

# Architecture of international involvement in the Tajik peace process

by Vladimir Goryayev

*The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations.*

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The Tajik peace process brought together a range of international partners who were able to coordinate their interventions effectively to support the efforts of Tajiks to end the war. They were united by the common goals of restoring peace, preventing the conflict from spreading throughout the region and alleviating the suffering of hundreds of thousands of victims of war. The UN was recognized as the leading international body driving the peace process and coordinating international responses to the crisis. Owing to the clear mandate from the UN Security Council, there was no ambiguity about the UN's sponsorship of the negotiations that were the focus of the peace process. The UN's role was accepted by all major parties to the conflict, the key observer countries and other states. Once the UN mandate was established, the offices responsible for implementation moved quickly and the UN presence was soon consolidated. Thereafter the UN response was characterized by an integrated approach involving the political, peacekeeping and humanitarian elements of the UN system.

The Special Envoys and, later, the Special Representatives of the UN Secretary-General were at the centre of the complex effort to coordinate the actions of various UN departments, programmes and agencies, regional international organizations, and influential international NGOs. They also liaised closely with Tajikistan's neighbours and other interested countries. In addition to facilitating the official inter-Tajik negotiations, UN mediators also maintained liaison with the 'second track' dialogue initiated by Ambassador Saunders of the Kettering Foundation. Despite the apparent complexity of international interventions in the Tajik conflict, clear mandates and effective coordination prevented duplication and 'competition of initiatives' – thus facilitating the comparatively rapid achievement of a peace agreement and helping to alleviate the suffering of those affected by war.



## The role of Special Envoys/ Representatives of the UN Secretary-General

The UN response to the Tajik civil war began in September 1992, when the first fact-finding mission led by Raymond Sommereyns, Director of the West Asia Division of the Department of Political Affairs (DPA) of the UN Secretariat, was dispatched to the country by Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali. The mission travelled to the areas where fighting was most intense and met all the principal political and military leaders on both sides. It subsequently reported that Tajikistan was engulfed in civil war. On 2 October 1992, the Secretary-General conveyed the mission's findings to the Security Council. From 1 to 14 November 1992, a second mission visited Tajikistan, initiating the active involvement of key UN humanitarian agencies – the UNHCR, the World Food Programme (WFP), UNICEF, and the World Health Organization (WHO). This mission also interacted closely with a high-level mediation team from four CIS countries, led by Felix Kulov, at that time Vice-President of the Kyrgyz Republic, and included the Deputy Foreign Ministers of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan and the Russian Ambassador to Tajikistan. Their cooperation in November 1992 mutually reinforced the UN and CIS missions. It demonstrated the potential of an intervention that combined the involvement of the UN – perceived as an impartial third party with moral authority and expertise in multilateral negotiations – with that of Tajikistan's close

neighbours who could exert political, economic and military leverage. This first positive experience was the catalyst for a partnership used to the fullest extent during the negotiations and the implementation of the 1997 General Agreement.

The first two UN missions revealed that the Secretary-General and the Security Council lacked the detailed information needed to design an effective strategy. To address this problem, in late December 1992 the Secretary-General decided to establish a small political mission in Dushanbe, with the agreement of the Tajik Government. Liviu Bota of Romania was appointed to head this United Nations Mission of Observers in Tajikistan (UNMOT), which started work on 21 January 1993. The mission was charged with the following tasks:

- a) to monitor the situation on the ground and provide the Secretary-General with up-to-date information;
- b) to ascertain the positions of all concerned parties on various aspects of the conflict and to encourage regional peacemaking efforts or, where no such efforts are in place, to encourage regional states or groups of states to undertake them;
- c) to assess the military situation in Tajikistan and explore how assistance could be provided to regional peacekeeping efforts;

d) to provide liaison and coordination services to facilitate prompt humanitarian assistance by the international community.

Information from UNMOT soon led the Secretary-General to appoint a full-time Envoy mandated to concentrate on achieving a ceasefire and establishing the process of negotiations for a political solution. On 26 April 1993, Ambassador Ismat Kittani of Iraq was appointed the Secretary-General's Special Envoy. In January 1994, he was succeeded by Ambassador Ramiro Piriz-Ballon of Uruguay. The efforts of Ambassadors Kittani and Piriz-Ballon, as well as those of UNMOT, began to produce results when the two Tajik parties held the first round of inter-Tajik negotiations in Moscow on 5-19 April 1994. These Special Envoys were later succeeded by Special Representatives resident in Tajikistan: Gerd Merrem of Germany (May 1996-April 1998), Ambassador Jan Kubics of Slovakia (July 1998-August 1999) and Ambassador Ivo Petrov of Bulgaria (from September 1999). Each in turn led the negotiation process that resulted in the General Agreement of 17 June 1997 and its eventual implementation. Although the Special Envoys/Representatives acted during different phases of the conflict and peace process, their contributions to the restoration of peace in Tajikistan were equally valuable. Over a period of almost 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. They served as mediators and worked with the Tajik parties to organize the negotiations and numerous high-level consultations between rounds. With the input of the Tajik negotiators, they drafted the protocols that made up the General Agreement.

Another important function of the Special Envoys/Representatives was to report through the Secretary-General to the Security Council and stimulate its active interest and involvement in the Tajikistan conflict. The Secretary-General reported regularly to the Security Council, helping to ensure that key member states remained politically committed to the process. This in turn helped to strengthen the hand of the Special Envoys/Representatives in performing their functions. Security Council backing was important not only in their work with the warring Tajik parties, but also for their contacts with states that directly or indirectly supported one of the Tajik sides.

In designing the negotiating strategy, the first Special Envoys, Ambassadors Kittani and Piriz-Ballon, paid special attention to the need for constructive integration of countries in the region into UN peacemaking efforts. The Special Envoys gave as much attention to their contacts with the governments of these countries as they gave to

direct consultations with the parties to the conflict. Following consultations in the capitals of Russia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan, these countries became observers in the inter-Tajik negotiations, with the explicit agreement of both the Tajik government and the leaders of the United Tajik Opposition (UTO). In September 1995, Turkmenistan joined the group of observer countries. (The important role played by these countries in the peace process is discussed in more detail in the chapter on the inter-Tajik negotiations.) In the years after the General Agreement was concluded, it became clear that it would have been impossible to reach an agreement without ensuring the synergy of efforts of the United Nations negotiating team and the governments of the observer countries.

## UN departments

Institutionally, the DPA was the leading UN office for the inter-Tajik negotiations. Under-Secretaries-General Marrack Goulding and Kieran Prendergast paid close attention to the negotiating process. At several critical junctures they intervened personally with the parties and other players. For example, when the negotiations reached an impasse on the issue of the venue for the second round, Goulding flew to Dushanbe in early May 1994 to consult with President Rakhmonov and the problem was solved. Prendergast directed the negotiating process in its final critical stage and personally chaired the Vienna donor conference in November 1997. DPA staff were also active. Sommereyns participated directly, albeit intermittently, in the negotiations. The DPA desk officer for Tajikistan served as a political adviser to all the Special Envoys/Representatives and was executive secretary at each round of talks and at the consultation meetings.

The DPA had several responsibilities: it developed the strategy of the peace process; organized each round of negotiations; prepared draft agreements; drafted the reports of the Secretary-General to the Security Council; provided substantive guidance and administrative support to UNMOT from January 1993 to December 1994; coordinated the efforts of other UN departments, programmes and agencies; and organized meetings at UN headquarters for the informal 'Group of Friends of Tajikistan'. In addition to these specific duties, DPA staff fulfilled the critical function of maintaining the institutional memory of the process.

At the same time, the DPA cooperated closely with other UN departments, particularly with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO). DPA and DPKO officials acted as a unified team during the peace process. The Director of the Asia and Middle East Division of DPKO, Joachim Hütter, participated in the inter-Tajik

negotiations when the military and peacekeeping aspects of the peace process were discussed. After a UN peacekeeping mission was formed in December 1994, the spirit of cooperation between the departments was maintained. The DPKO became the lead department providing substantive guidance to UNMOT. It was responsible for the administration of the peacekeeping mission, prepared drafts of the Secretary-General's reports to the Security Council and convened the UN Task Force for Tajikistan. The DPA, however, retained responsibility for the negotiation process. This division of labour and responsibilities between the two departments proved effective.

## UN humanitarian agencies

The severe humanitarian crisis in Tajikistan affected the negotiation process. One of the most important issues on the agenda was how to address the problem of refugees. The DPA and the Special Envoys/Representatives worked closely with the relevant UN humanitarian bodies and their Tajik counterparts to devise strategies to respond to these problems. Everyone was aware that the humanitarian problems could not be solved without addressing the core political problems. Therefore, without compromising the humanitarian principles that guide their work, the agencies benefited from the political perspectives and advice of the DPA. The Task Force on Tajikistan at UN headquarters was a useful *ad hoc* coordinating body. It included all the relevant UN departments, programmes and agencies with representation from the DPA, the DPKO, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the UNHCR, the UNDP, the WFP, UNICEF, the WHO, the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights, and the World Bank. Task Force meetings, organised by the DPKO, were held at UN headquarters whenever necessary, usually every two to three months. They typically addressed issues of concern to all the partners, such as measures to ensure the safety of personnel and operations, election monitoring, and donor conferences.

The UNHCR was accepted by the government and was able to play a much larger political and mediating role than is normally the case. This was made possible by both its operational capacity and its unwillingness to make artificial distinctions between the needs of internally displaced people and those who had crossed the border into Afghanistan. Coordination between the DPA and the UNHCR was particularly close. The Special Envoys/Representatives consulted regularly with the High Commissioner for Refugees, Sadako Ogata. The UNHCR representative in Tajikistan, Pierre-François Pirlot, was included in the UN negotiating team when the refugee issue was discussed during the talks. This close coordination later facilitated the implementation of the Protocol on Refugees, in which the UNHCR played a key

role. The organization actively sought to promote conditions on the ground that would allow people to return home in safety. It developed a strong in-country protection programme that included both mediation and monitoring of human rights. It helped to resolve disputes, including those over house occupations, as well as providing emergency assistance and relief. It also initiated projects that contributed to poverty alleviation and peacebuilding. Many of these activities set new precedents for the UNHCR and, as a result, its operation contributed to the stability and security of the country. In later stages, however, the operation lacked the resources for a smooth transition from relief to development.

## Regional inter-governmental organizations

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), with a membership of fifty-five states, and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), with its membership of fifty-six states, were key partners in the Tajik peace process. The OSCE – known as the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) until 1994 – participated as an observer for the first time at the Tehran meeting in June 1994. The OIC participated in the next round of talks in Islamabad in October 1994. Both then continued as official observers in the process and were a part of the Contact Group of guarantor states after the General Agreement was signed.

The OSCE contribution to the peace process was particularly important. As the OSCE began to consider how it could play a role, its chairperson-in-office, Wilhelm Hoyt, exchanged a series of letters with Marrack Goulding that became an informal memorandum of understanding on the different roles that each organization would fulfil. This helped to ensure that there was no collision in their respective mandates. It was agreed that the UN would continue its leading role in the peace process, while the OSCE would take a primary role in promoting the development of democratic institutions – a task that included organizing elections, helping to develop a new constitution, and monitoring human rights. The OSCE mission in Dushanbe, which opened in June 1993, offered technical assistance to the Tajik government. Later in the transition period, after the General Agreement was signed, the OSCE monitored and regularly reported on the human rights situation of returning refugees and displaced persons. As a guarantor of the General Agreement, it provided support for implementation, in particular for the protocols dealing with political and military issues and refugee return.

The Special Envoys/Representatives of the Secretary-General coordinated their negotiating positions with representatives of the OSCE and the OIC and kept them

informed of all details of the process. Throughout the peace process, the UN Special Envoys/Representatives and their staff regularly communicated with the OSCE Secretariat, its chairperson-in-office, and mission staff. As the UN representatives made a point of communicating their plans and strategies, OSCE representatives were able to make relevant contributions in support of the process when necessary. In June 1994, Ambassador Piriz-Ballon had consultations with the OIC Secretary-General in Jeddah. The UN mediators benefited from the information provided by OIC and OSCE field staff.

One practical outcome of this coordination was that a clear and consistent message from the key multilateral organizations cut off opportunities for any of the parties to look for a more 'convenient' mediator who might be more amenable to a process promoting their own cause. The Tajik parties, dissatisfied with the pressure applied by the UN negotiating team at certain points in the peace process, mentioned a possible change in mediators – implying that the OSCE should take over the lead. The OSCE, however, immediately ruled out this option and consistently supported the UN process. At critical moments in the peace process, the OSCE issued official statements in support of the UN peacemaking efforts and this had a positive effect on the Tajik parties. The combination of clear and complementary organizational mandates, together with continuing efforts to ensure politically unified strategies, also helped to ensure that personnel from the different organizations were able to work cooperatively.

## The role of international NGOs

With the human costs of war escalating rapidly, several international NGOs came to Tajikistan to provide humanitarian assistance, help protect civilians, and facilitate a peaceful resolution of the conflict. Among the most active were the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Aga Khan Foundation, *Médécins sans Frontières* and Helsinki Watch/Human Rights Watch. The UN – through the Special Envoys/Representatives and UNMOT – maintained close contact with these NGOs and sought to harmonize international efforts to help restore peace. The UN's contacts with ICRC and the Aga Khan Foundation were particularly close.

The ICRC played a significant role in helping to implement the agreement on the exchange of prisoners of war and detainees. The political decision on exchanges was achieved in the third and fourth rounds of negotiations at Islamabad and Almaty, respectively, and it was an important confidence-building measure. Given its reputation, experience and technical knowledge, the ICRC was given the extremely complicated task of conducting the exchanges, which it did successfully. In its turn, the UN used its political leverage with the parties to

facilitate important elements of the exchanges that the ICRC had difficulty in fulfilling, such as gaining access for ICRC delegates to detainees in prisons. Although the ICRC representatives did not participate directly in the negotiations, they visited Islamabad and Almaty 'informally' when the humanitarian issues with which they were concerned were on the agenda.

Given the great moral authority of His Highness Prince Karim Aga Khan over the Ismaili population of Badakhshan, Special Envoy Piriz-Ballon and Special Representative Merrem consulted him on issues related to the peace process. His visits to the country, informal mediating role and moderating influence significantly contributed to the success of the peace process. The Aga Khan Foundation made major contributions to alleviating the humanitarian crisis, particularly in the eastern part of the country.

## CIS Peacekeeping forces

In late September 1993, the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defence of the CIS established the Collective Peacekeeping Forces in Tajikistan (CIS/PKF) composed of contingents from the Russian Federation – based on the 201st Division stationed in Tajikistan – and battalions from Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and Uzbekistan. In the chaos of civil war and with the collapse of government authority in many regions of Tajikistan, the CIS/PKF was the only disciplined and reliable force able to protect humanitarian convoys and strategic installations, such as chemical plants and hydroelectric power stations. Foreign embassies and international organizations also relied on its protection. Its presence had a stabilizing effect and helped to ensure that heavy weapons did not fall into the hands of the combatants. They thus helped to prevent further destruction and casualties. The CIS/PKF, together with the Russian Border Forces, also helped to control the transshipment of massive quantities of arms, ammunition and drugs from neighbouring Afghanistan.

The Special Envoys/Representatives and UNMOT military observers maintained regular contact with CIS/PKF commanders to discuss the military situation in the country and explore options to secure a ceasefire. The Protocol on Military Issues, signed in March 1997, gave CIS/PKF forces the important and delicate role of accompanying UTO units from Afghanistan to the assembly areas under the supervision of UNMOT, which they conducted successfully. This model of cooperation between UN military observers and regional peacekeeping forces could be applicable elsewhere, when the risks involved in sending unarmed UN personnel are high and regional countries are prepared to furnish the military 'muscle' to achieve political objectives defined by the Security Council.

## Strengths and weaknesses of the 'Tajik model' of peacemaking

On 12 May 2000 the UN Security Council issued a statement recognizing that 'the United Nations has played a successful and important role in the peace process in Tajikistan.' The success of the 'Tajik model' of international involvement was determined by the following factors:

- a) The UN was involved in Tajikistan practically from the beginning of the conflict, interacting with all factions and external players. Acting together with a high-level mediation team of the CIS countries, in autumn 1992 the UN helped to prevent the escalation of inter-ethnic clashes in the Qurghonteppa region.
- b) All parties to the conflict, foreign governments and international organizations recognized the UN as the coordinator of the peace process. UN mediators, with support from the Security Council, were able to build consensus among countries in the region and ensure their sustained support for the peace process. This also prevented the multiplication of peace initiatives and their unhealthy competition, which could have been detrimental to the peace process.
- c) The Special Envoys/Representatives provided good offices in a pro-active manner: they led, rather than simply followed, the peace negotiations. They applied a wide spectrum of negotiating formats and techniques to stimulate progression. It was important that the UN negotiating team prepared all the draft agreements. This ensured coherence with the principles of the UN Charter. It also helped to avoid fruitless polemics over drafts prepared by the Tajik delegations.
- d) The Protocol on the Fundamental Principles for Establishing Peace and National Accord in Tajikistan was signed at a relatively early stage of the negotiating process. It set out the basic political parameters for future agreements and provided clear direction for the rest of the process.
- e) The peacemaking efforts of the Special Envoys/Representatives were supported at a critical juncture by the quick deployment of UN military observers. This helped to strengthen the confidence of the parties and encouraged their compliance in implementing the agreements.
- f) The negotiating efforts of the Special Envoys/Representatives moved in parallel with humanitarian action by UN specialized agencies and NGOs. This demonstrated the UN's commitment to Tajikistan and strengthened the position of the mediators.
- g) The support of the observer countries, which hosted the Tajik delegations and provided them with conference facilities, food and lodging, security guarantees, and other amenities greatly facilitated the process.



Although the UN's involvement in support of the peace process has been widely acknowledged as a success, it had its imperfections. The protocols signed by the Tajik parties contained agreements on principles that were rarely spelled out in detail and some lacked mechanisms for implementation. For example, the agreement on a 30 per cent quota for UTO representatives in the power structures did not explain how this provision would be achieved. The vagueness of the agreements caused some difficulty with implementation. Yet the protocols reflected the maximum compromise that could be achieved when they were being negotiated. An attempt to go into greater detail could have damaged the dynamics of the talks at a time of political uncertainties, which included the risk that the advance of the Taliban in Afghanistan might cause further destabilization.

Another frequent criticism is that the north of the country was not represented at the talks and that its interests were not reflected in the agreements. However, the mandate of the United Nations was to mediate between the two warring sides – the government and UTO – so as to achieve a settlement that would end the war. The protocols subsequently reflected agreements reached between these parties. A proliferation of negotiating parties was not justified and could have delayed the restoration of peace.