

**IRAN, AFGHANISTAN, AND TAJIKISTAN ALLIANCE:
ASSESSING THE POTENTIAL OF A PERSIAN-SPEAKING
ASSOCIATION**

by

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ABSTRACT

Iran has suggested the formation of a Persian-speaking Association in collaboration with Afghanistan and Tajikistan, a collaboration that focuses on facilitating trilateral trade. Using the gravity model of trade, the author confirms that creating this regional trade association would potentially result in considerable increase in trade among these states. This study further evaluates Iran's use of the Persian identity, language and culture to unite itself with Tajikistan and Afghanistan, in order to position itself as a contender for regional superpower status. Iran's motives for creating the Association are as follows: increasing its influence in Tajikistan and Afghanistan; acting as a counter-balance to TÜRKSOY and the League of Arab States; preventing the increasing dominance of Russia in Tajikistan; alleviating the consequences of the American and NATO presence in Afghanistan; and increasing trade and finding new economic partners in the wake of the external sanctions due to its nuclear plans.

Keywords: Iran; Afghanistan; Tajikistan; Persian language; Central Asia; Middle East; Regional Trade Agreements; Gravity Model; Language-based Associations, Regionalism; Hegemony.

"By union the smallest states thrive.
By discord the greatest are destroyed"
-Sallust

for my brother, Amir

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1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Trend toward Regionalism

The evolution of regionalism is increasing trade between sovereign states. “Second only to culture, governmental trade restrictions have the greatest impact on the success or failure of international business.”¹ Governments with potentially clashing objectives can choose political and economic policies that affect the flow of trade between them, either to harm each other’s interests or to benefit from trading with one another.² Although bilateral and multilateral regional trade has always existed among states, trade agreements have increased post World War II, and regional trade has never been as numerous and successful in as many parts of the world as is prevalent today. Multiple trade agreements have blanketed the Americas including all nations and almost all possible combinations among them. Europe has witnessed a similar trend, with consolidation of the monetary union and the rapid developments to incorporate Eastern European states.³ Africa and Asia have been also engaged in pursuing regional integration policies, identified by organization such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC).

Regional cooperation in trade has increased not only among the developing countries, but also between developed and developing nations in areas such as

¹Reardon, Kling, McCorkle and Miller, "The Formation of Regional Trade Blocs: A Theoretical Perspective Using Game Theory," 1.

²Caves, Frankel and Jones, *World Trade and Payments: An Introduction*, 245.

³Devlin and Estevadeordal, "Trade and Cooperation: A Regional Public Goods Approach",2.

“preserving the environment, building transnational infrastructure networks, providing for the eradication of cross-border diseases, promoting research networks and establishing regional regulatory frameworks or standards in different areas of economic policy-making.”⁴ Generally, preferential trade agreements result in the participating countries eliminating trade restrictions among members while maintaining them against the rest of the world. The majority of such economic groupings “are regional, involving countries with common borders sharing a continent, and often with common ties of culture and language.”⁵

As of July 2010, 474 regional trade agreements (RTAs) have been notified to the GATT/WTO, of which 283 were in force.⁶ The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the European Union (EU) and ASEAN are three of the most successful trading agreements that come to mind. Other in force agreements include the Central American Integration System (SICA), the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA), the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the G-3 Free Trade Agreement (G-3), the Greater Arab Free Trade Area (GAFTA), the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the South Asia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA), and the Trans-Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership (TPP).

“By expanding access to regional markets, RTAs promise increased, low-cost intra-regional trade. RTAs can also help promote foreign direct investment (FDI), expand economic growth, improve a country's balance of payments position, and bring

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Caves, Frankel and Jones, *World Trade and Payments: An Introduction*, 245.

⁶ "Regional Trade Agreements", www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/region_e/region_e.htm

new skills and technology.”⁷ The Canadian government estimates that during the first five years of implementation of NAFTA (the RTA among Canada, Mexico and the US), Canada’s trade with the United States grew 80 percent while trade with Mexico doubled.⁸ More recent data also suggests continuation of the upward trend for members. In 2007, US agricultural export to the two NAFTA partners was greater than exports to the next six largest markets combined. From 1992 to 2007, the value of US agricultural exports worldwide increased 65 percent while US farm and food exports to Canada and Mexico rose by 156 percent.⁹

Similarly, MERCOSUR, the southern Latin American countries’ RTA, is credited with the significant increase of the regional trade between its members from 1990 to 2000. Exports from MERCOSUR states increased from US\$ 4.1 billion to US\$ 17.6 billion during this time while imports rose from US\$4.2 billion to US\$17.9 billion.¹⁰ From 1995 to 2000, exports of every MERCOSUR country to another showed an upward trend.¹¹ However, the increasing trade flow may only be a secondary motive to socio-economic, security, geostrategic and political motives that trigger governments to form and participate in RTAs. The formation of ASEAN and MERCOSUR reflect a combination of economic and security motives. ASEAN was initially formed “as a response to the perceived spread of communism in the region in the 1960s.”¹² Similarly, MERCOSUR, made up of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay, was originally created to provide a platform to discuss common security concerns such as drug

⁷ Rafi Khan, "Regional Trade Integration and Conflict Resolution," 3-4.

⁸ Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, "The NAFTA’s Impact."

⁹ U.S Department of Agriculture, “Fact Sheet: North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)."

¹⁰ Rafi Khan, "Regional Trade Integration and Conflict Resolution," 4.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

trafficking, in addition to help “reduce tensions between Argentina and Brazil, and to prevent a possible coup attempt in Paraguay following reaffirmation by the Presidents of the MERCOSUR member countries that democracy was a necessary condition for membership.”¹³

There are also many regional organizations that are language-based.

Linguistically-founded organizations have gained weight over time, becoming both a discussion forum for countries and leading to agreements on more diverse issues seemingly unrelated to language. Consensus around linguistic issues was clearly perceived to facilitate common action and cooperation in other fields as well.¹⁴

The Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries, Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie, The Organization of Ibero-American States for the Education, Science and Culture, League of Arab Nations, and the Joint Administration of Turkic Culture and Art (TÜRKSÖY), are all examples of language-based organizations.¹⁵ Although many of these organizations are regional blocks, some are not. As well, some are a combined economic and language-based association. This paper serves as a case study of the Association of Persian-Speaking Countries (hereafter referred to as the Association) - an agreement in the making that has both a regional and linguistic base, and which aims to increase trade.

Initially, in 2006, Iran suggested collaboration with the other two Persian-speaking nations, Afghanistan and Tajikistan, to form a RTA. The Association would

¹³ Ibid. 7.

¹⁴ d’Orville, "The Politics of Linguistic Affinity," 2.

¹⁵ Ibid. 4-10.

provide access to a combined market of 110 million people¹⁶ focusing on facilitating trilateral trade designed to improve the economic growth of all three members. Although the original focus is economic, there also are many political advantages to creating such an association. As a country, Iran is attempting to become the strongest state in the Middle East and Central Asia regions. Such economic arrangements could prove to be very helpful for Iran and the other two states, as currently there is little trade between these nations.

Iran's path to becoming a regional hegemony and a key player in the Middle East and Central Asia is not easy. Economically, Iran is aware of the economic rise of China, as well as the advances of Turkey and some oil producing states of the Middle East. From a cultural standpoint, Iran competes with Russia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan in the region for dominance. Tajikistan and Afghanistan are the two states most likely to fall under Iran's influence as both countries are heavily influenced by the Persian culture, more than any other states in the region. By creating a regional association that is based on Persian culture and language, Iran would counter-balance the cultural dominance of Turkey in Central Asia, as well as the Arab League of Nations in the Middle East; however, Iran will have to overcome some overwhelming obstacles in her way. Facing global isolation and economic sanctions as a result of pursuing its nuclear plans, Iran is also challenged by foreign forces in the region, especially the American and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) troops at its borders in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Iran's position has been further tested by the virtue of not having any meaningful allies to rest on for international support and protection. Tehran has often singled out Russia and Syria as its strategic partners, but

¹⁶ Iran's population in 2009 was 72,9 million, Afghanistan 28, 9 million and Tajikistan 6,9 million. <http://data.worldbank.org>

neither of these two countries has demonstrated a sustained commitment to sacrificing its own interest for Iran's sake. Interestingly, some circles in Tehran now refer to Russia as a spent force and not worth relying upon, while others speak of Syria's possible collapse as it struggles to stem the American tide in the Levant.¹⁷

As neither Russia nor Syria is a reliable long-term ally, Iran's new policy is to create new tactical partnerships. Iran's role as the only non-Arab Shi'ite Islamist state is further complicated among the Middle Eastern states. Iran-Arab state relations are precarious. Iran has no formal ties with Israel, and in fact rejects Israel's right to sovereignty. In addition, the domestic stability of both Pakistan and Turkey and their close proximity to the United States concerns Iran. Iran is aware of the possibility that Turkey and Pakistan's domestic problems could spill over into its territories. "[Iran] fears that a military backlash in Ankara could follow the contradictions of Turkey as a pro-Western power with an Islamist government."¹⁸ Tehran also fears Pakistan as being a weak state, known with nuclear weapons, with "vibrant, vocal, and militant Sunni fundamentalist and Salafi movements and little love for the Iranian dominated Shi'ite sect of Islam."¹⁹ Additionally, the collapse of the Soviet Union brought a new chapter into Tehran-Moscow relations, as their common border was replaced by a multitude of new independent countries between them. Hence, both Iran and Russia have had to change their games in order to compete for dominance in the new states, as well as act upon their common interests.²⁰

Iran is increasingly aware that attaining cultural hegemony in only two countries is insufficient to dominate the Middle East and Central Asia; however, creating

¹⁷ Ehteshami, "Iran's International Posture After the Fall of Baghdad," 186.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Parker, *Persian Dreams: Moscow and Tehran Since the Fall of the Shah*, 57-58.

the Association would serve as a crucial first step. This study evaluates Iran's use of the Persian identity, language and culture to unite Tajikistan and Afghanistan, in order to create a multi-level influence in these two states and position itself as a contender for regional super-power status. This paper also addresses the obstacles that prevent the functionality of the Association. Using the gravity model of trade, the author evaluates Iran's potential trade increase with Tajikistan and Afghanistan as a result of creating this RTA. The results of the study confirm that trade would increase. More specifically, Iran's export to Tajikistan and Afghanistan could potentially increase by 75 percent and 85 percent respectively. As outlined above, Iran has several reasons for creating the Association:

- Increasing its influence in Tajikistan and Afghanistan
- Acting as a counter-balance to TÜRKSOY and Turkey's cultural hegemony in Central Asia
- Acting as a counter-balance to League of Arab States in the Middle East
- Preventing the increase of Russian dominance in Tajikistan - Iran's natural realm of influence
- Alleviating the consequence of the American and NATO presence in Afghanistan - Iran's historical realm of influence
- Increasing trade and finding new economic partners during the external sanctions due to its nuclear plans

Creating the Association does not mean that Afghanistan, Iran and Tajikistan will transform into one big block of people with the same identity and culture. Nor does it

mean that Tajikistan and Afghanistan will lose their independence in terms of economic and political decision-making or practices of their religions. Rather, these three states will attempt to make adjustments to create convergence in different areas of social, economical and cultural affairs and act in the same direction. For instance, the three nations may remove or reduce tariff rates, design a similar tax system, common currency, and banking system, share investments, create a common educational system, develop ways to ease transportation, lift visa requirements, and establish a common criminal system. All of these measures have been applied to many RTAs and the effects are predictable should they be applied to the Association.²¹

1.2 Methodology

This paper is divided into ten chapters. The introductory chapter sets the grounds on which the arguments are presented throughout the paper that indicate Iran's proposal of creating a Persian-speaking Association is beyond simple economic gains from increased trade. Iran is attempting to secure Tajikistan and Afghanistan as strong regional allies for itself, as a step towards becoming a regional hegemon. Chapter Two presents Iran, Tajikistan and Afghanistan's current state of affairs, including statistical data on the linguistic and ethnic composition of each nation. Chapter Three addresses Iran's motives for creating the Association among Persian-speaking countries, in order to compete with the cultural dominance of TÜRKSOY and the League of Arab States. Chapter Four evaluates the spillover of instabilities from one country to another and the need for the Association as a forum to address such issues. Chapter Five analyzes Iran's underlying objectives for its recent strong investment in cultural, economic and transportation

²¹ Erfani-Mazdak, "Ettahadiye Keshvarhaye Farsi Zaban."

projects in Tajikistan, in order to draft this country as a strong regional ally. The chapter also provides criticisms to Iran's underlying assumption that Tajikistan is a natural realm of influence and investigates Iran's policy shift from over-emphasizing religious similarities to emphasizing cultural similarities between the two nations. Chapter six examines the rivalry between Iran and Russia for Tajikistan, as well as the recent cold relations between Tajikistan and Russia that could ally Tajikistan closer to Iran. Chapter Seven analyzes Iran's position in Afghanistan and its profound influence in Herat. This chapter also discusses Iran's varying stances towards American and the allies' presence in Afghanistan. Chapter Eight evaluates the three countries' cooperation under the guidelines of the Association thus far and offers several sources of skepticism regarding the Association. Chapter Nine attempts to estimate trade increase among the Persian-speaking countries, should the Association become economically fully functional. The author has used the gravity model of trade, which estimates that Iran's export to Tajikistan and Afghanistan can potentially increase by 75 percent and 85 percent respectively. This chapter also evaluates different preferential trade agreements that can be modelled for the Association, and concludes that due to present circumstances, creating a Free Trade Area or a Custom Union is more feasible. Chapter ten concludes the evaluations and offers the next steps for continuing this study.

For the analyses offered in this paper, various methods have been used for collecting data; however, the collection of accurate and reliable statistics has been challenging. Due to language advantage, the author was able to read and interpret data from Persian and Dari sources; however, the local statistics lacked consistency when verified against other official documents. Consequently, the majority of data was

retrieved from the database of more reputable international organizations including the World Bank, World Trade Organization, CIA fact book, and selective official Iranian government statistics websites. Owing to the lack of Tajikistan-Afghanistan trade data, the author has focused exclusively on Iran to display the potential for increase in trade. The gravity model confirms that Iran's export to Tajikistan and Afghanistan has a considerable potential for growth.

Apart from the economic analysis, secondary sources have also been utilized for collecting data. While the results of other scholars' studies have been used throughout the analysis, it was necessary to draw on data from news agencies for information that pertained to countries' current state of affairs, political relations, and on-going economic agreements and projects. Considering that Iran is the main force behind the creation of the Association, this paper has taken an Iran-centered approach. Thus, the historical background, arguments, predictions, and economic estimates have been outlined in more depth for Iran. For example, Iran-Afghanistan and Iran-Tajikistan relations are outlined in detail, whereas addressing the details of Tajikistan-Afghanistan relations - although equally applicable- is beyond the scope of this paper.

It is also important to note that although there are other countries in the region with some Persian-speaking population, such as Uzbekistan, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, and Pakistan, the Association has decided to form exclusively with countries in which over 50 percent of the population speaks Persian, and the Persian language is recognized as one of the official languages. The criteria restrict the member states to Iran, Afghanistan and Tajikistan.

The author acknowledges that Iran, Afghanistan and Tajikistan have peoples of other ethnicities besides Persian. The creation of the Association does not deem Persian citizens as superior to others; rather, the Association is one of many strategies that may prove beneficial in boosting the economic, social, and cultural status of Iran, Tajikistan and Afghanistan.

2: IRAN, TAJIKISTAN AND AFGHANISTAN OVERVIEW

2.1 The Islamic Republic of Iran

“Iran has functioned for at least 5000 years as a civilization and as fertile ground for the emergence of the world's first state in the modern sense of the word.”²² The word *Iran* means *the land of Aryans*, a branch of Indo-European people whose appearance dates to approximately 2000 BC.²³ Iran was ruled by monarchy for over 2000 years through 46 dynasties and 400 kings. “At its peak, the Persian Empire stretched from the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea in the west to India to the east.”²⁴ Iran has also been ruled and influenced by foreign tribes and rulers, who have each left permanent cultural marks. Arabs ruled Iran for three centuries after the Arabic Islamic conquest in the seventh century. Turk-Mongol rulers also took control of Iran from 11th to the 16th century. As a result, Iran followed the Sunni faith of Islam up until the 16th century, when the Safavid kings of Iran promoted the conversion to Shi’ite faith because

it broadened their political support and enhanced their legitimacy as descendants of Imams, who were direct descendants of the Prophet. It also provided a religious justification for the struggle with the Ottoman Empire, which ruled the Sunni Islam world. As a consequence, the Safavid dynasty succeeded in significantly increasing religious influence in their running of the country.²⁵

²² Mojtabeh-Zadeh, "Iran: An Old Civilization and a New Nation State," 20.

²³ Javidan and Dastmalchian, "Culture and Leadership in Iran: The Land of Individual Achievers, Strong Family Ties, and Powerful Elite," 140.

²⁴ Ibid. 140.

²⁵ Ibid.

Known as Persia until 1935, Iran became an Islamic republic after Mohammad Reza Shah, Iran's last monarch was overthrown in 1979 by the Islamic Revolution. Since 1979, Iran has been ruled by a unique form of government, in which Shi'ite clerics rule the country, in addition to the democratic mechanism in place that elects the President and Members of Parliament.²⁶

Due to its history, geographically, the term *Iran* may include territories beyond the current state of Iran, which is referred to as *Greater Iran*. Greater Iran includes the "entire Iranian plateau, an area bounded in the north by present-day Turkmenistan, the Caspian Sea, and the Caucasus Mountains, in the east by the Indus River, in the south by the Persian Gulf, and in the west by Mesopotamia."²⁷ The Iranian plateau includes Iran, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and parts of Pakistan, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Turkey, Uzbekistan, and Iraq. In addition, culturally, the term *Iran* includes all people who speak various Iranian languages (a subdivision of the Indo-European family of languages) such as, Persian, Tajik, Dari, Luri, Kurdish, Baluchi, Mazandarani, Khorasani and Azeri Turkish (Azerbaijan's local Turkish dialect with more Persian influence in words and characters than the Mongolian and Anatolian Turkish).²⁸

Today, with a population of over 74 million,²⁹ Iran is home to many ethnicities, although Persian is the most predominant. Compared to other multi-ethnic states in the region, Iran's national identity has remained coherent and stable,³⁰ as Iranian people have a strong sense of *being Iranian*. This identity was re-emphasized by Iran's

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Harvey and Slocum, "Indo-Iranian Origins."

²⁸ Mojtahed-Zadeh, "Iran: An Old Civilization and a New Nation State," 20.

²⁹ *Markaz Amar Iran*, amar.sci.org.ir/

³⁰ Bayat, "The Ethnic Question in Iran," 42.

1979 Islamic revolution and the overthrow of US-backed Shah regime, as well as the eight-year war with Iraq that began in 1980 after Saddam Hussein invaded Iran. Iraq was heavily supported by foreign powers and especially the United States. As a result “many Iranians felt they were fighting a holy war against overwhelming odds.”³¹ Both events mobilized all Iranian people regardless of their ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, and reinforced unified Iranian nationalism instead of a specific ethnic identity.³² Of the total population, 51 percent are Persian, 24 percent are Azeri, eight percent are Gilaki and Mazandarani, seven percent are Kurdish, three percent are Arab, two percent are Lur, two percent are Baloch, two percent are Turkmen, and one percent are other.³³

Iran’s only official language, Persian - locally known as Farsi - is a Western Iranian language, originating from the Indo-European family of languages, and is spoken in those parts of Iran where predominantly Persians dwell.³⁴ Although Persian is the native language of 58 percent of the population, 26 percent speak Turkic dialects, 9 percent speak Kurdish, 2 percent speak Luri, 1 percent speaks Balochi, and 1 percent speaks Arabic.³⁵ Iran is predominantly Muslim, with 98 percent practicing Islam, and the remaining 2 percent practicing either Zoroastrian (ancient Iran’s religion before Islam), Jewish, Christian, or Baha’i.³⁶ Of Iran’s Muslim population, 89 percent are Shi’ite and 9 percent are Sunni.

³¹ Peterson, Esfandiari and Sadjadpour, "Let the Swords Encircle Me: A Journey Behind the Headlines of Iran."

³² Ibid.

³³ The World Factbook, "Iran."

³⁴ Iran Chamber Society, "People of Iran: Iranian Ethnic Groups."

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ The World Factbook, "Iran."

Iran is a large state with a population that exceeds that of all of the Arab states of the Persian Gulf combined.³⁷ Iran has the second largest economy (GDP) in the region.³⁸ It is also the second largest oil producer in the Organization of Petroleum Producing Countries (OPEC) after Saudi Arabia,³⁹ and has the world's second largest natural gas reserves.⁴⁰ According to The New York Times, "as Iran's leadership pursues an aggressive, confrontational approach in foreign policy, it is effectively trying to become a regional superpower to fill the absence of any one dominating nation."⁴¹ Iran's size in terms of geography, population, economy, and military gives it the status of a strong player and rising power in the region, in need for new allies.

2.2 The Republic of Tajikistan

The Republic of Tajikistan gained its independence after the disintegration of the Union of Soviet Social Republics (USSR) on September 9, 1991, and thereafter experienced civil war from 1992 to 1997. Many factors contributed to the brutal civil war "including a central power vacuum, ethno-regional rivalries, status as the poorest former Soviet republic, and lack of historical experience in nationhood."⁴² Due to the social, economic and political ramifications of independence and civil war, Tajikistan is one of the weakest states in the region. During the destructive five-year civil war, an estimated 50,000 – 100,000 people lost their lives, and approximately one million became

³⁷ Barry, "Iran: The Rise of a Regional Power."

³⁸ Second to Turkey. The World Factbook, "Country Comparison: GDP (Purchasing Power Parity)."

³⁹ The World Factbook, "Iran."

⁴⁰ US. Energy Information Administration, "Country Analysis Briefs."

⁴¹ Slackman, "Iran Grasps at Regional Dominance."

⁴² Foroughi, "Nations in Transition 2010: Tajikistan," 502.

internally and externally displaced.⁴³ During the internal conflict, approximately 70,000 people fled to Afghanistan, and hundreds of thousands fled to the neighboring Commonwealth of Independent States, mainly the Russian Federation.⁴⁴ “The state-funded education system deteriorated as a result of a severe decline in resources and the civil war, which destroyed one-fifth of Tajikistan’s schools.”⁴⁵ The country also witnessed the decline of health status, especially among the poorest sectors, as a result of diminishing access to health services in the 1990’s. There was a sharp increase in communicable diseases, such as tuberculosis, as well as diseases caused by micronutrient deficiencies.⁴⁶

The Tajikistan civil war was partly a battle over ideologies. On one side was the Communist Party Alliance, known as the Popular Front, with its support base mainly in the northern Sughd and southern Kulob regions. The opposing side consisted of Islamists and secular politicians, headed by the United Tajik Opposition, with the main support base in the southern and eastern regions.⁴⁷ After five years of brutal violence, both sides agreed to a ceasefire in 1994, and finally, with direct mediation from the UN, Russia, Iran, and a few other states, the General Agreement on Peace and National Accord was signed on June 27, 1997 that provided a coalition government and the holding of national elections..⁴⁸

According to the 1994 Constitution, Tajik is the official language of Tajikistan, even though Russian is widely used in the business and government sectors. “In the first

⁴³ Khodjamurodov and Rechel, "Tajikistan: Health System Review 2010," 8.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 8.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 2.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 2.

⁴⁷ Khodjamurodov and Rechel, "Tajikistan: Health System Review 2010," 8.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 8.

years after independence, Russian remained the main language of business, but nowadays it is, in many respects, being replaced by Tajik, although Russian continues to be used, mainly in urban areas.”⁴⁹ Approximately 25 percent of the population speaks Uzbek, and small minority groups speak Kyrgyz, Tatar, Turkmen, Uighur, and Korean.⁵⁰ Approximately 90 percent of the population is Muslim, 85 percent of which are Sunni,⁵¹ while the remaining 5 percent are Pamiri Tajiks who belong to the Shi’ite branch of Islam and are followers of the Aga Khan.⁵²

Independence, civil war, and the subsequent economic downturns created a massive emigration of approximately two million Tajik citizens. This change is especially apparent in the Russian population. The Russian percentage of the population, which once stood at 8 percent, decreased significantly to 1.1 percent.⁵³ According to 2010 estimates, Tajikistan has a population of 7.3 million people, of whom 79.9 percent are Tajik, 15.3 percent Uzbek, 1.1 percent Russian, 1.1 percent Kyrgyz, and 2.6 percent, other ethnicities.⁵⁴

Tajikistan is the poorest nation in the former Soviet sphere by \$1900 GDP per capita.⁵⁵ Before the Soviet collapse, it was heavily dependent on the USSR’s assistance and import subsidies. Tajikistan’s independence and the five-year civil war damaged the already weak economy even further. In 1996, the real GDP was 34 percent of its 1991 level. After the peace agreement and return to political stability, Tajikistan is

⁴⁹Ibid.3.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹(2003 est.) Matveeva, "Tajikistan Stability First."

⁵²Khodjamurodov and Rechel, "Tajikistan: Health System Review 2010," 3.

⁵³Ibid. 2.

⁵⁴(July 2010 est.)The World Factbook, "Tajikistan."

⁵⁵(2009 est.) Ibid.

one of the most successful examples of fast growing economies. Between 1999 and 2005, its GDP increased from 7.5 percent to 10.6 percent annually.⁵⁶ With Tajikistan's potential for growth, the Association could prove to be very beneficial for Tajikistan as it facilitates and promotes trade with Iran - one of the strongest states of the region - as well as with Afghanistan, Tajikistan's next-door neighbor.

There are several major external players in the political, cultural and economic arena of Tajikistan: the Russian Federation, Iran, Afghanistan, the United States, Uzbekistan, and China. Even after two decades of USSR collapse, Russia plays a crucial role in Tajikistan. Russia's "long-standing economic and political ties, its military role and its economic influence as a source of demand for labour from Tajikistan" makes Russia a strong player in Tajikistan's affairs.⁵⁷ After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and the consequent presence of the United States in Afghanistan and in Central Asia "where the US has set up military bases and reactivated its economic interests and ties," the US is playing a more important role in the politics of Tajikistan⁵⁸. A NATO airbase has been located on Tajik territory to provide support for operations in Afghanistan.⁵⁹ Some Central Asian nations, such as Uzbekistan, are especially important to Tajikistan because of ethnic, historic, and economic ties. Also, "because of intricate cross-border ethnic, economic, and geographic ties, Afghanistan has played an important role as a haven for Tajik fighters, as a source for the drug trade, and as a destination for refugees."⁶⁰ Sharing close cultural ties, Iran also plays an important role in Tajikistan,

⁵⁶Khodjamurodov and Rechel, "Tajikistan: Health System Review 2010," 4.

⁵⁷Pillay, "Evaluation of UNDP Assistance to Conflict-Affected Countries: Case Study Tajikistan," 17.

⁵⁸Ibid.17.

⁵⁹Khodjamurodov and Rechel, "Tajikistan: Health System Review 2010," 4.

⁶⁰Ibid.17.

ending the civil war, investing in Tajikistan's energy sectors and, more recently, by establishing the Association with Tajikistan as one of the key members.

2.3 The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, commonly known as Afghanistan, is a landlocked mountainous state that borders Iran on the west, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan on the north, the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region of China on the northeast, and Pakistan to the south and east. According to Afghanistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, both Persian (Dari) and Pashto are the official languages. Fifty percent of the population speaks Dari and 35 percent speaks Pashto. Of the remaining population, 11 percent speak varieties of Turkic languages, primarily Uzbek and Turkmen, and 4 percent speak 30 minor languages, primarily Balochi and Pashai.⁶¹ Afghanistan has a wide ethnic diversity. Of the 29 million Afghani, 42 percent are Pashtu and mainly reside in the eastern and south central Afghanistan, 27 percent are Tajik living around Herat and in the northeast, nine percent are Hazara of Mongolian origin living in central mountains, nine percent are Uzbeks living in the north, four percent are Aimak, three percent are nomadic Turkmen who live along the Turkmenistan borderland, two percent are Baluch living in the extreme south, and four percent are other ethnicities. Although the extended instabilities have resulted in internal and external dislocation of citizens, regional ethnicity has remained roughly the same in Afghanistan.⁶²

Afghanistan has suffered from chronic instabilities due to internal and external conflicts. Afghanistan's position of being "sandwiched between the Middle East,

⁶¹ Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan-Warsaw Website, "Languages."

⁶² The World Factbook, "Afghanistan." and The Washington Post Website, "Country Guide: Afghanistan."

Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent along the ancient *Silk Route*”⁶³ has made this nation strategically important for the great powers for centuries. Afghanistan was at the centre of the *Great Game* between the British Empire and Imperial Russia in the 19th century, since the British Empire did not want Russia to expand into the Central Asia and towards India. Afghanistan also quickly became a key Cold War battleground in 1979 after the Soviet Union deployed its troops to Afghanistan to “prop up a pro-communist regime.”⁶⁴ The anti-Communist Muslim Afghan Guerrilla opposition forces, mujahidin (Islamic warriors), actively fought both Soviet forces and the Soviet-backed Afghan government in what is commonly referred to as the Afghanistan War.⁶⁵ The Afghanistan War cost over one million lives and damaged Afghanistan’s infrastructure and the economy. Soviet forces withdrew in 1989; however, the internal instabilities continued even after the withdrawal of Soviet forces and “the government steadily lost ground to the guerrilla forces. In early 1992, Kabul was captured, and the guerrilla alliance set up a new government [with Burhanuddin Rabbani as interim president]...;however, the victorious guerrillas proved unable to unite.”⁶⁶ Guerrilla leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar’s forces launched attacks on Rabbani’s government. Fighting among various factions eventually divided Afghanistan into several independent zones each having its own ruler. The Taliban, a militia of Pashtun Islamic fundamentalist students mainly from the Pashtun ethnic group became a powerful force in 1994. Eventually, in September 1996, the Taliban took over Kabul, declared itself the legitimate government and imposed strict Islamic laws in the two thirds of the country. By 2000, the Taliban controlled over 90

⁶³BBC website, "Afghanistan Country Profile."

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵The Washington Post Website, "Country Guide: Afghanistan."

⁶⁶Ibid.

percent of Afghanistan. The US and its allies launched attacks against Taliban and Al Qaeda in October 2001, when the Taliban refused to hand over Osama Bin Laden, the Al-Qaeda leader responsible for planning the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11 2001.⁶⁷ Hamid Karzai was appointed as the head of the interim government in the Bonn Conference in December 2001. A general election in 2004 reinstated his term in office.

The decades-long instabilities in Afghanistan have ruined the economy. Agricultural sector constitutes for about 45 percent of Afghanistan's GDP and employs more than 70 percent of the work force. However, less than 10 percent of the land is cultivated as the country is generally mountainous. Moreover, a large percentage of the arable land has been damaged by three decades of warfare. Currently Afghanistan's agriculture is "impeded by inadequate infrastructure, a lack of knowledge of modern practices, water scarcity, and soil degradation."⁶⁸ Afghanistan supplies about 90 percent of world's opium. Other main exports of Afghanistan, such as fruits and hand-woven carpets, have been downsized to a minimum as a result of the instabilities. The civil war has also ruined Afghanistan's main industries and damaged road, communication, and transport. The country possesses various natural resources that have substantial commercial value, such as "hydrocarbon, oil, an estimated 16 trillion cubic feet natural gas, two billion tons of copper, significant quantities of precious gemstones, substantial gold deposits, large coal reserves, and millions of tons of other valuable minerals such as chromite, iron and uranium."⁶⁹ However, due to unstable condition of Afghanistan, many

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸ Global Security, "Report to Congress on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan."

⁶⁹ Ibid.

resources have been and continue to be untapped, although, some resources such as gemstones and timber are being illegally depleted at an alarming rate.⁷⁰

Even though Afghanistan still suffers from political, social and economic instability, the situation has improved since the fall of the Taliban regime. The health sector is one area that has shown progress, with reductions in morbidity (disease) and mortality (death) rates. “In 2001, 8 percent of the Afghan population had access to basic health care; today, 79 percent have access to basic health services... Since 2006, Afghanistan has reduced child mortality (five years and under) by 25 percent.”⁷¹ Immunization coverage has also increased to 83 percent of children under age one. Moreover, approximately 70 percent of health facilities have at least one female staff member, compared to 45 percent during the Taliban regime, making it easier for Afghani females to access health care services.⁷²

As Afghanistan moves toward relative internal stability, it is able to play a stronger role regionally as well. By joining the Association, Afghanistan has taken the initiative to get engaged in a deeper level of regional cooperation with two of its neighbors: Iran and Tajikistan.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

2.4 The History of the Persian Language in Central Asia

Although historically *Turkestan* referred to the area that is today's Central Asia, the inhabitants have not been exclusively Turkic. Various Iranian people have lived in Central Asia, and affected the politics and culture of the region.⁷³

In both the medieval and modern periods, Persian language has been used at times by non-native speakers, in Central Asia and parts of South Asia from Anatolia to India, as a language of literature, learning and government. With the use of the language came the influence of Persian culture and traditions that were expressed through it. The transformation of the non-nomadic population of Central Asia, from predominantly Iranian to predominantly Turkic dates from after the Arab conquest, although scholars disagree on the pace of the change.⁷⁴

Tajiks are by far the most numerous Persian speakers in Central Asia, and speak the eastern variation of Persian. In pre-Islamic times, Tajikistan was joined with northeastern Iran, northern Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, and southern Uzbekistan in a culturally unified region called Khorasan. Khorasan's poets, writers and artists greatly contributed to the Persian language, culture and heritage.

⁷³ Manz, *Central Asia in Historical Perspective*, 127.

⁷⁴ Bregel, "Turko-Mongol Influences in Central Asia." In *Turko-Persia in Historical Perspective*, 127.

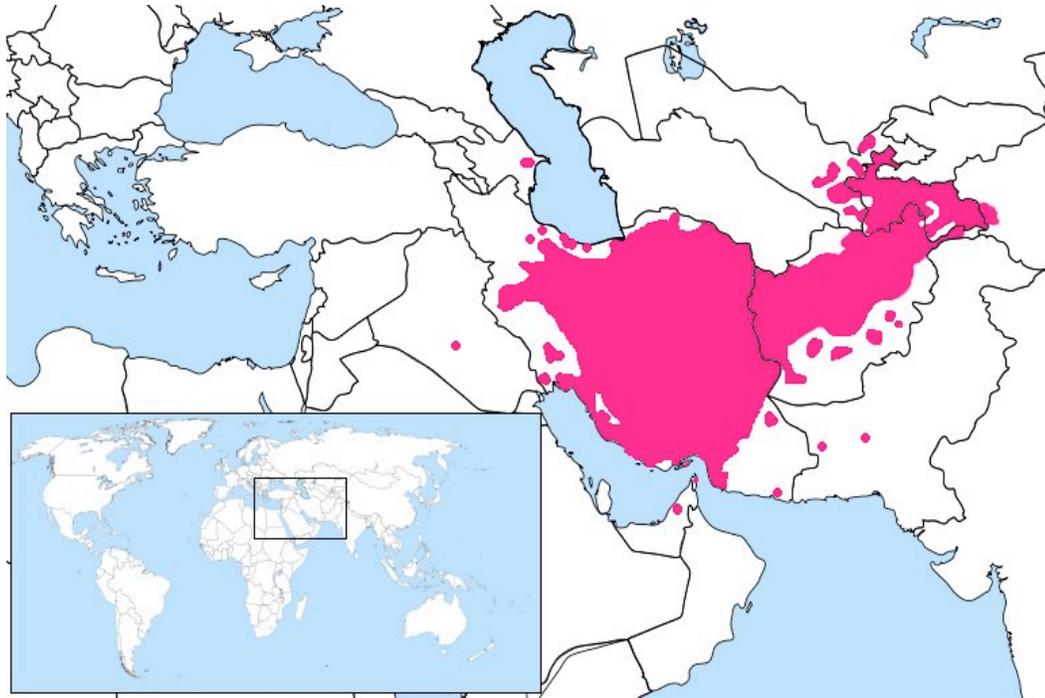


Figure 1:Map of Persian Language in the Region
(Source⁷⁵: Iran Chamber Society).

The map above demonstrates the spread of Persian language in the region. “The language is called Dari in Afghanistan, Tajik in Tajikistan, and Farsi in Iran.”⁷⁶ Although there is a difference in the dialect across the three nations, a transcribed text can, in general, be read and understood by all members, and all speakers can converse without an interpreter's assistance.

⁷⁵ <http://www.iranchamber.com>

⁷⁶Sergey Luzianin "Pakistani, Afghan, and Iranian Factors of Influence on the Central Asian Region."
Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs

3: PERSIAN IDENTITY VERSUS OTHER DIRECT COMPETITORS

There are two main associations in Central Asia and the Middle East that are based on language and cultural similarities: the League of Arab States and TÜRKSOY. Iran, Tajikistan and Afghanistan are restricted from joining these associations, because these nations are neither Arab nor Turkic. Therefore, in order to overcome its cultural isolation, Iran initiated a similar association based on Persian identity, to unify Persian-speaking people in the region. The Association could help overcome the current economic and political isolation of these three nations. Afghanistan is ravaged from internal and external conflicts of the past few decades, and is on a reconstruction path economically, socially and politically. Tajikistan, one of the poorest states of Central Asia, is a newly independent state that has experienced a recent destructive civil war. Iran faces external sanctions, trade restrictions and political isolation due to its nuclear program. All three nations are in great need of trading partners to improve their economic conditions, as well as strong strategic regional allies. Formation of the Association is extremely important for Iran as a rising regional power who faces two direct cultural opponents of its hegemony: the strong Arab and Turkish cultural identities throughout the rest of the Middle East and Central Asia.

3.1 The League of Arab States and the Rise of Iran

One of the senior members of OPEC, Iran is a country located in the heart of the Middle East, surrounded by Arab states to the south and the west. Although Iran is a Muslim country and, was under Arab Islamic rule for three centuries after the emergence of Islam in the seventh century, it is not an Arab state.⁷⁷ Throughout history, relations between Iran and most Arab countries have been turbulent.

Richard Haass, the previous Director of Policy Planning for the US Department of State writes that soon Iran will be one of the two most powerful states in the Middle East (the other being Israel). He argues that “those who have seen Iran on the cusp of dramatic internal change have been wrong.”⁷⁸ Iran has a great wealth, holds sway over both Hezbollah and Hamas, and is the most powerful external influence in Iraq. Haass adds “Iran is a classical imperial power, with ambitions to remake the region in its image and the potential to translate its objectives to reality.”⁷⁹

Many Sunni Muslim leaders “fear that Iran is trying to hem them in with a sphere of influence that would encompass Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Gaza.”⁸⁰

Right now, Tehran's proxy in Lebanon, Hezbollah, is the de facto state. With friendly governments in Damascus and Baghdad, Iran intends to put the rest of the Levant under its thumb. The power of America's traditional allies, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Egypt, is diminishing at a time when Iranian influence is spreading across the Palestinian territories and the Gulf sheikhdoms. Iran is quietly, but inexorably, building an empire, securing territory, resources, raw economic power, military strength and

⁷⁷Javidan and Dastmalchian, "Culture and Leadership in Iran: The Land of Individual Achievers, Strong Family Ties, and Powerful Elite," 130.

⁷⁸Haass, "The New Middle East," 6.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Slackman, "Iran Grasps at Regional Dominance."

the allegiance of the “oppressed.” If Iran's rise continues, it will find itself at the heart of Middle East oil and at the apex of power.⁸¹

Other Arab states with large Shi'ite populations, such as Kuwait and Saudi Arabia are especially concerned with the increasing influence of Iran. Saudi Arabia's royal family is especially alarmed, as its Shi'ite population is mainly concentrated near the crucial oil-producing areas- where any revolt would cause maximum damage to the Saudi economy.⁸²

Besides the different ethno-religious backgrounds, which are a primary source of Iran-Arab relation divergence, other crucial factors have also caused hostilities. One major source of rivalry is between the Iranian and Arab members of OPEC.

While in the past, issues such as the price and the production output of oil dominated areas of disagreements between Iran and the major Arab producers, today, given the high oil price milieu, the emphasis has switched to arguments that pit boosting production capacity – a position favoured by the Saudis – against maximizing oil revenues – something that is of more interest to Iran.⁸³

Another important source of friction in Iran-Arab relations is the unresolved territorial disputes. The most prominent of these disputes is the historical issue between Iraq and Iran over conflicting claims to navigation rights in Arvand Rud [Shatt-al Arab waterway] which gave rise to Saddam Hussein's attack on Iran in 1980 and the subsequent eight-year Iran-Iraq war. To this day, there has been no formal treaty between Iran and Iraq to officially end the dispute and settle all the relevant outstanding issues such as the reparation owed to Iran by Iraq because of its aggression. Another territorial dispute is between Iran and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) over the

⁸¹ Baer, "Iranian Resurrection."

⁸²The Sydney Morning Herald,"Why Arabs Fear Nuclear Iran."

⁸³Khonsari, "Iranian-Arab Relations: A Persian Perspective," 296.

ownership of Abu Musa and the two Tunb Islands (the ‘Lesser Tunb’ and the ‘Greater Tunb’) in the Persian Gulf.⁸⁴

Given the turbulent relations between Iran and most Arab countries, it is viewed by some “as an oxymoron that Iran, whose tension with the Arabs stretches back to the seventh century AD or even earlier, has adopted a pro-Arab policy against Israel, a nation with which Iran has no historical grievances.”⁸⁵ Post-revolutionary Iran has taken a public pro-Palestine and anti-Israel approach to fulfill its self-proclaimed role of leading the Muslim world. Nonetheless, the enduring Iranian-Arab enmity has made Iran’s policymakers to slowly move away from *Arabism* to *Persianism* and *Iran-first* foreign policy approach.⁸⁶ As a result, Iran increasingly seeks to tie itself with strategic partnerships with the non-Arab states of the region. Russia, Pakistan and Turkey are the strongest non-Arab countries in the region; yet, they are also Iran’s key economic, political and cultural rivals. Hence, Iran has turned to non-Arab Persian-speakers of the region for partnership, namely Afghanistan and Tajikistan, Iran’s historical realm of influence.

3.2 Turkey’s Regional Influence

The collapse of the Soviet Union provided the ultimate opportunity for Turkey to expand its cultural, economic, and political influence in the Turkish speaking areas of the Central Asia: Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan Republic, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. “Encouraged by the United States, Turkey was fast out of the blocks in 1991-1992, launching a myriad of initiatives across the region: opening embassies,

⁸⁴Ibid. 296.

⁸⁵ Parsi, "Israel and the Origins of Iran's Arab Option: Dissection of a Strategy Misunderstood," 493.

⁸⁶Ehteshami, "Iran's International Posture After the Fall of Baghdad," 188.

broadcasting TV, sending economic emissaries, opening schools, and offering scholarships.”⁸⁷ Turkey’s desire for an international organization for Turkic-speaking nations resulted in the creation of TÜRKSOY in 1993. According to Turkey’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, “TÜRKSOY was established to strengthen cooperation in the fields of culture and arts between the countries of Turkish origin and language, to ensure better relations between these countries, in order to protect and promote Turkish culture.”⁸⁸ Iran was unhappy with Turkey’s move of cultural expansion into Central Asia and Caucasus, as it “posed a sectarian and geopolitical challenge ...[as] Sunni Turkey and Shi’ite Iran, with their different cultures, histories, languages, and national aspirations, have long been anathema to each other, their hostile relationship predated the Islamic Republic of Iran by centuries.”⁸⁹ As a result, by establishing the Persian-speaking Association, Iran has attempted to counter-balance Turkey’s cultural expansion in Central Asia, and maintain its status as a strong player in the region.

⁸⁷ Parker, *Persian Dreams: Moscow and Tehran Since the Fall of the Shah*, 45.

⁸⁸ Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs Website, "TÜRKSOY"

⁸⁹ Parker, *Persian Dreams: Moscow and Tehran Since the Fall of the Shah*, 46.

4: THE SPILLOVER EFFECT

4.1 The Regional Ethnic Mixing Challenge

Although, the Persian language and cultural similarities give Iran an advantage in Afghanistan and Tajikistan, Iran faces a region in which immense ethnic, religious and ideological problems have deep roots. Central Asian leading ethnic groups include Kyrgyz, Tajiks, Uzbeks and Pashtuns. The first three ethnic groups clashed in Osh, Kyrgyzstan. The latter three groups are engaged in Afghanistan. Constant conflicts also occur over ideologies. The continuous hostilities between Sunnis and Shi'ites afflict the region. Fundamentalist Islam is strongly present in the region. "Communism used to offer an alternate vision. With the collapse of the Soviet Union; however, communism now is reduced to the common background of a self-interest group."⁹⁰

(Please refer to Appendix 1 for the map of ethnicity mixing in the region)

The Afghanistan civil war started in 1979, and aftermath of the disaster remains. In Afghanistan, ethnic mixing creates political complications in Tajik-Pashtun relations. Even though Tajiks comprise only approximately 35 percent of Afghanistan's population, there are more Tajiks living in Afghanistan (7.8 million)⁹¹ than in Tajikistan itself (5.9 million)⁹². In addition, there are more Pashtuns living in Pakistan than in Afghanistan. This imbalance can potentially affect the politics in the region.

⁹⁰Mandelbaum, *Central Asia and the World: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan*, 54.

⁹¹ The World Factbook, "Afghanistan."

⁹² The World Factbook, "Tajikistan."

The fate of Tajikistan influences the course of events in Afghanistan, which in turn influences politics in Pakistan. To the north, Tajikistan influences Uzbekistan, which influences Kazakhstan, which has a potentially major bearing on Russia. In a sense, then, Tajikistan stands as a pivot, capable of creating problems from the Indian Ocean to the North Pole.⁹³

Peace and stability in the region is dependent on Afghanistan. However, Afghanistan's future will be largely determined by Tajikistan's developments.⁹⁴ Being in close proximity to both states, Iran is also affected by problems in Tajikistan and Afghanistan. It is no surprise then that Iran has been trying to expand its sphere of influence within these two nations, in order to prevent the negative spillovers from reaching its borders.

4.2 Iran-Afghanistan Spillover

“The not-so surprising revelation that the Karzai office has been receiving cash payments from Tehran, which he was compelled to confirm and Iran continues to deny”⁹⁵ confirms Iran's attempt in influencing the politics of Afghanistan and expanding its role in that country.

Today, Iran is among Afghanistan's top five import and export partners, and has committed some \$660 million to Afghan reconstruction. Uncertain about the future of Afghanistan and American intentions there, Iran has hedged its bets and has carefully cultivated good relations with most major players in Afghanistan: Ismail Khan, the former amir of Herat; Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a notorious warlord; the top leadership of the Northern Alliance; the Hazara Shi'ites, who constitute some 20 percent of the

⁹³Mandelbaum, *Central Asia and the World: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan*, 69.

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵Milani, "Why Karzai Needs Iran."

population; and even to some elements of the Taliban, who have reportedly received limited weapons from Iran.⁹⁶

Two major spillovers of the Afghanistan's instabilities to Iran have been narcotics smuggling and the massive inflow of Afghan refugees. Both issues have created a massive burden on Iran and have affected Iran-Afghanistan relations. The Association can potentially alleviate the negative effects of such spillovers, as it creates a forum for the governments to discuss new solutions.

4.2.1 Afghan's narcotics problem and Iran

Narcotics smuggling from Afghanistan to Iran is one of the biggest concerns for the Iranian government. According to the 2006 United Nations estimate, 60 percent of Afghanistan's opium passes through the Iran-Afghanistan border.⁹⁷ In July 2009, Iranian Police Chief, Esmail Ahmadi-Moqaddam, stated that his country would allocate \$150 million to increase border security.⁹⁸ A portion of this funding will be used for "the construction of a cemented barrier separating the two countries, allowing Tehran to completely close the border."⁹⁹ Although construction of the cement wall has been a source of contention, Iran and Afghanistan have successfully increased operational cooperation on border security. Iran spent millions of dollars on "150 border watchtowers, and several hundred miles of trenches, in addition to training Afghan customs officials and constructing a customs checkpoint at Islam Qala."¹⁰⁰ Since July

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Beehner, "Afghanistan's Role in Iran's Drug Problem." (See Farrar-Wellman, "Afghanistan-Iran Foreign Relations.")

⁹⁸ Ibid

⁹⁹ Farmer, "Afghanistan's Frontier of Suspicion." (See Farrar-Wellman, "Afghanistan-Iran Foreign Relations.")

¹⁰⁰ Farmer, "Afghanistan's Frontier of Suspicion." (See Zarif and Majidyar, "Iranian Influence in Afghanistan: Recent Developments.")

2009, Iran and Afghanistan have also begun conducting joint patrols along the common border.¹⁰¹

4.2.2 Afghan refugees in Iran

Historically, there have been regular population movements from Afghanistan to Iran. “Before 1979, cross-border migration of Afghans to and from Iran was common and driven by economic opportunities.”¹⁰² Post 1979, however, has seen unprecedented crisis-driven movement due to Afghanistan’s revolution, the USSR invasion, and the Afghan civil war.¹⁰³ Currently, it is estimated there are close to one million registered Afghan refugees in Iran,¹⁰⁴ and according to Iran’s Ministry of Interior’s estimate, there are over two million more illegal Afghan refugees.¹⁰⁵

Initially, the Afghan refugees were welcomed “out of a strong sense of Islamic solidarity.”¹⁰⁶ Afghan refugees helped Iran fill the gaps in the local labour market, especially in the agriculture and construction industries,¹⁰⁷ caused in 1980s by the Iran-Iraq war.¹⁰⁸ Afghan refugees have also been a source of controversy in Iran, as a result of economic downturns and high unemployment, as well as Iran’s policy change due to the sudden absence of the communism threat and, more recently, the fall of the Taliban. Since November 2001, many Afghan refugees have been returning to

¹⁰¹“Iran, Afghanistan Start Joint Border Patrol Operation,” Islamic Republic Of Iran News Network Television, July 29, 2009 (See Farrar-Wellman, "Afghanistan-Iran Foreign Relations.")

¹⁰² Wickramasekara et al., "ILO-UNHCR Cooperation Towards Comprehensive Solutions for Afghan Displacement: Afghan Households and Workers in Iran: Profile and Impact," 23.

¹⁰³ Strand, Suhrke and Harpviken, "Afghan Refugees in Iran: From Refugee Emergency to Migration Management."

¹⁰⁴ Wickramasekara et al., "ILO-UNHCR Cooperation," 10.

¹⁰⁵ BBC Persian, "Vezerat Keshvar Iran: Do Million Mohajer Gheir Ghanouni Darim."

¹⁰⁶ Wickramasekara et al., "ILO-UNHCR Cooperation," 23.

¹⁰⁷ Strand, Suhrke and Harpviken, "Afghan Refugees in Iran: From Refugee Emergency to Migration Management."

¹⁰⁸ Wickramasekara et al., "ILO-UNHCR Cooperation," 23.

Afghanistan, either voluntarily or non-voluntarily, as of Iran's policy shift from generous hospitality to stating "it should no longer shoulder this burden."¹⁰⁹ In 2003, the Executive Coordination Council for Foreign Nationals approved 11 articles entitled *Regulations on Accelerating Repatriation of Afghan Nationals*, which "imposed a number of tough measures against Afghans, including legal actions against employers for unauthorized employment of Afghans, denial of access to a number of essential services, and also restrictions on renting of accommodation."¹¹⁰

On the other hand, however, many argue that the return of refugees is not a bad phenomenon for Afghanistan. Rahnaward Zaryab, Afghani writer and the senior advisor to the Culture and Information Ministry of Afghanistan, believes Iran has had a huge influence on Afghan arts and literature. Many of Afghanistan's writers, poets, and reporters who lived as refugees in Iran were influenced by Iranian literature. Some who attended journalism and media schools there have returned home to Afghanistan to work for Afghan newspapers and media, and are considered pioneers in their fields.¹¹¹

4.3 Tajikistan-Afghanistan Spillover

The 1979 USSR war in Afghanistan has complicated relations between Tajiks and Afghans. The similarity and close proximity of Tajikistan enabled Moscow to use it in support of the communist regime in Kabul. As a result, many publications were sent to Afghanistan from Tajikistan and many Soviet Tajiks were deployed to work in government, educational organizations, and serve in the Soviet military in Afghanistan.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. 27.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Hamedani, "Iran Behtarin Tasir Ra Bar Vaziat Adabi Afghanistan Gozashteh Ast," 11.

¹¹² Atkin, "Tajikistan's Relation with Iran and Afghanistan," 104-105.

Towards the end of Soviet regime and post Soviet rule, official relations between Tajikistan and Afghanistan increased dramatically. An Afghani Consulate was established in Dushanbe by the then-communist regime of Afghanistan, who sought to increase trade, publishing and educational ties between the two nations. Due to the Soviet's policy of banning religious studies in the republics, many Tajiks went to northern Afghanistan to attend *madrasas*, the Islamic schools. Afghanistan's Tajiks were said to be most influential in the *Jami'at-i Islami* (an Islamic political party in Afghanistan meaning Islamic Society), which controlled much of northern Afghanistan, including the areas near Tajikistan's border. In 1992, when Tajikistan found itself in the middle of a civil war, rumors increased about Afghanistan's involvement in Tajikistan politics and especially arming the Islamic Revival Party.¹¹³

According to Ray Takeyh and Nikolas K. Gvosdev,

Islamist movements have managed to acquire prominence [in Tajikistan.] The collapse of Soviet power has created such a vacuum that there are no viable alternatives...The specter of an Islamic takeover in Tajikistan began to arise because of the unsettled and unstable nature of the transition in this republic. Moreover, Tajikistan's close geographic proximity with Afghanistan, as well as ties between groups in Tajikistan and their ethnic kin across the border meant there was considerable spillover from the civil war in that country.¹¹⁴

The debate of Afghanistan's influence on Islamic fundamentalism in Tajikistan and arms smuggling is controversial and lacks proper supporting documents.¹¹⁵ However, there is no debate on the fact that Tajikistan has been affected by the consequences of the

¹¹³ Ibid., 104.

¹¹⁴ Takeyh and Gvosdev, *The Receding Shadow of the Prophet: The Rise and Fall of Radical Political Islam*, 126.

¹¹⁵ Atkin, "Tajikistan's Relation with Iran and Afghanistan," 105.

Soviet war in Afghanistan and the situation in that country ever since. In 1991, Lakim Kayuov, Tajikistan's Foreign Minister stated that,

Afghan's mujahideen control of the long Tajik-Afghan border presented the most difficult and complex problem Tajikistan had ever faced. There had been mujahideen incursions into Tajikistan and if Islamic fundamentalism is very high in Afghanistan then it is natural it will influence Tajikistan also.¹¹⁶

4.3.1 Tajikistan's current health and economic issues related to Afghanistan

Tajikistan bears serious socio-economic problems as a result of having Afghanistan - the largest opium producer in the world - to its south. Approximately 85 percent of drugs from Afghanistan seized in Central Asia are confiscated in Tajikistan.¹¹⁷ According to the UN Office of Drugs and Crime report, Afghanistan produced 6,900 tons of opium in 2009 alone, 15-30 percent of which passed through Tajikistan.¹¹⁸ The considerable increase in domestic drug use and HIV/AIDS cases in Tajikistan is linked to the drug trafficking from Afghanistan. In addition, the trafficking of drugs accounts for between 30 and 50 percent of Tajikistan's economic activity. "Some experts in the country assert that the elimination of trafficking-related economic activity would have a serious impact on living standards in the already very poor country of Tajikistan."¹¹⁹

The existence of the Association among Persian speaking countries as a forum to address such issues becomes increasingly important. Due to the close proximity of these states to one another, the spillage of one county's instability into the other is unavoidable. Although alleviation of such negative effects is possible via transnational solutions, such results are only achieved by increased level of trust and cooperation among the three

¹¹⁶ Parker, *Persian Dreams: Moscow and Tehran Since the Fall of the Shah*, 58.

¹¹⁷ IRIN, 2007 (see Khodjamurodov and Rechel, "Tajikistan: Health System Review 2010," 16.)

¹¹⁸ Foroughi, "Nations in Transition 2010: Tajikistan."

¹¹⁹ Khodjamurodov and Rechel, "Tajikistan: Health System Review 2010," 16.

states. Creation of the Association can move these countries toward the ideal level of cooperation that is needed to resolve the conflict.

5: TAJIKISTAN'S GEO-POLITICAL IMPORTANCE FOR IRAN

5.1 Tajik's Cultural Affinity with Iran

Since the majority of republics in Central Asia are Turkic, Tajikistan has a greater cultural affinity with Afghanistan and Iran than with its immediate neighbors of the former USSR states.¹²⁰ In fact, on March 21, 2007, Tajikistan's President, Emomali Rahmonov, publicly stated that he had abandoned "the Russian suffix from his name, because he wants to be known as Emomali Rahmon, the original name of his father, which reflects the Persian roots of his family."¹²¹ Despite this historic gesture, it is difficult to determine where the majority of Tajiks stand regarding the importance of their historical cultural ties with Iran.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the USSR republics were divided based on nationality. As a result, ethnicity played a huge role in the political, economical, cultural, and social concerns of the region¹²². Even though the term *Tajik* traditionally was used to distinguish between Turkic and Persian speakers in Central Asia, "the use of that name to designate a nationality in a political sense is a 20th century creation of the Soviet regime."¹²³ The Soviet Union categorized Tajiks - as well as other ethnicities in the region - as *formerly backward peoples* who owed their progress to Communist rule as

¹²⁰ Beeman, "The Struggle for Identity in Post-Soviet Tajikistan."

¹²¹ Ganieva, "Cultural Reformation in Tajikistan."

¹²² Atkin, "Tajikistan's Relation with Iran and Afghanistan," 92.

¹²³ Ibid.

well as to the guidance of *the more advanced* Russians.¹²⁴ This Kremlin's policy meant that different nationalities were constantly competing for political power, as well as for access to education and natural resources. One way in which the Tajiks countered the degrading interpretation of their culture by the Russians was to emphasize their ties to the Persian culture. By classifying anything Persian as Tajiki, Tajikistan's elites were able to maintain that "Tajik-Persian culture was not formerly backward nor a mere addendum to the Turkic character of Central Asia, but rather was highly developed and ancient in origin."¹²⁵

The Soviet era is known as the era of "the decline in the state of the Tajik language and culture."¹²⁶ In 1929, Moscow banned the use of the modified Arabic alphabet in which Persian is written. Initially, this was replaced by Latin, and then modified Cyrillic was introduced. As a result, communication between Tajiks and other Persian speakers outside of Tajikistan became very limited.¹²⁷ In 1989, Tajikistan made Tajik the state language and the wording of the law states that Tajik and Persian are the same language. After the collapse of Soviet Union, it made much sense for the independent Tajikistan to develop close relations with Iran. For the most part, this interest was cultural. There have been attempts by both Iran and Tajikistan to initiate cultural exchanges throughout contemporary history. In 1990, a cultural agreement was signed between Iran and Tajikistan that enabled Iran to send books, publications, and magazines of various content and to hold publication exhibitions and Iranian film festivals in

¹²⁴ Ibid. 92.

¹²⁵ Ibid. 93.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

Tajikistan.¹²⁸ However, Iran wanted to expand the bilateral relations further. A summit meeting between the two countries was held in Iran on June 28-30, 1992, in which Tajikistan's then President, Rakhmon Nabiev, attended and agreed on further economic and cultural relations with Iran. A government commission was also established to promote on-going cooperation. Upon his return to Tajikistan, Nabiev stated, "we and the Iranians have a single language, a single faith, and a single science and culture. Moreover, up until the 15th century we and they lived in a single state."¹²⁹ Soon after Tajikistan's independence, Iran launched book exhibitions in various cities of Tajikistan in order to provide much-needed Persian texts. The establishment of the Iranian publication *Alhoda* and a permanent bookstore in Tajikistan in August 1992 further revealed Iran's interest in participating in Tajikistan's cultural scene.¹³⁰

Official artists' exchanges are held between the two nations, where writers, poets, and artists from each country visit the other country, hold exhibitions, and participate in joint projects. In addition, Iran and Tajikistan have increased their mutual cultural and scientific cooperation and projects, with most of such activities taking place in Tajikistan. These include: holding the *mawarannahr* music festival, publication of Tajikistan's contemporary literature collection, musical and theatrical groups exchanges, sending restorators for historical sites in Tajikistan, establishing the informatics college, offering research scholarships to Tajikistan's students, establishing research units in

¹²⁸ Ibid.94.

¹²⁹ Ibid. 96.

¹³⁰ Mahmoudi, "Asia Markazi Va Roshd Hamkarihaye Chand Janebe Iran Va Tajikistan," 15.

Tajikistan's foreign affair ministry via Iran's foreign affair ministry office, establishing new Persian and Tajik language centers and buildings.¹³¹

Iran also launched a monthly Persian magazine in Central Asia, called *Oshno (Acquaintance)*. The first issue was dedicated solely to Iran's commonality with the republics of Central Asia in terms of language, history and arts.¹³² Currently, several magazines are published in Tajikistan via the cultural sector of Iran's embassy in Dushanbe.¹³³ As well, in 2009, the Iranian state-run Persian News Agency opened its first office in Dushanbe, a move that was supported by Tajik cultural minister, Mirzoshohrukh Asrori. Persian News Agency's managing director, Hamid Reza Moghaddam, appreciated the recent greater media cooperation between the two nations as they "foil the soft threats posed by Western media" against Iran and Tajikistan.¹³⁴ In summary, Iran's attempts in creating an ongoing cultural exchange with Tajikistan have been successful. Iran has been able to portray itself as a supporter of strengthening the role of Persian language and culture in Tajikistan, and as a provider of Persian material to Tajik public.

5.2 Tajikistan's Geographical Appeal

Tajikistan is regarded as a valuable geographical asset by China, Iran, Russia, and more recently, the USA and NATO due to the country's close proximity to Afghanistan. According to Morteza Mahmoudi, Iranian author and expert on Iranian-Central Asian relations at Islamic Azad University in Iran, compared to others in the

¹³¹ Mahmoudi, "Asia Markazi Va Roshd Hamkarihaye Chand Janebe Iran Va Tajikistan," 18.

¹³² Atkin, "Tajiksitan's Relation with Iran and Afghanistan," 95.

¹³³ *Makaz Pazhouheshi Miras Maktoub*. <http://mirasmaktoob.ir>

¹³⁴ "FNA MD Warns About West's Soft Threats Against Tajikistan", Fars News Agency, May 4, 2009 (See Farrar-Wellman and Frasco, "Tajikistan-Iran Foriegn Relations.")

region, Iran has many advantages in dealing with Tajikistan: shared religion, geographical attraction, cultural and historical similarities, and language. Iran's energy resources can greatly benefit Tajikistan's production industries. Moreover, as Tajikistan is landlocked, Iran can be used to connect Tajikistan to other parts of the world via its ports and the Persian Gulf.¹³⁵ Historically, Iran and Tajikistan both belonged to the same geographical unit.¹³⁶ As a result, they share many traditions, customs, and language, and both nations take a great deal of pride in historical Persian writers, poets and scientists.¹³⁷

When the USSR and the communist system officially collapsed, many citizens were left puzzled about their identity. As history, culture, and language are important aspects of a nation's identity, it was natural for Tajikistan to look up to Iran for assistance, especially for issues regarding cultural matters.

5.3 Iran's Strong Presence in Tajikistan

Iran was the first country to recognize Tajikistan's independence, and opened the first embassy in Dushanbe on January 21, 1992.¹³⁸ In return, Tajikistan renamed the street on which the Iranian Embassy is located to Tehran Street.¹³⁹ Since the return of political stability in Tajikistan, Iran has attempted to increase economic ties. Currently, Iran is one of the main exporters of food and construction materials to Tajikistan. In return, Iran imports cotton and aluminum from Tajikistan. Iranian businessmen have established over 45 factories, and production units in Tajikistan, and there have been over 150

¹³⁵ Shirazi and Majid, "Siasat Va Hokoomat Dar Asiyae Markazi," 15. (See Mahmoudi, "Asia Markazi Va Roshd Hamkarihaye Chand Janebe Iran Va Tajikistan," 8.)

¹³⁶ Mohajerani, "Jografiyaye Eghtesadi Mantage Asia Markazi," 14.

¹³⁷ Mahmoudi, "Asia Markazi Va Roshd Hamkarihaye Chand Janebe Iran Va Tajikistan," 8.

¹³⁸ Ibid. 14.

¹³⁹ Atkin, "Tajikistan's Relation with Iran and Afghanistan," 97.

economical agreements signed by the two states.¹⁴⁰ In fact, the first foreign firm registered in Tajikistan was Iranian.¹⁴¹

Iran has taken a unique strategy towards Tajikistan: concentrating on humanitarian aid. After Tajikistan's independence, Iran offered 300,000 tons of free oil to the new nation, and initiated the facilitation of communication means, railway transportation, and mutual investment projects in Tajikistan.¹⁴²

Iran loaned Tajikistan US\$10 million, to be used to stimulate exports and imports, while offering assistance in dealing with the costs of imported energy. In 1995, Iran agreed to pay for Tajikistan's importation of natural gas from Turkmenistan; Tajikistan then was to reimburse Iran in cotton rather than in currency.¹⁴³

Iran also signed agreements to build and operate medical and pharmaceutical equipments. In addition, the two nations signed multiple banking, commercial, and cultural agreements. In 1995, Iran announced its willingness to participate in Tajikistan's economic growth. Tajikistan President Rahman visited Iran in 1995 and signed 12 commercial and economic agreements, in addition to agreeing to establish direct flights between Tehran and Dushanbe.¹⁴⁴

Iran and Tajikistan have been engaged in many development projects and industrial relations, constantly seizing opportunities to increase economic ties. Bilateral trade between the two nations has increased steadily, although approximately 85 percent of the volume of trade has been Iran's export to Tajikistan, mainly food and construction

¹⁴⁰ Mahmoudi, "Asia Markazi Va Roshd Hamkarihayeh Chand Janebe Iran Va Tajikistan," 22.

¹⁴¹ US Library of Congress, "Foreign Economic Relations."

¹⁴² Mahmoudi, "Asia Markazi Va Roshd Hamkarihayeh Chand Janebe Iran Va Tajikistan," 24-25.

¹⁴³ US Library of Congress, "Foreign Economic Relations."

¹⁴⁴ Mahmoudi, "Asia Markazi Va Roshd Hamkarihayeh Chand Janebe Iran Va Tajikistan," 25.

materials.¹⁴⁵ According to Saidrahmon Nazriyev, Tajikistan's Deputy Minister of Economic Development and Trade, however, trade between Iran and Tajikistan has been affected by the recent world financial crisis, shrinking by 41 percent in 2009. Despite the setback, bilateral trade soon recovered in 2010. According to Tajikistan's Deputy Minister "trade between our two countries increased by almost 90 percent in the first four months of 2010 compared to the same period in 2009."¹⁴⁶

Recognizing the lack of the hydrocarbon resources in Tajikistan compared to its neighbors, Hasan Karroubi, Second Secretary of the Iranian Embassy in Tajikistan emphasized the hydroelectric potential of this small nation, stating, "Iran is one of the world's most experienced countries in building hydroelectric power facilities, and our companies are ready to help Tajikistan develop its hydroelectric resources."¹⁴⁷ In February 2006, Iran and Tajikistan signed an agreement for construction of the \$220 million Sang Toudesh II Power Plant in Tajikistan. Iran has provided \$180 million of the cost as a 10-year loan to Tajikistan. After finishing this project in 2012, Tajikistan will be able to fully satisfy its electricity demands and export the remainder to other neighboring countries. Iran has also signed numerous contracts in constructing residential units in Tajikistan, as well as building communication facilities.¹⁴⁸ In terms of transportation, in February 2009, Iran and Tajikistan agreed on the construction of a railway that will connect the two countries via Afghanistan.¹⁴⁹ Further project progress was achieved in

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. 27.

¹⁴⁶ "Tajik Officials, Iranian Businessmen Discuss Investment Cooperation," Asia-Plus Online, May 26, 2010 (See Ibid.)

¹⁴⁷ "Iran Supports Tajik Energy Projects – Diplomat," Asia-Plus Online, March 31, 2010 (See Ibid.)

¹⁴⁸ Mahmoudi, "Asia Markazi Va Roshd Hamkarihayeh Chand Janebe Iran Va Tajikistan," 29.

¹⁴⁹ "Iran Plans Rail Line With Tajikistan Thru Afghanistan", Kabul Pajhwok Afghan News, February 19, 2009 (See Farrar-Wellman and Frasco, "Tajikistan-Iran Foreign Relations.")

May 2010 in the 37th meeting of the Organization of the Islamic Conference in Dushanbe, when Tajikistan and Iran signed a technical agreement to complete the project.¹⁵⁰

Iran also hopes to increase ties with Tajikistan in the realm of defense and regional security. In June 2009, Ali Asqar Sherdoust, Iran's Ambassador to Tajikistan, emphasized the regional importance of Tajik-Iranian relations by stating that "Iran, as the most important power in the Middle-East, and Tajikistan, as the main axis of Central Asia could have a significant stake in the expansion of relations between Southern, Western and Central Asia."¹⁵¹ An obstacle exists in regards to Iran-Tajikistan military cooperation, however, as Tajikistan's military agreements with Russia binds and prevents Tajikistan from pursuing greater cooperation with Iran.¹⁵² In May 2010, Iranian Defense Minister, Brigadier General Ahmad Vahidi, met with Tajik Defense Minister Hamrokhon Zarifi, Tajik Parliament Speaker Mahmadsaid Ubaidulloyev, and General Sherali Khayrulloev to sign a Memorandum of Understanding regarding military ties. Iranian Defense Minister Brigadier General Ahmad Vahidi stated "Iran follows long-term and strategic relations with Tajikistan...[and] believe[s] that powerful neighbors can pave the way for their progress and development if [they] stand by each other."¹⁵³ Vahidi also met with President Rahmon in a follow-up meeting, in which he forwarded "warm greetings"

¹⁵⁰“Iran, Tajikistan To Build Linking Railway,” Fars News Agency, May 22, 2010 (See Ibid.)

¹⁵¹“Envoy Highlights Iran, Tajikistan's Regional Roles”, Tehran Times, June 10, 2009, http://www.tehrantimes.com/index_View.asp?code=196283, (See Ibid.)

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³“Iran, Tajikistan Sign Defense MoU,” Iranian Students News Agency, May 15, 2010 (See Ibid.)

from the Iranian President and emphasized his country's "willingness to increase collaboration, particularly in personnel training and weapons production."¹⁵⁴

5.4 Iran's Underlying Intention for Participating in Transportation Projects

Iran has invested greatly in Tajikistan's Anzob Tunnel, a five-kilometer tunnel that connects northern and southern Tajikistan, including Dushanbe and Khujand, Tajikistan's two largest cities.¹⁵⁵ The project is valued at \$39 million, of which Tajikistan has paid \$7.8 million. Iran has offered \$10 million to Tajikistan as development assistance; the remaining \$21.2 million has been loaned to Tajikistan by Iran.¹⁵⁶ The road connecting Dushanbe and Khujand is closed much of the year due to snow in the Anzob mountain pass from November to March. During that time, Khujand is only accessible by air, which is expensive, dangerous, and unsuitable for large cargo, thus hindering trade. As a result, Tajikistan is split in two during the winter months. In Soviet times, the alternative was to travel around the mountain pass through what is now Uzbekistan. Tajik relations with Uzbekistan have deteriorated in recent years, however, and Tajik citizens now require a visa. Therefore, Iran's assistance in constructing the Anzob Tunnel is extremely important for Tajiks, as it lessens their dependence on Uzbekistan.¹⁵⁷ The Anzob tunnel is also referred to as the *Esteghlal* tunnel - the tunnel of independence.¹⁵⁸

At the celebration ceremony of the completion of the Anzob Tunnel in July 2006, which both President Ahmadinejad and President Rahmon attended and gave a

¹⁵⁴ "Iran Ready To Help Resolve Tajik-Uzbek 'Cooperation Problems'," Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran (See Ibid.)

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Mahmoudi, "Asia Markazi Va Roshd Hamkarihayeh Chand Janabe Iran Va Tajikistan," 30.

¹⁵⁷ Pylenko, "Tajikistan Plans to Improve Infrastructure, Become a Transport Hub."

¹⁵⁸ BBC Persian, "Bahrehbardari Az Tunel Anzob."

speech, Ahamdinejad referred to the tunnel as the *century tunnel* since many thought that Iranian and Tajik technicians would be unable to build it. He continued his speech by announcing that the Anzob Tunnel is a gift from the Iranian people to the people of Tajikistan, since Iran sees the growth and construction of Tajikistan as Iran's growth and construction.¹⁵⁹ Rahmon also added that the Anzob Tunnel is a peace and brotherhood tunnel between Iran and Tajikistan, and symbolizes Iran and Tajikistan's long-term cooperation.¹⁶⁰ In spite of the celebration of the completion of the tunnel by politicians, four years later the tunnel's structural quality restricts usage, and an estimated \$6 million is still required to complete its lighting and ventilation systems.¹⁶¹

Although Iran's attempt to build the Anzob Tunnel might be the start of long-term cooperation, the project "is part of a broader Iranian regional transport blueprint, in which Tajikistan plays a central role in a transit route linking China to the Persian Gulf."¹⁶² Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Iran has found itself increasingly competing with Turkey for commercial influence in Central Asia. "Iran considers Turkey's relative prominence in the Caucasus and Central Asian markets an embarrassment, and sees road building as a means to enhance Tehran's economic profile in the region."¹⁶³ Increased linkage between Iran and Central Asian states could also help Iran "alleviate concerns about strategic encirclement by the United States."¹⁶⁴

In 2003, Iranian Road and Transportation Minister, Ahmed Khorram, revealed Iran's ambition for

¹⁵⁹Mahmoudi, "Asia Markazi Va Roshd Hamkarihayeh Chand Janebe Iran Va Tajikistan," 29-30.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. 30.

¹⁶¹ Hasanova, "Tajikistan Needs Another \$6 Mln to Complete Istiqlol Tunnel."

¹⁶² Arman, "Investing in Tunnel, Iran Nurtures Ambitions in Tajikistan."

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

the construction of a road that will connect Tajikistan to Iran and the Persian Gulf through Afghanistan...The road which would run from Iran through Herat [Western Afghanistan], Mazar-i-Sharif [Northern Afghanistan] and Sherkhan Bandar [Northern Afghanistan] to Tajikistan and from there up to China: this is a real Silk Road.¹⁶⁵

In an attempt to increase its geopolitical importance in the region, Iran has shown a substantial interest in regional road building. "Beyond pursuing a north-south corridor that could link its cities to Russia,"¹⁶⁶ Iran has also been pursuing ambitious plans to connect itself to China via Central Asia. The Association would facilitate Iran in reaching such goals.

5.5 The Role of Tajikistan in Iran's Bid to Become a Full Member in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization

Iran views Tajikistan as a strategic partner in the international scene. In particular, Iran has been increasingly relying on Tajikistan to act as a close ally regarding the issue of Iran's full membership to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The SCO is a permanent intergovernmental international organization founded in 2001 by China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. SCO's main focus is to increase military, security and socio-economic cooperation among members.¹⁶⁷ Currently, Iran holds an observer status in SCO. Iran applied for full membership in 2008; however, due to the ongoing United Nation sanctions against Iran, its full membership request was denied.¹⁶⁸ Thus, Persian-speaking Tajikistan - considering its

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ "Brief Introduction to the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation," <http://www.sectsco.org/EN/brief.asp>

¹⁶⁸ Jiao and Xiaokun, "SCO Agrees Deal to Expand."

close proximity to China and Russia - could be a key player in advocating for Iran's membership in the SCO.¹⁶⁹

5.6 Tajikistan's Position Regarding Iran's Controversial Policies

Iran's policies and controversies have resulted in global economic and political isolation. Tajikistan is among the few nations who have emerged as a strategic partner during this harsh time. After the much-debated June 2009 Presidential election, when the majority of states hesitated to recognize Ahmadinejad's victory, Tajikistan's President was one of the first to congratulate Ahmadinejad, stating, "your landslide victory in a free and transparent election is evidence that the Iranian people support your policy."¹⁷⁰ Tajikistan has also been consistently supportive of Iran's nuclear plans. Ali Dolatzadeh, Tajikistan's first Deputy Secretary-General of the People's Democratic Party, indicated that all nations must respect Iran's right to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, stating, "the claims that Iran is after developing atomic weapons should be proven first-hand before taking any measures against Iran."¹⁷¹ Saymumin Yatimov, Tajikistan's first Deputy Foreign Minister, also assured that his country encourages a peaceful resolution to Iran's nuclear energy issue, and further emphasized that Tajikistan upholds the "international agreements, contracts and conventions [that] stipulate Iran's right to use nuclear technology for peaceful purposes."¹⁷² At the International Conference on Disarmament in the Central Asian and the Caspian Sea Littoral States, Khamrokhon

¹⁶⁹ Mahmoudi, "Asia Markazi Va Roshd Hamkarihaye Chand Janebe Iran Va Tajikistan," 27-28.

¹⁷⁰ "Rahmon Congratulates Ahmadinejad On Landslide Victory In Iran's Presidential Election", Asia-Plus, June 6, 2009, <http://www.asiaplus.tj/en/news/16/53077.html>(See Farrar-Wellman and Frasco, "Tajikistan-Iran Foreign Relations.")

¹⁷¹ "Tajik Official Urges World To Respect Iran's N. Rights", Fars News Agency, August 28, 2008 (See Ibid.)

¹⁷² Ibid.

Zarifi, Tajikistan's Foreign Minister voiced Tajikistan's concerns over the use of sanctions against Iran, stating that Tajikistan "does not think the Security Council resolutions will be a useful means to resolving global issues but instead will make them more complicated."¹⁷³

5.7 Obstacles to Iran's Increased Influence in Tajikistan

The Persian language is the greatest similarity between Iran and Tajikistan. Although Iran and Tajikistan share many other cultural and historical commonalities, there are also noteworthy differences between the two nations that could pose obstacles in deepening relations.

After the dissolution of the USSR, Iran attempted to play a major cultural role in Tajikistan by sending teachers, publications and printed materials.¹⁷⁴ These efforts were relatively unsuccessful, however, partly because of the alphabet change to Cyrillic. In 1929, at the time of the alphabet change, the majority of Tajiks were illiterate. However, the current movement to change back to the Arabic alphabet is targeted at a population who is almost entirely literate in Cyrillic. Today, only less than one percent of the population is able to read Arabic phonetics.¹⁷⁵ Therefore, it is incredibly difficult to retrain the entire population in the Arabic alphabet. In addition, Tajikistan's nationalists are not keen on the idea of relying exclusively on Iran for learning materials after decades of looking to Russia for guidance. One way in which some educated nationalist Tajiks view their heritage and avoid falling into Iran's shadow is to treat their heritage as

¹⁷³ "Tajikistan Urges Dialogue to Resolve Iran's N. Issue," Fars News Agency, June 25, 2010
<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8904040315> (See Ibid.)

¹⁷⁴ Atkin, "Tajikistan's Relation with Iran and Afghanistan," 94.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

deriving not only from the Western Iranian Persians but also from the Eastern Iranians (Sogdians) indigenous to Central Asia.¹⁷⁶ “The Sogdians of ancient Central Asia were active in commerce along the silk route and had a highly developed culture.”¹⁷⁷ Muriel Atkin argues that Tajik nationalists use the Eastern Iranian heritage connection as a means to refute the argument that Turkic people are the original Central Asians and Tajiks arrived after the Arab conquest. Moreover, showing roots to Sogdian counters the previous Soviet claim of Tajik backwardness. In addition, it also counters many Iranians who view Tajikistan as mere provincials on the periphery of the Perso-Iranian world.¹⁷⁸

Tajikistan’s concern of avoiding Iran’s periphery is evident by the way they consider their Persian heritage. The accepted Tajik view of the revival of Persian as a literary language after the disruption caused by the Arab conquest is that it took place not in what inhabitants of the contemporary Iranian state think of as the Persian heartland – the Iranian plateau- but rather focused in Central Asia and the adjoining parts of Iran and Afghanistan. Only after this revival was well under way did literary Persian spread southwest across the Iranian plateau.¹⁷⁹ In addition, there are other barriers to expanding bilateral relations at a faster pace.

Tajikistan's external debt and its limited ability to contribute to joint projects with Iran pose as an obstacle to meaningful bilateral agreements and economic cooperation. In 2005, Tajikistan's overall debt was \$900 million. The situation became worse when the World Bank initially refused to forgive Tajikistan's \$100 million debt; however, “the

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. 97.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. 98.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

International Monetary Fund announced in December 2005 that it would grant Tajikistan full debt relief.”¹⁸⁰

After Tajikistan’s independence, Iranian politicians turned their attention to this fragile state; however, this attention has been inconsistent. There are two viewpoints among Iranian policy-makers in regards to Tajikistan. One viewpoint emphasizes the Islamic religious commonality and roots in Tajikistan and ignores the ideological differences. This group argues that Iran should access the economic opportunities in Tajikistan by supporting their Islamic groups (*nehzati Islami*) to strengthen them and thus strengthen Iran’s presence in Tajikistan.¹⁸¹

Compared to other republics, Islam is more politically active in Tajikistan. The Iranian Islamic revolution in 1979 and the Soviet presence in Afghanistan have had an impact on the Islamic groups in Tajikistan.¹⁸² Ahmad Shah Mas'ud of Afghanistan was a Tajik himself, and was greatly noted in Tajikistan. The Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan is one of the most powerful among similar parties in other republics even though its effort in Islamization of Tajikistan has not been consistently successful. “In the mid-1991 uprising against the Communist Party of Tajikistan, and even more so in the recent civil war there, the party played a major role.”¹⁸³ Many believe the party played an active role in the “Islamic-motivated protests and demonstrations against Rahman Nabiyev's elections as state president.”¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁰ Marat, "Iran, Tajikistan Strengthen Cooperation In The Energy Sector."

¹⁸¹ Ahmadi Fesharaki, "Jomhuri Eslami Iran Va Tajikistan: Chaleshha Va Manafe Meli Iran," 84.

¹⁸² Landau, "Islamic Versus Other Identities in the Greater Middle East: Comments on the Ex-Soviet Muslim Republics," 193.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

The problem with over-emphasizing Islamic religious similarities is that, unlike Iran, the majority of Tajikistan's Muslims, as well as the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan – which expects full support from Iran - are not Shi'ite but Sunnis.¹⁸⁵ As such, their Islamic ideology is quite different from that of Iran. In general, even though the majority of Tajiks are Muslims who have Persian heritage, this does not translate into Tajikistan's willingness to model Iranian Islamic politics.¹⁸⁶ Muriel Atkin argues that Tajiks are well aware of, and distinguish between their Persian cultural pride and Iranian hegemony. For people in Tajikistan, “*de facto* reclamation of Persian culture and history began roughly half a century ago, long before political Islam came to power in Iran.”¹⁸⁷ In fact, “Tajik intelligence was never drawn to political Iran, neither to the Iran of the Shah nor to the Iran of Ayatollah Khomeini. Rather, the initial attraction was Iran's pre-Islamic, predominantly Zoroastrian culture.”¹⁸⁸ Even if Iran's full support of Islamic groups and parties in Tajikistan leads to the increased importance of such organizations, it is very unlikely that they would remain loyal to Iran's Shi'ite worldview in the long term. Tajikistan's Islamic worldview is much more similar to Iran's religious competitors - Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Hence, Iran's financial or moral support of Islamic groups in Tajikistan potentially could lead to tension between the two countries instead of strengthening their relations.¹⁸⁹

Moreover, Islamic ideology is not widespread among politicians and the masses. Therefore, it is debatable whether Tajikistan citizens have the “knowledge of

¹⁸⁵ Ahmadi Fesharaki, "Jomhuri Eslami Iran Va Tajikistan: Chaleshha Va Manafe Meli Iran," 91.

¹⁸⁶ Atkin, "Tajikistan's Relation with Iran and Afghanistan," 99.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid..

¹⁸⁸ Parker, *Persian Dreams: Moscow and Tehran Since the Fall of the Shah*, 47.

¹⁸⁹ Ahmadi Fesharaki, "Jomhuri Eslami Iran Va Tajikistan: Chaleshha Va Manafe Meli Iran," 97.

theological distinction between the Sunni and Shi'ite sects,"¹⁹⁰ after decades of communist rule in the former USSR and a secularization policy. Ten years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Sunni and Shi'ite differences are not relevant to the people, ranking fourth or fifth in terms of self identity.¹⁹¹ In addition, most political leaders attempt to counter "the flow of extremist propaganda from Iran and the incursions of Islamic militants from Afghanistan" by balancing relations among Iran, Russia, and Turkey.¹⁹² Akbar Turajonzoda, one of Tajikistan's most powerful religious figures (*qadi*) has repeatedly asserted that Tajikistan is not willing to mimic the Islamic politics of Iran.

The conditions are completely different. In Iran, there was never a Communist Party in power. The 70-year predominance of atheism has had an effect on our country... Today the people are afraid of an Islamic regime, and why should one make the people afraid? The people understand religion in their way: they do not want the women to wear the veil again and to sit at the hearth, they reject polygamy, and they are afraid that human rights will be restricted if Islam comes to power. This at least is what they have been taught. Psychologically, they are not ready to support an Islamic state.¹⁹³

Tajikistan's Constitution (Principle 100) explicitly states it respects Islam, but emphasizes secularism when it comes to state politics. Hence, any direct or indirect Iranian support in bringing religion into Tajikistan's politics will backfire, as it has no mass support among the people or the politicians, and would be viewed as meddling in internal politics.¹⁹⁴ Iran should never overlook the fact that Soviet Muslims and the people of Tajikistan "did very little to bring about the end of communism or to break up

¹⁹⁰ Parker, *Persian Dreams: Moscow and Tehran Since the Fall of the Shah*, 46.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Landau, "Islamic Versus Other Identities in the Greater Middle East: Comments on the Ex-Soviet Muslim Republics," 193.

¹⁹³ Atkin, "Tajikistan's Relation with Iran and Afghanistan," 100.

¹⁹⁴ Ahmadi Fesharaki, "Jomhuri Eslami Iran Va Tajikistan: Chaleshha Va Manafe Meli Iran," 98.

the USSR.”¹⁹⁵ Secularism is fundamentally accepted by the majority of Tajikistan’s ordinary people, elites, and educated population.¹⁹⁶

The second viewpoint with regards to Tajikistan focuses on the cultural similarities between the two nations and ignores the religious aspect altogether. This ideal is based on deepening the cultural ties and strengthening economic relations based on Iran’s national interest.¹⁹⁷ There is more harmony in recognizing the importance of the Persian language among both Tajiks and Iranians. Tajiks have shown they place a great degree of importance on their language and heritage. Despite the changing of their alphabet and banning of language teaching, they never abandoned their Persian roots. The validity of this argument is prominent in Tajikistan’s efforts to establish research and publication institutions in the field of Persian literature and writings. The same is not true for their religion, where the majority of people in Tajikistan identify themselves as secular. Unlike Iran’s religious support, which would be frowned upon as meddling, Iran’s cultural support in strengthening Tajik literature is welcomed in Tajikistan.¹⁹⁸ There is no other country in the region that can replace Iran’s cultural role for Tajikistan, and Iranian policy-makers should take advantage of this situation.

Iran’s foreign policy witnessed a shift after the Iran-Iraq war, especially regarding the balance between Iran’s national interest and its “internationalist/ Islamic aspirations or obligations.”¹⁹⁹ This new policy became more apparent between May and October

¹⁹⁵ Mandelbaum, *Central Asia and the World: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan*, 59.

¹⁹⁶ Ahmadi Fesharaki, "Jomhuri Eslami Iran Va Tajikistan: Chaleshha Va Manafe Meli Iran," 98.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid. 84-85.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid. 91-99.

¹⁹⁹ Rubinstein and Smolansky, *Regional Power Rivalries in the New Eurasia: Russia, Turkey, and Iran*, 126.

1992, when the Tajik Islamic opposition might have had a chance to advance in the civil war; yet, Iran took a very passive role in their support. Such passiveness reflected Iran's "awareness of Central Asian geopolitical realities, [as well as] the general belief in Tehran that the clash in Tajikistan... while couched in ideological terms, reflected tribal, regional, and ethnic differences, rather than an immediate receptivity to an Islamic alternative."²⁰⁰ Iran soon realized that promoting Islamization in an *unready* Tajikistan could undermine its other unique and less threatening source of influence - the cultural linkage to Tajiks.²⁰¹

This policy was feared to have lost its significance with the victory of Ahmadinejad in Iran's election in 2005, as arguably, he is "the product of an Islamic puritan movement that wants to restore the guiding principles of Iran's 1979 revolution."²⁰² Many thought Iran-Tajikistan relations would deteriorate after his election considering Rahmon is a "Soviet-style secularist who has acted steadily to curb the influence of Islam in Tajikistan's politics in recent years."²⁰³ The two Presidents have considerable ideological differences; however, the increased trade and diplomatic relations throughout Ahmadinejad's term have proven otherwise. Some argue that "the U.S. and European Union pressure on Iran over its nuclear program prompted conservative Islamic leaders in Tehran to set aside long-standing political and religious considerations in their search for international allies."²⁰⁴ In short, to Iranian policy makers, Tajikistan is a strong ally for whom Iran is willing to sacrifice its ideals.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid.126-127.

²⁰² "Tehran Forges Closer Ties with Dushanbe." <http://www.newnations.com/archive/2006/March/tj.html>

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

6: THE RISE OF IRAN AND THE RUSSIAN-IRANIAN DYNAMICS IN TAJIKISTAN

Iran's main cultural, political and economical rival in Tajikistan is Russia who has had a strong and continuous military and diplomatic presence in Tajikistan even after the Soviet Union disintegration. Yet, Tajikistan shares no common border with Russia, and Tajik, not Russian, is the dominant language. In fact "the once sizable Russian population [of Tajikistan] largely has abandoned the country."²⁰⁵ Since independence, Tajikistan has experienced a destructive civil war, and post-war economic, political and social decline. "In a short period of time Tajikistan went from the status of a middle-income country to one of the poorest countries in the world."²⁰⁶ Russian presence in Tajikistan is particularly interesting, taking into account the fact that Tajikistan offers little commercial value to Russia.

[Tajikistan] has virtually no oil or gas production. Tajikistan is rich in metal mineral resources and has vast hydroelectric potential, but mineral resources are plentiful in Russia and Tajikistan's hydroelectric energy is too far away to transport cost-effectively. Tajikistan's largest commodity export, aluminum, competes with Russian domestic enterprises rather than offering complementary commercial possibilities.²⁰⁷

Despite the argument that it is not in Russia's national interest to maintain such an expensive commitment to Tajikistan, Russia has been a presence. Approximately

²⁰⁵There was a sizable contingent of ethnic Russians in Tajikistan during the Soviet period, but the Russian population of Tajikistan -excluding soldiers and diplomats - dropped by 65 percent in the first five years of independence." Gleason, "Why Russia Is in Tajikistan," 77.

²⁰⁶Ibid.

²⁰⁷Ibid.

12,000 troops of Russian Federal Border Guard were in charge of overseeing Tajikistan's border control, especially guarding the troubled border of Tajikistan-Afghanistan, until 2004, when Russia and Tajikistan signed a treaty in which Tajik troops gradually "assumed border enforcement duties, leaving Russian advisers in place beginning in 2005."²⁰⁸ Russia is one of Tajikistan's main trading partners and one of the main investors in Tajikistan's economy. "Tajikistan's geostrategic significance is out of proportion to its geographical size, the size of its population, or the size of its economy. Tajikistan's future will define new diplomatic and strategic relationships that will reach well beyond its borders."²⁰⁹ As a result, Russia and Iran are equally interested in Tajikistan, and compete for dominance in this small, economically-deprived Central Asian state.

6.1 Frictions in Russian-Tajik Relations

Even though Moscow enjoys a great degree of influence on Dushanbe, there is widespread frustration among Tajik citizens towards Russia. In February 2010, in an article in *Asia Plus* newspaper, Tajik political analyst, Abdullo Rahnamo, stated, "Russia's aggressive pursuit of short-term economic and security interests in the region, often at the expense of local needs of the population, has generated significant disappointment and resentment among traditionally pro-Russian Tajik citizens."²¹⁰ One explanation for Tajiks frowning upon Russia is Moscow's focusing on security issues and ignoring more comprehensive economic cooperation with Tajikistan. As the poorest ex-Soviet Republic, Tajikistan expects Russian economic investment in Tajikistan in

²⁰⁸ Library of Congress – Federal Research Division, "Country Profile: Tajikistan," 16.

²⁰⁹ Gleason, "Why Russia Is in Tajikistan," 87.

²¹⁰ Sodiqov, "Russia Losing Hearts and Minds in Tajikistan."

exchange for political alliance. The global economic crisis has caused Tajikistan's main export commodity prices to decline - especially cotton and aluminum. "The shrinking of key sources of income has, by tradition, led millions of Tajiks to look towards Moscow for assistance....however, Russian leaders appear reluctant to rescue Tajikistan from the economic impasse in which it finds itself," according to Andrei Grozin, leading Central Asia expert at Moscow's CIS Institute.²¹¹

As well, in recent years there has been a sharp increase in ethnic violence against Tajik workers and immigrants in Russia, and Russian authorities have turned a blind eye on the issue.²¹² Continuous incidents of murder and hate crimes against Tajik citizens have caused significant anger among the Tajik public. Eighty-three percent of Tajik migrants choose to go to Russia.²¹³ The situation of migrants in the Russian Federation is especially problematic. Not only are they contending with the increased ethnic violence, but also most immigrants and workers do not have the required work or residence permits, and the Russian Government has begun to take an increasingly strict stance. From 2004 to 2006, approximately 50,000 Tajik workers were deported from Russia, and the amnesty request of Tajikistan government for these workers was denied by the Russian Federation. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimates Tajikistan's annual income of remittances between US\$ 400 million and US\$ 1 billion.²¹⁴ Given the poor economy of Tajikistan, remittances coming from Russia play a crucial role for many ordinary Tajik families, and link their economic wellbeing to Russia-Tajikistan relations and especially to Russia's policies toward Tajik workers and immigrants in Russia.

²¹¹ Quoted by the Ozodi radio on March 2, 2010 (See Ibid)

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Jones, Black and Skeldon, "Migration and Poverty Reduction in Tajikistan," 10.

²¹⁴ Khodjamurodov and Rechel, "Tajikistan: Health System Review 2010," 3.

Another source of Tajik's disappointment with Russia is Moscow's siding with Uzbekistan over water and energy issues. Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are in disagreement over Tajikistan's hydroelectric power development projects, as Uzbeks are concerned that the damming up of the Amu Darya River could negatively affect the water supply to cotton fields in Uzbekistan. Until 2008, Russia publicly supported hydroelectric projects in Tajikistan, "repeatedly promising to complete the giant Soviet-planned Rogun hydroelectric power station (HEPS)." ²¹⁵ However, Moscow has been favoring Uzbek's water management position recently, as Moscow-Tashkent relations have improved. Russia announced they would not invest in any hydroelectric power projects if other Central Asian countries' interests have not been taken into consideration. "Confronted with severe restrictions in electricity provision or complete blackouts for the last several winters, ordinary Tajiks saw Moscow's refusal to build the Rogun HPES as a betrayal of the strategic partnership."²¹⁶ Due to recent frictions, Tajikistan's public "increasingly call for the revision of a 'strategic partnership' with Russia and for closer ties with other powers including the United States, the European Union, China and Iran."²¹⁷

On the other hand, Russian experts argue "the birth of the Persian-Speaking Association would not have been possible without the recent *cold* relations between Russia and Tajikistan. There are fewer Tajik-Russian top-level meetings between presidents, fewer economic cooperation ventures, and more importantly, unstated mutual dissatisfaction."²¹⁸ Thus, Dushanbe's move to turn away from Russia

²¹⁵Sodiqov, "Russia Losing Hearts and Minds in Tajikistan."

²¹⁶Ibid.

²¹⁷Ibid.

²¹⁸ Medrea, "Persian-Speaking Union Created by Afghanistan, Iran, Tajikistan."

and develop close ties with another strong state, such as Iran, could be a well-calculated strategy.

Playing geopolitical games such as providing benefits to one strong country over another has achieved that in the past: in 2004, when Iran offered Tajikistan a quarter of a billion dollars to build hydroelectric stations and launch a number of smaller-scale projects, the Russian press was at first upset and dissatisfied. However, later that year, Russia initiated a series of projects in Tajikistan, promising to invest two billion dollars and thus re-established its dominance over Tajikistan.²¹⁹

6.2 Iran's Policy Towards Russia in Tajikistan

Mohiaddin Mesbahi, regional expert and associate professor at Florida International University argues that Iran has two main themes regarding its relationship with Russia: Russian Centric and Iran's Centrality.²²⁰ Iran's Russian Centric policy suggests that Iran's policy in Tajikistan is "not anti-Russian and is cognizant of the realities of Russia's interest and influence [...] [this] does not imply following Moscow's lead, but rather assuring Moscow that Tehran does not aim to replace Russia in Tajikistan."²²¹ In other words, Tehran will coexist and cooperate closely with Moscow via Tajikistan. A good example of this cooperation is the completion of two hydroelectric power stations in Tajikistan, in which Russia agreed to complete Sangtuda I and Iran invested in the completion of Sangtuda II.²²² Iran's Centrality "implies that Iran's interests and influence in Tajikistan cannot be denied or ignored."²²³ Implementation of this policy was evident in Iran's active mediation role in the peace process during Tajikistan's civil war.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Rubinstein and Smolansky, *Regional Power Rivalries in the New Eurasia: Russia, Turkey, and Iran*, 128.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Associated Press, "Russia, Iran Sign Deals to Build Power Stations in Tajikistan." (12 Jan, 2005)

²²³ Rubinstein and Smolansky, *Regional Power Rivalries in the New Eurasia : Russia, Turkey, and Iran*, 129.

6.2.1 Iran's role in peace negotiations in Tajikistan

In an attempt to match Russia's influence in Tajikistan, as well as to stop the spread of instability throughout the region, Iran played a key role in finding a solution for Tajikistan's civil war. During the Tajikistan civil war, Iran and Russia played important, yet opposing roles. Iran supported pro-Islamist groups represented by the United Tajik Opposition, while Russia supported the communist groups of the Popular Front. Political and economical matters would not allow Iran and Russia to go head-to-head full force in Tajikistan, however. Iran and Russia have been allies in other situations such as cooperation in the Caspian Sea, resistance to the growth of NATO in the Caucasus, and distrust of American policies in the region. As a result, both countries attempted to facilitate a cease-fire first, and then encouraged the warring parties to reconcile.²²⁴ Following Iran and Russia's efforts, Tajikistan's government representative, Rahmon, and the opponent's representative, Sayid Abdullah Nuri, met in Moscow on April 3, 1994. Iran's positive role in the negotiations was evident. "Iran's official line was that the crisis was an internal conflict with disturbing regional consequences."²²⁵ Iran was able to negotiate a hostage exchange between the two sides, in addition to getting them to agree to decrease the amount of force used. Hence, all participants agreed to a second round of negotiations in Tehran on June 18, 1994. Iranian President Rafsanjani attended the negotiations himself, and the two opposing sides met with Iran's supreme leader, Ali Khamenei. Iran's attempts were successful, and the parties started to draft a comprehensive cease-fire agreement.

²²⁴ Etefaghfar, "Zaminehaye Peidayesh Janghaye Dakheli Dar Tajiksitan Pas Az Esteghlal Va Naghsh Jomhuri Eslami Iran Dar Bargharari Solh," 35.

²²⁵ Parker, *Persian Dreams: Moscow and Tehran Since the Fall of the Shah*, 70.

In the third round of negotiations in Islamabad, Iran proposed a four-day informal meeting, to be held September 12-17, 1994, between the Tajiki opponents in Tehran. These informal sessions had a great impact on the peace process, and the final draft of the Tehran Agreement was forwarded to the UN where it was signed. Iran continued to assist in negotiations and arranged for a direct meeting between Rahmon and Nuri, which led to the creation of a reconciliation committee consisting of 26 members, 13 from each side. Iran promised financial and technological assistance to Tajikistan as an incentive and pre-condition for cease-fire and long-lasting peace in the country.²²⁶

In short, Iran has a natural influence in Tajikistan, and has been constantly trying to increase its role and presence in Tajikistan's affairs, as evidenced by its role in peace negotiations in Tajikistan. After the civil war, in his interview with *Tehran Times* in 1997, Tajikistan's President, Imam Ali Rahmon said:

Iran is our friend and brother state. Iran assisted in ending the Tajikistan civil war. It met with our opponents in Tehran and Mashhad, and as a result, permanent peace and reconciliation steps were taken. In the midst of brutal fighting, Iran offered much humanitarian assistance to the people of Tajikistan.²²⁷

²²⁶ Etefaghfar, "Zaminehaye Peidayesh Janghaye Dakheli Dar Tajiksitan Pas Az Esteghlal Va Naghsh Jomhuri Eslami Iran Dar Bargharari Solh," 35.

²²⁷ Mahmoudi, "Asia Markazi Va Roshd Hamkarihayeh Chand Janebe Iran Va Tajikistan," 26-27.

7: IRAN'S ROLE IN AFGHANISTAN

Iran has historical ties to Afghanistan, especially in terms of language and culture, particularly with the Hazara and Tajiks in Afghanistan, which constitute a total population of over 10 million people.²²⁸ Afghani Tajiks are Persian-speakers who mainly reside in Herat Province and the Hazara are a Shi'ite minority in central and northern Afghanistan. Iran's influence is most visible in Herat, which was the capital of the Persian Empire in the early 15th century.²²⁹ Until 1857, Herat was considered an integral part of Iran. When the British repelled Iranian advances toward Herat, Iran and the UK signed the Treaty of Paris in March 1857. Although Iran abandoned its historic claim on Herat, it reserved the right, under Article VII, to send forces into Afghanistan "if its frontier is violated."²³⁰ Iran is also very influential among the Hazara, Afghanistan's third largest ethnic minority and Afghanistan's only substantial Shi'ite population. "Hazara are not Persian, Pashtun, or Turkic, but are believed to be Mongol in origin."²³¹ Although Iran enjoys a relatively great degree of influence among the Hazara due to linguistic and religious similarities, it is important to note that "Hazara are far from a monolithic demographic. They comprise dozens of tribes in parts of six provinces."²³²

²²⁸ Out of 29 million population of Afghanistan, 27 percent are Tajik, 9 percent are Hazara--CIA fact book

²²⁹ Burno and Beehner, "Iran and the Future of Afghanistan."

²³⁰ Milani, "Iran's Policy Towards Afghanistan," 252.

²³¹ Houk, "The Shia Factor for the Stabilization of Afghanistan: Iran and the Hazara."

²³² Ibid.

7.1 Iran's Recent Economic Support

Iran's investments reveal that it seeks a long-term financial and economic presence in Afghanistan. As one of its largest donors, Iran has played an active role in the reconstruction of Afghanistan since the American and allies' presence, which began in 2001. Tehran initially committed to contribute \$570 million in 2002 to the reconstruction of Afghanistan, and paid the final installment in March 2006. Iran then pledged an additional \$100 million in aid at the Conference on Afghan Reconstruction in February 2006.²³³ Iran's non-oil exports to Afghanistan also increased dramatically, reaching half a billion dollars in 2008.²³⁴

Iran's economic influence in Afghanistan is mostly in Western Afghanistan and Herat Province, the areas closest to its border. Much of Herat's infrastructure owes its funding and construction to Iranian firms and investors, including a major road connecting the Islam Qala border to the Province's center and a proposed railroad link between Iran and Afghanistan. Iran also provides part of Herat's non-stop electricity.²³⁵ This Iranian gesture is especially important since Afghanistan's capital city of Kabul "only recently achieved that feat after years of limited electricity supply, and still experiences power shortages in some areas."²³⁶

²³³“Iran Pledges Another \$100m Aid to Afghanistan,” IRNA, February 2, 2006 (See Farrar-Wellman, "Afghanistan-Iran Foreign Relations.")

²³⁴(“Iran, Afghanistan Stress Increase in Border Exchanges,” Fars News Agency, July 22, 2009.(See Zarif and Majidyar, "Iranian Influence in Afghanistan: Recent Developments.")

²³⁵Frederic Bobin, “How Iran Is Expanding Its influence In Afghanistan,” Le Monde, April 2, 2009. Available at World News Connection. (See Ibid.)

²³⁶ Ibid.

In 2009, Iran's largest automobile factory, *Iran-Khodro*, announced the company plans to invest \$20 million US dollars in a car manufacturing plant in Herat.²³⁷ Iran also established a Chamber of Commerce in Herat in 2009, in an effort to facilitate trade between the two nations.²³⁸ In addition, Iran plans to expand its investment beyond Afghanistan's western provinces. Iranian First Vice-President, Pervez Davoudi, stated in February 2009 that Iran and Afghanistan plan to develop a railway network that connects Iran with Tajikistan through Afghanistan's northern provinces.²³⁹ Iran is also upgrading a "tax-free trade route, linking the Port of Chabahar to the southwestern border post of Malik in Afghanistan, and to Kandahar and Kabul. Once completed, this route would greatly diminish the economic importance of the Karachi-Kandahar road, which is Afghanistan's only current roadway to international markets. Not only would it shorten Afghanistan's route to the Persian Gulf by approximately 700 kilometers; but also Iran has offered Afghanistan

the right to use the Port of Chabahar with a substantial discount on port fees...Iran is additionally allocating substantial resources to upgrade the Malik Bridge over the Helmand River, as well as to upgrade another bridge over the Parian River on the Iran-Afghanistan border.²⁴⁰

7.2 Iran-Afghanistan Relations

Like Tajikistan, Afghanistan has been playing the role of a close ally in terms of Iran's controversial policies. Following the disputed 2009 Presidential election in Iran,

²³⁷Ibid.

²³⁸“Joint Iran-Afghan Chamber of Commerce Established in Western Afghan Province,” Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran, May 18, 2009. Available at World News Connection. (See Ibid.)

²³⁹“Iran plans rail line with Tajikistan thru Afghanistan,” Pajhwok Afghan News, February 19, 2009. Available at World News Connection. (See Ibid.)

²⁴⁰ Milani, "Iran's Policy Towards Afghanistan ," 252.

Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai announced his happiness for Ahmadinejad's re-election, and relations between the two countries "have significantly expanded during the course of Ahmadinejad's first term."²⁴¹ Regarding Iran's nuclear plans, in July 2008 Karzai noted that Afghanistan has friendly relations with both the United States and Iran. Karzai further explained, "Afghanistan does not want its soil to be used against any country, and Afghanistan wants to be a friend of Iran - a neighbour who shares the same language and religion."²⁴²

The relationship between Tehran and Kabul is complicated, however. Over the years, Afghanistan's political turmoil has resulted in some challenges for Iran, mainly the sudden influx of Afghan refugees who fled to Iran as a result of the Taliban's gender, ethnic, religious, and political oppression. In addition, the rise of the Taliban in 1994 threatened Iranian security interest in Afghanistan.

The Taliban undermined traditional Iranian influence in Afghan border regions...the Taliban also posed a constant threat to Afghanistan's minority Shi'ite Hazara concentrated in central Bamiyan province, supported by Iran throughout the long Soviet occupation.²⁴³

Iran was a target of the Taliban's terrorism acts. The most notable act of terrorism against Iran occurred in August 1998, when the Taliban took over the city of Mazar Sharif, capturing and executing dozens of Iranian diplomats.²⁴⁴

²⁴¹"Afghan President Congratulates Ahmadinejad on Victory", Fars News Agency, June 20, 2009; "International Protests Over Iran Election Crackdown", Agence France-Press, June 15, 2009 (See Farrar-Wellman, "Afghanistan-Iran Foreign Relations.")

²⁴²Salahuddin, Sayed, "Karzai Opposes US Use of Afghan Soil Against Iran," Reuters UK, July 14, 2008 (See Ibid.)

²⁴³Parker, *Persian Dreams: Moscow and Tehran Since the Fall of the Shah*, 170.

²⁴⁴Ibid., 170.

During the Taliban's dominance, Iran's policy toward Afghanistan was based on four principles. Firstly, it refused to recognize the Taliban government and sought to return Rabbani to power. Secondly, it supported the Northern Alliance as a counterforce against the Taliban. Thirdly, it sought to avoid any direct military engagement with the Taliban. Finally, it aimed to intensify its activities in the United Nations' *Six Plus Two* negotiations concerning the future of Afghanistan (Iran, Pakistan, China, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Russia and the U.S.).²⁴⁵

7.3 The Paradox of the American Presence in Afghanistan

Despite troubled relations between Iran and the USA, Iran has benefited from the war in Afghanistan.²⁴⁶ Throughout Afghanistan's civil war, Iran was one of main supporters of the Shi'ite groups, "perceiving the Taliban as an existential threat."²⁴⁷ Iran refused to recognize the Taliban, and instead assisted the Northern Alliance.²⁴⁸ American and NATO efforts to keep Taliban from gaining power in Afghanistan have been in line with Tehran's interests.

The overthrow of the Taliban in 2001 was an unintended strategic gift from Washington to Iran, as it removed Iran's nemesis from power and substantially empowered the Northern Alliance, a non-Pashtun alliance Iran had fully supported during the Taliban's rule.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁵ Milani, "Iran's Policy Towards Afghanistan," 243.

²⁴⁶ Cristiani, "Iran's Growing Interests and Influence in Central Asia."

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Milani, "Iran's Policy Towards Afghanistan," 244.

²⁴⁹ Milani, "Why Karzai Needs Iran."

To show good will at the UN brokered, U.S.-sponsored Bonn Conference in 2001, Iran shifted its support from its own candidate, Rabbani, and instead backed the American candidate, Hamid Karzai.²⁵⁰

The war and instabilities in Afghanistan pose a dilemma to policy-makers in Iran. In the long term Iran desires a very stable Afghanistan, as the two countries “are linked by a strategic geography, and problems due to instability in one country can easily affect its neighbor.”²⁵¹ The continuous wars and instability in Afghanistan have brought Iran numerous problems, such as flows of refugees, drug trafficking, and crime along the shared borders.²⁵² A strong, stable government in Kabul would potentially minimize such problems.

On the other hand, “Tehran perceives the long-standing presence of American and NATO troops at its borders as a strategic threat,”²⁵³ hence publicly criticizes their presence. Iran can undermine the American interests in Afghanistan, in order to provide “leverage over Washington on other issues, such as the confrontation over its nuclear program.”²⁵⁴ Therefore, in the short term, Iran can benefit from meddling and destabilizing Afghanistan. Peter Tomsen, former U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan, stated, “a weak Afghanistan lessens the likelihood of it becoming a U.S. ally against Iran...By maintaining a certain level of instability... [Iran] keeps us tied down. After all, we have air bases in Afghanistan where we could mount attacks on Iran.”²⁵⁵ An unstable Afghanistan, especially with a strengthened Taliban, could be used as a “means to boost

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Cristiani, "Iran's Growing Interests and Influence in Central Asia."

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Burno and Beehner, "Iran and the Future of Afghanistan."

Iran's leverage at a time when it is under pressure to end its uranium-enrichment program.”²⁵⁶

As well, Iran has been increasingly playing the refugee card and threatening to deport at least one million Afghani refugees living in Iran, in order to pressure Afghanistan’s government and the coalition forces and as a means of pressuring the United States indirectly.

The flow of refugees across the border could have a highly destabilizing effect on Afghanistan...A surge in repatriated refugees will probably increase unemployment in Afghanistan, which will result in weakening the central government by strengthening drug lords and anti-government elements who may be able to tap into this new pool of potential recruits.²⁵⁷

Iran is aware of the opportunities and constraints that the new regional order presents as the result of the presence of foreign forces in Afghanistan.

Tehran feels exposed to developments in Afghanistan and worries that American presence there could undermine Iran’s deep-rooted influence in that largely Persian-speaking country. Weakness in Afghanistan has a direct bearing on Iran’s relations with Central Asia as well, in particular with its poorest and only Persian-speaking country, Tajikistan. American military encirclement, from Tehran’s perspective, is being underpinned with subtle barriers being erected between Iran and its traditional sphere of cultural influence in West Asia. It should not be surprising then to see a siege-mentality taking root.²⁵⁸

Publicly, Iran criticizes the foreign presence in Afghanistan. Following the 2010 Persian-Speaking Countries Summit in Tehran, in the meeting with the three presidents, Ayatollah Khamenei, Iran’s Supreme Leader, said, "Foreigners who came to Afghanistan under the slogan of providing security and democracy now target civilians, while their

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Rahmani, "Iran's Decision to Expel Refugees May Destabilize Western Afghanistan."

²⁵⁸ Ehteshami, "Iran's International Posture After the Fall of Baghdad," 187.

presence has not had any result except evilness and corruption,"²⁵⁹ rejecting the West's claim that it is fighting terrorism. "These powers are only after their own interests in the region."²⁶⁰ During the same summit, Ahmadnejad also stated that Afghanistan's issue should be resolved in the region. Others are not able to solve our regional problems, just as they cannot fix Iraq's problems. He added, "many do not welcome the independence of our three countries and they do not want a friendship between three powerful countries to be formed in the region because it will jeopardize their equilibrium."²⁶¹

²⁵⁹ Karimi, "Iran Wants Cooperation with Afghans, Tajikistan."

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

8: CURRENT SUCCESS OF THE PERSIAN-SPEAKING ASSOCIATION

8.1 The First International Conference of Persian Speakers

The first international conference on Tajik and Persian speakers abroad, as well as the symposium on *Iran's part in world art and culture* was held in Dushanbe on September 9-15, 1992. The starting date of the conference was very symbolic, as it coincided with the first anniversary of Tajikistan's independence. At this historic celebration, the Ferdusi statue was inaugurated. This statue is built on one of the main squares of Dushanbe, and replaced the Lenin statue from the communism era.²⁶² Ferdusi himself symbolizes the Persian language. Many argue that he is the greatest Persian poet who single-handedly kept the Persian language alive after the Arabs conquered the Persian Empire. The Ferdusi statue also symbolizes Tajikistan's attempt to renew their language and cultural heritage. The USSR had allowed Tajiks to preserve their costume, clothing, food, and dances, but had replaced their language - at least the written part of it - with Cyrillic fonts. As a result, Tajiks lost their connection to other Persian language speakers.²⁶³

8.2 The Three Countries' Cooperation

Considering the unique historical and cultural similarities of Iran, Tajikistan and Afghanistan, Iran suggested a three-fold Association among the three nations after

²⁶² Naser Irani, "Iran va Tajiksitan Mostaghel", 2

²⁶³ Ibid. 3.

Tajikistan's independence. Cooperation was limited, however, due to the unstable political situations in both Afghanistan and Tajikistan. Recently, after relative political stability in the two states, Iran put forth the agenda again.

On January 16, 2006, Iran invited the Presidents of Tajikistan and Afghanistan to attend a meeting in Iran on mutual cooperation, the establishment of a common market, and decreasing tariff rates. At the conference the leaders recognized the importance of connecting transportation among the Persian-speaking countries in order to further strengthen historical and cultural ties. Many argue that this conference was not a success, however, as Hamed Karzai, Afghanistan President unexpectedly declined the invitation only days before the conference. Karzai's office stated he was unable to attend the conference due to bad weather and technical problems. However, some experts argue that due to cold Iran-American relations, Afghanistan has taken a cautious approach in its relations with Iran. Based on this view, Karzai failed to attend the conference due to immense pressure from the United States and their concerns about Iran's nuclear policies. It is argued that Karzai's presence in Iran and strengthening ties with this Islamic Republic, could have posed a negative effect on Afghanistan in the upcoming London conference.²⁶⁴

After Tehran's failed conference in January 2006, the three Presidents met in July 2006 in Dushanbe, where they discussed issues such as terrorism, drug trafficking, new opportunities for increased cooperation in energy and transportation, and increased cultural exchanges, as well as rebuilding Afghanistan.²⁶⁵ A cultural cooperation commission was created, and the three presidents emphasized the need to facilitate closer

²⁶⁴ Ibid.20.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.21.

tripartite ties in the era of economic and security.²⁶⁶ According to President Ahmadinejad, the commission would meet twice per year, with the inaugural gathering planned for the following fall in Kabul. In addition, Ahmadinejad also advocated the creation of a joint television network that would "broadcast the Persian language and culture to the world," and the expansion of educational exchanges.²⁶⁷ Security was one of the central discussion themes of the Summit. Ahmadinejad also announced "We think Tajikistan's security is our own."²⁶⁸ Rahmon also indicated the leaders should "pay special attention to regional security and military-technical cooperation." In a joint press conference after the two-day meeting and in line with Iran's policy, Tajik President, Rahmon called for an end to the ongoing violence in Lebanon. Afghan President, Hamid Karzai, "played a relatively low-key role in the proceedings, and focused his comments on the fight against drugs, cross-border trade, and energy cooperation."²⁶⁹ Two years later, on March 25, 2008 in Dushanbe, the Foreign Ministers of Iran Tajikistan, and Afghanistan met and signed an agreement to establish the Economic Council of the Persian-Speaking Union.²⁷⁰

In terms of transportation, in February 2009 Iran and Tajikistan agreed on the construction of a railway that will connect the two countries via Afghanistan.²⁷¹ In March 2009, Iran, Tajikistan and Afghanistan held their third meeting of Persian-speaking countries, in which they signed a 24-point joint declaration, focusing on development,

²⁶⁶ Eurasianet, "Afghanistan, Iran and Tajikistan Probe Closer Economic Ties."

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Luzianin, "Pakistani, Afghan, and Iranian Factors of Influence on the Central Asian Region."

²⁷¹ "Iran Plans Rail Line With Tajikistan Thru Afghanistan", Kabul Pajhwok Afghan News, February 19, 2009) (See Farrar-Wellman and Frasco, "Tajikistan-Iran Foreign Relations.")

energy, and cultural ties.²⁷² In June 2009, Iran and Tajikistan announced they are working on creating a joint Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Literature, to expand these ties. The three countries also discussed the establishment of a joint bank, which they claim, “will lessen the effects of global economic instability in the region.”²⁷³ Iran and Tajikistan stressed their commitment to cooperate to restore peace and security in Afghanistan. With regards to the drug trafficking from Afghanistan to Iran and Tajikistan, Ahmadinejad stated that if the three countries of Iran, Tajikistan and Afghanistan cooperate fully, even though we might not be able to stop drug production, we could stop it from entering our countries.²⁷⁴

Many argue that Iran’s attempt to organize a Persian-Speaking Association with Tajikistan and Afghanistan is “a diplomatic effort to alleviate international pressure over Tehran’s nuclear program.”²⁷⁵ The Persian-Speaking Countries Summit provided diplomatic support for Iran right after it was faced with the UN Security Council threat of harsh sanctions unless it suspended its efforts to enrich uranium.²⁷⁶ Iran-Tajikistan’s energy deals may potentially contradict America’s sanctions against Iran. Tajikistan has been attempting to downplay such concerns. According to Talbak Nazarov, Tajikistan’s Foreign Affairs Minister, Iran-Tajikistan relations do not have any effects on Tajikistan-U.S. relations.²⁷⁷ Regional expert, Roman Muzalevsky, argues that, “the relative political and economic isolation of all three countries has been the driving force behind this

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³“Iran, Afghanistan, Tajikistan to Set Up Bank to Counter Economic Crisis”, Fars News Agency, March 21, 2009 (See Ibid.)

²⁷⁴ "Taghir Moadelat Jahani Ba Etehad Se Keshvar Iran, Afghanistan Va Tajikistan."
<http://www.inn.ir/newsdetail.aspx?id=49154>

²⁷⁵ "Afghanistan, Iran and Tajikistan Probe Closer Economic Ties."

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Mahmoudi, "Asia Markazi Va Roshd Hamkarihaye Chand Janebe Iran Va Tajikistan," 33.

expanding collaboration.”²⁷⁸ As the only Persian-Speaking former Soviet state in Central Asia, Tajikistan is more open to creating a Persian-Speaking Association than Afghanistan.

Many experts argue that Tajikistan’s welcoming of the Association is in direct response to the Turkish-Speaking Association in Central Asia of which the former USSR states of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan are members. Hence, a Persian-Speaking Association in Central Asia would be a balancing force for Tajikistan.²⁷⁹ In addition, Tehran’s efforts to invest in regional transport and hydro-energy projects via the Association have been welcomed by Dushanbe and Kabul, as both countries will benefit from such projects.

The projects discussed at the Persian summit, therefore, offer a development opportunity for Afghanistan, which is in need of energy imports and links with the outside world. Tajikistan, for instance, has an annual capacity to produce 527 billion kilowatts of electricity, yet it currently generates only 6 percent. Moreover, Afghan-Tajik economic and trade relations have increased almost twenty times over the last six years. During the summit, all parties also reaffirmed plans to build a joint railway network, ensure access to South Asia and regional seaports, as well as enhance regional security.²⁸⁰

In addition, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have major disagreements on hydroelectric power development. Tajikistan seeks to minimize its reliance on Uzbekistan as the main transportation node and instead attempts to pursue southern transportation networks and electricity exports to end its energy and transport isolation. “Yet, Tashkent’s opposition to the country’s hydro projects, capable of undermining Uzbekistan’s regional leverage, and alleged transportation blockades has hindered Tajikistan’s vision, despite Dushanbe’s

²⁷⁸ Muzalevsky, "The “Persian Alliance” and Geopolitical Reconfiguration in Central Asia."

²⁷⁹ Mahmoudi, "Asia Markazi Va Roshd Hamkarihaye Chand Janebe Iran Va Tajikistan," 33.

²⁸⁰ Muzalevsky, "The “Persian Alliance” and Geopolitical Reconfiguration in Central Asia."

related appeals to regional and international partners and organizations.”²⁸¹ In response to Tajikistan’s effort, the Iranian Government has invested in Anzob tunnel in Tajikistan to end this county’s reliance on Uzbekistan for transportation. Iran also “threatened to block Uzbek rail cargo passing through Iran if Uzbekistan did not lift the six-month-long blockade on freights to Sangtuda-II hydro-station – Iran’s \$180 million investment project in Tajikistan.”²⁸²

8.3 Criticism of the Persian-Speaking Association

Currently, Hamed Karzai, Afghanistan’s President has shown interest only in the lower levels of cooperation, such as agreements on drug trafficking, commercial deals, and energy matters.²⁸³ In an interview with Deutsche Welle, Afghanistan expert Citha Maass from the German Institute for International and Security Affairs revealed his skepticism about the future of the Persian-Speaking Association.

I view it [the Persian-Speaking Association] as unrealistic, because President Karzai knows that in the coming years he will need American and international help in both civilian and military terms. He knows that if he were to enter into a direct alliance with Iran he would immediately be cut off by the Americans. I see, however, another dimension at play. Karzai is already consolidating his power position for the period after the ISAF forces withdraw, not the Americans, but other ISAF contributors. So he's working on a scenario in which his clan can strengthen its power after the majority of the international forces have left. When he engages in discussions with other states, I would also count China and Russia for example; he sends a signal to the Americans that he has greater negotiating leverage. That is what's decisive to me.²⁸⁴

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Mahmoudi, "Asia Markazi Va Roshd Hamkarihaye Chand Janebe Iran Va Tajikistan," 34.

²⁸⁴ Iran Newspaper Online (www.inn.ir) "A Persian Alliance After NATO's Withdrawal From Afghanistan?"

The other criticism regarding the Persian Speaking Association is Iran's "presumption of the right to lead, expressed in both religious and cultural terms."²⁸⁵ This became dynamic when Iran announced its wish to create a shared Persian television channel. This was seen as another attempt by Iran to export its cultural and Islamic values to its neighbors.²⁸⁶ Many fear that a shared television channel would become a point of disagreement and even a source of divergence among the citizens of the three nations, as "their values, interests, tastes and state policies vary."²⁸⁷ For instance, while it is mandatory for Iranian women to wear headscarves in TV shows, audiences in secular Tajikistan might frown upon such practices on their television channels.²⁸⁸ However, one should be cognizant of the fact that increased cooperation among the three nations - even if it leads to Iranian cultural dominance - might benefit Karzai's government to some extent. In Afghanistan, "since Tajiks comprise about one third of the country's predominantly Sunni Muslim population, the Karzai-led government, as in Iran, is not keen on seeing a return of the Wahhabi ideology-inspired Taliban."²⁸⁹ Hence, seeking closer ties with Iran and Tajikistan might prove very beneficial for his government in the long term.

Other skepticism reflects the three states' different political systems. Although Iran, Tajikistan and Afghanistan share the same language, culture and religion, "this commonality within the same civilizational framework did not prevent them from

²⁸⁵ Atkin, "Tajiksitan's Relation with Iran and Afghanistan," 101.

²⁸⁶ Mahmoudi, "Asia Markazi Va Roshd Hamkarihayeh Chand Jenebe Iran Va Tajikistan," 35.

²⁸⁷ Medrea, "Persian-Speaking Union Created by Afghansitan, Iran, Tajiksitan."

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Muzalevsky, "The "Persian Alliance" and Geopolitical Reconfiguration in Central Asia."

experiencing different political destinies, especially during the 19th and 20th centuries.”²⁹⁰ Unlike Iran, who was internationally recognized as a state, Afghanistan was not independent until the beginning of the 20th century, and Tajikistan was a Soviet republic until the collapse of USSR regime. “As a result, there are different levels of political development and various stages of state-building processes in these countries.”²⁹¹ Political observers in Tajikistan argue the Tajik government is undoubtedly interested in expanding trade with Iran; however, they are cautious that Iran may attempt to use the increased relations to advance a political/cultural agenda. “Undoubtedly, the Iranian party pursues its ideological purposes. The Iranians have always pursued the idea of exporting their cultural values,” said Galim Fashutdinov, an independent expert and journalist.²⁹²

Faramarz Tamana, Deputy of Culture in Afghanistan’s embassy in Iran, stated the shared language could bring the Persian-speaking countries together in deepening political and social ties.²⁹³ We live in a world in which economical interests cause convergence among nations. Because we must dialogue with the world, fluency in English is crucial to connecting on a global level. Therefore, familiarizing our citizens with English is one priority. Tamana explains that both Persian and English are required for engagement in globalization and dialogue among civilizations. Persian is a national language and is the foundation of the culture, connecting Iran and Tajikistan through great cultural figures such as Mowlana, Sanayi, Hafiz, and Ferdousi. The English language is also very important, to enter the world front. Tamana added that Iran, Afghanistan and Tajikistan,

²⁹⁰ Friedman and Randeria, *Worlds on the Move: Globalization, Migration, and Cultural Security*, 253

²⁹¹ Ibid

²⁹² Eurasianet, "Afghanistan, Iran and Tajikistan Probe Closer Economic Ties."

²⁹³ Keshvarhaye Pasizaban, "Iran Va Afghanistan Va Tajikistan Varesan Asli Tamadon Iran Kabir Hastand."

who are the real heirs of Persian civilization, do not view each other on the same level. “We have always accepted each other as brothers, but not equals.”²⁹⁴ Iran has always regarded herself as the mother nation and main heir of this civilization, a view that is unacceptable for the other two nations. Some Tajiks also make the same claim, even though they have been under the rule of communism for 70 years and did not benefit from written Persian. Afghanistan never makes such claims about being the real heir among these three nations even though it is the only nation that has saved the verbal and written language completely and has not been influenced by foreign invasions.²⁹⁵

Another source of skepticism sounds the sanctions that are imposed on Iran, which could hinder trade with its neighbors. Although Iran benefits from an ideal geopolitical location that can be easily translated to commercial and transportation links to the rest of the world, its international isolation reduces its attraction for states that are economically weak themselves.²⁹⁶ The issue of sanctions and its effect on trade within RTAs needs more in-depth study and is beyond the scope of this paper.

Another argument looks at Iran’s backwardness in terms of world technology. Tajikistan and Afghanistan recognize the technology Iran offers is actually *second hand* and originated from other advanced states²⁹⁷ and can be obtained directly from those states instead.

Perhaps the biggest criticism to the Association, however, will be from the citizens of each state, as none of these countries are homogeneously Persian-speaking.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Mandelbaum, *Central Asia and the World: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan*, 48.

²⁹⁷ Ibid. 54.

Each country has large minority groups that speak languages other than Persian, and are concerned that overemphasizing the Persian language will overshadow their cultures and languages. This concern might seem less serious in Iran where Persian is the only official language, and even though roughly half the population speaks other languages, government and educational affairs take place in Persian. Even in Afghanistan where Dari and Pashto are both official languages, not everybody speaks Dari and policies with one official language centrality could become very political and a source of controversy.

9: ECONOMIC CALCULATIONS

There are many reasons why countries choose preferential trade agreements, either to benefit “from terms-of-trade gains, or so that the members would select each other to extract a gain from the rest of the world. Countries seem to pick their partners primarily on political grounds, not based on economic motives or calculations.”²⁹⁸ Creating preferential arrangements-even if created on little basis for trade- benefits the participating countries both regionally and globally, as there are benefits to increased trade. In 2005’s United Nations Central Asia Human Development Report, the United Nations argues “for Central Asian countries alone GDP could be 50 percent higher after 10 years of continuous and comprehensive regional cooperation.”²⁹⁹ Inter-regional trade is relatively small in this region. However, once the major regional economic powers such as China and Iran are added, intra-regional trade will also grow to the point that it could reach more than half of total trading volume.³⁰⁰

Using the Gravity Model, this chapter tries to evaluate whether or not there is potential for increased trade among the three states if the economic dimension of the Association becomes functional. It also attempts to evaluate which type of RTA meets the needs of the Association members better. Table 1 below offers a comparative summary among the three Persian-speaking countries in terms of their population, economic size, political system, and Human Development Index.

²⁹⁸ Ibid. 251.

²⁹⁹ Aziz, "The New Silk Road Studies: Afghanistan," 72.

³⁰⁰ Ibid. 72.

Table 1: Country Comparison, 2009 data

	Islamic Republic of Iran	Republic of Tajikistan	Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
Population (mil)*	72.9	6.9	29.8
Persian Speaking population **	42	5.5	14.9
GDP per capita (Current US\$) *	4,540	716	366***
GDP (bil US\$) *	331	4.9	10.6
Export (bil US\$) **	70.3	1.1	0.5
Import **	57.1	2.8	5.3
Income level *	Upper Middle Class	Low Income	Low income
Landlocked	No	Yes	Yes
Instable state of affairs	International sanctions	Post civil war	War torn
Civil War in Recent History	No	Yes	Yes
Government **	Theocratic republic	Republic	Islamic republic
Official Language	Persian (Farsi)	Tajik (Russian widely used in government and business)	Dari and Pashto
Human Development Index 301 (2010 Ranking)	70	112	155

* World Bank 2009 data

** CIA fact book 2009

***2008 data

As discussed earlier, the Association has been created in the hopes of bringing economic prosperity for the Persian-speaking states, as well as fulfilling Iran's political objectives. Currently, the three Persian-speaking countries have a very low volume of

³⁰¹ "Human Development Index (HDI) - 2010 Rankings." <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/>

trade. A quick observation of the above table confirms there is potential for all parties to benefit from the Association and the ease of trade restrictions that would follow. The landlocked geography of Tajikistan and Afghanistan has made these two states increasingly dependent on neighboring countries such as Iran, which has access to the rest of the world via its seaports.

The volume of trade depends primarily on two factors: the size of the economy and transportation costs. The larger the country, in terms of size of the economy, GDP, and population, the greater the volume and variety of products it is capable of supplying. A country's demand for goods and services also increases as it spends its income.³⁰² With a population of 72.9 million, Iran's economy is much bigger than Afghanistan and Tajikistan, who have populations of 6.9 million and 29.8 million respectively. Tajikistan and Afghanistan's combined market of 36.7 million people is approximately half the size of Iran's market. Utilizing this market is crucial for Iran. Afghanistan and Tajikistan's close proximity and similar culture, tradition, language, and religion correspond to comparable consumer choices and tastes. Thus, Iran's products have a natural market in these states.

Transportation cost is also an important factor that affects the volume of trade. "Transportation costs depend on the mode used. They increase with distance, although less than proportionally."³⁰³ This is another benefit of creating the Association from Iran's viewpoint. Iran borders Afghanistan and Afghanistan borders Tajikistan, as a result the distance between the nations is minimal. In addition, Iran has invested greatly in transportation initiatives in order to ease the movement of goods from Iran to

³⁰² Caves, Frankel and Jones, *World Trade and Payments: An Introduction*, 246.

³⁰³ Ibid. 246.

Afghanistan / Tajikistan and to facilitate more trade. As previously discussed, Iran has played a key role in the construction of Tajikistan's Anzob tunnel, and in building the railway and highway connecting the three countries together.

9.1 The Gravity Model

Inspired by Newton's gravity equation in physics, the Gravity Model for trade is commonly used for studying the bilateral trade between states as well as the effects of regionalism and RTAs on trade flows.³⁰⁴ Two main forces affect the volume of bilateral trade: the level of the economic activity (GDP) and the physical distance between the two states. Economic activity has an effect at both the extensive and intensive margin of choice. The extensive margin means that large countries, in terms of the size of their economy, tend to trade more with each other. More quantity and various products are produced in a large economy. Consequently, there are more types of products from which to benefit from trade. Economic activity at the intensive margin refers to the level of per capita incomes. With a higher per capita level of income, a country can purchase more from another, simply as a function of its wealth and the presumably positive income elasticity of demand.

The physical distance between countries, especially among geographically remote states, leads to lower trade volume in comparison to countries that trade with their immediate neighbors. Remote in this context also refers to the implied costs of transportation and the likelihood that the products are familiar to the other party. As Iran,

³⁰⁴ Toosi et al., "Regionalism and Its Effects on Iranian Agricultural Exports: The Case of Economic Cooperation Organization," 1381.

Tajikistan and Afghanistan are geographically close, a higher volume of trade among the three is expected.

Other important factors affecting trade flow are common language, trade policies, political uncertainty, isolation, geographical characteristics such as being landlocked, overlap in consumer preference schemes, common currency, common colonial history, and membership in common regional trade organizations.³⁰⁵ Iran, Afghanistan and Tajikistan share a similar culture and language, in addition to sharing common borders (Iran with Afghanistan, and Afghanistan with Tajikistan). The three states are also members of Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). Despite these facts, the volume of trade among them is not substantial.

In this section, a gravity equation will be used to determine the expected trade flow among the three Persian-speaking countries. Then, the result of the estimate will be compared to the actual trade data to see if creating the Association would indeed lead to increased trade. Iran's export data to Afghanistan and Tajikistan in 2005 is used as a sample. The study is easily expandable to all possible trade combinations among the three states.

³⁰⁵ Helmers and Pasteels, "Tradesim (Third Version), a Gravity Model for the Calculation of Trade Potentials for Developing Countries and Economies in Transition," 1-3.

The gravity equation for trade between any two Persian-speaking countries is the following:³⁰⁶

$$\ln(T_{ij}) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \ln(GDP_i) + \beta_2 \ln(GDP_j) + \beta_3 \ln(PCI_i) + \beta_4 \ln(PCI_j) + \beta_5 \ln(DIST_{ij}) + \beta_6 (ADJ_{ij}) + \beta_7 (LANG_{ij}) + \beta_8 (ECO) + \epsilon_{ij}$$

where T_{ij} is the trade between country i and country j , GDP_i is the gross domestic product of country i , GDP_j is the gross domestic product of country j , PCI_i is the per capita income of country i , PCI_j is the per capita income of country j , $DIST_{ij}$ is the distance between country i and country j , and ADJ is the dummy variable for common borders. ADJ takes a value of 1 if two countries have a common border and 0 otherwise. $LANG_{ij}$ is the dummy variable for a common language, which takes a value of 1 if two countries have a common language and zero otherwise. ECO is the dummy variable for countries belonging to the ECO bloc. It is 1 when both countries i and j are part of the agreement and 0 otherwise.

“Trade is expected to increase with the size of the domestic economy (GDP), level of development (PCI), and common border (ADJ) and language (Lang) and declines with distance (DIST), β_1 , β_2 , β_3 , β_4 and β_6 should be positive, and β_5 negative.”³⁰⁷ Jahangir Khan Achakzai estimated the above gravity equation using 2005 data, in which the export values for 137 countries were taken from the UN COMTRADE database. The World Bank’s 2005 World Development Indicators were used for GDP and PCI. The data, the distance between capital cities and countries sharing borders, and

³⁰⁶ Achakzai, "Unilateral Liberalization Versus Regional Integration: The Case of ECO Member Countries," 30-31.

³⁰⁷ Ibid. 31.

common languages were obtained from the French Centre for Exploratory Studies and International Information (Le CEPPII, Centre d'Etudes Prospectives et d'Informations Internationales).³⁰⁸

Table 2: Gravity Model Estimation.³⁰⁹

Explanatory Variable	Coefficient	t-Statistics
GDP _i	1.095	102.13
GDP _j	0.775	89.892
PCI _i	0.076	5.67
PCI _j	0.076	6.225
DIST _{ij}	-1.268	-56.505
Adjacency	1.065	9.183
Language	0.0915	4.34
ECO	1.132	-82.808
Constant	-27.934	
R ²	0.627	-
Adjusted R ²	0.627	
Std Error	2.1542	
Heteroskedasticity	520.928	
DW	1.754	-
No. of Observations	16,265	-

Hence, Achakzai's gravity model as follows,

$$\ln(X_{ij}) = -27.93 + 1.1\ln(\text{GDP}_i) + 0.86\ln(\text{GDP}_j) + 0.08 \ln(\text{PCI}_i) + 0.08 \ln(\text{PCI}_j) - 1.27\ln(\text{DIST}_{ij}) + 1.06(\text{ADJ}_{ij}) + 0.92(\text{LANG}_{ij}) + 1.13(\text{ECO})$$

³⁰⁸ Ibid. 32.

³⁰⁹ Ibid. 33.

Table 3: GDP and PCI in 2005³¹⁰

Country	GDP	PCI (GNI/pop)
Iran	192,015,000,000	2,570
Tajikistan	2,310,562,721	330
Afghanistan	6,814,753,581	260

Capital-to-capital distance is:

- Tehran-Kabul = 1610.3 kilometers
- Tehran- Dushanbe = 1562.8 kilometers
- Dushanbe-Kabul = 464.98 kilometers

Calculations of Iran's potential export to Afghanistan and Tajikistan are shown in table below. The year 2005 is also chosen for comparing Iran's actual export to predicted export to Afghanistan and Tajikistan. The third column reveals the ration of actual to predicted export.

Table 4: Iran's predicted export to Afghanistan and Tajikistan (000, \$US)

	Actual Export ³¹¹	Predicted Export	Ratio
Tajikistan	100,324.94	392,385.47	0.25
Afghanistan	482,342.54	3,037,878.64	0.15

As seen in Table 4, the results clearly indicate that the actual export from Iran to Tajikistan and Afghanistan is below the predicted levels of the gravity model. There is potential for Iran to increase its export to Tajikistan by 75 percent, and by 85 percent to

³¹⁰ World Bank

³¹¹ UNCOMTRADE 2005

Afghanistan to reach the world average. This is not to say that these nations necessarily will reach the world average, since roughly half of all countries do less than the average amount of trade.³¹² However, it is an indication that there is potential for additional trade if relations among the three countries can approach an interaction that is similar to most other trading countries, and is particularly the case if there are identifiable impediments to trade.

One important obstacle to trade among the Persian-speaking states is the existing “procedures at border and custom posts. Burdensome documentation, rigid procedures, and a lack of harmonized laws prevent commercial traffic from reaching its potential.”³¹³ As shown in Table 5 below, Persian-speaking countries require far more documents for cross-border trade than OECD countries. There is also a higher average delay on imports and exports.

Table 5: Cross-Border Trading Costs in 2008 in Persian-Speaking States and OECD³¹⁴

Country	Documents to export (number)	Time to export (days)	Documents to import (number)	Time to import (days)
Afghanistan	12	67	11	71
Iran	7	26	8	39
Tajikistan	10	82	10	83
OECD	5.3	12.6	6.9	14

³¹² World Bank, "Exploring the Linkage Between the Domestic Policy Environment and International Trade," 7-24.

³¹³ Aziz, "The New Silkroad Studies: Afghanistan," 53.

³¹⁴ "Historical Data Sets and Trends Data." <http://www.doingbusiness.org/custom-query#hReprtpreview>, based on Aziz, "The New Silk Road Studies: Afghanistan."

Modifying such rigid cross border procedures among Iran, Tajikistan and Afghanistan should result in increased trade, albeit such change does not occur overnight.³¹⁵

9.2 Preferential Trade Agreements

There are different preferential agreements among countries that try to eliminate the tariff and non-tariff barriers on trade among specific nations. The most common types of such agreements are as follows:³¹⁶

- *Free Trade Area.* Members eliminate tariff rates for partners but keep the original tariff rates for the rest of the world (such as NAFTA).
- *Customs Union.* Members eliminate all tariffs among themselves but create new tariff rates for the rest of the world.
- *Common Market.* Member states move beyond Custom Union, eliminating the restrictions on movements of factors of production among themselves (such as the European Union).
- *Economic Union.* Members go beyond the Common Market, unifying their monetary, fiscal and socioeconomic policies (Luxemburg and Belgium formed an Economic Union in 1921).

Currently, the dynamics among the three Persian-speaking countries limits their type of trading arrangements. It is unlikely that Iran would engage in creating a Common Market or Economic Union where capital and labour can move freely. Due to the size of Iran's market and economy compared to post-civil war Tajikistan and Afghanistan, it is predictable that there would be a flow of low-skilled workers from

³¹⁵ Ibid. 53-54.

³¹⁶ Caves, Frankel and Jones, *World Trade and Payments : An Introduction*, 247.

these two countries to Iran to work if labour could move freely. Currently, Iran attempts to deport millions of Afghani refugees that reside in Iran. Therefore, it is very unlikely that Iran would engage in arrangements that allow free movement of labour from Afghanistan, worsening the already problematic issues of terrorism, drug trafficking, and refugees. In addition, there is a high unemployment rate in Iran, which discourages policy-makers from drawing foreign workers to the economy.

Aside from the labour movement issue, unifying monetary, fiscal, and socioeconomic policies is also not an option right now, as each of these countries has a unique sociopolitical and economic situation that requires a different treatment - as outlined in Chapter Two and also identified in Table 2 at the beginning of this chapter. Iran has one of strongest economies in the region, which is heavily dependent on oil revenue and mostly controlled by the state. However, Iran also faces international sanctions, and suffers from economic mismanagement, high inflation and unemployment. Iran's focus has been on developing its manufacturing sector, privatization and trade liberalization, as well as attraction of foreign direct investment.³¹⁷ Afghanistan, in contrast, is very poor. Much of its population lacks access to clean water, medical care and electricity, and the economy is recovering from decades of conflict and is dependent on foreign aid. Afghanistan's focus has been on job creation, improving infrastructure, eradicating high levels of corruption, and eliminating the production and trade of illegal narcotics.³¹⁸ Tajikistan has one of the lowest per capita GDPs in Central Asia. Due to lack of employment, a substantial percentage of the labour force works abroad - mainly in Russia. Less than seven percent of Tajikistan's land is arable. Tajikistan's civil war has

³¹⁷ Ilias, "Iran's Economy," 3-32.

³¹⁸ World Factbook

damaged the already weak agricultural and industrial sectors, and more than half of Tajik citizens live in poverty. As well, Tajikistan's considerable external debt poses a great burden on the state.³¹⁹ The divergence in the state of economy of these three states requires different policies that challenges the creation of a Common Market and Economic Union, and instead makes a Free Trade Area or a Custom Union more attractive in the near future, as the latter options do not require free movement of labour and capital or merging of socioeconomic policies.

Preferential Trade Agreements could result in trade creation as well as trade diversion, which can potentially affect the welfare of different sectors of the economy. The governments' willingness to participate in regional agreements can be influenced depending on the size of such outcomes. Please refer to appendix 2 for a more comprehensive discussion of trade creation and trade diversion as a result of RTAs.

³¹⁹ World Factbook

10: CONCLUSION

As important pieces of the historical *Greater Iran*, the majority of people of Tajikistan and Afghanistan recognize their cultural ties with the Persian language, literature, art, and culture. Iran has relied on this historical tie in its attempt to ally itself with these two states on its path toward becoming a regional superpower. However, the question about “how far and how deep these ties” are with modern Iran, and in particular, with post-revolutionary Iran remain to unfold.³²⁰ The apparent isolation of all three Persian-speaking countries has encouraged them to expand their trilateral relations.³²¹ Although it is too early to make any comprehensive assessment on the success of the Association, economically, it seems to benefit all its members. As investigated in this paper, such a partnership would potentially result in a substantial increase in trade among Iran, Tajikistan and Afghanistan. However, such claims cannot be made with certainty about whether the Association can potentially create a substantially stronger political or military alliance in the near future. Economic gains from trade can provide incentives for states to eventually become stronger regional allies; however, cold or damaged relations could hinder success. For Iran to overcome its political and economic isolation and step up towards becoming a regional superpower, understanding the sociopolitical dynamics of its two Persian-speaking allies is very important. Assuming that the three states are homogenously Persian - while ignoring other diverse ethnicities – would be a huge mistake that could bring an early end to the Association.

³²⁰ Beeman, "The Struggle for Identity in Post-Soviet Tajikistan."

³²¹ Muzalevsky, "The 'Persian Alliance' and Geopolitical Reconfiguration in Central Asia."

On the other hand, upon the growing cooperation and the successful completion of the transportation blueprint among the three states, the Association can have “the potential to facilitate significant geopolitical reconfiguration”³²² as it connects the landlocked Central Asian nations of Afghanistan and Tajikistan to the Middle East and the rest of the world via Iran.

10.1 Looking Ahead/ Further Research

This paper is a brief study of why Iran is attempting to create a Persian-speaking Association. As the Association is still in the early stages of making, it is too soon to assess the direction it will take. Committing to a RTA in the near future and lifting the trade barriers would signal a more intense interest among the three states to continue a more in-depth regional cooperation. However, if praise of the Persian culture and language continues to dominate the governmental meetings and summits, the Association will be reduced to a mere cultural union instead of a comprehensive economic and political agreement.

One possibility for further research would be to examine the details of trade creation or diversion as a result of the Association, and identify the industries that would benefit from or be harmed by tariff reductions. Such studies are important, as they could predict government reaction to such changes in one sector’s welfare that could potentially affect their willingness to participate in regional agreements.

One major limitation faced during this research was regarding the lack of officially released trilateral trade data among the three states in general, and on

³²² Ibid.

Afghanistan in particular. It is presumed the latter problem will diminish as Afghanistan hopefully moves towards relative stability in the coming years. On that note, any meaningful trilateral cooperation is locked to the future of Afghanistan and its foreign policy outlook.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Figure 2: Map of Ethnicity Mixing in the Region



Source³²³ : Le Monde Diplomatique

³²³ Rekaewicz and Marin, "A Tangle of Nations and Conflicts."

Appendix 2

Trade Creation and Trade Diversion

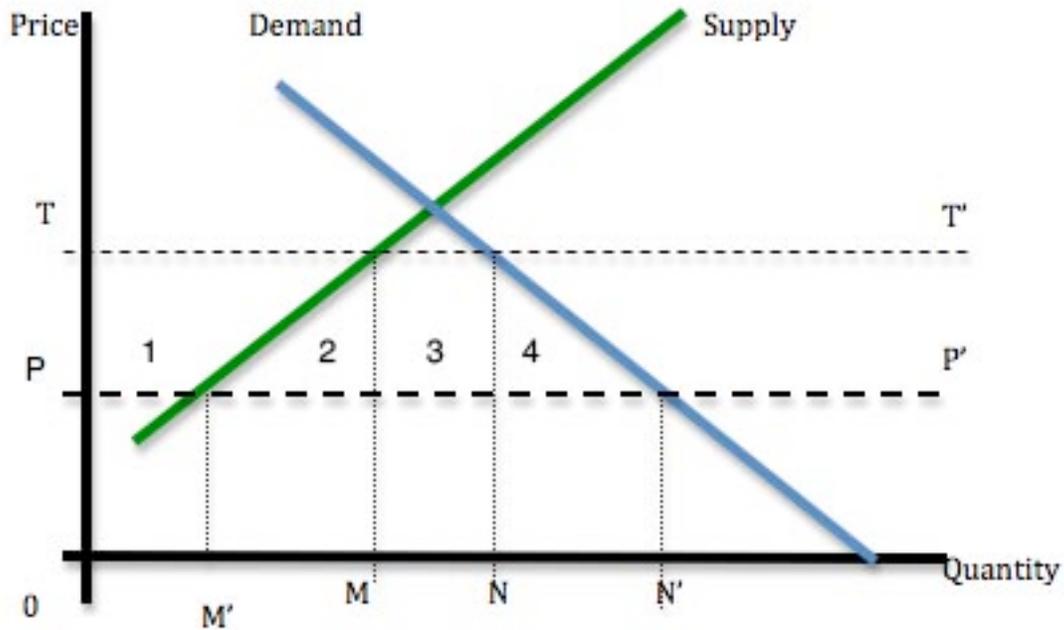
Preferential trade arrangements are very complex, and could result in “improving or worsening allocations, leading to either *trade creation* or *trade diversion*.”³²⁴ Suppose that country (A) and (B) form a custom union together, leaving (C) (the rest of the world) outside. Before joining the union, country (A) insufficiently produced some parts of its local consumption of good (x), while maintaining the tariff to country (b) and (C). Country B is the sole exporter of good (x) (and is the most efficient producer of good (x)). As country (A) and (B) form a trading union, country (A) eliminates tariffs against country (B), the imports of good (x) from country (B) to country (A) increases, as country (A)’s insufficient industry for good (x) is competed down. In this case, trade has been created.

It is important to note that government policies play an important role here. Government (A) might decide it wants to *protect* the local producers of good (x) at home. Hence, it does not participate in the tariff reduction against country (B).³²⁵ The following diagram illustrates the effect of tariffs.

³²⁴ Caves, Frankel and Jones, *World Trade and Payments : An Introduction*, 247.

³²⁵ *Ibid.* 247.

Figure 3: Trade Creation



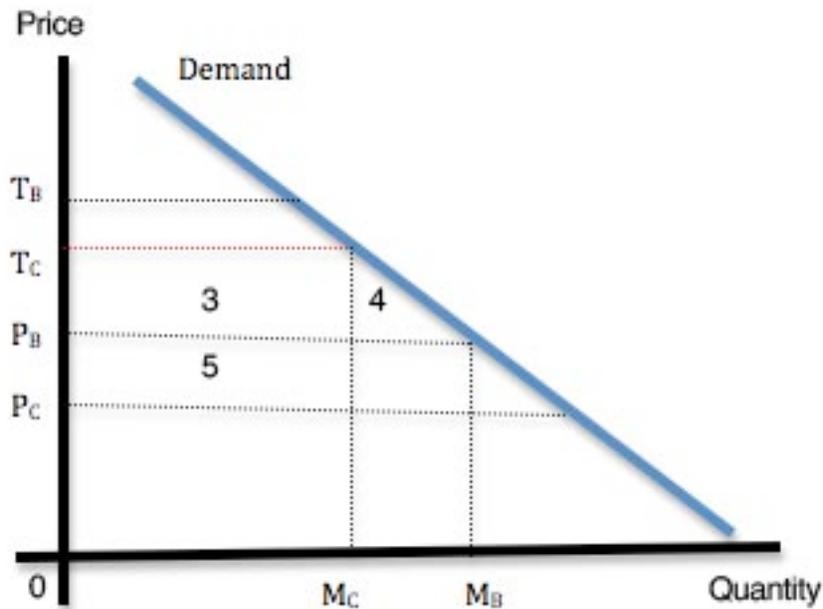
In the diagram above, country (A)'s demand and supply curve for good (x) are shown. Assuming that under conditions of perfectly elastic supply, country (B) produces good (x) at price (P) (meaning an unlimited quantity of good (x) can be produced at the price of (P)). Country (A) has put tariffs at the rate PT/p in effect. Hence, country (A) supplied quantity $0M$ of its $0N$ consumption, resulting in the import of MN . After country (A) and country (B) join a Custom Union, this causes consumption of good (x) in country (A) to increase to $0N'$, and reduces country (A)'s production of good (x) to $0M'$.

Area 1, 2, 3 and 4 measure country (A)'s welfare gains. Consumers of good (x) in country (A) enjoy a surplus gain equal to area $1+2+3+4$. However, this is not the net gain for the country. Area 1 is the producer loss. This area was formerly a profit to country

(A)'s protected producers of good (x) that is now lost due to tariff removal. Area 3 formerly represented Government (A)'s tariff revenue that is now lost as the preferences is given to country (B). Therefore, the net benefit to country (A) is 2+4.

Custom Union can also result in trade diversion for other goods, such as good (y) (See Figure 3).

Figure 4: Trade Diversion



If country (A)'s consumption of good (y) was produced by (C) (the rest of the world), assuming (C) is the most efficient producer of good (y) (country (B) also produces good (y)), then trade diversion may occur. Since country (B) also produces good (y), the Custom Union and the tariff reduction between countries (A) and (B) could

make it cheaper for country (A) to buy good (y) from country (B) rather than from (C) (since C pays tariff but country (B) does not). In the diagram, the blue line is the demand for good (y) in country (A). P_C is the price that good (y) is produced by (C), but due to tariff rates imposed by country (A), good (y) is imported at price T_C (P_C plus the tariff rate of $T_C - P_C$). Good (y) is also produced by country (B) at the price of P_B that is higher than P_C . Applying the same tariff rates make the imported price of good (y) from country (B) - T_B - higher than T_C . Hence, country (A) imports good (y) from C. If country (A) engages in a Custom Union with country (B) and eliminates the tariff on good (y) imported from B, the final imported price for good (y) stays at P_B ; yet, the price of good (y) from (C) remains at T_C since the tariff removal does not include (C). As P_B is lower than T_C , the quantity demand increased from M_C to M_B .

Lowering tariff allows country (A)'s consumers of good (y) to gain area 3+4. Welfare gain occurs if area 4 is larger than 5.

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