

**TAJIKISTAN:
SPECIAL FEATURES OF
COOPERATION WITH
LEADING INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC
ORGANIZATIONS**

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There are currently several dozen legal and illegal international Islamic organizations in the world which differ in structure, goals, level of representation, and spheres and forms of activity. Tajikistan is a member of more than 20 international organizations, including regional,

and closely cooperates with such prestigious legal Islamic structures as:

- The Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC);
- The Islamic Development Bank (IDB);
- The Islamic Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO);
- The Imamate of Ismailites—the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN);
- The Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO).
- Moreover, an illegal international Islamic organization Hizb ut-Tahrir-al-Islami—the Party of Islamic Liberation (HTI)—operates in Tajikistan.

It should be noted that scientists and analysts have still not clarified the relations between international Islamic organizations and Tajikistan, the role of these organizations in settling conflicts and ensuring security, or in creating a destabilized situation, as well as in the country's socioeconomic development. Nor have studies dealt with the question of the political activity of these organizations.

The goals of the Organization of the Islamic Conference reflect the new reality that has emerged in the Islamic world and international community as a whole since the day this organization was created. These goals include multifaceted cooperation among Muslim states based on religious solidarity aimed at resolving the most important problems, including ensuring the national security of these countries. The creation of the OIC is more a story of establishing mechanisms to prevent religious extremism, fundamentalism, and radicalism, rather than promoting solidarity. One of the main reasons its founding states created the OIC was to express their rejection of the ideas and practice of religious extremism, fundamentalism, and radicalism. For example, Saudi Arabia believes these manifestations to be destructive and, as one of the main founders of this organization, is exerting efforts to make it a lever for preventing religious extremism, fundamentalism, and radicalism.

Secretary General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) Hamid Algabid said the following about the organization's positive role in strengthening stability and security in the Muslim countries in his introductory speech at the 23rd Conference of Foreign Ministers of the OIC States in Karachi in 1993: "We should appreciate those efforts that are being exerted in this direction; efforts being exerted to overcome the difficulties and resolve the problems that systematically arise in a particular member state of our organization. These efforts are aimed at the peaceful settlement of military conflicts which are having a destructive influence on the region of our ummah. In this respect, we are pleased to report that the relations among our member states are gradually normalizing."¹

On the other hand, as noted above, one of the areas of the OIC's activity is ensuring development and stability in the Muslim countries and expanding economic, scientific, and cultural cooperation. It is no accident that two specialized institutions have been created for expanding economic and scientific-cultural cooperation within the OIC: the Islamic Development Bank and the Islamic Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO).

The OIC, which is mainly based on secular principles, as already noted, deals with problems that do not go beyond the framework of the national interests of its member countries. In other words, national states are its main actors, and the activity of this essentially secular organization is aimed at resolving the aforementioned problems of the Islamic world. The Islamic factor in this organization, on the other hand, serves only to unite the Muslim countries in solving strictly secular tasks.

An analysis of the Tajikistan's activity in the OIC shows that all the projects being carried out in cooperation with this organization meet the republic's national and state interests and play a perceptible role in strengthening the country's economic stability and scientific-cultural development. From the first days of its membership in

¹ *Kayhoni hawoi* (Tehran), No. 963, 1992.

this organization, the republic has been offering projects aimed at developing various branches of the national economy, and the country's cooperation dynamics with one of the specialized OIC institutions, the Islamic Development Bank, is a vibrant example of this.

Between 30 June and 3 July, 1997, Tajik President Emomali Rakhmon made an official visit to Saudi Arabia. This visit resulted, among other things, in the Islamic Development Bank granting Tajikistan an interest-free loan of 16.7 million dollars for developing public health and education in the country.²

The republic's cooperation with the OIC, including with its specialized institutions, is not limited to receiving loans. For example, on 12 June, 2000, Tajik President Emomali Rakhmon welcomed representatives of the Coordination Group of the IDB Arab Funds, the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development, the Saudi Development Foundation, and the OPEC Fund, who arrived in Tajikistan to participate in an international round table. It was organized under the auspices of the IDB, National Bank of Tajikistan (NBT), regional representative office of the IDB in Central Asia and Europe, and the above-mentioned Arab funds. At a meeting with the round table participants, Emomali Rakhmon noted that at the new stage—the stage of post-conflict socio-economic restoration and poverty-level reduction, the republic's government is placing great emphasis on developing foreign economic relations and attracting foreign investments, including from the Arab countries. What is more, the republic's president expressed the hope that the work of the round table would be productive and make it possible to lay a foundation for holding a conference of businessmen of the Islamic Development Bank member states in Tajikistan, about which a corresponding agreement was reached with head of the IDB Doctor Ahmed Muhammad Ali during his visit to Tajikistan. The creation of an Islamic corporation for developing the private sector, an agreement on the founding of which the

republic signed on 26 April, 2000, will help to encourage foreign direct investments into the Tajik economy.³

One of the special features of the republic's cooperation with the IDB is that all the agreements signed by the sides are being put into practice. For example, as noted above, on the initiative of Tajik President Emomali Rakhmon and IDB President Muhammad Ali, the idea was put forward of convening an international round table with the participation of the Arab funds. During this undertaking, Tajikistan offered 70 important projects in power engineering, transportation, finances, agriculture, public health, education, telecommunications, and so on. According to the Hovar National Information Agency of Tajikistan (NIAT), the IDB approved 17 of these projects, in correspondence with which the republic is being rendered assistance in building the Kulob–Kalai-Khumb highway (9.5 million dollars) and an international passenger terminal in Dushanbe (270,000 dollars).⁴

It should be noted that during the years of cooperation with the OIC, the republic has been making efficient use of this organization's potential. A special resolution on Tajikistan (No.10/27), which was adopted by the member states at the Organization's 10th session on the initiative of President Emomali Rakhmon, shows that this structure is playing a particular role in Tajikistan's system of international relations and will be able to help resolve the country's socio-economic problems to a certain extent. "It appeals to all the member states and financial institutions of the OIC region to take active and cooperative part in the efforts being exerted by the Tajikistan government to overcome the economic difficulties and advance the economic reforms. The document addresses the Islamic Development Bank with a request to significantly increase its financial and technical assistance to Tajikistan. Secretary General of OIC Abdelouahed Belkeziz was personally entrusted with monitoring the execution of this resolution and

² See: Z. Saidov, *Vneshniaia politika Tadjhikistana v usloviiakh globalizatsii*, Avasto, Dushanbe, 2004, p. 569.

³ See: *Ibid.*, p. 173.

⁴ See: *Narodnaia gazeta*, No. 25, 22 June, 2002.

presenting a report on its accomplishments to the 11th session of the OIC.”⁵

In this way, cooperation between Tajikistan and the OIC is growing with each passing day and encompassing other structures of this organization. At a session of the Interparliamentary Union (IPU) of its member states held on 16 February, 2007 in Kuala Lumpur, Tajikistan’s membership in this Union was approved.

Along with this, it should be noted that Tajikistan only cooperates with the OIC at the intergovernmental level, although under the conditions of the market economy, other public structures, particularly the private sector, play an important role in expanding the relations among the countries. The proposal of Tajikistan’s president to create an Islamic corporation for developing the private sector with the participation of Arab funds could significantly promote this undertaking.

Another prestigious Islamic structure, of which Tajikistan has been a member since 1992, is the Economic Cooperation Organization (on 21 May, 1998, the republic’s Majlisi Oli approved the new Izmir Pact and ratified Tajikistan’s membership in the ECO).

Tajikistan’s cooperation with the ECO is particularly noticeable in trade. The signing and approval of the Trade Agreement (ECOTA) as a fundamental element of regional cooperation within the framework of this organization will serve as an example for expanding cooperation in other spheres. For example, in 1999 alone, the volume of Tajikistan’s foreign trade with ECO countries amounted to 600 million dollars, that is, 40% of the country’s foreign trade turnover.

Tajikistan is interested in developing broad regional cooperation and regional integration, and the ECO could play an important role in achieving this goal. The purpose and tasks of this organization (the Izmir Treaty, the Almaty Program for Development of the Transport Sector, the Ashgabad communiqué of the meeting of states and member countries of the ECO for de-

veloping the transport and communication infrastructure, as well as the Strategy of Economic Cooperation in the ECO region) envisage the development of market economic relations of the member states and their rapid integration into the world economy.

But along with the achievements in ECO activity, there are also several unresolved problems that are creating obstacles to expanding cooperation among the member states. In his speech at a meeting of leaders of the ECO states on 14 October, 2002, Tajik President Emomali Rakhmon said: “Despite the obvious achievements in this area, there are still serious obstacles hindering further development of multifaceted economic trade cooperation in the ECO region. For example, the high railroad transit fees, the lag in providing banking services among the member states, the lack of standardization of the regulatory legal base and harmonization of fees and payments, and the introduction by several member states of strict visa conditions are having a very negative effect on interregional trade.”⁶

It should be noted that the border disagreements between some of the member states and unstable political situation are one of the reasons ECO regional cooperation is not developing as well as it should. “Although the leaders of the ECO member states at the Tehran summit in January 1992 called peace and security the main prerequisites for expanding economic cooperation among these countries, the instability in Afghanistan, disagreements between Pakistan and India over Jammu and Kashmir, the unsettled conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, and the problem of the Turkic-speaking communities of Cyprus, among other things, have turned this organization into a tool for settling political problems.”⁷ From this viewpoint, Tajikistan’s membership in the ECO

⁶ Z. Saidov, op. cit., p. 294.

⁷ F. Umarov, “Naqshi Sozmoni khamkorii iktisod (ECO) dar ravavndi Hamgaroii mintaqavi: mushkilot va dumamoi” (The Role of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) in Regional Integration: Problems and Prospects), in: *Materialy mezhdunarodnoi konferentsii “Regionalnaia integratsiia Tsentralnoi Azii: problemy, prerspektivy,”* Irfon, Dushanbe, 2006.

⁵ Z. Saidov, op. cit., p. 489.

and problem-resolving in its format do not go beyond the framework of national and state interests. And the functioning of the United Nations International Drug Control Program (UNDCP) within the ECO is one of the important mechanisms for strengthening security in the region, particularly in Tajikistan.

In addition to these organizations, non-governmental Islamic structures also function in the republic, in particular the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN)—the Aga Khan Fund, which has made a worthy contribution to achieving peace in Tajikistan and to post-conflict restoration of the country's economy. Taking into ac-

count the great prestige and influence of the founder of this Fund, Shah Karīm al-Hussainī Aga Khan IV, special U.N. envoy Ramire Piris Ballon and special U.N. representative Gerdt Dietrich Merrem discussed the peaceful settlement of the conflict in the republic with him in 1995. Aga Khan's working visits to Tajikistan and his unofficial efforts as mediator played a great role in achieving peace among the Tajiks and in ensuring the country's security.

At present, the Aga Khan Fund is functioning in all the regions of Tajikistan, in its capital, and in the regions subordinate to the republican government.

1. Cooperation in the Economy

In 1999, the ESF Program and the Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development (AKFED) offered loans totaling 530,000 dollars to 700 enterprises. This money was allotted to develop agriculture, the cotton industry, and tourism. The average amount of each loan was 1,000 dollars, with a one-month payback term, which helped to create 15,000 new jobs and, according to preliminary estimates, should have brought in revenue totaling 4.6 million Tajik rubles. Since the ESF began its activity in 1996, aid has been allotted to 1,630 enterprises, 4,200 jobs have been created, and revenue of 12.3 million Tajik rubles has been generated in the Karategin Region in 1997 alone. The total amount of loans for implementing the ESF Program amounted to 1.2 million dollars.

2. Cooperation in Education

The general vector of the AKFED education programs is cooperation with the government in support of educational reforms—from primary schools to higher educational institutions. In accordance with these programs, targeted professional development schools have been created in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (GBAR), which will later become teacher training institutes. What is more, the Aga Khan Development Program in Human Science for Central Asia has drawn up a training program in cooperation with the Education Ministry, teachers, and intelligentsia of the region. It is based on ethics, traditions, and values, in which the region is extremely rich. This program is currently taught in five of the country's universities. Moreover, 500 students of the Aga Khan lyceum in the city of Khorog are learning English, information technology, and the fundamentals of the market economy. This undertaking in education by the Aga Khan Fund under Tajikistan's current economic conditions, when many teachers have turned to the market as a source of income due to the low salaries they are paid, is of immense significance in ensuring the country's cultural security.

3. Cooperation in Agriculture

The Aga Khan Development Program has drawn up a special Agricultural Reform Program, which encompasses seven regions of the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (Vanch, Darvaz, Rushan, Roshtkala, Shugnan, Ishkashim, and Murgab) and seven territories subordinate to the republican government (Jirgatal, Tavildara, Tajikabad, Garm, Rasht, Faizabad, and Rogun). The 22,000 farmers participating in this program have been able to raise the yield of their crop harvests by 1.5%. As a result of transferring collective farm land to the farmers and developing new land, 27,500 tons of flour was produced in the GBAR in 1999, which met 92% of the region's needs, and four-fold more potatoes and wheat were grown in the Karategin Region than in 1998. For this purpose, the Aga Khan Fund allotted 1.3 billion Tajik rubles, which made it possible for 760 entrepreneurs to engage in business in the agricultural industry. Moreover, between 1996 and 2000, the Program rendered assistance to 2,400 small businesses, which produced goods totaling 18 trillion Tajik rubles.

The Aga Khan Fund has allotted more than 150 million dollars to implementing its programs in Tajikistan. These funds were spent during the difficult years of the civil war and after it ended, when the situation in the country was still unstable. Thanks to the Fund's prestige and influence in many countries, it has been able to attract investments into Tajikistan. For example, in 1999, the United States allotted "700,000 dollars via the Aga Khan IV Fund to develop the agrarian sector in the Garm group of regions. Moreover, a decision is already being drafted in the U.S. government to allot Tajikistan a grant of 700,000 dollars for developing rural areas and helping the rural population of the Kulob zone of the Khatlon Region to find jobs."⁸

This decision was made at a time when not one country had yet allotted funds to restore Tajikistan's national economy. This organization will be able to make a worthy contribution to the country's food, cultural, social, and economic security.

During the post-war period, two other Islamic structures, the Saudi Development Fund and the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development, with which the republic began cooperating in 1997, made a valuable contribution to Tajikistan's socioeconomic development. Until 2000, they mainly allotted financial aid and carried out small projects. After the situation in the country was normalized and a relatively favorable investment climate emerged, communications increased and large projects were implemented. For example, in 2000 the Saudi Development Fund participated in rebuilding a maternity and pediatric hospital and building an infectious disease hospital and secondary schools in Tajikistan. The same year, this Fund approved a loan of 6 million dollars for joint (along with the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development and the OPEC Fund) investment in a project for building the Zigar-Kosta-Shkeve highway.

In 2002, a ceremony was held to sign loan agreements between Tajikistan and the Saudi Development Fund for building three secondary schools and purchasing equipment for them in three regions of the republic, as well as for rebuilding a maternity and pediatric hospital in Dushanbe and furnishing it with equipment totaling 3 million dollars.

During the time Tajikistan has been cooperating with the Saudi Development Fund, a loan agreement for a total of 35.2 million dollars was signed for building (in cooperation with the country's government) the Shogun-Zigar section of the Kulob-Kalai-Khumb highway⁹; a maternity hospital has been rebuilt, several general education secondary schools completed, the water supply system in

⁸ Z. Saidov, *Respublika Tadjikistan na sovremennom etape*, Avasto, Dushanbe, 2006, p. 78.

⁹ See: *Azia-Plus*, 23 August, 2002.

Dushanbe modernized, and a terminal in the capital's airport put into operation, to name a few achievements.¹⁰

As noted above, the Kuwait Development Fund also cooperates with Tajikistan. This Fund, which was created on 31 December, 1961 as a financial structure, is an autonomous state structure with an independent legal status. The Fund allots money to 86 countries, 16 of them are Arab, 35 African, 22 European and Asian, etc.

Kuwait is the first Arab state to which the Tajik president paid a visit. On 10 January, 2001, after the loan agreement was signed between Tajikistan and the Kuwait Development Fund for 5 million Kuwaiti dinars (16.5 million dollars) to build the Zigar-Shkev highway, the Fund's Deputy General Director Hisham I. Al-Waqayan noted: "This loan agreement is the result of terms reached during Tajik President Emomali Rakhmon's official visit to Kuwait in 1995."¹¹

From the example presented above, it can be concluded that Tajikistan's cooperation with this organization began primarily thanks to the Tajik leader's long-sighted policy and is growing with each passing day. Nevertheless, this historical fact shows that the Fund's activity as a prestigious financial institution is more pragmatic in nature and it executes the contracts it enters within the set deadlines.

It is precisely this aspect of the organization's activity, on the one hand, and the pragmatism of Tajikistan's foreign policy under the direction of its president, Emomali Rakhmon, on the other, that are the main factors playing a primary role in expanding cooperation between the sides.

Since bilateral relations began between the Islamic organizations and funds and Tajikistan, these structures have participated (and are participating) in the implementation of projects totaling 180 million dollars, 76 million dollars of which have already been used.¹²

4. Tajikistan and Illegal International Islamic Organizations

As we have already noted, along with the legal Islamic organizations, illegal ones also operate in the republic, including the religious-political Hizb ut-Tahrir-al-Islami party. According to different sources, its headquarters (emirate) are either in Western Europe, or in Palestine, and it has branches in Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Turkey, and some Central Asian countries.

The activity of HTI has long been recognized by most Muslim countries as unconstitutional, since the party's political doctrine is based on the idea of the caliphate.

Since the 1950s, movements and organizations have been emerging in the Muslim states, the activity of which later became Islamist in nature. They formed on the basis of local, regional, and international factors. We will single out the following among them:

- the crisis experienced by the Western and Soviet development models, toward which the elites of many Muslim countries oriented themselves;
- the constant defeat of the Arab states in the struggle to liberate their land seized by Israel, which lowered the prestige of the national-secular ideas among the broad masses of Muslim countries, particularly Arab, as a result of which they turned to Islam to resolve their problems and look for answers to important present-day problems;

¹⁰ See: Z. Saidov, *Vneshniaia politika Tadjhikistana v usloviakh globalizatsii*, pp. 113-115.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 304.

¹² See: *Azia-Plus*, 17 May, 2006.

- the failure of the unification projects in the Arab world on a national basis (for example, Arab unity) compared with the unification processes in Europe;
- the financial power and political influence wielded by Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, and other oil-exporting countries in the Islamic world.

As for the HTI, an important role in its emergence (in 1952) was played by the Palestinians' struggle to liberate their land, although other factors also had a certain amount of influence. And it was created on the basis of the party's Palestinian branch, al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin. Its founder was Takiyeddin al-Nabahani al-Falastini.

At the first stage, the party declared its purpose to be liberating Palestinian land from Israeli occupation. Later, the absence of support from Muslim countries, particularly Arab, as well as the U.N.'s inefficiency in regulating this crisis prompted the HTI to put forward its idea of creating a caliphate to resolve the problems. After the new international system (the Yalta-Potsdam system in 1945-1990) formed in the Islamic world and the number of nation-states rose, they declared the HTI unlawful in order to preserve their own political regimes and protect their national interests, which was why this party began carrying out its activity illegally. In other words, the governments of the Muslim countries regarded the idea of a caliphate as a serious threat to their national-state interests.

After the Central Asian republics acquired their independence and taking advantage of the ideological vacuum left during the post-Soviet period, the HTI was able to create its underground structures in some cities and regions of Tajikistan. According to Russian scientist Alexei Malashenko, "HTI cells exist in the northern regions of Tajikistan. Here their members supposedly reach 5,000."¹³

In our opinion, the reason for this party's great influence in the north of the country lies in the following:

- geographically the northern part of Tajikistan belongs to the Ferghana Valley, an economically and socially backward part of Central Asia, where this party initially arose;
- the weak influence of the legal Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan in this region since most of its leaders come from the southern regions of the country;
- most of the residents of the eastern part of Tajikistan follow the Islamist trend of Islam.

Along with this, it should be noted that there is the likelihood of several countries using this party as a tool for realizing their geopolitical interests.

This party, being extremist, directly threatens the country's state security, which could be expressed in the following ways.

1. A change in lifestyle and way of thinking of each Muslim. From the viewpoint of the ideologists of this party, in order to establish a caliphate at the present stage the Muslims' lifestyle and way of thinking must change to correspond to "true Islam."

In our view, if such ideas are disseminated, they could lead to destabilization within traditional Islam itself in Tajikistan and thus to a religious conflict. The thing is that Hizb ut-Tahrir's leaflets set forth its attitude toward the ritualistic-dogmatic provisions upheld by most Muslims of Tajikistan. They condemn the striving of the followers of traditional Islam to adhere to the traditional precepts of this religion, as well as their loyal attitude toward the authorities.

2. The idea of creating a caliphate.

"The main (and already realizable) task of HTI is to penetrate the state machinery, including the security service."¹⁴

¹³ A. Malashenko, "Islamism v Tsentral'noi Azii: segodnia i zavtra. Tsentral'naia Azia 2007. Klyuchevye faktory bezopasnosti," in: *Materialy mezhdunarodnoi konferentsii*, Almaty, 2007, p. 17.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

The HTI's program states that if the opportunity arises to overthrow the ruler, Muslims are obligated to use arms to achieve this goal, if such an opportunity does not arise, force must be mobilized and help sought among the strong. As we see, using force to achieve one's goals is not an exception in the strategy of this party, penetrating the power-related structures and recruiting their representatives are some of the main tasks in the party's program. From this viewpoint, the party's activity in Tajikistan also threatens state security. Members of HTI are promulgating (along with anathematizing the existing political regimes and leaders of the Muslim countries) the idea of a Golden Age and the rule of the righteous caliphs, which at times of economic difficulties and ideological crises can have a negative effect on stability in society and cause a large part of the country's population to fall under its influence.

3. The use of this party by some countries to achieve their geopolitical goals.

HTI's residences (emirates), as we have already noted, are located in different countries. Therefore it is possible that foreign forces will try to use this party to realize their geopolitical interests. In other words, it will be able to replace the terrorist organization al-Qa'eda, which (like Hizb ut-Tahrir) arose on the basis of the Muslim Brothers movement; and it is possible that there is some connection between them.

4. Since, according to some data, most members of this party in Tajikistan are Turkic-speaking, imposing their ideas on the local Muslims could cause an ethnic conflict and have a negative effect on Tajikistan's relations with its neighboring Turkic-speaking states.

C o n c l u s i o n s

So after the republic acquired its independence, international organizations, particularly Islamic, began occupying a special place in its system of international relations. A model of relations with international organizations, especially Islamic, began forming in Tajikistan's foreign policy and, as we can see, cooperation with them largely corresponds to the republic's national-state interests.

Although today certain states are the main actors in international relations, their opportunities for resolving regional and international problems are limited. So an increase in cooperation between Tajikistan and regional and international organizations could help to resolve global and regional problems. On the other hand, Tajikistan's membership in these organizations proves that multilateral diplomacy is also beginning to play a greater role in the country's international relations system. Whereas its bilateral diplomacy is largely promoting the resolution of intergovernmental bilateral problems, multilateral diplomacy is aimed at resolving regional and global problems, so Tajikistan can safely become involved in regional and globalization processes.

In our opinion, the importance of expanding the republic's cooperation with international Islamic organizations is defined by the following factors.

1. Intensifying cooperation with the above-mentioned organizations could reduce the influence of extremist and fundamental structures operating in the name of Islam on Tajikistan's political and social life. This is contributing to the country's domestic stability.
2. Taking into account the national interests of the member states, the above-mentioned organizations, especially the OIC, will be able to help to eliminate conflicts arising among the member states.

3. Tajikistan's membership in these organizations is raising its authority on the international arena, particularly in the countries of the Islamic world.
4. These organizations are capable of making a worthy contribution to the republic's social, economic, scientific, and cultural development and in this way can help to implement the National Development Strategy to a certain extent.

As for the illegal Islamic organizations, their aim is to advance the Islamist project designed to disrupt law and order and stability, remove certain areas of the country from current state jurisdiction, create parallel structures to rule the country, and organize armed seizure of power.
