

The Escalation of the Iran-Tajik Conflict

The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Tajikistan accused Iran of financing terrorists during the civil war in the country. “The murders of the well-known politicians, scientists and journalists in Tajikistan were committed with the financial support of Tehran and on the instructions of ex-Deputy Minister of Defense of Tajikistan Abdulhalim Nazarzoda”, - the documentary was shown on Tajik television on the evening of August 8.

“The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Tajikistan announced about making of this film on the basis of confessions obtained during the interrogation of three arrested supporters of General Abdulhalim Nazarzoda”, - Radio Ozodi reports.

To clarify the reasons for the information attack by the authorities of Tajikistan to Iran, which has always considered Rahmon’s closest ally and which had close relations in many areas, it is necessary to pay attention to the following:

1) Close relations between the two countries formed immediately after the collapse of the USSR when Iran, as a foreign state, was the first to recognize Tajikistan’s independence and opened its embassy in that country. Further, the cooperation between the two countries developed rapidly and during the civil war, the Iranian authorities declared the need to restore peace and harmony in Tajikistan. In the autumn of 1994 in Tehran, the opposing sides - the government of Tajikistan and the United Tajik Opposition (UTO) - signed a ceasefire agreement which was several times subsequently extended.

2) After achieving peace between the opposition and the current authorities in 1997 with the support of Tehran, an influx of Iranian investments began; the economic cooperation between the two countries was rapidly growing from year to year. The volume of Iranian investment was the largest for a long time. The chairman of the State Property Committee of Tajikistan, Davlatali Saidov, said in 2011: **“The biggest investor in the Tajik economy today, like last year, remains Iran, whose share of investments in the economy of our country for the first quarter of this year was \$ 97.4 million”**. From 2007 to 2012, Iran invested more than \$ 1 billion in the Tajik economy.

In addition, President Rahmon supported Iran’s nuclear program, saying in 2010 **“We support the Iranian peaceful nuclear program at all levels as a strategic partner”** (IA RBC on January 4, 2010). Iran, in turn, stood up for Tajikistan in the same year, threatening Uzbekistan to freeze the movement of Uzbek trains through Iran until Tashkent allows the trucks to pass through Tajikistan safely.

3) The close relations between the countries lasted until the Iranian authorities arrested the famous Iranian billionaire, Babak Zandzhani, on charges of misappropriation of 2 billion and 60 million euros of budget funds that belonged to the Iranian Ministry of Oil. In February 2014, Iranian President, Hassan Rouhani, personally ordered the investigation of the theft of budgetary funds in the conduct of operations related to Babak. According to the Iranian side, these funds were withdrawn through the national bank of Tajikistan. Information on this was disseminated by the Iranian media in August 2014 with reference to the Minister of Petroleum Industry of Iran, Bizhan Namdar Zangane. This was the beginning of a cold wind in relations between Tajikistan and Iran.

But later, the conflict intensified when Iran in 2015 invited the leader of the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (IRPT), Muhiddin Kabiri, to a conference called “Islamic Unity” along with a delegation from Tajikistan headed by Supreme Mufti, Saidmukarram Abdullkodirzoda. Moreover, in the hall where the conference was held, the mufti was seated next to Kabiri, who has already been in Tajik search. This event was regarded in Tajikistan as “an unfriendly step, disrespect for Tajikistan”, and a note of protest was handed to the Iranian ambassador. The head of the Ulema Council of Tajikistan called Iran “an accomplice of terrorists”.

After all this, Tajikistan limited imports of Iranian goods. Iranian big and small companies began to close in the country. Iranian citizens stopped issuing visas at preferential terms at Dushanbe airport. The trade turnover between these countries fell to \$ 292 million in 2013 and to \$ 114 million in 2016.

IA "Avesta" reported on July 31, 2017 with reference to the Minister of Transport of Tajikistan, Khudoyor Khudoyorzoda, that Iran financed only 20% of the total amount of promised funds for the development of an economic assessment of the construction of the Tajik section of the railway project of the international project "Kashgar-Herat".

4) The cooling of relations between the two countries, taking into account the current economic situation in Tajikistan, forced the Rahmon regime to seek new investors to support the country's economy and to implement a number of its projects, including the completion of the Rogun hydropower plant. During the search for the new investors, Tajikistan came across Saudi Arabia with the authorities of which the Tajik authorities repeatedly held talks. According to the press service of the President of Tajikistan on July 22, 2017, there took place a telephone conversation. The details of the conversation were not reported between Rahmon and King of Saudi Arabia Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud.

What are the reasons for the accusations of the Tajik television against Tehran? The answer to this is the following:

On August 5, 2017, the Tajik delegation led by the Minister of Energy and Water Resources, Usmonali Usmonzoda, took part in the inauguration of Iranian President Hassan Ruhani. However, the Tajik media did not say anything about the details of the visit of the Tajik delegation to Iran while the Iranian IA "Mehr" reported on August 6 that a meeting was held between Usmonzoda and Iranian Energy Minister Hamid Chitchian. And on the evening of August 8 on Tajik state television, there was a documentary film where Iran was accused of organizing murders of prominent public figures in Tajikistan in the 1990s during and after the civil war.

Thus, it can be assumed that Rahmon did not manage to attract Iranian investments to implement a number of projects after which the Tajik side finally lost hope for Iran as a source of investment. And all this happened during the visit of the Tajik delegation on August 5 to Iran. Therefore, the reason for displaying the anti-Iranian film is to demonstrate to regional Iranian competitors that Tajikistan has quarreled with it and is ready to cooperate with the Arab countries.

However, it should not be forgotten that swearing money from Arab countries does not have far-reaching prospects for Tajikistan, and therefore, relations with Iran can again radically change at any minute if there is an appropriate occasion.

The vicious secular regime in Tajikistan has long plundered the country, condemning the people to poverty. Rahmon and his family sold the country to foreigners. They sold the land and the country's ecology to the Chinese, and their people to Russia's slavery. Now, he is similar to the corrupt tyrants and is unable to cope with the economy. He turns convulsively to international investments, loans and issuance of government bonds without a prospect of return. That is, it turns out that the axis of rotation of Tajikistan's foreign policy is a pathetic attempt of the tyrant Rahmon to beg the wealthy countries to have more money to extend the life of his regime. How low is this ruler, may Allah destroy his power!

To what extent will Muslims tolerate such rulers?

**Written for the Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir by
Umar Farsi**