajikistan's highly centralised communication systems, such as the Unified Electronic Communications Switching Centre, present a critical point of vulnerability for Tajikistan's C2 systems. As in a hypothetical coup scenario, even a small number of Russian Spetsnaz or private military contractors could potentially seize control of these key communication hubs. This would not only cripple the government's ability to coordinate defence efforts and respond effectively but also allow foreign actors to control the online narrative, giving better-equipped forces with access to satellite communications a tactical advantage throughout the country.

The centralisation of these systems, while intended to enhance censorship capabilities and executive security, has instead created significant single points of failure, making it easier for adversaries to disrupt both governmental and military functions. This highlights a broader issue within Tajikistan's military planning: the lack of investment in resilient, decentralised communications infrastructure capable of withstanding targeted attacks. To mitigate these vulnerabilities, Tajikistan would need to prioritise the development of decentralised communication networks across multiple city and national districts. However, the implementation of such systems appears to be a low priority for the current administration. At a minimum, if the state hopes to better protect itself against these types of targeted attacks, it could consider implementing secure satellite communication systems and rapid-response protocols across its more trusted units, such as the Tajik National Guard, as these additions would be crucial to maintaining command integrity during crises.

2) - It would only take a few Tajik individuals defecting for the coup to succeed.

The scenario here highlights how co-opting or neutralising just a handful of military figures could allow Russia to facilitate a coup in Dushanbe, as while this centralisation of the city's security among just a few key individuals allows the government to maintain a smaller circle of potential powerbrokers, it also places increased structural vulnerabilities to states security. By concentrating so much power within such a small group, it not only reduces the likelihood of a coup plot being discovered and countered before implementation, but also means that an external power would only need to sway as little as 3 to 5 key actors to execute a coup, as outlined above.

In contrast, more democratic command structures, like those found in nations like

States or France, devolve much more of these sorts of military powers across a much broader range of individuals, with the commands of these structures also possessing many more built-in checks and balances. In these sorts of structures, with increased civilian and inter-branch coordination, an external actor would need to turn far more individuals at both the upper and mid-levels of command in order to gain the same level of military support as the Russians were able to in this scenario. To address this vulnerability, Dushanbe could consider implementing a more frequent rotation policy for senior military leaders, many of whom have already held their positions for extended periods of time. Within the upper levels of the Tajik officer corp, these sorts of prolonged tenures can lead to feelings of career stagnation or dissatisfaction, factors that Russia has readily exploited when previously orchestrating similar coups in other countries. Offering these commanders unable to progress much further in their careers guarantees of much better positions within a new administration.

By rotating upper-level personnel more frequently, this would help address some of these issues around career stagnation, while also reducing the time available for Moscow to co-opt each of the 3-5 key actors required for the coup. As any of the 3 to 5 actors could be rotated out before Moscow has the opportunity to leverage any favours or establish deep connections with the individuals required.

3) - Reducing the risk of coups through partial democratisation.

Due to the concentration of power within the executive branch, and the overly broad powers granted to the presidency over the past two decades, the removal or usurpation of the president would leave the remaining branches of government with limited capacity to legally restrain the new executive's actions. This issue is also then further exacerbated by a weakened judiciary, which lacks the necessary checks and balances to prevent executive overreach. Over this period, the independence of the judiciary in Tajikistan has been eroded, making it easier for incoming leadership to exploit vague legal mechanisms to usurp and consolidate power, suppress opposition, and entrench autocratic rule.

This centralisation of authority not only makes the regime more vulnerable to internal power struggles but also increases the attractiveness of Tajikistan as a target for foreign interference. As in the eyes of a state like Russia, controlling or replacing a single individual, namely, the president, could allow an external actor to effectively steer the entire state into a more favourable direction. In the context of a potential coup, this makes the presidency a highly coveted target for Moscow or other foreign powers seeking to shift Tajikistan's domestic or foreign policies in their favour.

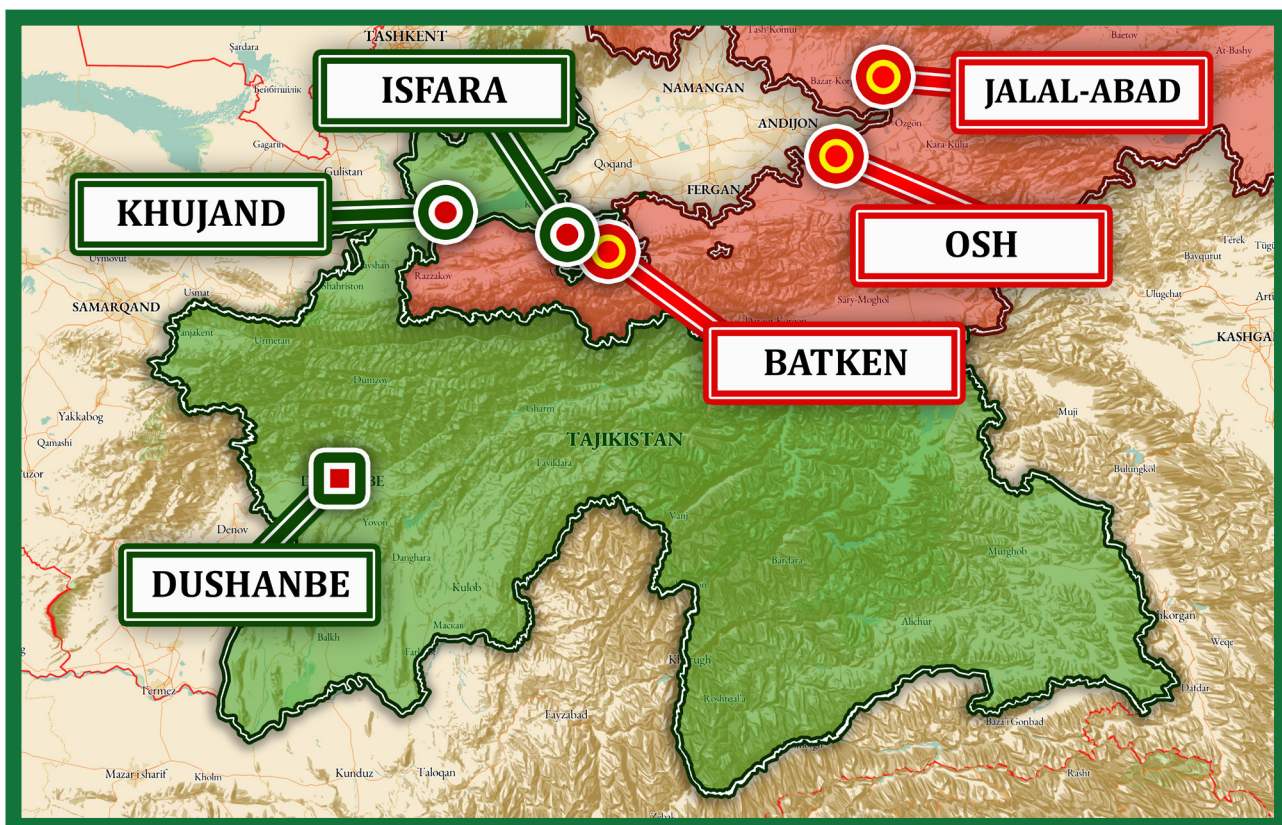
To mitigate this strategic vulnerability, Tajikistan could explore devolving more power from the executive branch. Redistributing authority among multiple government bodies, regional administrations, and key sectors would ensure governance continues uninterrupted, even in the event of the president's removal. This would maintain policy continuity and reduce the impact of sudden leadership changes, thereby preserving both foreign and domestic policy integrity.

More importantly, decentralisation would also diminish the incentive for states like Russia to attempt a coup in the manner wargamed here, as with a reformed structure,

it would be much harder to simply just replace one president for another. However, pursuing decentralisation reforms is unlikely under the current administration due to the deeply entrenched political culture and power structures that have historically resisted any efforts to dilute executive authority here in Tajikistan. Thus, while decentralisation could significantly strengthen Tajikistan’s resilience against both internal and external threats, such reforms remain improbable in the near term.

6.10.3 - A Tajik Invasion of Southern Kyrgyzstan

For our final flashpoint scenario, we conducted a comprehensive wargame simulating a full-scale invasion of southern Kyrgyzstan by the Tajik armed forces. This hypothetical scenario envisions a situation where Dushanbe leverages ongoing border disputes with Kyrgyzstan as a pretext for launching an expeditionary strike aimed at capturing and occupying key southern cities in Kyrgyzstan. While we assess the likelihood of such a large-scale conflict to be exceedingly low, the wargame offers valuable insights into the significant vulnerabilities and shortcomings within Tajikistan’s expeditionary, offensive, and logistical capabilities. It is also important to clarify that this exercise, although grounded in reality, is not intended to reflect the current state of Kyrgyz-Tajik relations, nor does it imply any imminent threat of conflict at this scale between the two nations.

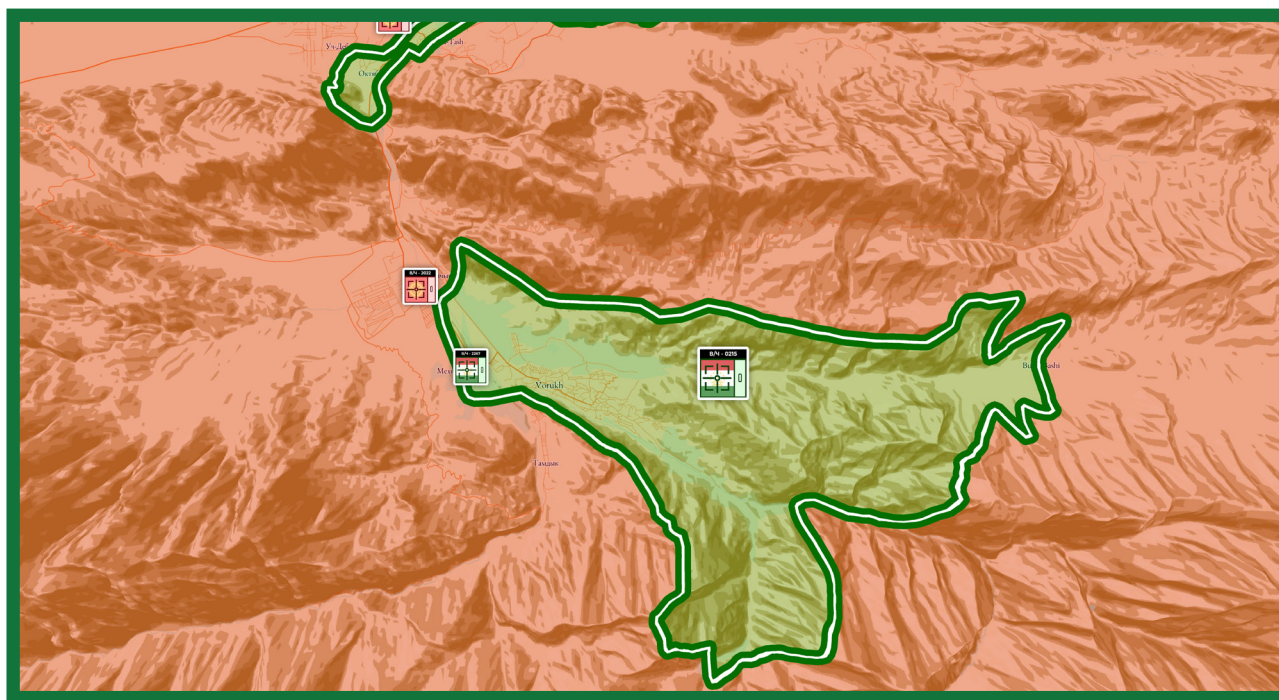


(Figure 6.10.25: A map of Tajikistan (green) and Kyrgyzstan (red) with the locations of the main Kyrgyz (red and yellow) and Tajik cities (green, red and white) mentioned within the analysis)

The border areas around Batken, situated between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, have been a persistent flashpoint for decades, largely due to the failure of previous administrations to properly demarcate the Fergana Valley borders or establish effective cross-border cooperation mechanisms during the transitional period of the 1990s. Over time, localised skirmishes over

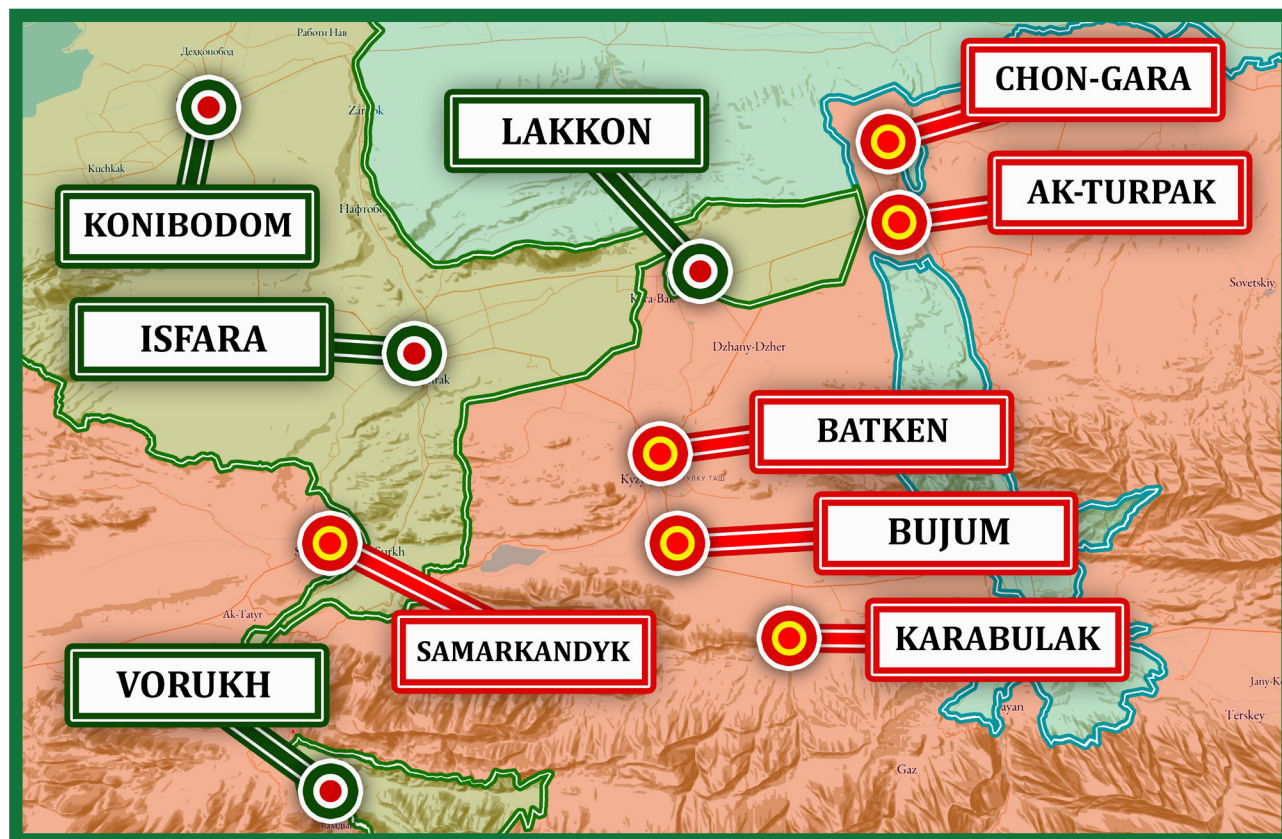
resources in the region have steadily intensified, becoming highly politicised and, on several occasions, escalating into open conflict between the armed forces of both sides.

While clashes have repeatedly flared across various sectors of Batken, the most intense confrontation took place as recently as just 2022, with the most recent round focused on the area between the Tajik city of Isfara and the Kyrgyz city of Batken. The fighting in 2022, as outlined in section 6.2.4, concluded in a stalemate, resulting in a temporary ceasefire commonly referred to as a “white peace.” However, this fragile truce has since fuelled an arms race, as both nations have sought to enhance their military capabilities in preparation for future engagements, particularly in the same contested region, and since 2022, nationalist voices in both Bishkek and Dushanbe have now framed the issue as not just a boundary dispute but as a matter of national sovereignty and pride, with increasing calls for military solutions from their respective populations. While some efforts have been made to resolve the issue peacefully, the military and political leadership in both capitals still arguably remain locked in a posture of distrust and mutual hostility, and without meaningful dialogue or external mediation, the risk of further militarised clashes still remains high. The ongoing military buildup in the Batken region by both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan is a clear indicator that both sides are preparing for a potential escalation in hostilities, and given the strategic imperatives at play, the prospect of a preemptive strike by either side is a somewhat realistic scenario. However, if launched by Tajikistan, such an operation would likely focus on securing key terrain and establishing a tactical advantage before the hostilities begin to reveal some of the state’s logistical vulnerabilities, or start drawing in outside powers. In this hypothetical scenario, the Tajik president has decided to abandon diplomatic talks with Bishkek, and commit to achieving a decisive military victory against Kyrgyzstan, in hopes of gaining a stronger position in border negotiations between the two states. Securing the Batken region is crucial for Dushanbe as it both resolves the two states’ ongoing border disputes, but if occupied, would also secure permanent control over the land corridors connecting the Tajik exclave of Vorukh to the rest of the country.



(Figure 6.10.26: A map of the Vorukh Exclave, with Tajik territory highlighted in green and Kyrgyz territory in red)

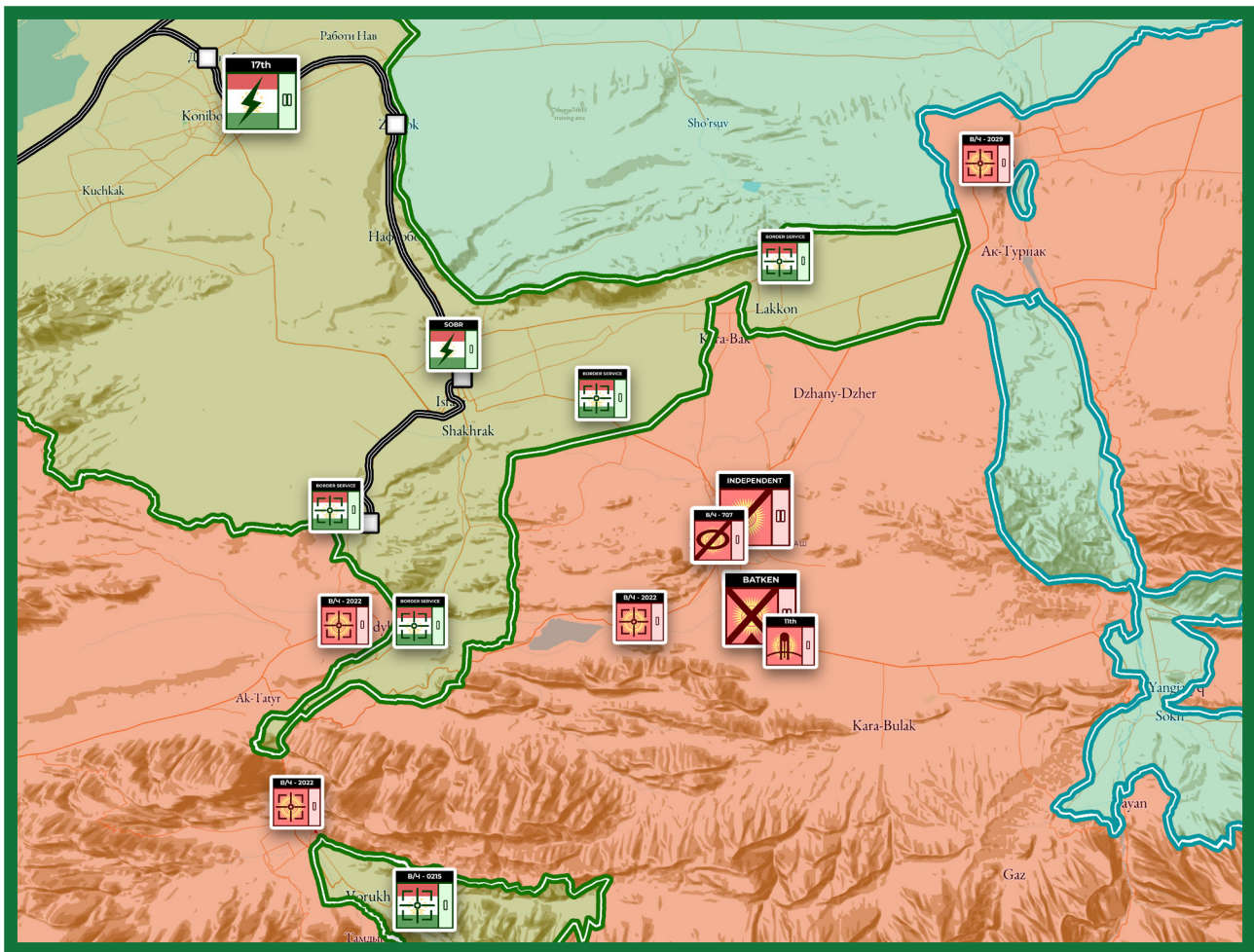
For Tajikistan, the operation will likely go beyond just securing access through the Vorukh Corridor, with Dushanbe's strategy likely to also include seizing the adjacent towns and the airfield in Batken, with the concept being to then reinforce Tajikistan's defensive position against subsequent Kyrgyz counteroffensives from the east.



(Figure 6.10.21: A map of the conflict zone, with key cities, towns, and villages of Tajikistan (green/red) and Kyrgyzstan (red/yellow) highlighted)

For Tajikistan, the operation will likely go beyond just securing access through the Vorukh Corridor, with Dushanbe's strategy likely to also include seizing the adjacent towns and the airfield in Batken, with the concept being to then reinforce Tajikistan's defensive position against subsequent Kyrgyz counteroffensives from the east.

However, as the analysis details, achieving these broader objectives showcases significant logistical and operational challenges for the Tajik armed forces. These challenges include an overreliance on ageing military vehicles, limited operational resources, and the state's considerable disadvantages in air warfare capabilities. As while Tajikistan does benefit from relatively robust access to vital rail infrastructure and railheads in Konibodom, Isfara, and Shurob, without improving the speed and efficiency of troop and supply mobilisation, the advantages offered by these rail lines are significantly diminished upon entering contested Kyrgyz territories. Once Tajik forces enter Kyrgyz territory, they will no longer enjoy rail support and will instead promptly become reliant on the nation's inadequate road and rotary fleet to facilitate their logistical support. At this point, the Tajiks' lack of resources like fuel trucks, engineering vehicles, and mobile repair and replenishment stations will start to hamper the speed and efficiency of their movements. With that in mind though, it is also critical to note that the Kyrgyz military are similarly hindered by these same logistical and operational challenges, although not to the same extent as the Tajik forces.



(Figure 6.10.28: A map of Batken, with Tajikistan (green), Kyrgyzstan (red) and Uzbekistan (blue), illustrating the existing rail infrastructure within this theatre. The rail lines being illustrated in black, with the locations of railheads represented by white squares. The railheads (from north to south) being located in Konibodom, Neftobod, Isfara, and Shurob)

The scenario analysed here centres around a hypothetical expeditionary attack by the Tajik's armed forces into Kyrgyz, with the main objectives being the capture and occupation of the Kyrgyz cities of Ak-Sai, Batken, Bujum and Chon-Gara. As a basis for modelling this scenario, we will be using existing military training manuals, contemporary doctrines, data from recent military exercises, and insights gleaned from interviews with military, academic, and government officials. These sources will help establish the initial parameters and provide a framework for predicting how each side's military might react and conduct itself in such a scenario.

Under normal circumstances, the conflict between these two parties would likely remain localised to border skirmishes or not occur at all, as Tajikistan's military is neither designed nor equipped for sustained expeditionary operations. Dushanbe would also be acutely aware of the increased military funding and partnerships currently in place with both China and Russia, both of which could exert significant pressure on the Tajik government if they chose to intervene. So, to make this invasion scenario somewhat plausible, several alterations and assumptions will need to be made, or else the scenario ends too quickly or does not escalate to war in the first place. The first critical assumption in this scenario is that Kyrgyzstan achieves complete surprise in its initial strikes on Tajikistan, successfully repositioning soldiers and assets to the necessary staging areas around Batken without alerting Dushanbe, Moscow, or Beijing.

From a strategic perspective, it is also essential for Tajik military planners to account for the modest technological and numerical superiority of the Kyrgyz armed forces within this theatre. As in Batken, Bishkek permanently maintains several above-average battalions, all of which are further supported by the larger garrisons in Osh, 200 km to the east, and a notable deployment of UAVs, including Bayraktar TB-2 drones, stationed approximately 250 km eastward in Jalal-Abad.

However, should Dushanbe choose to overlook the significant logistical challenges and still press ahead with its invasion plans, the strategic objective will be to swiftly secure and establish new defensive positions, and then use their newly acquired positions as leverage during post-conflict negotiations with Bishkek, seeking to formalise permanent territorial concessions. Although given the constraints of public opinion and the limitations in ammunition, supplies, and overall sustainment, Tajik military advisors are likely to push for a highly condensed campaign. Their recommendations would centre on conducting all major offensive operations within a 5-6 day window, with the advisors likely to stress to Bishkek that the entire campaign must not extend beyond a month, as protracted engagements would strain both the military's capacity and the government's ability to manage domestic support.

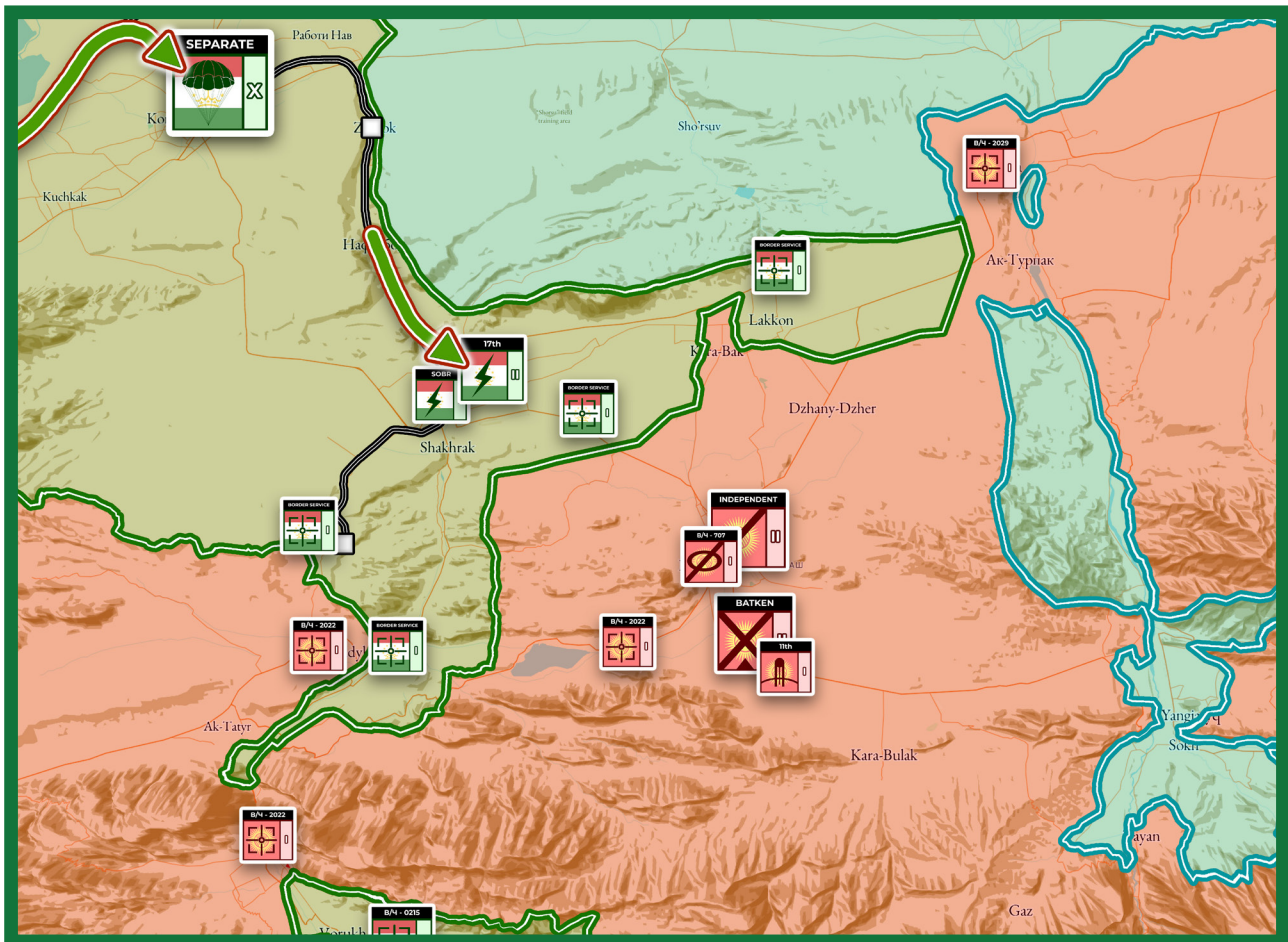
iii) - Pre-offensive manoeuvres and redeployments

While numerous strategic realities will influence the decision-making of Tajik defence planners, two key factors are likely to take precedence over anything else. The first is that the leadership in Dushanbe will likely prioritise domestic stability over any offensive military capabilities, particularly in scenarios like this, where significant domestic opposition would be expected if financial and economic sanctions begin to impact the wider Kyrgyz population. As a result, military commanders are likely to only be granted access to only a limited number of personnel and equipment for the forthcoming expeditionary operations, with Dushanbe ensuring that sufficient resources are retained within the major cities to maintain, and if necessary, bolster the operational readiness of the MIA's Internal Troops.

The second critical factor will be the prioritisation of speed, with Dushanbe aiming to capture the targeted cities as swiftly as possible and establish defensible positions before Kyrgyz or external forces can mount a cohesive response to the offensive. Although this approach would consume significantly more supplies on a daily basis, the most likely strategy for the Tajiks would involve launching simultaneous offensives towards both Batken and Chon-Gara, effectively splitting the defenders' priorities. From there, areas of the frontline where Tajik forces achieve some tactical success would be reinforced with supplies and reserve forces from the TBS garrisons along the border or additional units brought up from Khujand.

In preparation for such an attack, Tajik forces would likely begin stockpiling and pre-positioning essential supplies closer to the border with Kyrgyzstan. These supplies would include key items such as communications equipment, ammunition, fuel, and medical support. However, during peacetime, Tajikistan's standard military presence along this section of the border is fairly minimal, with only police, small SOBR platoons, and lightly armed Border Service units stationed within the region. In reality, with no large permanent force operating in the area, any significant redeployment of Ground or Mobile Forces into this forward theatre would greatly increase the likelihood of preemptive detection by Bishkek. If detected, this would grant Kyrgyzstan a significant tactical advantage, providing the local Kyrgyz commanders additional

time to bring reinforcements, materiel, and vehicles up from Osh in preparation for the forthcoming attack. However, as a caveat for this scenario, we have modelled the conflict under the assumption that Bishkek did not detect the Tajik redeployments, and as a result, Kyrgyzstan will only have its garrisons permanently stationed in Batken available for the initial stages of the scenario.

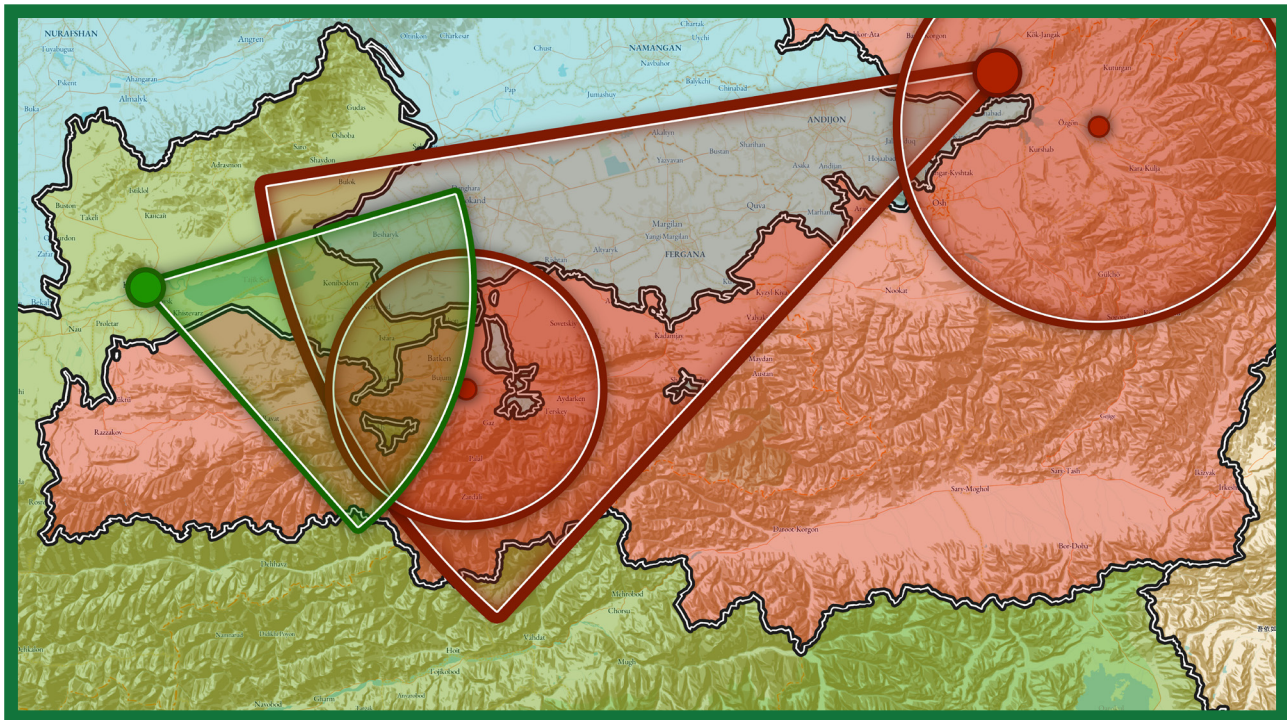


(Figure 6.10.29: The Separate Airborne Assault Brigade (SAAB) and the 17th Rapid Response Battalion are transported into the theatre via rail, before moving to their assembly areas outside of Isfara. The redeployment likely being conducted over an extended period to avoid alerting Russian or Kyrgyz intelligence)

iv) - First strikes

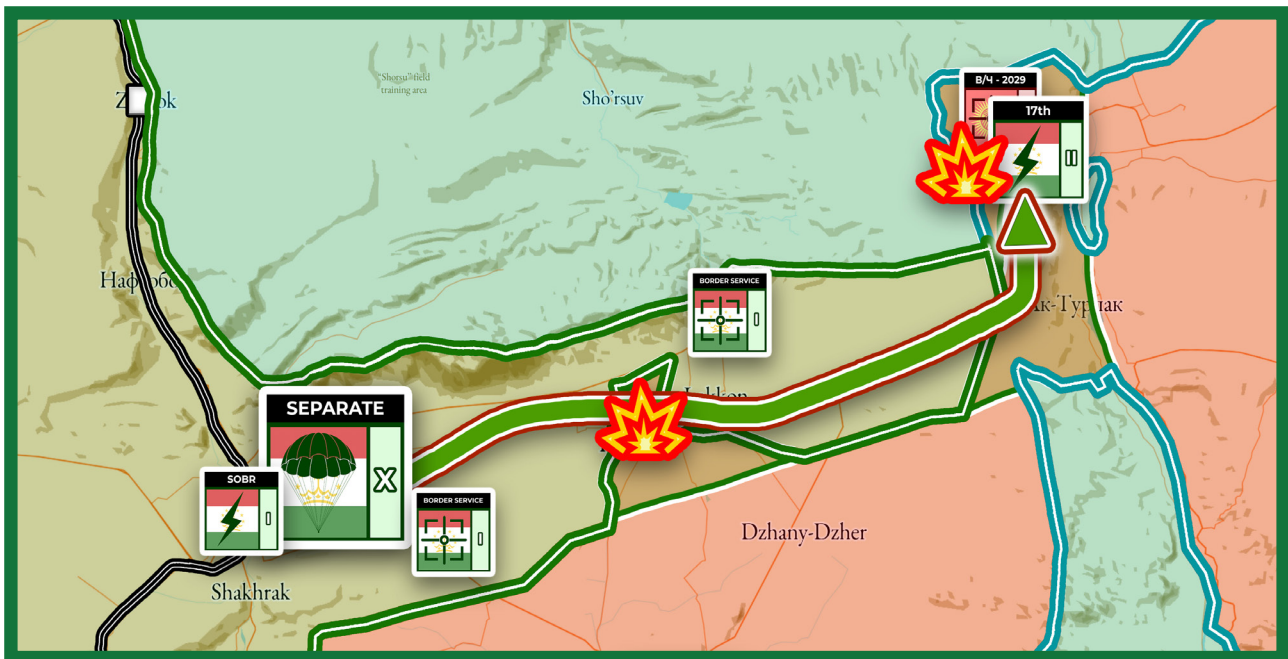
Under textbook Tajik offensive doctrine, an operation of this nature would usually involve the utilisation of overwhelming initial airpower and precision strikes by the attacker, targeting as much of the enemy command and control centres (C2), ammunition depots, and critical infrastructure as possible, with the Tajik's hoping to diminish the defenders' capacity to respond effectively. However, constraints on Tajikistan's air capabilities, particularly its limited access to longer-range offensive drones and modernised Mi-24V attack helicopters, combined with challenges in pilot proficiency and serious maintenance issues within the TJAADF, will all significantly restrict their aerial support options. As a result, for a scenario in this theatre, it is probable that the Tajik Air Force will only be able to comfortably allocate a handful of Abadil-2 UAVs and possibly 1–3 helicopters attack helicopters for the initial strike missions, all of which would likely operate out of Khujand Airport (100km to the west).

The expected targets for these initial strikes would likely include military installations in Bujum and Batken, local government coordination centres, the air defence batteries southeast of Bujum and the air traffic control and communications facilities at Batken airport. Should these strikes achieve their objectives, pilots may then receive orders to return to Khujand, replenish their supplies and redeploy back toward Batken for attacks against secondary targets, including communication nodes, roadblocks, and government buildings. However, by the time the Tajik helicopter fleet has returned to Khujand, resupplied, and flown back to Batken for a second round of airstrikes, the Kyrgyz are likely to have deployed their own air assets or shoulder-fired anti-aircraft weapons into the theatre, significantly increasing the risk of the Tajik rotary fleet being shot down.



(Figure 6.10.30: Map of southern Kyrgyzstan illustrating the operational ranges of air and air defence assets stationed in the theatre. The green cone representing the operating range of a Tajik Ababil-2 UAV flying out of Khujand, and the red cone representing the operating range of a Kyrgyz Bayraktar TB2 flying out of Jalal-Abad, assuming the Kyrgyz do not have permission to fly over Uzbek airspace. The red circles indicate air defence ranges, with the red circle on the left representing the maximum range of the SAM systems operating out of Bujum, and the circle on the right representing the range of the SAM systems operating out of Mryza-Ake)

While the initial attacks would create significant problems for the local Kyrgyz garrisons, they would not eliminate the more pressing threat to the Tajik invasion force: the drone and ground attack assets based at Osh and Jalal-Abad airfields to the east. The Kyrgyz have already demonstrated the effectiveness of their UAV fleet during the 2022 campaign, and while the Tajiks would hope to counter these assets, they currently have very limited options available to do so. As despite the clear strategic value of neutralising Kyrgyz air capabilities stationed in Jalal-Abad, none of the Tajik missiles or UAVs currently in operation would be capable of reaching Jalal-Abad from Khujand, and even if an attack helicopter were modified with a larger fuel tank to cover the distance, Kyrgyz SAM batteries positioned along the flight path between Khujand and Jalal-Abad would make it nearly impossible for a slow moving helicopter to reach the target in Jalal-Abad.

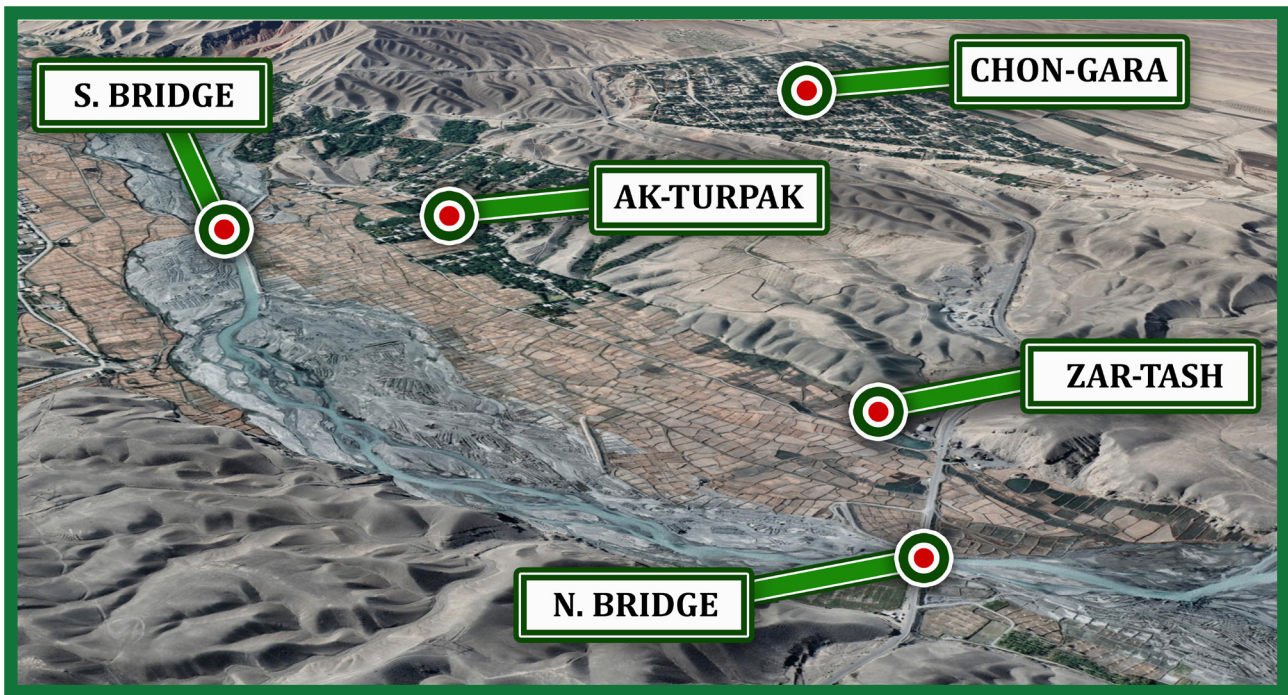


(Figure 6.10.31: A map of eastern Isfara. The 17th Rapid Response Battalion advances eastward to engage the small Kyrgyz State Border Guard Service (SGBS) garrison in Chon-Gara, swiftly seizing the facility and securing the bridges over the Sokh River in Ak-Turpak and Chon-Gara)

The first unit expected to depart its assembly area will be the 17th Rapid Response Battalion, as they have the furthest distance to cover on the first day. Advancing from their starting positions in Isfara, the 17th will proceed eastward along the main highway, bypassing Kara-Bak to the north, moving through the Tajik town of Lakkon, and forcing their way through the lightly manned Kyrgyz border checkpoint east of Lakkon. From there, they will turn northeast towards the Zar-Tash and Ak-Tepe bridge crossings, located approximately 15km inside of Kyrgyzstan.

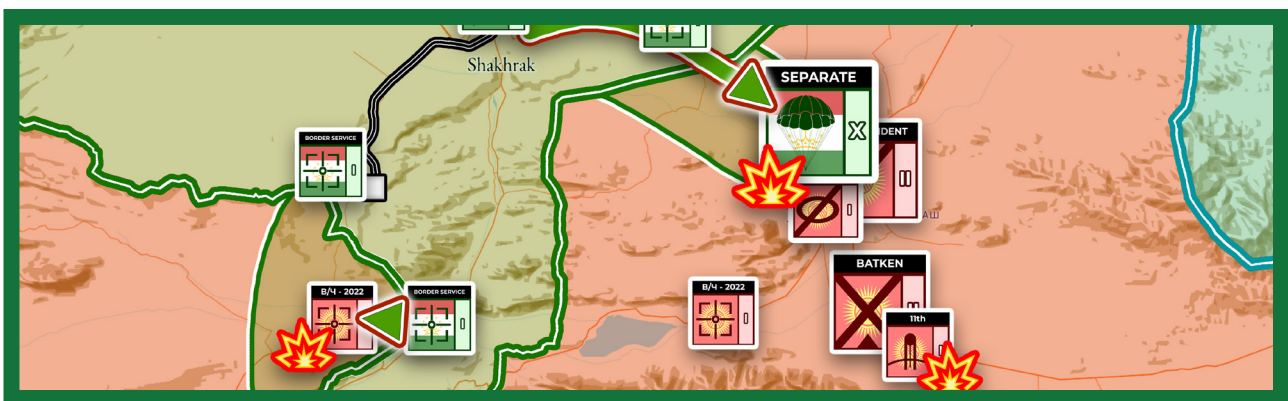
While capable of advancing quickly, the 17th is only equipped with a limited arsenal of portable light machine guns, assault rifles, and a small allotment of anti-armour weaponry, including RPG-7s, and SPG-9s, and while this lack of heavier weapons reduces the units demands for fuel and support vehicles, it also makes them highly vulnerable to attacks from tank and larger calibre artillery. Despite being restricted to lighter weapons, the unit would also be expected to hold the bridges across the Sokh River and repel any armoured counterattack approaching from the east for as long as possible.

The importance of this initial thrust cannot be overstated, as the main bridge crossing over the Sokh River into Zar-Tash represents a critical Kyrgyz chokepoint for the operation, as the highway running through this bridge serves as the primary logistical artery linking Osh to Batken, making it a key strategic target for both sides. While there is also a secondary crossing approximately 6 kilometres to the south at Ak-Turpak, this southern bridge holds a more limited value for Bishkek. As this bridge is not only significantly narrower, but the roads leading from it tend to veer northward shortly after crossing the river, further diminishing its utility for large-scale troop movements or supply convoys. Within this scenario, Tajik forces would likely anticipate that the bulk of Kyrgyz mechanised units and heavier vehicles will concentrate their avenue of advance along the Zar-Tash bridge. As such, Tajik commanders would likely prioritise securing and defending this crossing point over the secondary bridge at Ak-Turpak, given the constraints on manpower within the battalion.



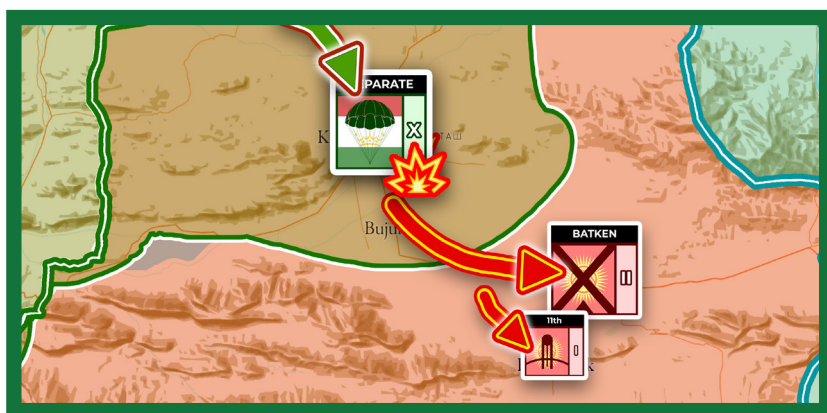
(Figure 6.10.32: Satellite imagery of the Zar-Tash bridge and its surrounding areas, highlighting the locations of key points of interest)

This position near Chong-Gara likely also represents the furthest point Tajik commanders would be willing to extend their forces away from their own borders. As advancing beyond this would almost certainly be deemed operationally unfeasible due to the risk of overextending the 17th Battalion's limited logistical capabilities, which are currently already stretched along the axis from Isfara to Chong-Gara. However, once fortified positions have been established along the western bank of the river, the 17th will have effectively secured its preliminary objectives, and at this stage, will now shift focus towards limited anti-partisan operations and work on strengthening their defensive positions around Chon-Gara.



(Figure 6.10.33: Map of the Batken area in the opening stages of the conflict. After the initial round of air interdiction operations against Kyrgyz targets, the SAAB begins its surprise assault across the border toward Batken, aiming to dislodge the local defenders before they gain the chance to mobilise and launch a coordinated defence. If the Tajik's had managed to achieve full strategic surprise, they would be likely to encounter minimal resistance at the border checkpoint, and be able to fairly rapidly make their way into the northern suburbs of Batken, and from there begin moving toward local bases and administrative centres)

Under the assumption that the Kyrgyz are not successful in repelling the Tajik forces, the Kyrgyz deficiency in armoured vehicles and the lack of stockpiled antiarmour weaponry within the region would force a withdrawal from the Batken and Bujum southeast toward the town of Kara-Bulak, with Tajik forces then occupying Batken and the surrounding areas)

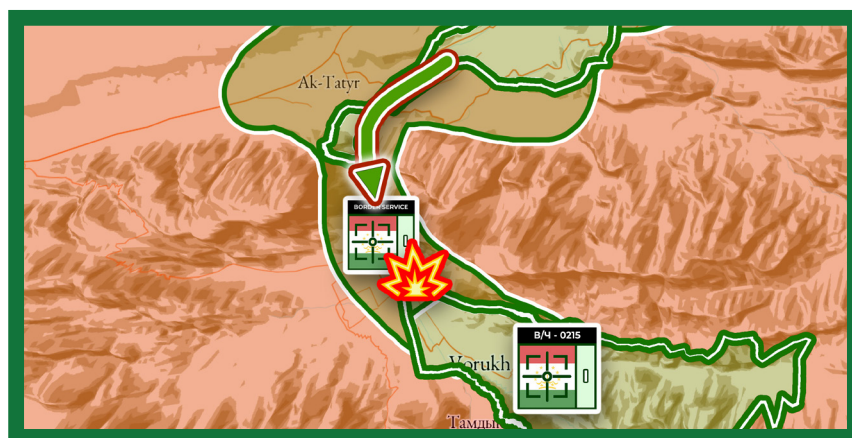


(Figure 6.10.34: A map of Batken and its surrounding areas. After sustaining heavy losses from the Tajik's armoured forces, with the remaining Kyrgyz forces beginning to fall back toward Kara-Bulak to regroup and await reinforcements arriving from Osh)

From here, Tajik military units will need to commence essential maintenance, refuelling, and retrofitting activities for their vehicles and equipment. Additionally, they will need to evacuate casualties to field hospitals in Isfara and replenish soldiers' ammunition. These tasks will likely prevent any further advances beyond Batken or Bujum until offensive readiness and logistical support systems can be restored. However, given the lack of pre-existing field support infrastructure within the Tajik forces, conducting this maintenance in Batken is likely to be significantly challenging for the Tajik commander.

Unlike Russian or American field repair stations and depots, the Tajiks will have to rely on makeshift field-repair stations and unarmoured motorised convoys stretching back to Isfara or Khujand for support, with these convoys likely to come under significant aerial threat from Kyrgyz drones as the campaign continues on. Following the retreat of Kyrgyz forces, Tajik TBS units will begin moving into the strategic corridor linking Chorkuh and Vorukh, with their objective being to establish control over the approximately 300-metre gap that currently separates the two Tajik-controlled territories. With only a small opposing garrison of Kyrgyz frontier soldiers based in the gap, it is highly likely that Tajik forces will be able to push through and link up with the Tajik garrison inside the Vorukh exclave within a few hours of hostilities commencing. While the capture of this corridor provides minimal strategic advantage to the theatre as a whole, it remains a high priority for political reasons.

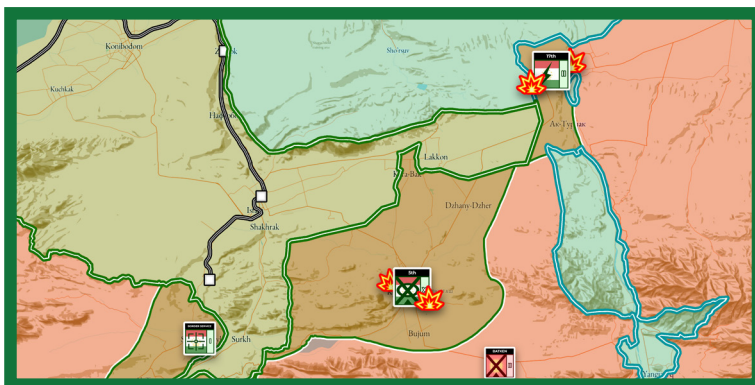
(Figure 6.10.35: A map of the Vorukh Gap. With the Kyrgyz defence now in disarray and personnel attempting to regroup to the east or west of the theatre, TBS forces seize and occupy Ak-Sai, effectively connecting Vorukh with greater Tajikistan)



v) - The impact of local Kyrgyz airpower

If Kyrgyzstan were caught off guard by this attack, there could be a significant delay before Bishkek and its Southwestern Command are able to organise and launch a comprehensive military response and counter-attack beyond the immediate reactionary counterattack from the two battalions already stationed within the theatre. Within this scenario, the first properly coordinated response from the Kyrgyz is likely to be carried out by Kyrgyz UAV units operating from Jalal-Abad, under the auspices of the Kyrgyz State Border Service. If committed to the theatre, the Kyrgyz would be able to deploy a varied array of UAV platforms against the Tajiks, including TB2, SAARA-02, Aksungur, and Akinci drones. With each of these platforms likely to inflict considerable attritional damage on the Tajik forces upon entering the theatre. Kyrgyz UAV operators are expected to carry out targeted strikes against Tajik forward command posts, communications hubs, tanks, fuel trucks, field repair stations, tracked vehicles, and resupply convoys travelling from Isfara towards Batken. As observed during combat in Libya, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Ukraine, these drones are anticipated to inflict substantial damage on the invading forces.

While the initial wave of strikes is likely to be highly problematic for the Tajik forces, the scope and intensity of UAV operations are expected to increase significantly over the following days as additional resources, ammunition, and systems are reallocated from northern sectors of Kyrgyzstan toward southern airstrips in Osh and Jalal-Abad. However, while the tempo of airstrikes will take some time to reach its peak sortie rate, it is expected to slow down after 1–2 weeks of high-tempo strikes due to Kyrgyzstan's limited stockpiles of ground-attack missiles, replacement drone parts, and repair facilities.



(Figure 6.10.36: Map of the Batken theatre. Kyrgyz drones launched from airstrips in Jalal-Abad and Osh commence airstrikes on Tajik positions, inflicting significant damage on vehicles, command centres, and logistical convoys travelling between Isfara and the frontline)

Given the aerial threats the Tajiks will be facing at this point, the most likely course of action will be to follow the Russian playbook in Ukraine and seek refuge for their vehicles within civilian structures. This serves the dual purposes of temporarily sheltering personnel, whilst also concealing military assets from identification and strikes by drones. However, while this dispersal strategy will make aerial targeting more difficult for the Kyrgyz, it will also complicate the Tajiks' logistical efforts for resupply and maintenance, as they will need to disperse platforms and personnel right across the city rather than being able to group them into a centralised location. Storing vehicles within civilian areas also introduces the added risk of sabotage by local paramilitary actors and the exposure of military asset locations via civilians posting on social media. Overall, with the Tajik UAV programme significantly trailing behind the Kyrgyz programme and a notable deficiency of modern or mobile air defence systems within the Tajik force, Kyrgyz UAV strikes are likely to significantly hamper Tajik operations throughout this theatre.

vi) - The regional response to Tajikistan's actions

In recent years, the geopolitical landscape of Central Asia has been increasingly shaped by the growing trend of deeper interregional trade and cooperative cross-border endeavours. With this in mind, the onset of large-scale hostilities between two regional states is likely to provoke substantial pushback and concerns from the region's key stakeholders, notably Russia, China, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan. All of these countries, aiming to minimise reputational damage to the region and avoid scaring away external inbound FDI, would be expected to promptly engage in concerted diplomatic efforts to persuade Dushanbe to cease its military actions and withdraw its forces back into Tajikistan.

If these suggestions are ignored, some of these states may escalate their requests into outright threats of adverse financial repercussions. The larger actors, in particular, have the capacity to inflict significant financial and social damage on the Tajik economy through measures such as the cessation of Tajik working visas, border closures, an embargo on outbound finances, or even the deportation of groups of Tajik workers back to Tajikistan in efforts to catalyse domestic unrest. In the case of Russia, Moscow also has an additional range of diplomatic and financial options available to it, including the presence of a substantial Russian garrison stationed only a few miles from the presidential palace.

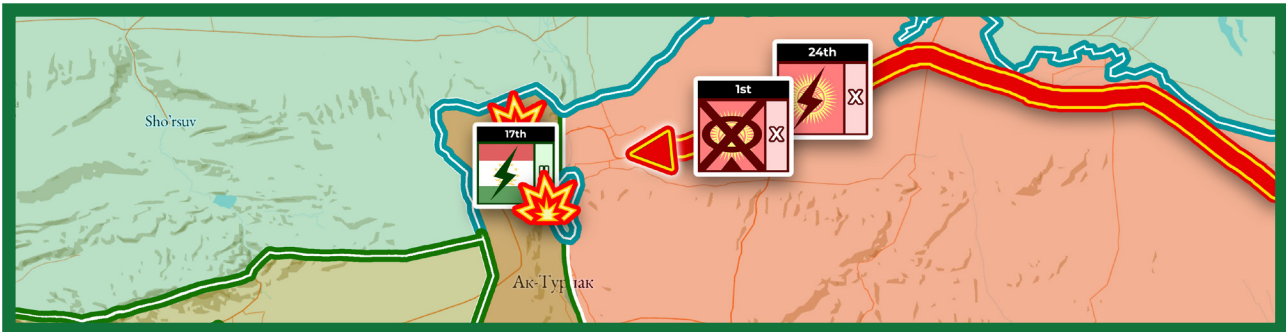
At a minimum, it can be expected that Russian leadership would initiate a series of diplomatic engagements with the governments of Dushanbe and Bishkek, hoping to convince both sides to disengage. Additionally, it is likely that Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan would implement security measures to seal their respective borders with Tajikistan, effectively prohibiting entry or exit for Tajik nationals and inbound consumer goods. While minimally burdensome for the Uzbek and Kyrgyz administrations to enact, such actions are likely to inflict substantial economic hardship on the Tajik citizenry and consumer markets, consequently increasing societal animosity toward the war. The economic implications of these external interventions are expected to rapidly exacerbate domestic grievances against the ruling elites and the presidential family, placing pressure on the administration to find an exit from the conflict. Despite the relatively minimal impact these military engagements will have on major population centres in Tajikistan, the economic ramifications would exponentially amplify internal demands for a speedy resolution from these cities' populations as their economic reality worsens.



(Figure 6.10.37: A map illustrating the countries likely to temporarily close their borders with Tajikistan. With Tajikistan (green), Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan (red) and China (orange), as there would be a high probability of Beijing joining the border closure agreement)

vii) - Kyrgyz counterattack

As domestic tensions grow within Tajikistan, and Bishkek's air campaign over the region steadily intensifies, additional Kyrgyz forces are expected to begin entering the theatre towards the end of the first week. In such a scenario, the Kyrgyz forces would presumably mobilise regional garrisons, including the 1st Brigade and the 24th Brigade "Ilbirs", along with select units of the National Guard to serve as the counterattacking forces, with all of these units departing from Osh and travelling westward toward the bridge crossing at Chon-Gara.

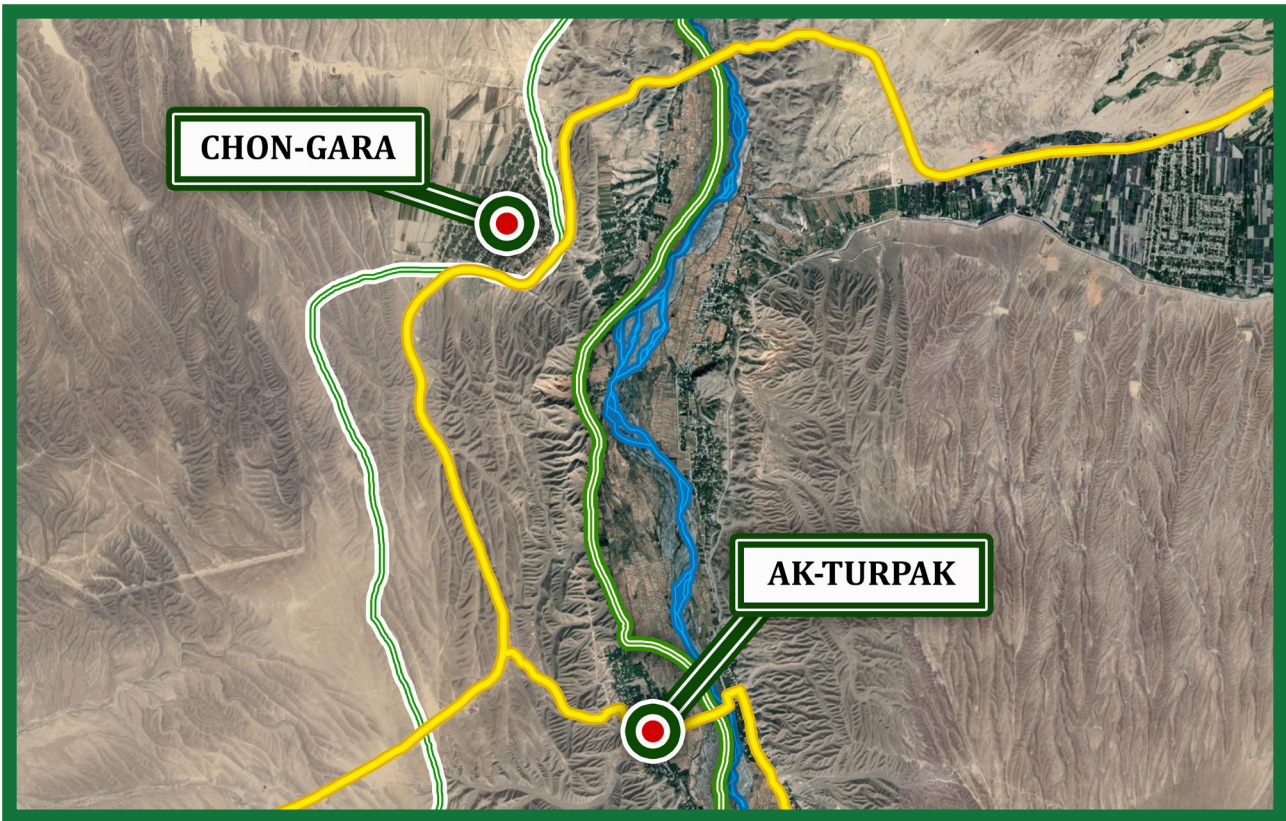


(Figure 6.10.38: A Map of Sokh River crossings. After nearly a week of sporadic airstrikes on Tajik positions all along the line, the Kyrgyz 1st Mountain Motor Rifle Brigade and the 24th Special Forces Brigade arrive in the theatre from the east. Upon entering, the 1st advances west toward the northern bridge at Zar Tash, while the 24th diverts south toward the southern bridge at Ak-Turpak, with both units then subsequently carrying out indirect mortar and artillery strikes on the Tajik positions along the west bank of the river)

While the river limits potential crossing points for the Kyrgyz, the Tajik 17th are also constrained by the terrain, with minimal options available to them for establishing adequate defensible positions along the western ends of the bridges. The geographical reality forces Tajik commanders to choose between one of two main strategies. Where commanders would either have to forward deploy their units closer to the bridges, which would allow for more effective targeting of Kyrgyz armoured units attempting to cross the bridge, but at the cost of the 17th now sitting in the direct line of fire from Kyrgyz artillery on the opposite bank. The only other option for the Tajiks being to reposition their troops away from the bridge toward the more defensible parts of the villages of Chon-Gara and Zar-Tash, which would help conceal and protect them from air and artillery strikes, but would also make it much easier for the Kyrgyz forces to cross the bridges and begin initiating a breakout.



(Figure 6.10.39: Satellite imagery of the Sokh River crossing, with the image illustrating the perspective of the westbound Kyrgyz forces)



(Figure 6.10.40: A map of Sokh River crossings. An illustration of the two possible deployment arrangements and reserve lines for the 17th Battalion. The forward line overlooking the bridges being marked in green, while the safer fallback line within the villages is marked in white. In addition to these lines, the highways have been marked in yellow, and the Sokh River is shown in blue. All of which has been depicted over satellite imagery of the area)

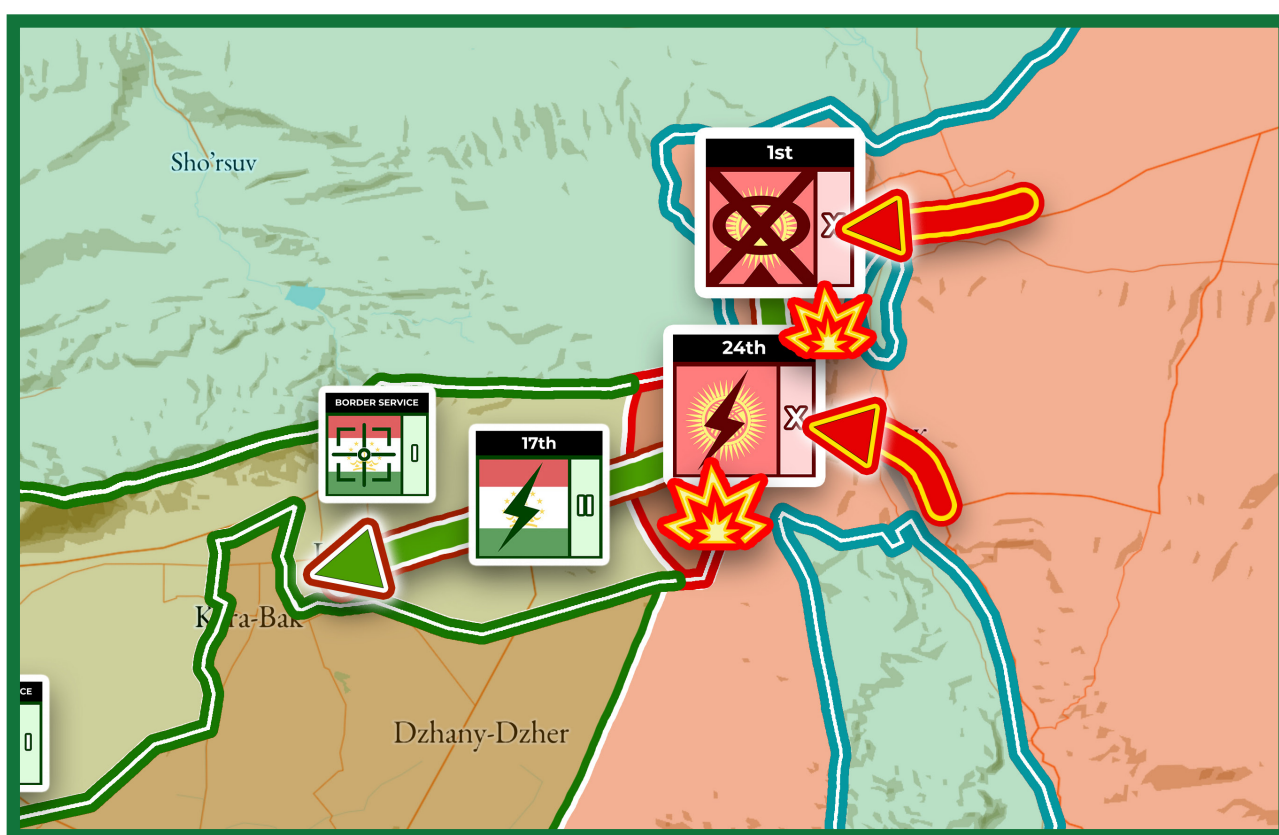
Within this scenario, the more cautious strategy of deploying a limited number of soldiers to the front line while keeping the majority in reserve is the more likely deployment structure for the Tajik forces. However, this approach ultimately positions the the Tajik's for a likely defeat. As the 17th would be entering the engagement with only a limited arsenal of light anti-tank weapons, and while they might succeed in neutralising a few enemy vehicles as they attempted to approach or cross the bridge, as the Kyrgyz vehicles begin entering the village, the overwhelming local disparity in troop numbers, artillery firepower, and aerial support would likely compel the 17th to inevitably abandon their positions. This would become particularly problematic if, while 17th Battalion is tied up fighting the 1st in Chon-Gara, the Kyrgyz 24th forces launch a parallel assault across the southern bridge at Ak-Turpak.



(Figure 6.10.41: A map of Sokh River crossings. While the 1st engages the 17th in Chon-Gara, lighter elements of the 24th begin crossing the bridge at Ak-Turpak, seizing and establishing a foothold on the western bank of the Sokh River)

If the bridge is taken, lighter elements of the 24th Brigade could advance across the smaller bridge, establish footholds on the west bank of the river, and then move directly northwest to threaten the road connection between Chon-Gara and the rest of the Tajik forces. With the Tajiks' sole axis of retreat now under direct threat, if the 17th Battalion chooses to stay and defend its position in Chon-Gara, they are highly likely to be cut off and isolated.

Upon realising the untenable position, the 17th would have little choice but to initiate an immediate withdrawal back towards Lakkon. However, this retreat would likely necessitate abandoning any heavy supplies or damaged weapons to ensure the retreating Tajiks reached Lakkon before the Kyrgyz did, diminishing their capacity to defend against subsequent attacks. Following the withdrawal from Chon-Gara, the 1st, along with motorised units of the 24th, will begin moving their more vulnerable units and logistics infrastructure across the river, establishing forward operating positions within the villages along the western bank, thereby allowing the Kyrgyz to replenish and refit their forces in preparation for a subsequent attack towards Isfara.

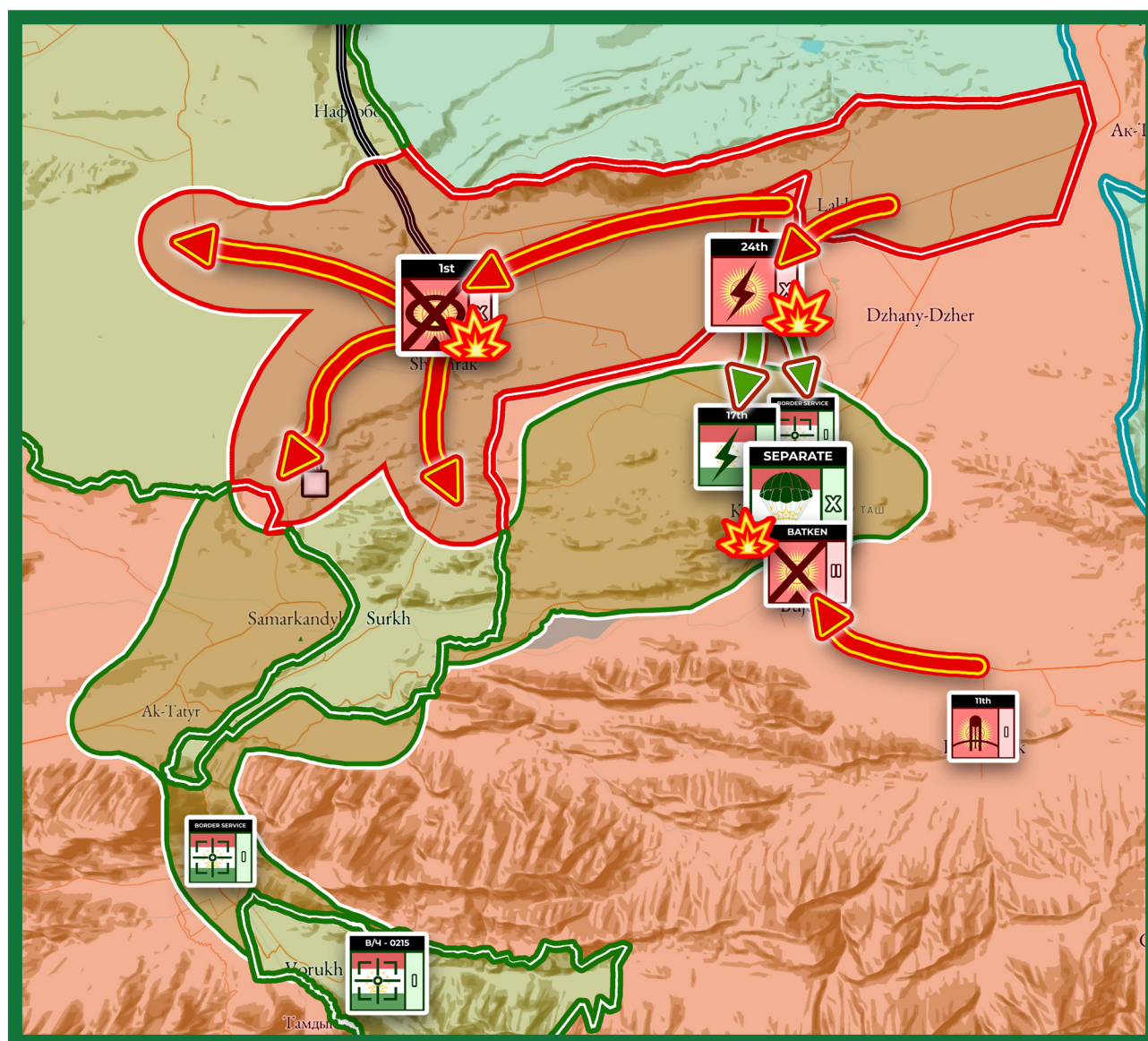


(Figure 6.10.42: A map of Sokh River crossings. Recognising the futility of their position amid increasing artillery strikes, and with the 24th now crossing the bridge south of Ak-Turpak, posing a significant risk of encirclement, the 17th Battalion evacuates its positions in Chon-Gara and withdraws towards the Tajik town of Lakkon)

viii) - Commander's dilemma

At this critical juncture in the war, Tajik commanders face a difficult set of strategic decisions. As following the abandonment of the 17th Battalion's heavier weaponry during the retreat, and the overwhelming advantage in heavy vehicles and airpower that the advancing Kyrgyz columns are likely to enjoy, the Tajiks must now decide between one of three strategic options:

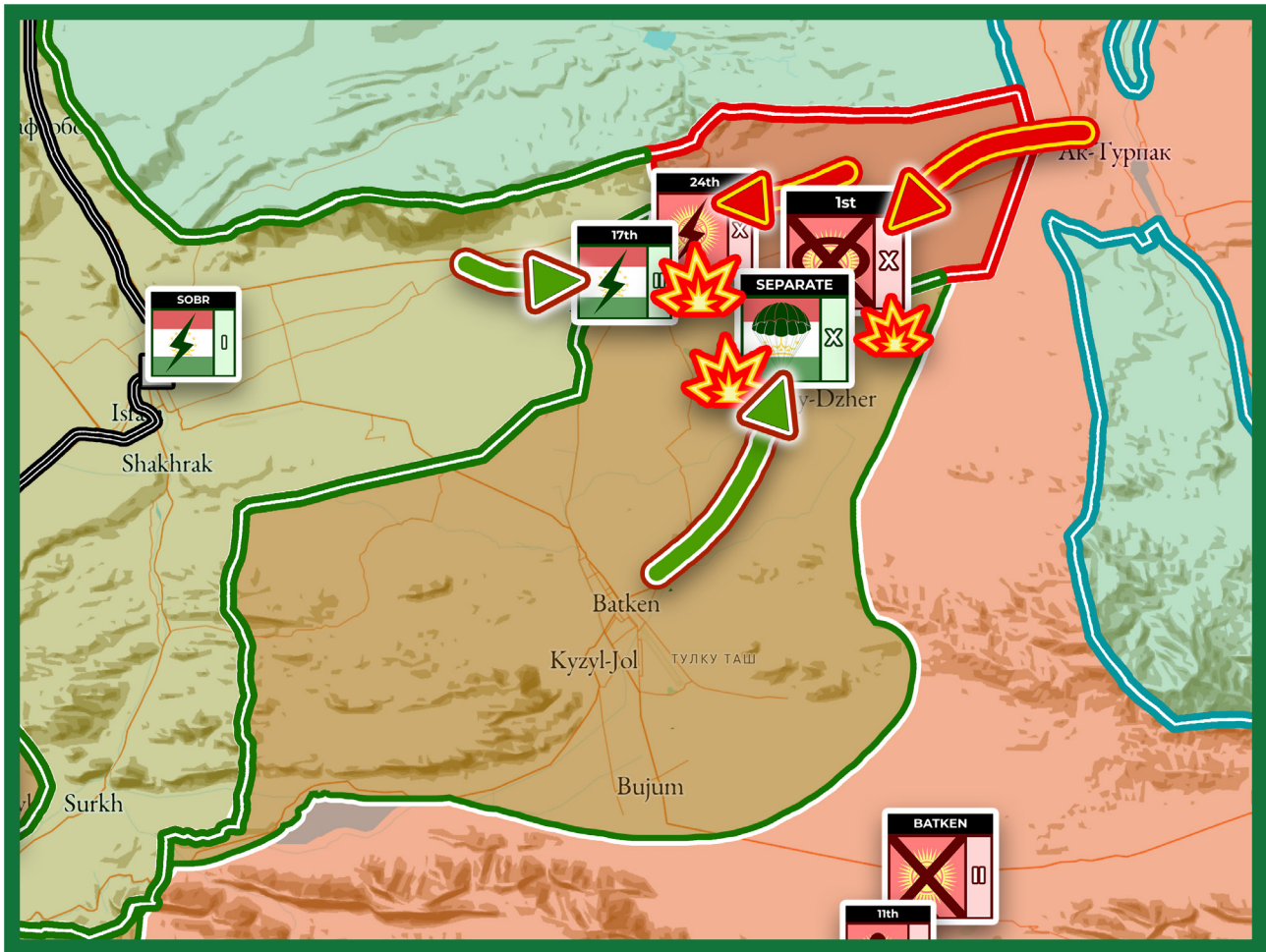
Option A): Maintain their current positions



(Figure 6.10.43: A map of Batken. With the 17th's forces compelled to establish a diminished and hasty defence along the highway in Lakkon, Tajik commanders will have very little force strength remaining along the highway running from Chon-Gara to Isfara. If the decision is made to also keep the SAAB deployed in occupied Batken, either to avoid airstrikes or for political reasons, there is a very real chance the Kyrgyz motorised units could advance along the highway, either routing the 17th from their positions through direct engagement, or by utilising the 24th as a fixing force, whilst the 1st bypasses Lakkon and advances directly into the rear supply lines and command centres of the Tajik forces in Isfara)

Given the 17th Battalion's depleted state from engagements around the river, should Tajik commanders choose to maintain their hard-fought positions in Batken and Vorukh, the most probable outcome would be a strategic breakthrough towards Isfara by the Kyrgyz 1st Brigade. Such a scenario would not only result in a significant loss of Tajik territory but also sever all logistical support for the 5th Brigade within Batken. This course of action, therefore, carries substantial risks and presents the highest likelihood of a catastrophic collapse for the Tajik forces within the theatre.

Option B): Launch a counteroffensive towards the Kyrgyz



(Figure 6.10.44: In an effort to prevent the Kyrgyz from advancing up the highway and into the Tajik rear, the remains of the 17th and the SAAB abandon their positions and launch a counterattack towards the advancing Kyrgyz)

In a purely tactical manoeuvre, the Tajik forces could abandon their defensible positions in Batken and Lakkon to launch a counterattack against the Kyrgyz forces, with these manoeuvres aiming to forestall any potential Kyrgyz breakout towards Isfara. While this operation might prevent some immediate territorial losses or an easy Kyrgyz breakout from Chon-Gara, it would also expose the Tajik forces to significant tactical and logistical vulnerabilities.

Executing this option would require the 17th Battalion to not only hold its ground along the highway, utilising only the armaments and supplies withdrawn from Chon-Gara, but also require the SAAB and its entire logistical support system to traverse a 20-kilometre distance from their more defensible positions in Batken. After travelling along a single exposed highway, the 5th would then be expected to launch an offensive from the march, against a more mobile adversary, all while operating without any Tajik air support. Should the Tajik command opt for this course of action, the 17th Battalion's limited armaments and the SAAB's exposure during their redeployment would constitute critical points of failure, likely resulting in significant losses and a possible collapse of the front. While a counteroffensive might offer a short-term tactical advantage or temporarily slow down the Kyrgyz advance, the inherent risks and potential for catastrophic failure render this option highly problematic.

ix) - Post-conflict terms

Given the high cost of prolonged conflict and the lack of any decisive strategic gain, Dushanbe's leadership will quickly face the reality that further continuation of hostilities would only lead to diminishing returns. This mounting pressure on the government from both domestic and external forces, will also only intensify the government's desire to begin soliciting the opposing side for a negotiated end to the hostilities. Regardless of the strategic option pursued by Dushanbe, it is anticipated that hostilities would likely conclude within a window of two to three weeks, with both Kyrgyz and Tajik forces suffering considerable losses in personnel, equipment, and vehicles during the fighting. Even in the event that the Tajik forces did manage to secure a somewhat favourable outcome on the battlefield, beyond what was achieved in the modelling here, such success is unlikely to yield anywhere near enough of a sufficient strategic advantage to justify the economic and political damage Tajikistan would have to endure by launching such an operation in the first place.

x) - Key findings

Based on the wargaming and analysis of the above scenario, here are our three key findings:

1) - Operational overreach and logistical challenges:

The Tajik military must be acutely aware of the significant operational risks associated with extending their forces beyond their logistical capabilities. That any attempt to conduct substantial expeditionary campaigns into the Batken region, while potentially politically advantageous, presents substantial risks for Tajikistan. The Tajiks' current reliance on the theatre's inadequate road and rail networks, alongside a deficient fleet of support and supply vehicles, and limited rotary-wing air support, all severely constrain the Tajiks' operational flexibility and sustainability. The operational reality is that the Tajik military would quickly overstretch its logistical capabilities in Batken, against their opponents, where the road networks in the region are not only sparse but also susceptible to disruption and interdiction by Kyrgyz forces.

Moreover, the limited reserve and logistical support further hamper the Tajiks' ability to respond swiftly to changing battlefield conditions, evacuate casualties, or resupply isolated units, and that within a battlefield scenario, while Tajik units will likely face repeated attacks upon their logistical network throughout the campaign, the Kyrgyz are likely to remain largely unmolested right up to the frontlines. In this context, Tajik commanders must recognise that the logistical challenges they face are not merely operational inconveniences, but critical factors that could determine the success or failure of the entire campaign. Without a secure and reliable logistical sustainment system, the Tajik forces risk being cut off, isolated, and ultimately overwhelmed by Kyrgyz counterattacks.

2) - Constraints posed by limited Tajik airpower:

Given the Tajik Air Force's limited air warfare capabilities, Dushanbe is currently unable to conduct critical early strikes aimed at disrupting Kyrgyz command and control facilities or against Kyrgyz assets beyond the immediate theatre of operations. This limitation significantly constrains Tajikistan's ability to diminish Kyrgyzstan's operational effectiveness in the opening stages of the campaign, and allows Bishkek

to respond much more quickly with a robust second-strike or retaliatory capability. Overcoming this deficit would necessitate significant investment in long-range missile technology and systems capable of striking targets in Batken, Osh, and Jalal-Abad, while also being able to penetrate Kyrgyz Air Defence Forces and skirt Uzbek airspace.

Although such missile technology is widely available in the current defence market, the high per-unit cost and the quantity required for a successful first strike, likely exceed the budgetary capacity of the Tajik armed forces. Tajik military planners must also account for the Kyrgyz advantage in advanced UAV capabilities, such as the TB-2 and Akinci drones, which can inflict significant damage on Tajik ground forces.

To mitigate this threat, the Tajiks must both acquire far more mobile, and far more numerous quantities of A2AD and battlefield Trophy Active Protection Systems in order to provide some level of protection for their vehicles and frontline command centres. Additionally, the Tajik forces cannot hope to achieve any success against Kyrgyzstan without also expediting the development of a substantial domestic drone program and establishing the necessary refuelling and rearming facilities at Khujand airfield. This could involve acquiring comparable UAV assets from current partners in Turkey and Iran or leveraging international diplomatic channels to obtain anti-drone technology from outside partners like Russia or China. Implementing such measures would help offset some of the Tajiks' current military disadvantages and counter the technological edge currently held by the Kyrgyz forces.

3) - The unpredictability of negotiated outcomes:

The scenario outlined above indicates that while the Tajik military might possess the capability to seize some limited battlefield objectives, the ambition of being able to leverage those territorial gains into diplomatic negotiations appears overly optimistic. As this strategy from Dushanbe is not only entirely dependent on Kyrgyzstan's willingness to engage in negotiations post-invasion, a highly unpredictable and unreliable variable, it also presumes that regional powers such as Russia, China, or Uzbekistan would tolerate Tajikistan's territorial advances and then subsequently recognise those gains. In reality, these regional actors would likely exert significant pressure on Tajikistan to refrain from initiating the invasion in the first place, or if hostilities had already commenced, use their significant geopolitical leverage to force Dushanbe into a status quo peace with Bishkek.

4) - Balancing economic, internal security and military commitments:

Above all other objectives for the Tajik armed forces is the maintenance of domestic security and stability. For Dushanbe, this means that maintaining internal stability, even while conducting operations in Kyrgyzstan, will take precedence in its strategic calculations. This prioritisation reveals a significant vulnerability in Tajikistan's expeditionary capabilities, as while Tajikistan would be willing to commit a portion of its better equipment and troops to the war effort, the best soldiers and equipment are likely to be retained within Tajikistan, focused on domestic security, leaving the Tajik commanders executing the Kyrgyz offensive to operate with only the resources Dushanbe feels it can spare.

As the war progresses, Dushanbe is also likely to prioritise domestically based forces even further. The concern being that if casualties are high, neighbouring countries close their borders, or remittances are cut off, the risk of internal unrest or destabilisation across Tajikistan's major cities increases exponentially. Such instability could threaten the continuity of the government and compel the redeployment of significant portions of their limited armed forces away from the frontlines and back into major cities for crowd control and riot suppression operations. Additionally, Tajikistan's heavily remittance-reliant economy also leaves it with minimal leverage in demands or negotiations with larger powers. Consequently, Dushanbe could be easily coerced into accepting peace terms dictated by external actors, under threats of devastating financial coercion. Until Tajikistan can bolster its economic resilience to a point where it can withstand external pressures, border closures, or financial sanctions, without significant economic and political destabilisation, its offensive operations will always remain constrained and deprioritised within the Tajik system.

6.11: CONCLUSION

The current state of the Tajik military reflects both its historical challenges and its strategic aspirations for the future. Where having emerged from the shadows of a devastating civil war, the Tajik armed forces have been on a path of gradual development since 1992. They have made steady progress in their efforts to professionalise and modernise their capabilities, albeit at a constrained pace due to significant economic limitations and persistent structural issues.

As a modern force, Tajikistan's military is no longer built for the chaotic militia-driven operations it maintained during the Tajik Civil War. Instead, today Dushanbe's military forces are primarily oriented towards maintaining domestic security and stability, a task for which they are still largely equipped. Despite being modest in size and equipped with ageing Soviet-era hardware, the Tajik forces appear capable of defending against minor incursions and addressing almost any internal security threat.

However, Tajikistan's ability to project power beyond its borders remains severely limited. The country grapples with military logistical and technological constraints that significantly hinder its operational flexibility and sustainability, which are further exacerbated by Dushanbe's various economic challenges. Geographical and infrastructural challenges also compound the military's difficulties in operating outside its heartland. With the nation's rugged terrain and inadequate infrastructure also significantly impeding the efficient movement of troops and supplies. This situation is particularly problematic in regions like the Pamirs and Sughd. The conventional vulnerabilities present in Dushanbe's overwhelming reliance on a small set of strategic tunnels and mountain passes also cannot be overstated, as Dushanbe faces a real threat of being cut off from the rest of the nation if attacked by a more modernised military force capable of denying the Tajiks route access beyond these chokepoints.










The most significant vulnerability, though, is economics, as Tajikistan's heavy reliance on remittances from citizens working abroad adds another layer of complexity to its defence planning. This dependency makes the country vulnerable to external economic shifts, deters domestic investments, and, more importantly, places Dushanbe in a position where they have little choice but to remain steadfastly tied to the leadership in Moscow.





(Figure 6.11.1: Photo of joint military drills taking place at the Harb-Maidon Training Ground, near the border with Afghanistan, 2021. Source: Didor Sadulloev (Reuters))

APPENDIX







6.12: USEFUL MAPS & CHARTS

	GROUND FORCES	LOCATION
	1st Motorised Rifle Brigade	Vose
	3rd Motorised Rifle Brigade	Bokhtar
	6th Motorised Rifle Brigade	Isfisor
	12th Artillery Brigade	Pushkin
	(B/Ч - 15426) Regiment	Murghob
	183rd Separate Reconnaissance Battalion	Vahdat
	17th Rapid Response Battalion	Konibodom
	74th Separate Engineer Sapper Battalion	Rudaki
	75th Separate Medical Battalion	Dushanbe





(** = Location acquired from only one source)

	<p style="text-align: center;">Agricultural Battalion</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Dushanbe**</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;">Honour Guard Company</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Dushanbe</p>

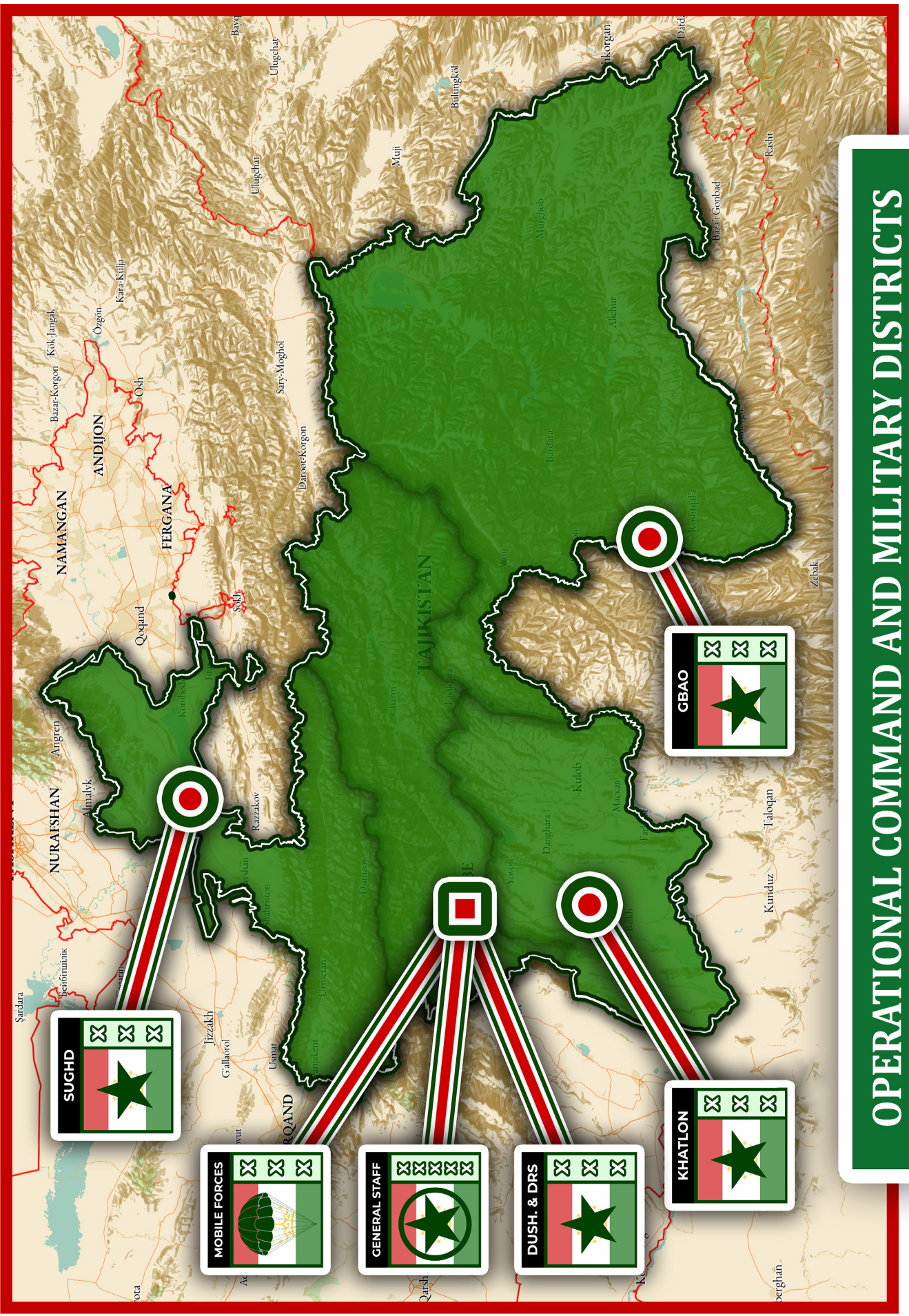
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	MOBILE FORCES	LOCATION
	7th Air Assault Brigade	Dushanbe
	Separate Rapid Response Brigade	Chkalovsk
	Peacekeeping Battalion	Dushanbe
	Separate Special Purpose Battalion	Vahdat
	Separate Rapid Response Mountain Motor Rifle Battalion	Gharm/Rasht
	Collective Rapid Reaction Battalion of the CSTO	Various

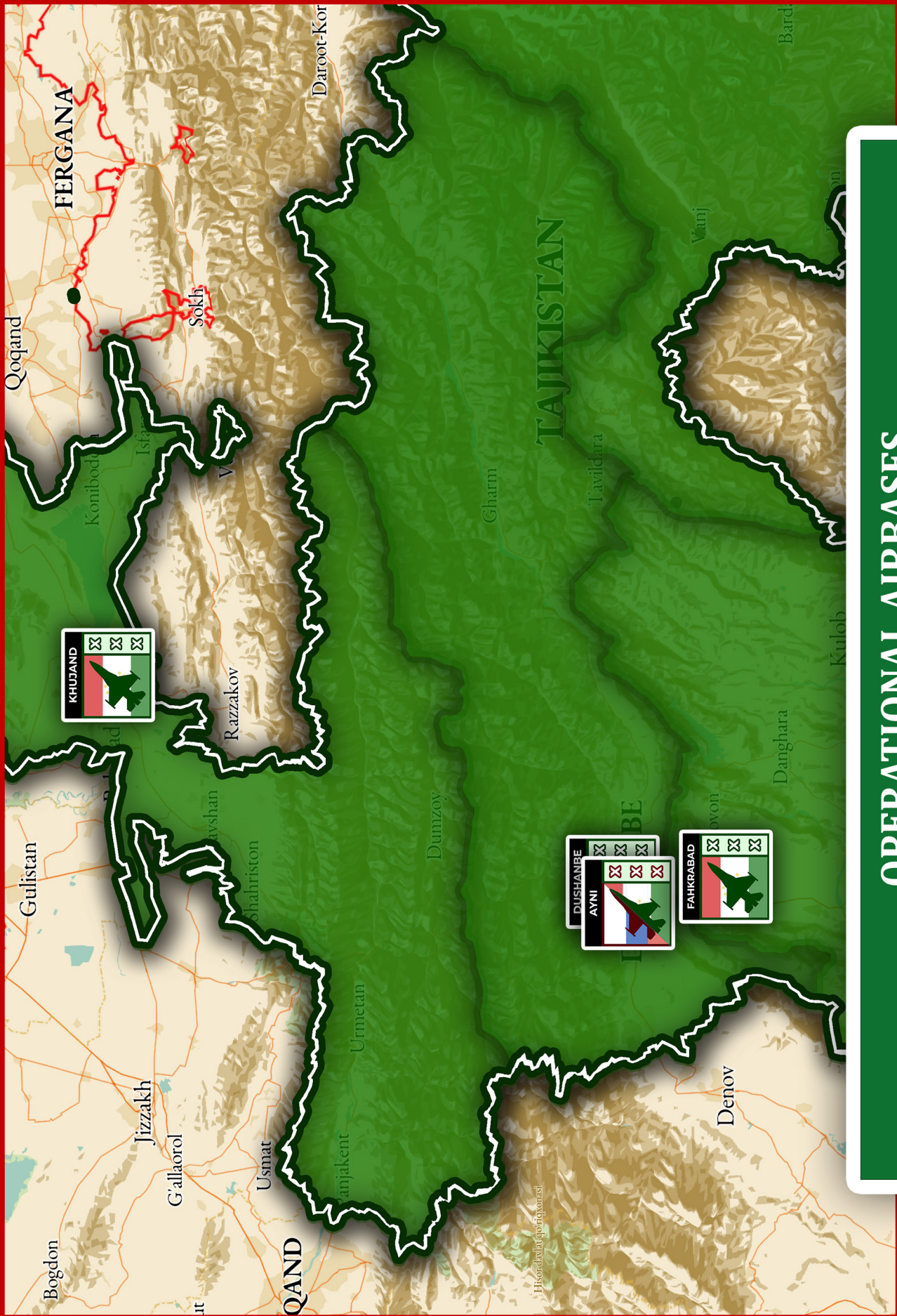
(** = Location acquired from from only one source)

	TJAADF	LOCATION
	Independent Helicopter Squadron	Ayni
	Transport Aviation Squadron	Dushanbe
	Transport Aviation Squadron	Ayni
	Independent Helicopter Flight	Dushanbe
	Independent Helicopter Flight	Ayni
	Training Flight	Fahrabad
	536th Anti-Aircraft Missile Regiment	Dushanbe
	45th Radio Engineering Battalion	Dushanbe/Hisor

(** = Location acquired from from only one source)

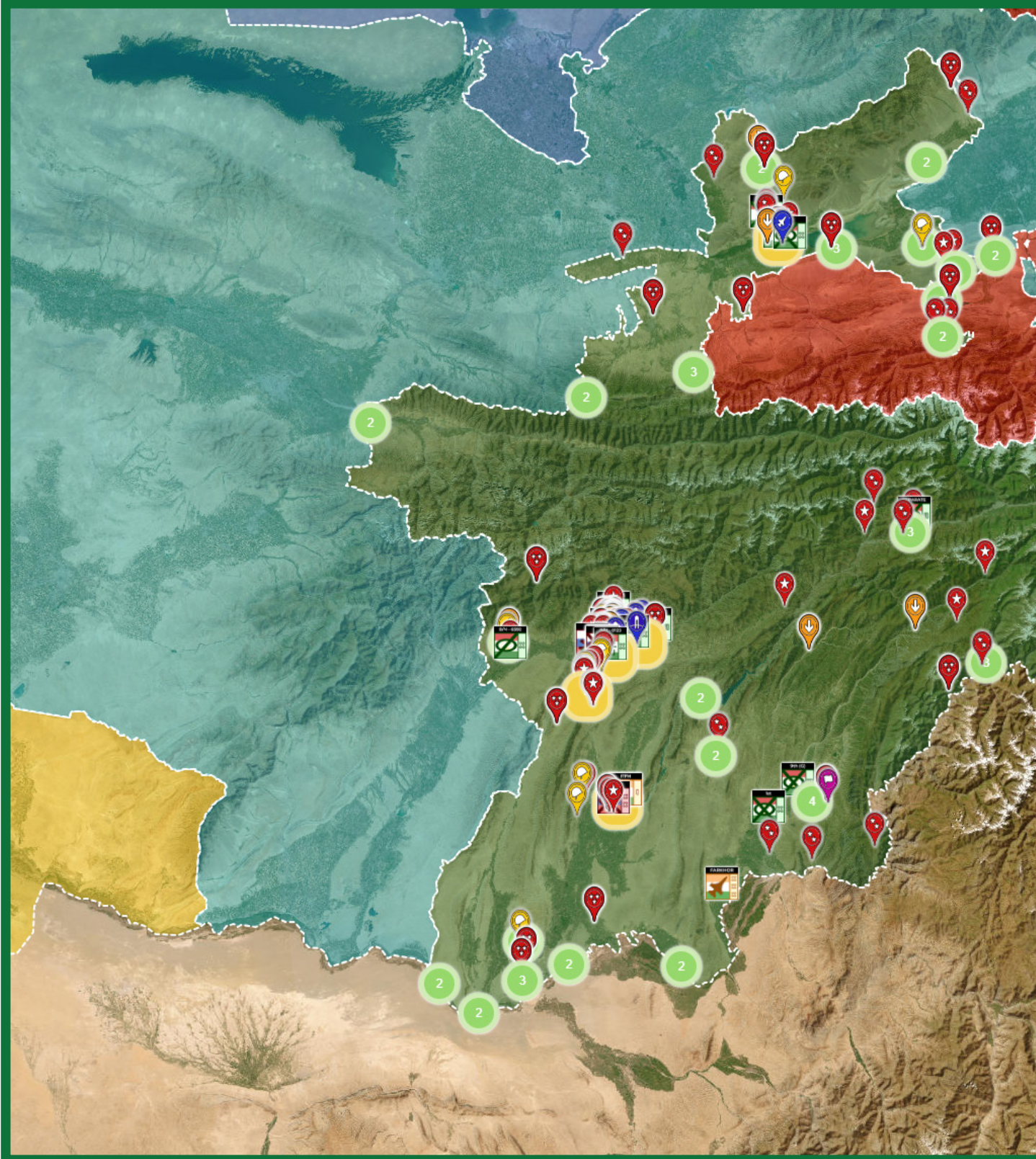


OPERATIONAL COMMAND AND MILITARY DISTRICTS



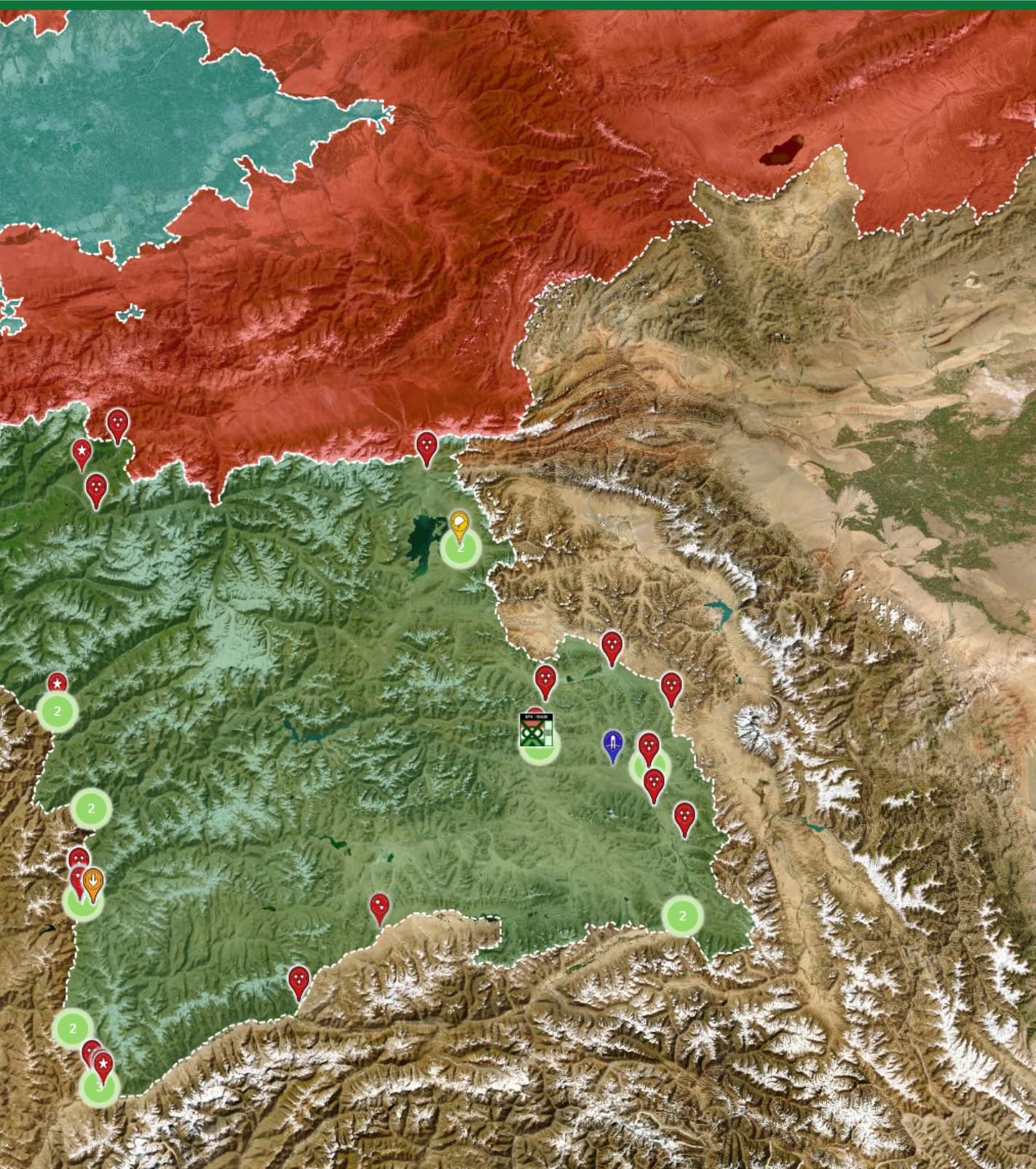
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CHAPTER VII: UZBEKISTAN



VII: UZBEKISTAN

THE ARMED FORCES OF CENTRAL ASIA:

CHAPTER VII: *UZBEKISTAN*

COMING SOON

APPENDIX

SECTION 1: GLOSSARY

ABBREVIATION	BREAKOUT OF TERM	EXPLANATION
A2AD	Anti-Access/Area Denial	Strategies and technologies preventing or limiting enemy access to critical areas.
APC	Armoured Personnel Carrier	Armoured vehicle used to carry infantry into battle but without offensive capability
ATGM	Anti-Tank Guided Missile	A precision-guided weapon designed to destroy armoured vehicles and fortifications, offering enhanced lethality and range compared to unguided anti-tank weapons.
BRDM	Boevaya Razvedyvatelnaya Dozornaya Mashina	Boevaya Razvedyvatelnaya Dozornaya Mashina, acronym comes from the Russian for an armoured reconnaissance and patrol vehicle
BTR	Brontransportyer	Brontransportyer, acronym comes from the Russian for armoured personnel carrier
CADRE	Cadre	A core group of trained military personnel responsible for forming and leading units during expansion.
CAS	Close Air Support	Aircraft delivering precise air strikes in close proximity to friendly ground forces.
CBRN	Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear	Hazardous materials or weapons requiring specialized protective and response measures.

CCTS	Close Combat Training Simulation	Advanced virtual training systems that replicate battlefield conditions
CIS	The Commonwealth of Independent States	A regional organisation formed by former Soviet Republics to facilitate cooperation in political, economic, and security matters post-USSR dissolution.
CoGS	The Chief of the General Staff	The highest-ranking military officer in the armed forces, responsible for overseeing military operations, strategic planning, and the overall command and control of the military forces.
CRDF	Collective Rapid Deployment Forces	Selected forces of the CSTO that contribute to alliance missions and participate in multilateral training; units are relatively well trained and equipped by their respective nations
CST	The Collective Security Treaty	Is a defence pact among several former Soviet Republics, including Uzbekistan, aimed at mutual defence and regional stability, operating under the framework of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organisation	Russia-led military alliance including Armenia, Belarus Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan; Armenia has suspended participation
C2	Command and Control	The authority and capability to direct military forces in the execution of missions.

DCR	Daily Rate of Consumption	The average amount of resources used by military units per day during operations.
DSR	Daily Rate of Supply	The average amount of resources provided to military units per day to sustain operations.
EEU	Eurasian Economic Union	A regional economic integration organization comprising several Post-Soviet states for economic cooperation.
EKT	Electronic Switching Centre	A system managing automated, high-capacity communications switching in military networks.
EUR	The Euro (Currency)	The official currency of the Eurozone, used by 20 of the 27 European Union countries.
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment	Overseas entities investing directly in a country's defence or strategic industries.
GBAO	Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast	A strategically significant, mountainous region in eastern Tajikistan.
GDP	Gross Domestic Product	Measures the total economic output of a country, indicating its economic health and capacity to fund defense expenditures.
GWOT	Global War on Terror	Refers to international military operations targeting terrorist networks and state-sponsored terrorism post-9/11.
IED	Improvised Explosive Device	A makeshift bomb used by insurgents, often triggered remotely, for asymmetrical warfare.

IFV	Infantry Fighting Vehicle	Armoured troop transport that is able to fight in the field
IMV	Infantry Mobility Vehicle	An armoured vehicle designed to transport infantry troops safely across various terrains.
IRPT	Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan	A banned political party formerly advocating Islamic governance in Tajikistan.
ISIL	The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant	A militant extremist group aiming to establish a caliphate, posing significant regional and global security threats.
ISKP	The Islamic State Khorasan Province	A regional affiliate of ISIL, operating in central and south asia, involved in terrorism and insurgency.
ITT	The Internal Troops of Tajikistan	Paramilitary forces responsible for domestic security, riot control, and counterinsurgency operations.
JADS	The Joint Air Defence System of the CSTO	The Joint Air Defence System of the CSTO coordinates member states' air defense capabilities.
MANPAD	Man-Portable Air-Defence	A usually shoulder-fired anti-aircraft weapon, or system, such as the Stinger or Strela
MBT	Main Battle Tank	A heavily armoured and armed combat vehicle designed for front-line engagements.
MCHS	The Ministry of Emergency Situations	Is responsible for disaster response, civil defence, and emergency management in Uzbekistan.

MFOC	Mobile Forces Operations Command	Oversees rapid deployment units for flexible, high-mobility military operations across diverse terrains in Uzbekistan
MIA	Ministry of Internal Affairs	Manages domestic security, law enforcement, and internal stability in a nation.
MIB	Military Base	A secured facility housing personnel, equipment, and infrastructure for strategic operations and defence activities.
MID	Military District	A regional command structure responsible for the administration, training, and operational readiness of military forces within a specific geographic area.
MLRS	Multiple Launch Rocket System	Military unit capable of long-range massed rocket fire
MOD	Ministry Of Defence	Government department in charge of the armed forces; the defence minister is the most important defence official in peacetime
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding	A formal agreement between parties outlining mutual commitments and cooperative actions without creating legally binding obligations.
MRAP	Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected Vehicle	Vehicle is designed to withstand improvised explosive device (IED) attacks and ambushes, enhancing troop safety in conflict zones.
MRB	Motorised (Or Motor) Rifle Brigade	Military unit of perhaps, very roughly, 4,000 personnel
MRD	Motorised (Or Motor) Rifle Division	Military unit of perhaps, very roughly, 12,000 personnel

MRR	Motorised (Or Motor) Rifle Regiment	Military unit of perhaps, very roughly 2,000 personnel
M/U	Military Unit (B/Ч)	An organised group of soldiers structured for specific missions, varying in size and capability.
MVD	Uzbek Ministry of Internal Affairs	See MIA
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer	A military leader responsible for training, discipline, and management within enlisted ranks.
NSC	National Security Council	Oversees all national military decisions.
OBLAST	Oblast	An administrative region in certain post-Soviet states, often with significant autonomy and governance structures.
OBOR	One Belt, One Road	China's strategic initiative for global infrastructure development and economic integration.
OPC	Operational Command	Responsible for planning, directing, and executing military operations within a specified theater or mission.
OMON	Otryad Mobilnyy (Or Militsii) Osobogo Naznacheniya	Police special purpose mobile detachment that fills an anti-riot or rapid response function, somewhat akin to American SWAT capabilities, acronym comes from the Russia; sometimes also referred to as Spetsialnyy Otryad Bystrogo Reagirovaniya (SOBR) .
OTS	The Organisation of Turkic States	An IGO promoting cooperation among Turkic-speaking countries in various sectors, including defence.

PAP	The People's Armed Police	A Chinese paramilitary force focused on internal security, counterterrorism, and disaster response.
PDPT	People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan	The ruling political party in Tajikistan, dominating national governance and policy.
PMC	Private Military Contractor	Mercenary troops that maintain a thin veneer separating themselves from official government forces.
PSS	Presidential Security Service	Responsible for ensuring the protection and security of Uzbekistan's president and other high-ranking officials.
RATS	Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure	Organ of the SCO tasked with coordinating counterterrorism efforts across member states; can also serve as a tool of transnational repression for its participating states
RMB	The Renminbi	Official currency of China, also known as the Yuan (CNY)
RUB	The Ruble	The official currency of Russia.
SAM	Surface-to-Air Missile	A guided missile designed to be launched from the ground to destroy aircraft or other aerial targets.
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organisation	A Eurasian political, economic, and international security organisation established by China
SGB	The Previous Uzbek State Security Service	See SSS
SNB	The Previous Uzbek State Security Service	See SSS

SRB	Special Reconnaissance Battalion	Conducts covert intelligence gathering, surveillance, and target acquisition behind enemy lines.
SSPB	Separate Special Purpose Battalion	An elite military unit focused on specialized missions, including counterterrorism and unconventional warfare.
SSS	The Uzbek State Security Service	Uzbekistan's primary intelligence agency, handling counterintelligence, counterterrorism, and national security operations.
SWMD	The Southwest Special Military District (Uzbekistan)	A Military District in Uzbekistan, overseeing military operations and defence in the southwest.
TECHNICALS	Technicals	Civilian vehicles modified with mounted weapons, used for military and paramilitary operations.
TBS	The Tajik Border Service	Responsible for securing Tajikistan's borders, preventing illegal crossings, and countering smuggling activities.
TDZ	Territorial Defence Zone	A designated area for organizing local defence, utilizing reserve forces and civilian resources for security.
TJAADF	The Tajik Air and Air Defence Forces	Responsible for protecting Tajikistan's airspace through aerial operations and air defence systems.
TNG	The Tajik National Guard	An elite force tasked with protecting the president, key state facilities, and maintaining internal security.
TPP	Tactical Planning Process	A structured approach used by military units to develop and implement mission-specific strategies and operations.

TTC	The Former Turkic Council	See OTS
UAV / UAS	Unmanned Aerial Vehicle / Unmanned Aerial System	Common term for uncrewed aircraft in previous decades; in recent years, terms such as drones have been popularised
UCG	The Uzbek Civil Guard	Paramilitary organization tasked with maintaining internal security, under the command of the UFS.
UFS	The Uzbek Frontier Service	Responsible for protecting and securing Uzbekistan's borders against illegal crossings and external threats., Under the command of the SSS.
UGF	The Uzbek Ground Forces	The primary land-based military branch, responsible for national defence, territorial control, and ground operations.
UIT	The Uzbek Internal Troops	A paramilitary force under the ministry of internal affairs, tasked with maintaining public order, internal security, and counter-terrorism operations., Under the command of the MIA
UNG	The Uzbek National Guard	An elite force responsible for protecting government officials, critical infrastructure, and ensuring national security. Under the command of the MOD.
URF	The Uzbek Riverine Flotilla	The Uzbek navy under the command of the UFS.
USD	The US Dollar (Currency)	The currency of the United States

USV	Utility and Service Vehicles	Vehicles used to support military operations by transporting personnel, equipment, and providing essential logistical services.
UTO	United Tajik Opposition	Was a coalition of anti-government forces in Tajikistan during the civil war, seeking political reform.
UZZADF	The Uzbek Air and Air Defence Force	Responsible for the aerial defence and airspace security of Uzbekistan
VKD	The Uzbek Ministry of Internal Affairs	See MIA

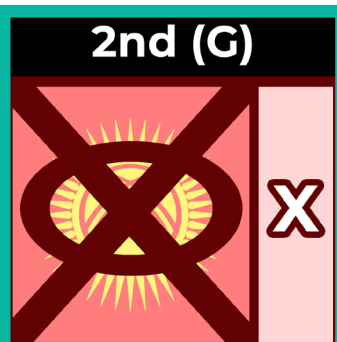
SECTION 2: SYMBOLOLOGY

SYMBOL

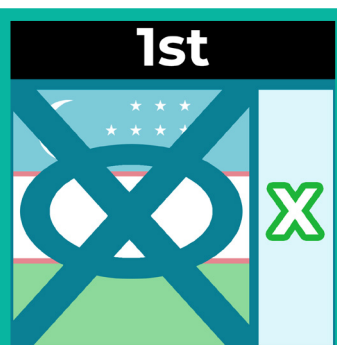
NATIONAL SYMBOLOLOGY





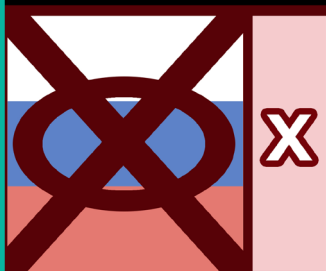


KAZAKHSTAN



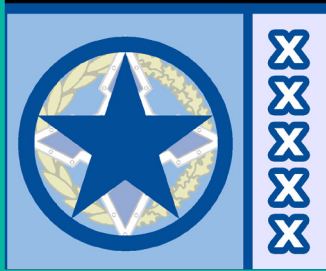

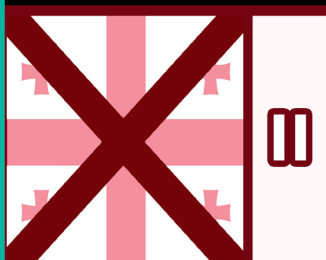

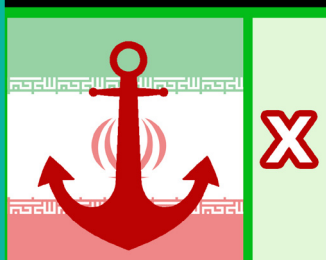
KYRGYZSTAN



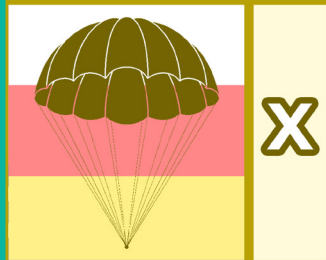
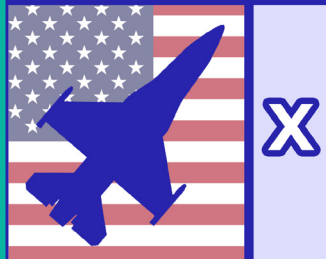


UZBEKISTAN

<p>1st</p> 	<p>TAJIKISTAN</p>
<p>11th</p> 	<p>TURKMENISTAN</p>
<p>131st</p> 	<p>RUSSIA</p>
<p>BORDER</p> 	<p>CHINA</p>
<p>ITFH</p> 	<p>INDIA</p>

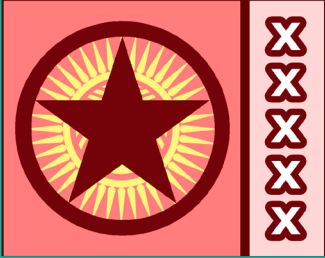
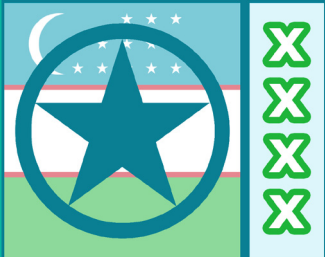

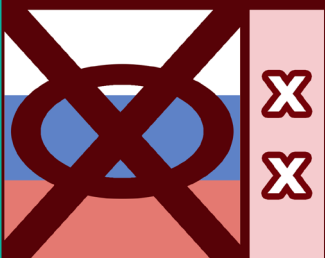
<p>1st</p> 	<p>ABKHAZIA</p>
<p>AL-FATAH (209)</p> 	<p>AFGHANISTAN (UNDER THE TALIBAN)</p>
<p>12th</p> 	<p>ARMENIA</p>
<p>1st</p> 	<p>AZERBAIJAN</p>
<p>103rd</p> 	<p>BELARUS</p>


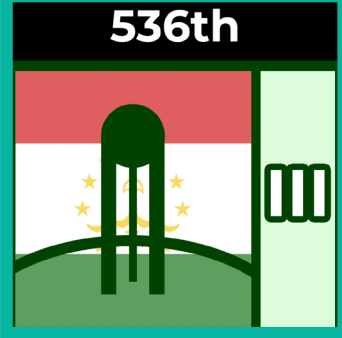



<p>CSTO</p> 	<p>CSTO</p>
<p>DUSHANBE</p> 	<p>FRANCE</p>
<p>11th</p> 	<p>GEORGIA</p>
<p>TERMEZ</p> 	<p>GERMANY</p>
<p>4th</p> 	<p>IRAN</p>

<p>GROUP D</p> 	<p>ISKP</p>
<p>PROTESTERS</p> 	<p>PROTESTORS</p>
<p>4th (G)</p> 	<p>SOUTH OSSETIA</p>
<p>MANAS</p> 	<p>THE UNITED STATES</p>

SYMBOL

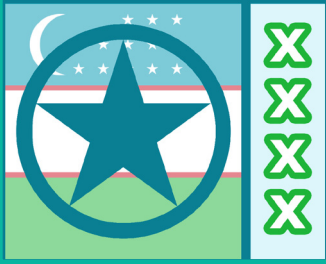
SIZE OF UNIT

<p>GENERAL STAFF</p> 	<p>“XXXXX” MAJOR COMMAND (EST: 10,000 - 500,000)</p>
<p>TASHKENT OC.</p> 	<p>“XXXX” ARMY/FRONT/COMMAND (EST: 5,000 - 300,000)</p>
<p>AHAL DIST</p> 	<p>“XXX” ARMY/BRANCH (EST: 3,000 - 30,000)</p>
<p>201st</p> 	<p>“XX” DIVISION (EST: 2,500 - 15,000)</p>

<p>12th</p> 	<p>“X” BRIGADE (EST: 1,000 - 5,000)</p>
<p>536th</p> 	<p>“III” REGIMENT (EST: 750 - 3,000)</p>
<p>BATKEN</p> 	<p>“II” BATTALION (EST: 250 - 1,000)</p>
<p>426th</p> 	<p>“I” COMPANY (EST: 75 - 150)</p>
<p>SKI UNIT</p> 	<p>“000” PLATOON (EST: 25 - 40)</p>

FORCE TYPES

TASHKENT



**OPERATIONAL
COMMAND**

GROUND FORCES



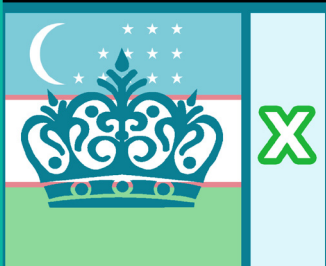
**GROUND FORCES
COMMAND /
MILITARY DISTRICT**

BALKANABAT

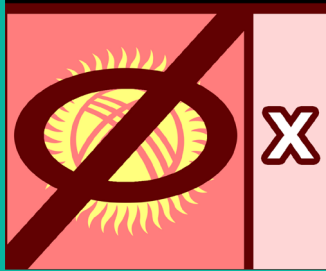
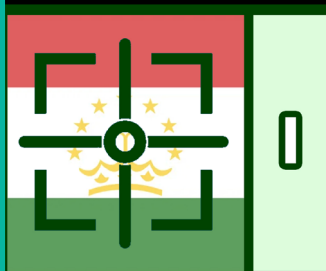


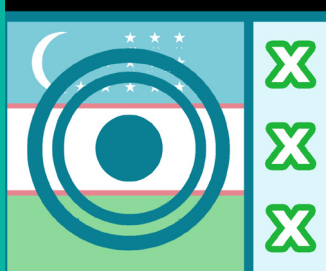


**UZAADF COMMAND
/ AIRBASE**

NATIONAL GUARD



**NATIONAL GUARD /
PSS / PRESIDENTIAL
SECURITY UNITS**

<p>INTERNAL TROOPS</p> 	<p>INTERNAL FORCES</p>
<p>B/4 - 9878</p> 	<p>SECURITY SERVICES / FRONTIER FORCES</p>
<p>COAST GUARD</p> 	<p>RIVERINE FLOTILLA / NAVAL PATROL</p>
<p>100th</p> 	<p>CIVIL GUARD / RECON RESERVE UNITS</p>
<p>EMERGENCY SIT.</p> 	<p>EMERGENCY SITUATIONS COMMAND / UNITS</p>

**GROUND / MOD
/ PARAMILITARY FORCES**

11th



**MOTOR RIFLE
BRIGADE**

68th



**MOUNTAIN
MOTOR RIFLE
BRIGADE**

OMON


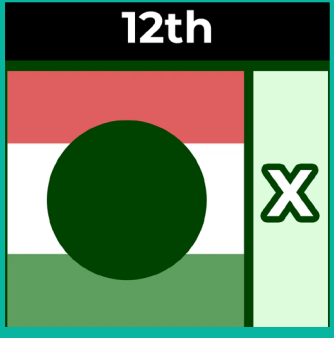

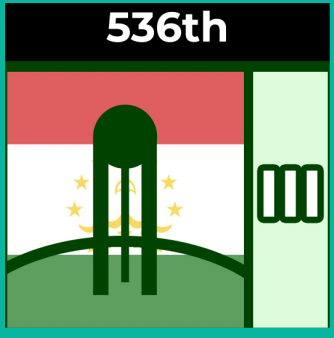



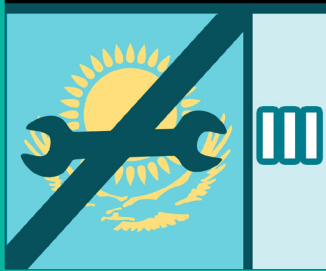
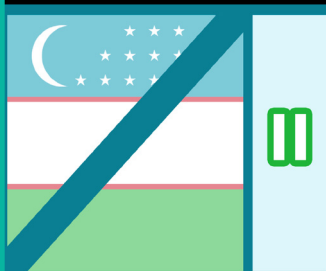


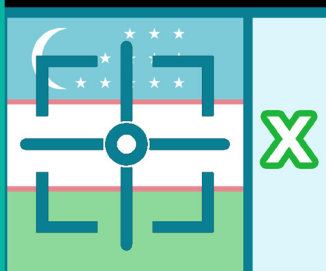
**SPECIAL FORCES /
RAPID REACTION
COMPANY**


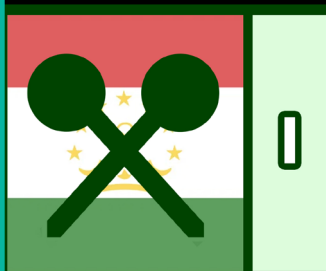

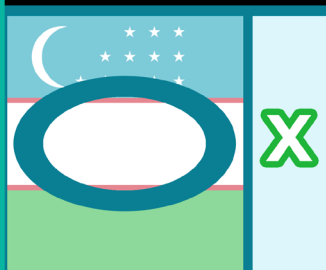
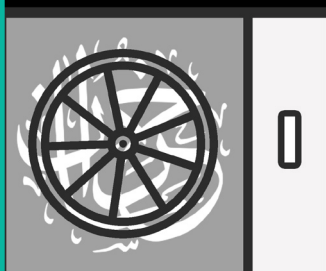
38th (G)

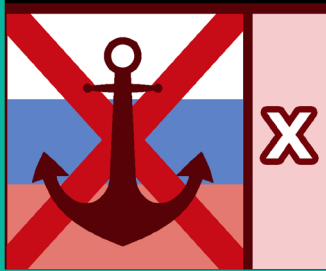


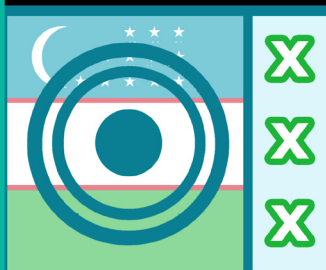



**AIRMOBILE /
AIR ASSAULT
BRIGADE**

<p>BATKEN</p> 	<p>MOUNTAIN RIFLE BATTALION</p>
<p>12th</p> 	<p>ARTILLERY BRIGADE</p>
<p>31st</p> 	<p>MLRS BRIGADE</p>
<p>536th</p> 	<p>ROCKET / SAM / ANTI AIR REGIMENT</p>
<p>HONOUR GUARD</p> 	<p>CEREMONIAL / PRESIDENTIAL GUARD / NATIONAL GUARD</p>

<p>20th</p> 	<p>ENGINEERING / SAPPER REGIMENT</p>
<p>SEPARATE</p> 	<p>RECON UNIT / LIGHTLY ARMED UNIT / MILITIA / CIVIL DEFENCE / RESERVE UNIT</p>
<p>NAVY</p> 	<p>RIVERINE FLOTILLA / NAVAL PATROL UNIT</p>
<p>INTERNAL SECURITY</p> 	<p>INTERNAL FORCES</p>
<p>SGB</p> 	<p>SECURITY SERVICES / FRONTIER FORCES</p>

<p>ITFH</p> 	<p>MEDICAL COMPANY</p>
<p>74th</p> 	<p>CHEMICAL / BIOLOGICAL / RADIOLOGICAL AND NUCLEAR (CRBN) COMPANY</p>
<p>INDEPENDENT</p> 	<p>INFANTRY UNIT</p>
<p>INDEPENDENT</p> 	<p>TANK BRIGADE</p>
<p>GROUP E</p> 	<p>TRANSPORTATION / LOGISTICS / AGRICULTURAL UNIT</p>

<p>126th</p> 	<p>MARINE INFANTRY BRIGADE</p>
<p>403rd</p> 	<p>ANTI-TANK BRIGADE</p>
<p>1109th</p> 	<p>SIGNALS / RADAR COMMUNICATIONS COMPANY</p>
<p>EMERGENCY SIT.</p> 	<p>EMERGENCY SERVICES</p>
<p>SPACE FORCES</p> 	<p>SPACE FORCES</p>

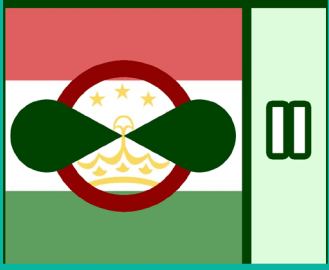
AIR UNITS

47th SEP MXD



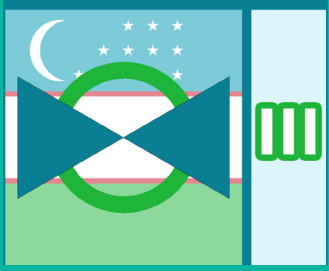
**MIXED AIRWING
(ROTARY AND
FIXED WING)**

TRANSPORT



FIXED WING UNIT

66th



ROTARY WING UNIT

DRONES



DRONE UNIT

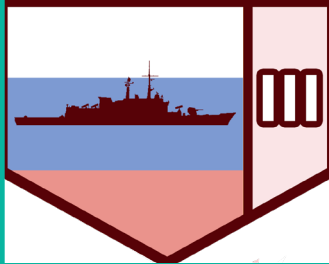
NAVAL UNITS

MOSKVA



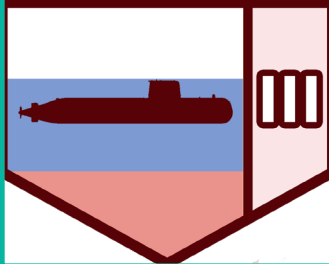
MISSILE CRUISER

FRIGATE



FRIGATE

KILO-SUB



KILO-CLASS SUBMARINE

CORVETTE



CORVETTE



**PATROL BOAT
/ GUNBOAT**

SECTION 3: REFERENCES

For all References, articles, maps, satellite photography, GPS locations and exact equipment figures.

They will be available for purchase through the Oxus Society for Central Asian Affairs.

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