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Analysis of multiparty mediation processes

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CHAPTER
IV

TAJKISTAN

Chapter IV: Tajikistan

The lengthy peace process which put an end to a violent civil war in Tajikistan represents a fairly successful case of multiparty mediation where activities of external actors were “exceptionally well coordinated” (Barnes and Abdulaev 2001, 11). This was an extremely complex process where essential contribution to resolution of the conflict came from a wide variety of actors. Most of the rounds of talks, supported by the OSCE, were held under the auspices of the UN, while observer states took turns in hosting them and thus providing substantial contribution in reaching an agreement (Iji 2001). At the same time the process also benefited from the participation of different non-state actors and was aided by a very dynamic second-track dialogue process which came out of the US-Soviet Dartmouth Conference (Rubin 1998; Saunders 1999).

Nevertheless, among all the different mediators involved, Russia and Iran played a pivotal role in the peace process. According to Iji, “it was their collaboration that moved the intractable conflict in Tajikistan toward a settlement” (Iji 2001, 365). Both countries had strong interests in the conflict and highly developed relationships with warring parties which all together allowed them to assume the role of potentially effective third-parties. Barnes and Abdullaev point out the fact that “with an interest in the outcome of the war, they became in effect ‘secondary parties’ to the conflict... although they contributed initially to the war effort they later became vital resources to the peace process” (Barnes and Abdullaev 2001, 8). According to Hay, the main three reasons for the breakthrough in the negotiations were: conflicting parties were exhausted from continuous fighting, Russia and Iran managed to reach a convergence of interests to promote peace in Tajikistan, and security concerns created by the Taliban taking over of Kabul (Hay 2001, 39). These factors allowed for a UN-led and coordinated multiparty mediation effort to produce a mutually acceptable solution for the parties in conflict.

Therefore, the peace process in Tajikistan has the potential of representing a case of multiparty mediation where eventual success was directly dependent on the interests of powerful neighboring states, regional geo-political conditions and international organization’s legitimate power to coordinate activities of multiple third-parties.

4.1 The Nature of Conflict

4.1.1 Sources of Intractability

Tajikistan's physical geography of a landlocked mountainous country induced the creation of several culturally diverse groupings. Although the majority of these groups are "a part of Iranian cultural world and are predominately Sunni Muslims", the mountainous terrain "has always made travel between different regions difficult... creating a significant obstacle to communication as well as social and economic integration" (Akiner and Barnes 2001, 18). The simplest distinction of the various ethno-cultural groupings in the country can be made between the populations that has lived in the flatlands in the northern part of the country, which "in ancient times were part of the rich urban-based culture of Transoxiana", and populations that inhabited mountainous areas in the rest of the county, which resulted in a creation of "strong localized identities" (Akiner and Barnes 2001, 18).

Until the USSR assumed control over the territory in the 1920s, there was almost no contact between the populations of these areas. The first decade of Soviet rule widened the gap between different communities (Roy 2001). Especially important was the impact of different policies that were drafted in Moscow, which treated quite differently the northern part of the country compared to the rest. While the plains in the north were gradually industrialized and modernized, the mountainous regions were widely ignored and therefore populations that lived there not only maintained and strengthened their local identities, they also continued to live as their ancestors did for centuries. In principle, the most significant political, social and cultural traits of contemporary Tajikistan were formed during the Soviet rule.

4.1.2 Development of Deep Feelings of Distrust and Mutual Hatred

Already in the early 1920s, Basmachi fighters from the mountainous areas showed intent of stopping the advancement of the Soviet Union to Central Asia. In order to suppress any form of resistance, "the Red Army massacred more than 10,000 Tajiks and Uzbeks between 1922 and 1926, according to official estimates" (Akiner and Barnes 2001, 19).

Large parts of the population found refuge in the neighboring Afghanistan, in an attempt to escape “violent purges, forcible resettlement and collectivization, and religious persecution” (idem). According to Akiner and Barnes, “these events had a lasting effect that contributed to the conflict dynamics which emerged during the civil war in the 1990s” (Akiner and Barnes 2001, 19).

In the early 1930s, the Soviet regime started promoting the collectivization and industrialization policies, which required a forcible transfer of people from the central and eastern areas of the country to the north. While these policies produced the first migratory dynamic in the country’s history, there was no evidence of any integration between populations. Rather, such policies “generated conflict by stimulating inter-group competition and sharpening perceptions of social difference” (Akiner and Barnes 2001, 19). Forced relocation and mixing of the people from different regions transformed the previously loose regional affiliations into a “more fixed group identity based on regional origin” (Roy 2001, 23).

Despite continuous efforts by central authorities in Moscow to organize Tajikistan along the secular-socialist lines, most of the population, especially in the predominant rural areas, maintained their clan loyalties and religious observances (Hiro 1998). According to Roy, “these networks have commonly been used to maximize access to and control over resources and they were translated into the political and administrative structures of the Soviet Union” (Roy 2001, 23). Even the politics of the local Communist Party evolved around the regional divide. In a centralized one-party rule system the only method of career advancement was loyalty to the party elite. The Party endorsed “administrative territorial divisions” and was “grouped around district, province and republic level committees” (Roy 2001, 23). Established clan loyalties combined with party association represented the source of political factionalism. While ideological differences were virtually inexistent, political divide followed the territorial cleavage, which emphasized regional administrative divisions. For Roy, “this generated inter-regional antagonisms in the struggle for access to power, goods and other benefits” (Roy 2001, 23).

4.1.3 Internal Characteristics of the Conflicting Sides and the Creation of Irreconcilable Positions

From the beginning of the Soviet rule, the power in Tajikistan was concentrated within two regions – Sogd or Sughd, also referred to as Leninabad in the north and Khatlon in the south east. Leninabad was by far the region that produced the largest number of public officials. While representatives from other regions held various powerful positions in the Soviet system, “all the first secretaries of the Tajik Communist Party from 1946 to 1991 were Leninabadis” (Roy 2001, 23). Due to their administrative positions, apparatchiks from Leninabad were able to develop very strong ties with the ruling elite in Moscow and enjoy the benefits of a much more advanced regional economy than the rest of the country.

On the other hand, the politically completely marginalized and economically deprived southwestern region of Gorno-Badakhshan, bordering Afghanistan, became a breeding ground for clandestine Islamist movements. What started off as an underground network for Islamic worship which rejected the authority of the official state-controlled Islamic structures, the movements slowly started assuming a political agenda. Despite some differences, “by the early 1990s an alliance was formed between the leaders of the distinct Islamic factions who made up the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP): the new radicals (led by Said Abdullo Nuri), and what was at the time Tajikistan’s official religious establishment (led by Khoji Akbar Turajonzoda)” (Akiner and Barnes 2001, 20).

Throughout the 1980s regional, political and economical disparity, turmoil in neighboring Afghanistan and proliferation of opposition forces were acutely challenging the authorities in Dushanbe. Along with Islamic movements, the underground political scene also generated various secular socio-political movements, such as the Democratic Party of Tajikistan (DPT), which initially had a very strong following. The first clear signs of popular dissatisfaction materialized in the street riots in February 1990, when participants attacked ethnic Russians and other Europeans while shouting “long live the Islamic Republic of Tajikistan” (Hiro 1998, 20). However, while most people in Tajikistan consider Islam to be of crucial importance to their socio-cultural heritage, it seemed that “most did not support the creation of an Islamic state” (Akiner

and Barnes 2001, 20). It appeared that even local religious leaders were not convinced that movements such as IPR represented the only and the best alternative to the decaying one-party rule of the Communist Party.

In principle, in the last two decades of the twentieth century, the political elites in Tajikistan failed to find adequate policies which would tackle the mounting problems of inter-regional disparities. According to Abdullo, the crucial challenges that the country was facing as the Soviet system was eroding were “disparities that had arisen from the increasing economic role of southern population, the demographic structure of the population, ideological diversification, and unequal participation in political decision-making in a country dominated by a northern political elite” (Abdullo 2001, 48).

4.1.4 Employment of Repressive Measures

By 1989, inter-group skirmishes over the allocation of scarce resources escalated into violent clashes. Inter-ethnic confrontations between Tajiks and other ethnic groups - mainly Uzbeks and Kyrgyz - become more regular. After a series of protests, Tajik replaced Russian as official language. This action drove large parts of Russian minority to flee the country. Xenophobic sentiment continued to linger, and on several occasions sparks violent protests - such as protests against re-housing of Armenian refugees in Dushanbe (Abdullaev and Barnes 2001, 83).

Following the dissolution of the USSR, the Tajik Supreme Soviet declared independence of Tajikistan on 9 September 1991. At the same time, facing strong public pressure the central authorities recognized and licensed several opposition movements such as IRP, the DPT and the Rastakhiz (Resurgence) People’s Organization. A 14-day rally in Dushanbe “brings an estimated 10,000 protesters on to the streets” calling for multiparty elections (Abdullaev and Barnes 2001, 83). All the opposition parties took part in the November 1991 presidential elections, eventually won by the Communist Party’s candidate from the Leninabad region, Rahmon Naiyev. The election results were immediately contested by all opposition leaders, accusing the ruling elite of rigging the process and taking advantage of disproportionate access to resources.

Following the election results, the opposition intensified its con-

testation of the communist regime and especially Naiyev's decision to create a government consisting only of Leninabadis from Sughd and Kulyabis from the Khatlon region. In May 1992 demonstrations prompted Naiyev to exercise his emergency powers and form a 'presidential guard', which also consisted only of Leninabadis and Kulyabis. Attempts to counter the pressure from the opposition turned into a military confrontation with some deaths (Iji 2001, 360; Abdullaev and Barnes 2001, 83). As the situation deteriorated, Naiyev tried to appease the situation by accommodating the opposition within a coalition government. However this experiment did not live very long and only managed to outrage the neo-communist elite, taking a country into a full-blown conflict. While Dushanbe was occupied by opposition forces, Naiyev urged the Community of Independent States (CIS) to send peace-keeping troops.

For Russia this situation was absolutely unacceptable, so without any hesitation it helped neo-communist forces from Kulyab to reclaim Dushanbe and push the opposition forces toward the Tajiki-Afghan border. In the meantime, the dissatisfied communist elite replaced Rahmon Naiyev with Emomali Rakhmonov from Kulyab who formed a government predominantly composed by loyal cadre from Leninabad and Kulyab. By the spring of 1993, the repercussions of the intense fighting were more than 30,000 dead and more than 300,000 displaced (Hiro 1998).

4.2 Involvement of International Actors

4.2.1 Powerful States and Their Interests in the Conflict

In July 1993, 25 Russian border guards were killed during an offensive by opposition forces that took place along the border with Afghanistan. Moscow's exasperation was best expressed by an irritated president Yeltzin who publically questioned Russian policy objectives until then, asking 'Why did we not have a plan to protect this border, which everyone must understand is effectively Russia's, not Tajikistan's?' (Hiro 1998, 20). It was evident that Kremlin's strong line now regarded the Tajik-Afghan border as 'an advanced Russian base', even though it is 1,450 km from Russian territory, 'that can protect Russia from the infiltration of guns, narcotics and Islamic fundamentalism' (Hiro 1995, 15).

Already in August 1993, the new doctrine was materialized through Russian-Tajik military cooperation, which paved the road for 25,000 Russian troops to be located in Tajikistan out of which 17,000 positioned along the border with Afghanistan. The second step was taken in November 1993 when the Tajiki government signed a document which subordinated its finances to Russia (*idem*). Tajikistan remained the only newly independent country in Central Asia that continued using the Russian ruble as the only official currency. It was clear that the Tajiki government's survival depended directly on Russian support.

Officially, the Russian military maintained a neutral stand in the Tajik civil war. However, there are numerous claims that "the army supported pro-government forces with vehicles, ammunition and weapons" (Abdullaev and Barnes 2001, 93). Again, officially the Russian government indicated a clear interest to maintain and develop official relations only with the Tajiki government. However, from 1993, as many members of the opposition, especially those from the DPT, found refuge in Moscow, Russian officials started encouraging the parties to talk and subsequently acted as a key sponsor of the inter-Tajik negotiations (Abdullaev and Barnes 2001, 93).

In order to counterbalance the asymmetric power, the Islamic-democratic coalition tried to find external support in Iran. The special relationship between two countries mainly revolved around cultural and religious issues: Tajikistan was the only Farsi-speaking new Muslim country in Central Asia. However, despite implicit appeals to Iran, manifestations of Islamic slogans - that echoed Iranian revolutionary days - were only a symbolic indicator of radicalization of the pro-Iranian Islamic agenda. In reality the Islamic-democratic opposition 'neither believed in the possibility or desirability of an Islamic alternative nor was it even united in a preference for and ideologically tainted political model for Tajikistan' (Mesbahi 1997, 143). The common agenda for the opposition forces was a pursuit of a democratic political system founded on a new constitution. From the beginning, it was absolutely clear to the authorities in Teheran that Tajikistan was not 'ready' for an Islamic revolution, due to its soviet heritage which largely dissociated the population from Islam, and regional/clan fragmentation. At the same time Iran was faced with a wide-ranging and formidable regional and international consensus, promoted by Russia and the US, on the issue of the Islamic threat and Iranian influence in Tajikistan (Mesbahi 1997, 148).

Iran's hesitation to fully promote an Islamic agenda in Tajikistan created problems for the opposition forces. Authorities in Teheran refused to provide armaments when it was most needed and on occasions failed to provide direct rhetorical support for the opposition through diplomatic means (Mesbahi 1997, 150). Nevertheless, Iran remained the biggest and most influential outside actor that was voicing out an undisputed support for the opposition.

Both Russia and Iran had an obvious leverage over the conflicting sides. Adequate use of such power represented a crucial resource that would allow the mediating coalition to produce necessary incentives in order to leverage the government and the United Tajiki Opposition (UTO) towards a mutually acceptable solution. However, in order to produce such incentives biased mediators need to assume a cooperative attitude. As this research hypothesized (H1), while cooperating with other mediators, biased mediators are useful as they can use their special relationship with one conflicting side to influence its behavior, positions and perceptions and consequently move it toward an agreement. This dynamic will be further analyzed and traced through out the present case study.

Finally, reflecting on Russia's and Iran's formation and projection of interests toward Tajikistan, the country was of high strategic importance for both regional powers. As indicated in the theoretical chapter, once third-parties show intent of cooperating with each other, in order to produce the necessary incentives and successfully manage the conflict, third-parties need to coordinate their activities and adequately use various leverages at their disposal in order to guide the parties toward a mutually acceptable solution. The intent of adequately applying necessary and available leverages is directly related to the strategic importance of the country for the involved third-parties. As hypothesized earlier (H10) the stronger the mediators' strategic interest in the conflict for a mediator the higher the chances of successful mediation through a coordinated effort by mediators in a coalition. The prospects of employing adequate (and necessary) leverage in order to steer the two conflicting sides toward an agreement will be further explored in the rest of the chapter.

4.2.2 Involvement of the UN

According to Goryayev “the UN was recognized as the leading international body driving the peace process and *coordinating* international responses to the crisis” (emphasis added, Goryayev 2001, 32). The UN got involved already in September of 1992, when it dispatched the first fact-finding mission to explore the conflict dynamics more closely. Once the mission reported in detail about the high levels of violence - defining the turmoil as civil war - the UN decided to dispatch a new mission (November 1992) which also interacted with representatives of neighboring states. These first consultations paved the road for future cooperation between the UN and neighboring countries that were able to exert necessary the political, economic, and military influence over the conflicting parties in order to move them toward a peaceful solution. By January of 1993 Secretary General established a small United Nations Mission of Observers in Tajikistan (UNMOT), mandated to monitor the situation on the ground and ascertain positions of all concerned parties. The information provided by the UNMOT prompted the Secretary General to appoint a full-time Special Envoy “mandated to concentrate on achieving a ceasefire and establishing the process of negotiations for a political solution” (Goryayev 2001, 34).

Goryayev points out that “over a period of seven years, the Special Envoys/Representatives and their staff were responsible for designing the negotiation process, maintaining contacts with all parties to the conflict and integrating the efforts of other countries and organizations” (Goryayev 2001, 34). While lacking muscle, the UN was able to provide leadership in coordinating the activities of various third-parties (Iji 2001, 347). The mediation process showed that the Special Envoys were extremely devoted to maintain and strengthen their relations with the officials from the neighboring countries as they were. Regular communication and consultations with the observer countries created an opportunity for the UN negotiating team to “inform the governments on the negotiations, to *coordinate* plans and actions, and to prepare for future rounds of talks” (emphasis added Hay 2001, 40). Such actions generated the needed degree of trust in the activities conducted by the UN, and assured the neighboring countries (especially Russia and Iran) that the UN led negotiations will not endanger the interest they had in the region. According to Hay, “the consultations with observer governments

kept them informed, engaged and confident that the Tajik delegations and the mediators were taking their views and interests into account” (Hay 2001, 42).

Throughout the process, the UN mediating team was not only in charge of facilitating the communication between the belligerents, they were also in charge of formulating proposals and drafting initial text to the agreement. In order to assure the interested states, and especially Russia and Iran, the UN mediators “often coordinated the compromise solutions they proposed” which “helped the observers to feel a sense of ownership over the negotiating process” (Hay 2001, 43). Such trust building efforts generated reciprocal attitudes among the observing countries. For the UN mediators it was of crucial importance to have the support of the powerful states, especially Russia which had strong military, political and economic interests in the region. For this reason the UN team regularly informed and consulted the Security Council, which generated a strong support for the SRSG’s mediating efforts from the Security Council.

While well equipped to perform the mediator roles of communicator and formulator, the UN lacked ‘muscle’ in the mediation process. The only leverage it had was that of legitimacy. As pointed out by Iji, “the UN’s legitimate and moral authority served as a complement to the incentives supplied by Russia and Iran” (Iji 2001, 376). This was especially important when the two conflicting parties showed no interest to compromise. In such critical conditions UN mediators would stop the negotiation process and consult the neighboring countries’ officials - especially those from Russia and Iran - share their formulas, draft new proposals, and “request them to use their leverage with the parties to encourage them to compromise” (Hay 2001, 43). Therefore, as hypothesized in H10 and H11a, the necessary conditions for a successful coordination - the needed level of legitimacy and compatibility of interests between the international organization and major powers - were present, and greatly contributed to the success of the mediation process. However, in order to come to the required degree of cooperation, both major powers first needed to achieve a mutual convergence of interests. This was neither a simple nor a fast endeavor.

4.3 Multiparty Mediation

4.3.1 Initial Lack of Cooperation Between Third Parties

In such a disproportional constellation of forces, where the government had an upper hand from Moscow, while the opposition was failing to find similar support elsewhere, Russia saw an opportune moment to initiate inter-Tajik negotiations under UN auspices. Reflecting on a previously illustrated game theoretical model, at this point the multiparty mediation process starts, and the 'game' is in *point b*, where the mediator that indicates attentions of cooperating with other third parties - in this case Russia showing intent to use the good offices of the UN - manages to reap comparatively higher benefits than those third-parties that are not part of the multiparty mediation endeavor - which in this case is Iran. The benefits stem directly from the ability to guide and direct the process in a way which is compatible with 'cooperative' mediator's interests, especially as these interests are not counterbalanced by the involvement of the other 'non-cooperative' mediator.

Already since the attacks on the border station in July 1993, despite the strong line assumed by the Russian army and president Yeltzin, the Russian ministry of foreign affairs was exploring the possibility of finding a settlement through negotiation. Acting as communicator and facilitator, Russia established direct contacts with the opposition leaders that found refuge in Teheran. Resorting to shuttle diplomacy, Russian envoys managed to encourage both sides in the conflict to start negotiations (Gretsky 1995; Iji 2001).

The first round of talks was held in Moscow from 5th to 9th of April 1994. The two sides managed to agree on an agenda for succeeding rounds of negotiation, classifying three categories of issues that needed to be tackled: political settlement, refugees and internally displaced persons, and the structure of the government of Tajikistan (Iji 2001, 360). From the start, substantial discrepancy over the 'sequencing' (Lax and Sebenius 1991) of these issues emerged. The government wanted first to see the mutiny end and a solution to the refugee problem, while the opposition called for an "all-party council to govern the country and the legalization of opposition parties" (Iji 2001, 360).

The following second round of talks was held in Teheran, from 18th until 28th of June 1994. The key issue on the agenda was achievement

of a ceasefire. Despite the initial readiness to come to an understanding regarding the ceasefire, parties failed to agree on a timeframe for its implementation. Once the talks failed, the government abruptly decided to hold a referendum on the new constitution and presidential elections, scheduling both for September. Irritated by this move, the opposition intensified military operations around the border with Afghanistan and the situation deteriorated even further.

Russia was not happy with an ongoing conflict, especially as it was endangering its troops located in the country. It decided to resort to manipulative strategies in order to force the government to sign a ceasefire agreement and to postpone elections and referendum (Hay 2001). At the same time Iranian diplomats used the same tactics with the opposition leaders. Shortly thereafter, a ceasefire was reached at a consultative meeting in Teheran in September 1994. According to Hay, the deputy foreign ministers of Russia and Iran “were instrumental in convincing the respective Tajik delegations to sign the Drat Agreement on a Temporary Ceasefire prepared by the UN negotiating team” (Hay 2001, 40). Compatibility of interest between two major powers, coupled by the coordinating efforts of the UN whose positions did not contradict major powers’ interests, were the necessary conditions for achieving the agreement. The armistice was eventually extended until February 1995 during the third round of talks in Islamabad, held from 20th until 31st of October 1994 (Iji 2001). This was a clear indication how a cooperative and coordinated effort by biased third-parties can produce sufficient incentives to leverage the disputants toward an agreement.

However, despite these important contributions for achieving a cessation of hostilities, Russia was still not fully committed to broker a negotiated solution to the conflict. According to Iji “Moscow helped jump-start the negotiations, move them forward, and focus the attention of the parties on talking rather than fighting, but was not prepared to pressure Rakhmonov strongly enough to accept power sharing with the opposition” (Iji 2001, 366). Such an attitude sent mixed signals to its partners in Dushanbe that were focused on regaining power through new elections (presidential in November 1994 and parliamentary in February 1995) and a referendum on the constitution (February 1995), that excluded participation of the opposition parties. The government’s decision reduced the already fragile confidence the opposition had in the peace process, so the spotlight once again shifted toward the frontli-

nes. Evidently, the lack of a strong presence of Iran in this phase of the process was directly hurting the opposition forces. They were clearly experiencing comparatively lower payoffs from the peace process (as predicted by the game-theoretical model), which in turn induced them to resort to violence in order to improve their negotiating positions.

As the belligerent activities escalated, the two conflicting sides agreed to meet in Moscow in April 1995, and discuss the possibility of extending the armistice. The opposition accepted the talks under the condition that they would lead to a more substantial negotiation over a potential political settlement. On the eve of this meeting, the Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev issued a statement addressed to Russians living outside Russia, emphasizing: “We have at our disposal an arsenal of methods to defend our compatriots” (Hiro 1995, 15). The opposition understood this as a direct warning and walked out from the UN-chartered meeting. Motivated by this unyielding Russian position, the Tajik president Rakhmonov reacted in a self-assured tone and offered to meet the opposition leader, Said Nuri, from IRP, “any time, anywhere” (Hiro 1995, 14).

After this statement a series of summits and rounds of talks were held. In most of the occasions, these talks only served as an outlet for both sides to channel their disagreement, without achieving any substantial progress. Evidently, the government was still having an upper hand in the peace process, especially given the overwhelming role of their Russian partners. However they were hurting on the battlefield, as the opposition resorted to violence to distort the present balance of power at the negotiating table, where they were still experiencing lower payoffs. Again lack of substantial Iran presence in the peace process was hurting the UTO.

During a series of summits and rounds of talks, worth mentioning are the agreements on refugees and prisoners of war achieved during the fourth round of talks in Almaty (22nd May – 1st of June 1995). Another important event was signing of the Protocol on the Fundamental Principles for Establishing Peace and National Accord in Tajikistan, which was a result of the Rakhmonov-Nuri summit facilitated by Iran in Teheran on July 19 and following indirect talks through the UN envoy. This protocol was “delineating the road to and the overall shape of a final settlement” (Iji 2001, 362). Despite Iran’s contribution in drafting the Protocol, its mediation potential was still not set in full motion.

Teheran still maintained financial and political support, together with a somewhat clandestine military assistance to the Islamic-democratic coalition. Iran's biggest hope was to create "an effective contestant against the Rakhmonov regime, although Teheran continued to be very careful to maintain good relations with the government side" (Iji 2001, 366). While both sides in conflict started sending signals of readiness to start negotiating on political issues, fighting on the ground never actually stopped. Evidently, conflicting sides used violence as an off-the-table-tactic, in order to improve their bargaining position (Sisk 2009). As the situation deteriorated, the consecutive (fifth) round of talks that was in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan – November 30, 1995 and 8-21 July 1996 - focused mainly (again) on finding an agreement on a ceasefire.

It was evident that neither side was fully committed to negotiate a peace agreement. Even though the peace process had been underway for more than two years high levels of mutual distrust still existed. The opposition questioned the legitimacy of the neo-communists to participate in negotiations as an official government, given the electoral frauds that had occurred over time. Its military success throughout the conflict was impressive, proving to Iran that its support was worthwhile. On the other hand, the government did not recognize opposition forces as an equal partner with whom they would not only negotiate, but eventually share the power. Government did not have to look far to find support for its claims. Russia was "most unlikely to let Tajik Islamist share power in a country which it regards as crucial to its own security" (Hiro 1996, 14). Clearly, while outside support was still available for their respective unilateral solutions, the Tajik parties participated in negotiations only 'half-heartedly' (Iji 2001, 366).

As this research hypothesized (H2), when the mediating coalition is faced with conflicting interests, if one mediator decides to defect from the group dynamic, this will have an important impact on the dynamics of peace process between negotiators. At the same time Russia and Iran still did not have a shared idea on a potential solution to the conflict, which would help them to push the parties toward a peaceful solution to their dispute. As previously hypothesized (H4), in case mediators do not reach convergence of interests, the conflicting sides will be induced to defect from negotiations, making it more likely for the peace process to fail. In the case of Tajikistan, this was unequivocally indicated by the unyielding positions of both the government and UTO. Neither side

was inclined to show any intent to compromise, and abandon maximalist claims in the peacemaking process.

4.3.2 Convergence of Interests Between Multiple Mediators

Just when the peace process was approaching a severe deadlock, in September 1996, violent events in nearby Afghanistan produced enough reasons for Russia and Iran to settle the conflict in Tajikistan (Abdullaev and Babakhanov 1998; Abdullo 2001). The storming of Kabul was the “last drop” that induced Russia to rethink its policy objectives that supported a military solution to the conflict. By then, the neo-communist regime in Dushanbe was in a serious decay, while the opposition forces were gaining momentum on the battlefield. Realizing a weakening of its military forces and its inability to fight Muslim insurgents – a lesson learned in a 20-month long conflict in Chechnya in 1995–96 – Russia came to view that “the cost of further military involvement in Tajikistan to be too high” (Iji 2001, 366). Since the Tajik–Afghan border was still considered to be ‘a Russian border’, Moscow urgently needed a stable Tajikistan to serve as a buffer zone against the threat of Islamic fundamentalism coming from Afghanistan (Iji 2001, 367).

Iran was also prompted to modify its policy objectives in Tajikistan. Despite the temporary military success of the opposition forces, it was already clear to Teheran that chances of an armed seizure of power were extremely small. And even in that case, in the eyes of policy makers in Teheran, Tajikistan was never ready to be modeled into an Islamic state. For this reason Iran was always very careful to maintain some relationship with the government in Dushanbe, at last within the cultural and religious dimensions. According to several observers, “Iran attached more importance to the maintenance of good relations with Russia than to the creation of an Islamic state in Tajikistan” (Iji 2001, 367). In fact, just in order to preserve good relations with authorities in Moscow, Teheran never provided all the assistance requested by the opposition forces (Mesbahi 1997). So when the Taliban militia gained power in Afghanistan, Iran immediately realized that the conflict in Tajikistan needed to be resolved as soon as possible. For Iran, a stable Tajikistan represented a solid shield against the regime in Afghanistan that was “adverse to their interests because of geopolitical, ethnic and religious reasons” (Iji 2001, 367).

Given the novel developments, two lead-states had converging interests in resolving the conflict in Tajikistan. As theorized previously (H3), if the mediators manage to achieve convergence of policy objectives among them, there are bigger chances that the peace process will be successful. In this case, both Russia and Iran shared an idea over the final outcome to the conflict: the final agreement should be based on a power-sharing arrangement between the government and the opposition (Hiro 1998). As Iji noted, “such coincidence of interests and positions rendered possible the joint mediation by Russia and Iran in the Tajik conflict... once Russia and Iran became serious about settling the conflict through a cooperative mediation effort, the negotiation began to gain momentum” (Iji 2001, 368).

In fact, both states took the conflict resolution process much more seriously. Using particular leverages at their disposal as biased mediators and lead-states, they resorted to manipulative strategies in order to move both conflicting sides toward an agreement. In cases where outside actors have a strong strategic interest in a country or region, which prompts them to manage a conflict (H9), the stronger the mediators’ strategic interest in the conflict the higher the chances of successful mediation through a coordinated effort by mediators in a coalition. As indicated previously, Tajikistan possessed all the necessary traits of a strategically important zone for both Russia and Iran. Therefore, a well coordinated action by both Russia and Iran soon brought results. Both conflicting sides, exhausted by continuous fighting, saw a military solution to the conflict as an unattainable option. Eventually as their sponsor-states definitely stopped providing assistance for military actions, both the government and the opposition started taking the option of actually negotiating a solution much more seriously. Thus, Rakhmonov and Nuri, each one experiencing increasing pressure from the outside patron states, agreed to meet and discuss the most delicate issues of the peace agreement. By December 1996 they managed to find a mutually acceptable formula for the final solution. In the following rounds of talks, hosted by Iran (Teheran, 6-19 January 1997) and Russia (Moscow 26th February – 8th of March 1997), thanks to well synchronized activities of powerful states, parties managed to overcome all the differences in opinion, accepted to make important concessions regarding the future power-sharing arrangement and paved the way to the actual peace agreement signed on June 27, 1997 in Moscow. According to Hay, “the

personal contribution of Russian Foreign Minister Primakov and his deputy Mr. Pashtukov, were invaluable for reaching agreement on the Protocol on Military Issues in March 1997, one of the most important documents of the process. The direct involvement of Iranian Foreign Minister Velayati facilitated the signing of Protocol on Refugees in January 1997” (Hay 2001, 40). What was even more remarkable was the fact that Russia and Iran were not only focused putting pressure on the negotiators; they also used all the necessary means in order to create a proper atmosphere for the negotiations. Especially important for them was to isolate the ‘spoilers’ (Stedman 1997) who had problems accepting the proposed power-sharing solution. An unprecedented demonstration of Russian dedication to achieve an uphold the peace settlement happened in August 1997, when Russian air forces bombed a garrison of governmental forces led by generals unhappy with the peace agreement and the power-sharing arrangement it prescribed. Evidently, Moscow was “deadly serious” about helping Rakhmonov implement the peace treaty (Hiro 1997, 14).

Looking back at the game theoretical model, the apparent convergence of interests moved the process to *point c*. In other words, the process reached the NME. The convergence of interests was a direct result of a series of factor. As hypothesized earlier (H5), a strong geo-political shift will induce the defecting mediator to change its strategy and engage in a cooperative meditation effort to manage the conflict. The storming of Kabul by Taliban forces represented a serious geopolitical challenge for both Russia and Iran. While the Tajik civil war could be treated as an isolated conflict, which could be contained within a region, without any fear of it spilling over to other countries, neither third party showed any intent to push for a more peaceful solution to the dispute. However, the projected and feared spill-over effect from Afghanistan induced Russia and Iran to rethink their policies toward the region, and thus find a stronger interest to stabilize the situation in Tajikistan as soon as possible. Therefore, the convergence of interests between two mediators was directly induced by a serious geo-political change in the region, and the causal link between Taliban occupation of Kabul and Russia and Iran’s convergence of interests could be deduced.

At the same time, this research hypothesized (H6) that an increase in costs of supporting a war will induce the defecting mediator to change its strategy and engage in a cooperative meditation effort to

manage the conflict. Both Russia and Iran found the amounting costs of perpetuating the war unbearable and in contrast to their self-interests. As indicated previously, Russia was especially harmed by the ongoing warfare, and this realization directly induced Moscow officials to rethink their policies regarding the peace process in Tajikistan. Therefore, the causal linkage between increasing costs of supporting warfare and convergence of interests between third parties could be observed. Once Russia and Iran realized that a military solution to the conflict was unattainable, they were able to reformulate their policies toward their partners and using specific power at their disposal and leverage them through a cooperative endeavor to find a mutually acceptable solution, as hypothesized in H1. While Iran was less affected by the costs of war, it was more prone to rethink its policies toward the conflict, due to the ineffectiveness of its strategy to produce any outcome that is in line with its self-interests. The same attitude can be attributed to Russia's change of attitude. This is in line with what was previously hypothesized (H7) - if a mediator's defecting strategy produces high costs in the mediation process for the state it supports, this will induce the defecting mediator to change its strategy and engage in a cooperative mediation effort to manage the conflict.

