Explaining negotiated settlements to armed conflict

Lessons from the Tajik civil war and peace process

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Abstract

The study aims to increase our understanding of the limitations and benefits of structural and agent-oriented accounts in explaining the success and failure of peace negotiations. The propositions of ripeness and readiness theory are analysed through the lens of the agency-structure debate. Implicit assumptions on the nature of agents and structures, contained within the theories' propositions on causality, are made explicit. Hypotheses are then formulated on the basis of these propositions and applied to the case of the Tajik civil war and peace process.

The study concludes that agential and structural explanations each have their own limitations and benefits in the context of the Tajik civil war. No single set of explanation can by itself fully explain the outcome. Instead, agential and structural explanations largely complement each other in providing a complete account of the peace process. In the specific case of Tajikistan, however, it is also concluded that contextual factors were the most important in eventually deciding the outcome.

Keywords: conflict management, peace negotiations, ripeness theory, readiness theory, agency, structure, Tajikistan, civil war

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1   Introduction

The gradual breakdown of the Soviet Union contributed to the emergence of conflicts in many of its member states. National minorities rediscovered long-suppressed identities, old conflicts reemerged and struggles for power ensued as old elites were challenged by new ones. Many of these conflicts have evaded resolution to this day. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is in deadlock, while the secessionist republics of Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia remain *de facto* independent states. As yet another conflict broke out in the post-Soviet space when Russia invaded Ukraine in 2014, understanding how these conflicts came to be – and more importantly how they can be resolved – has become urgent.

The Tajik civil war shared many of the characteristics of the other post-Soviet conflicts, with one crucial difference – on 27 June 1997, a peace accord was signed. The agreement marked the end of an exceptionally bloody war that had left 40,000 to 100,000 people dead, and had displaced over one million people, a sixth of Tajikistan's population (Epkenhans 2016:1-2). Even at the conservative estimate, the Tajik conflict alone produced 37 percent of the casualties of the post-Soviet conflicts, while the country only accommodated about 2 percent of the Soviet population (Driscoll 2015:70).

The comprehensive peace agreement was the result of a more than three year long, "exceptionally well-coordinated" negotiation process, conducted under the auspices of the United Nations (UN) (Barnes and Abdullaev 2001:11). However, at many points during the course of the five-year long conflict, the signing of such an agreement seemed highly unlikely. The Tajik peace process is a remarkable and unique case that, according to Barnes and Abdullaev (ibid.), "deserves careful study to learn lessons that could be applicable in peace processes elsewhere".

The aim of this thesis is twofold. Firstly, it seeks to provide an answer to why and how the Tajik civil war reached a peaceful conclusion. The overarching research question of this thesis is thus as follows:

- *What were the favouring conditions for a negotiated settlement in the Tajik civil war?*

Secondly, any social scientific theory situates itself in relation to an agent-structure problem. Meaning how agents and social structures relate to and influence each other (Wendt 1987:335-40). Theories assume – explicitly or implicitly – the primacy of one over the other, indicating the direction of causation. In theories on peace negotiations, this issue has not been sufficiently examined. Therefore, two influential theories on this subject, I. William Zartman's ripeness theory and Dean G. Pruitt's readiness theory, are analysed through the lens of the agency-structure debate. The second aim of the thesis is to

determine the explanatory power of the theories' propositions, structural and agent-oriented. While the overarching research question focuses on the general favouring conditions for the peaceful settlement of the Tajik conflict, the following questions refer to structural and agent-oriented explanations of the same:

- *Which contextual conditions enhanced or hindered the prospect of a negotiated settlement?*

- *In what ways did the parties express a political willingness to negotiate?*

1.1   Theoretical delimitations

This thesis will focus on the conditions that favour negotiated settlements. It will not seek to examine the conditions that favour conflict resolution *per se*, where the root causes of the conflict are addressed. Whenever the term "successful" is used in relation to the Tajik or any other peace process or negotiation, it is only in a minimalistic sense. Comparable to Galtung's (1969:183–6) conception of negative peace – the absence of direct violence. The focus of this thesis will be the process leading up to the successful outcome of negotiations, marked by the signing of a comprehensive peace agreement.

1.2   Disposition

The following chapter concerns the methodological considerations of the study (Chapter 2). Following this, we delve into theory (Chapter 3), initially discussing the ontological and epistemological implications of the agency-structure debate, before moving on to the debate itself. Some examples from IR theory will be presented for the sake of clarity. We then turn to Zartman and Pruitt, explaining their theories and placing them within the wider framework of theories on peace negotiations. The analysis and application of the theories will then be conducted in five stages during the course of the following chapters.

(I) Firstly, the theories are examined in turn. The implicit causal propositions of the theories are made explicit. (II) Secondly, these propositions are analysed with regard to agency and structure. (III) Thirdly, testable hypotheses are formulated on the basis of these propositions, concerning the conditions favourable – pertaining to either agents or structures – for negotiated settlements. They are then categorised according to their positioning ontologically and epistemologically. (IV) We then turn to the Tajik civil war (Chapter 4), where the hypotheses will be applied to the negotiation process, determining the respective

explanatory power of contextual (structure) and willingness (agency) factors. (V) Finally, the study will conclude with a discussion on the results attained, and an analysis relating to the overarching research question of the study (Chapter 5).

2   Method

2.1   Research design

This thesis has an explanatory approach. It seeks to explain a phenomenon – the outcome of peace negotiations – and determine the conditions favourable for that outcome. The goal of explanatory scientific research is, according to Gary King, Robert O. Keohane and Sidney Verba, to make inferences, or draw general conclusions, about causal relationships. That is, "to infer beyond the immediate data to something broader that is not directly observed" (1994:8).

According to them, all scientific research therefore faces the "fundamental problem of causal inference". That inferences about causal relationships are contingent on comparisons with something that did not occur (King, Keohane and Verba 1994:79-82). However, through structured comparisons of relevant cases, we can gain leverage over the fundamental problem, allowing us to draw scientifically valid inferences.

This thesis will utilise a qualitative methodology, which King, Keohane and Verba mean could entail some problems. They argue that it is impossible to avoid the fundamental problem in a single-case study (1994:208). This study might seem like a single case study, making this criticism problematic. However, the inter-Tajik negotiations were conducted over the course of over three years, with the parties meeting on twenty occasions (Hay 2001:43). There are thus twenty instances of negotiations available for study, mitigating the deficiency of the causal inferences.

A qualitative methodology is, however also suitable for analysing the theories of Zartman and Pruitt, testing their causal propositions with regard to agency and structure. Alexander George and Andrew Bennett write that one of the foremost strengths of case studies is the high levels of conceptual validity they enjoy (2005:19). That is, the connection between theoretical concepts and observable, empirical indicators. If we are to produce correct conclusions about how agent-oriented or structural conditions influenced the Tajik peace process, high conceptual validity is essential.

George and Bennett furthermore underline that case studies are particularly suitable for examining cases of complex causality. The detail-rich format of case studies allows for examining intervening variables and antecedent conditions necessary for the activation of certain causal mechanisms (2005:21-2). The case study-format thus also provides us with a framework for assessing the relationship between agent-oriented and contextual conditions.

2.2 Hypothesis testing and theory development

Explanatory theories are essentially propositions on the nature of relationships between different variables. Theory development progresses through testing these propositions through testing hypotheses (Halperin and Heath 2017:118-9). If the theory cannot fully explain a phenomenon, meaning that the results achieved are contrary to those that we expected from the initial propositions, the theory has to be reevaluated.

Karl Popper argues that there is a fundamental difference in confirming (verifying) and disconfirming (falsifying) a theory. In his view, verifying theories is impossible as it is inconceivable to test all observable implications of a theory (Popper 2002:248-9). Research should instead focus on falsifying theories. Here, hypothesis testing is an excellent method. If a hypothesis is disproven, the explanatory power of theory itself is called into question (ibid.:9-10). Hypothesis testing is thus a method suitable for discovering and clarifying the potential shortcomings of Zartman's and Pruitt's theories generally, and of agent-oriented and contextual explanations specifically.

2.3 The puzzling case of the Tajik peace accord

George and Bennett define a case as an "instance of a class of events" that is interesting from a scientific perspective (2005:17). In case selection, Flyvbjerg emphasises that "critical cases" should be prioritised. That is, cases that have "strategic importance" in relation to the scientific problem studied, and that "are likely to either clearly confirm or irrefutably falsify propositions" (2006:14). Studying these types of cases increases the external validity of any general conclusions drawn (Halperin and Heath 2017:174-5).

As only *four percent* of conflicts producing more than 10,000 deaths end in a comprehensive peace agreement (Greig and Diehl 2012:130), The Tajik civil war is, in this regard, an intriguing case of a successful peace negotiation process. The conflict also involved many additional complicating factors. Warlordism and war economies were prevalent, while regional identities and religion were prevalent issues, in addition to significant third-party involvement, with the Russian Federation heavily supporting the Tajik government, while the opposition enjoyed the support of both Iran and Afghan warlords (Driscoll 2015:100-2; Meshbahi 1997:149-55; Lynch 2000:150-172; Roy 1998:136-40). All factors reminiscent of Mary Kaldor's "new wars" (2012) – and notorious in complicating conflict settlement. Several authors have underlined that the Tajik peace process was "noteworthy" (Iji 2011:1), "deserves careful study" (Barnes and Abdullaev 2001:11) and "merit[s] attention" (Lynch 2001:50). The process itself was characterised by several instances of deadlock, escalation and breakdown, further underlining the puzzling nature of the eventual outcome.

3 Theory

3.1 The agency-structure debate: a question of ontology

The debate concerning agency and structure is one of ontology and epistemology (Wendt 1987:339). Briefly, ontology refers to how we are to understand the nature of social world. Is there a truly "objective" reality, or does our subjective understanding of it influence our perception of it (Halperin and Heath 2017:8, 50)? Epistemology, on the other hand, deals with questions of how it is possible to can gain knowledge about the social world. Are we limited to observing phenomena happening in the social world, trying to find empirical regularities, or can we gain scientific knowledge by interpreting the meanings behind why people act (ibid.)?

The agency-structure debate is one of the most fundamental in the social sciences, as it forces us to confront these issues. According to Alexander Wendt (1987:335-40), any social scientific theory situates itself in relation to an agent-structure problem. That is, how agents and social structures relate to, and influence each other. Theories assume – explicitly or implicitly – the primacy of one over the other, indicating the direction of causation, while constituting a structure for the theory as a whole.

The issue of agency and structure is fundamentally an ontological one (Wendt 1987:339). Wight writes that "[e]pistemological and methodological issues arise as a result of how differing theories resolve [the agent-structure] problem, but these are supervenient on the more basic ontological issues" (2006:3-4). The decision to give either agents or structures ontological primacy – what can be considered as "given", as irreducible – thus, in turn, forces us to confront epistemological considerations: how are we to study our object of interest?

Holism and *individualism* are the most common answers to the agent-structure problem (Wendt 1999:26). That is either giving structure (holism) or agents (individualism) ontological primacy. In clearer terms, holism entails that social structures are given analytical priority, and that any effects they produce cannot be reduced to independently existing agents. Feminist IR theory is an example, where theorists like, for instance, Laura Sjoberg, argue that gender hierarchies within the international system is an enabling factor for the incidence of war (2012:25-30). The actions (war) of agents (states) are explained by the properties of the social structure (gendered international system) where they are situated.

The agents themselves act according to the structure's properties. Structure is given ontological primacy.

Individualism gives analytical priority to the individual or agent. Or in Wendt's words, "social scientific explanations should be reducible to the properties or interactions of independently existing individuals" (1999:26). Classical realism is a clear example. To Hans Morgenthau, the actions of states and the existence of war are explained by man's inherent lust for power (1946:192). The actions (war) of agents (states, comprised of individuals) are explained by human nature (properties of individuals). Agents are given ontological primacy.

Attempts have been made to reconcile the extreme positions of holism and individualism, to give agents and structures equal ontological status (Wendt 1987:339). Wendt calls this "the structurationist approach" (ibid.:337), drawing on the theory of "structuration" chiefly developed by Anthony Giddens. Its basic proposition is that structure is "both medium and outcome" in reproducing agents' practices (Giddens 1986:25). Wendt used this notion of "the duality of structure" (ibid.:xx) to develop his take on IR theory, where states both influence and are influenced by the states system (Wendt 1999:243-45). From this comes his notion that anarchy is "what states make of it" (Wendt 1992). The shared ideas of states affect the "logic of anarchy" in the state system, while the system itself influences states to act according to the system's dominant culture (Wendt 1999:309).

From this very brief overview, then, the actions (war, peace) of agents (states) are explained by the inherent logic of the structures in which they are situated, and that they contribute to uphold (agent-structural reciprocity). Agents and structures are given equal ontological status.

3.1.1 Two stories of international relations theory

From our answer to the ontological question of agency and structure, epistemological and methodological issues arise (Wight 2006:3-4). In this vein, Martin Hollis and Steve Smith argue that the social sciences essentially thrive on two "intellectual traditions" regarding how to conduct research within the social sciences (1991:1). They write that these perspectives tell "two sorts of story" about the social world. That is, one from the *outside* and one from the *inside* (1991:1-3). This division essentially pertains to either *explaining* phenomena from the *outside*, representing an intellectual tradition based in the natural sciences. The story from *inside* is more concerned with *understanding* social phenomena. The desires and beliefs of individuals are in focus, and authors belonging to this tradition interpret results to a greater degree, rather than merely observing and trying to explain behaviour.

Although Hollis and Smith do not explicitly recognise that their division pertains to epistemology specifically, the fact is implicit in their argument. Irregardless of our decision to give either agents or structures ontological primacy, we then have to choose a method for examining our topic of interest. In their two-by-two matrix (Fig. 1) Hollis and Smith implicitly observe this fact, allowing for

theories to be positioned in either the explaining or understanding categories, regardless of their holist or individualist ontological supposition. I agree with Karin Aggestam, who writes that there, in this vein, are "four distinct stories" about international relations, rather than only two (Aggestam 1999:28).

Fig. 1: Explaining and Understanding (Hollis and Smith 1990:215)

	Explaining	Understanding
Holistic	External structures (1)	Collective rules (2)
Individualistic	Rational choices (3)	Reasoned choices (4)

3.1.2 Analysing the theories

This study's two specific research questions concern, firstly, the contextual conditions which enhanced or hindered the prospect of a negotiated settlement, and secondly in what ways the parties expressed a political willingness to negotiate. Following Wight's notion that epistemological issues follow from the answer to the ontological question of agency and structure, the first order of analysis will concern whether agents or structures are given ontological primacy in Zartman's and Pruitt's propositions. What is the unit of analysis concerned – are they following a *holist* or *individualist* notion of ontology? *Where* do we find the explanation to this particular proposition, in contextual causes, with agents or in both?

The second order of analysis concerns the epistemology of the argument. *How* do we find the explanation to this particular proposition? This is where Hollis' and Smith's terms *explaining* and *understanding* are used in order to categorise the proposition in this manner. This is equally important, as the epistemology of the argument is intimately related to its ontological foundation (Wight 2006:3-4, 62-3), comparable with Wendt's notion that the agent-structure problem is "really two interrelated problems", the first concerning ontology, the second epistemology (1987:337-40).

3.2 Studying the success and failure of peace negotiations

If conflict occurs when parties holding incompatible views take violent measures to enforce their will on each other, negotiation is the process whereby these divergent positions are reconciled into a single agreed outcome (Zartman and Faure 2005:4). Negotiation can be considered to constitute a form of conflict management. It is a means to limit negative aspects of conflict, while striving to establish a foundation for resolving the deeper contested issues. Jacob Bercovitch writes that non-violent conflict management, such as negotiation and mediation, should be seen as a "process designed to stop the destructive aspects of a conflict and realise its constructive potential" (2011:93-4). This contrasts with conflict resolution, where the very structures, attitudes and behaviour of the conflicting parties are altered.

Managing the destructive aspects of conflict can be a prerequisite for the subsequent resolution or transformation of the dispute. Although conflict escalation can contribute to the incidence of negotiations (Zartman and Faure 2005:295-7), enduring violence and worsening conflict spirals obstruct the constructive potential in conflict by disrupting communication between parties, deepening enemy imagery and polarising communities (Pruitt 2005:254-5). With these factors in mind, how should we approach the issue of success and failure in attempts at negotiating peace and conflict?

3.2.1 Approaches to the study of negotiations

Zartman names four general approaches in studying negotiations and negotiation success. These are structural, strategic, behavioural and processual analytical approaches (Zartman 2009:323).

Structural approaches are mainly concerned with the perceived power balance between conflict parties (ibid.:325). Aggestam writes that unequal power relations between conflict parties make them strive for unilateral solutions to a greater degree (2002:70). Power parity, on the other hand, makes conflict parties more amenable to accepting concessions and increases their motivation to negotiate (Bercovitch 2011:100-1). Considering the preceding section on the agent-structure debate, this approach is wholly in the holism end of the spectrum – power structures explain the behaviour of conflict parties.

Strategic approaches chiefly employ rational choice theory to explain outcomes of negotiations. That is, studying how rational agents try to maximise gains while minimising costs, also considering the actions of any opponent interfering with the agent's actions (Jeong 2015:24-5). The approach thus

employs an individualist perspective, focusing on agents' choices. The epistemological foundation for rational choice, however, lie in the explaining category. Agents follow rules when they act: following self-interest and striving to maximising gains. In contrast to an understanding perspective, rational choice presupposes that all individuals would act the same way given the same circumstances.

Behavioural approaches focus on the negotiator. Here, the specific traits of negotiators are key (Zartman 2009:332-3). In his study of the South Africa conflict, Zartman employs this approach when describing how Nelson Mandela and Frederik de Klerk each was indispensable for the resolution of that conflict (Zartman 1995:170-1). Due to this focus on agents, interpreting how particular personalities contribute to the resolution of conflict, this approach wholly belongs to the individualist and understanding typologies.

Processual approaches, such as ripeness theory, view negotiation as a process. A dynamic practice where the process of negotiation interacts with the process of conflict (Zartman 2009:329).

3.3   Ripeness theory

One of the enduring focuses in determining how negotiations succeed or fail is the issue of timing. When should efforts be made, either by a mediator or the parties themselves, to initiate or advance negotiations? This is where Zartman's concept of a "ripe moment" (1989:10) is illuminating. To Zartman, the settlement of conflict is wholly contingent upon "the identification of the ripe moment in differing patterns of conflict and escalation", and then prompting the conflict parties to seize that moment (ibid.:263).

A ripe moment is constituted of two elements. The first concerns when parties "are susceptible to their own or others' efforts" to resolve conflict through negotiation (Zartman 2000:228). This moment is defined by the conflict parties' perception of a mutually hurting stalemate (MHS). That is, a situation where the parties realise that they are unable to unilaterally achieve their goals by escalating the conflict, instead being stuck in a pain-inducing deadlock (Zartman 2008:164). The MHS is furthermore optimally associated with a catastrophe – impending, past or narrowly avoided (Zartman 2000:228). In Zartman's original conception of the theory, the catastrophe was necessary for an MHS to occur, while in his subsequently altered version, it is merely favourable. Either way, the painful deadlock induces parties to seek alternatives, or a "way out", while the catastrophe supplies a deadline: a promise of dramatically increased costs and pain if nothing is done (Zartman 1989:266-9; 2000:228). Zartman has likened the deadlock to a plateau, "a flat, unpleasant terrain stretching into the future" from which there is no hope of either decisive escalation or escape (1989:267-8). The catastrophe is in turn likened to a precipice, "a realisation by both parties that matters will swiftly get worse" (ibid.).

The second component of ripeness is the perception of a way out – that political alternatives to conflict are possible. It entails that parties to a conflict share "a sense that a negotiated solution is possible", in addition to a "willingness" to explore negotiated solutions (Zartman 2000:228). This constitutes a "pull" factor for the parties, in contrast to the "push" factor that the MHS provides (Zartman 1989:269-72). A conflict is thus ripe for resolution if both parties to a conflict perceive the existence of both an MHS and a way out of conflict (Zartman 2000:228-9).

In the theory's original conception, Zartman also included the presence of a valid spokesperson for each conflict party as an element of ripeness. He later retracted this claim, although still ascribing it "second-level importance" (2000:235).

Zartman has also repeatedly acknowledged the theory's limitations. He writes that "[r]ipeness is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the initiation of negotiations, bilateral or mediated" (2000:227). He further emphasises that it only constitutes a condition, it is neither self-fulfilling nor self-implementing. At the core of this is the notion that a ripe moment must be seized by the conflict parties themselves, if it is to lead to fruition.

3.3.1 Propositions of ripeness theory

The basic proposition of Zartman's theory is that a ripe moment is a necessary but not sufficient condition for negotiations to begin. The ripe moment is in turn constituted of two elements, the MHS and the perception of a way out. The MHS is in turn constituted of deadlock – a hurting stalemate, a painful plateau stretching into the future – optimally associated with an impending, past or narrowly avoided catastrophe. In addition to this objective element of the MHS (hurting stalemate), it also consists of a subjective (perception of a hurting stalemate) element. Zartman argues that only the latter is necessary for the existence of an MHS (2000:229-30).

This points to the theory's problematic ontological and epistemological basis. Irrespective of any objective referents a ripe moment is first and foremost a subjective, perceptual event. The existence of both an MHS and a sense of a way out hinges on whether the parties recognise their very existence. Thus, although they are said to have structural causes – deadlock, catastrophe, alternative policy tracks – we have to find proof of their existence within the agents themselves. The subjective aspect of an MHS could therefore be considered to be the most important element in ripeness theory.

Zartman also recognises that a ripe moment, and specifically the perception of a ripe moment, "can be created if outside parties can cultivate the perception of a painful present versus a preferable alternative" (2000:229). If a perception of an MHS can be created, this begs the question: what are the minimum structural conditions for an MHS to be perceived? Zartman writes that "objective referents" constitute the basis for the subjective perceptions of a ripe moment (ibid.). At the same time, however, he also recognises that even with "clear [objective]

evidence" of the existence of a ripe moment, this is not a sufficient condition for the perception of one (ibid.). If this is true, then it is also true that no objective evidence – apart from the existence of conflict – have to be present for the parties to recognise a ripe moment. The existence of such a moment is effectively entirely dependent on the agents and their willingness or inclination to perceive a ripe moment.

This is also true for the second element of ripeness, the perception of a way out. Here, the explanation also fully pertains to the perceptions of agents themselves, and evidence of these beliefs have to be found within the agents themselves.

With regard to the agent-structure problem, ripeness theory is thus very much a mix of both holist and individualist viewpoints. It also combines both explaining and understanding epistemologies. We can assess data concerning pain-inducing costs and casualties to determine whether a hurting stalemate exists, but to conclude whether the parties recognise this stalemate, we have to look *within* the agents, placing us firmly within the understanding paradigm.

3.3.2 Ripeness theory: hypotheses

In our examination of the theory, we have to analyse the ripe moment through its two constituent elements. We firstly have to determine whether there is any evidence of a hurting stalemate on both sides, secondly whether they each perceive it and thirdly if they express a willingness to explore negotiated solutions.

What are our indicators for analysis? Zartman and Soto write that the hurting stalemate is intimately connected to costs, absolute, relative or opportune, to escalation in terms of increased casualties, and to decreases in external patrons' support (2010:13-8). Absolute costs refer to financial expenditure in absolute terms, while relative costs entail the measurement against some standard. What are viewed as acceptable costs, in relation to the results achieved? Opportunity costs refer to whether the expenditures of conflict prevent preferable or necessary investments, while escalation refers to increases in "body bags and other measures of casualties" (ibid.:13-4). Decreases in external patrons' support refer both to decreases in actual monetary or military support, as well as to decreased tacit support, or encouragement for continued conflict (ibid.:16-7). Determining relative costs and changes in tacit support also requires an understanding epistemology, once again demonstrating Zartman's tendency to mix divergent ontologies and epistemologies without explicitly acknowledging the fact.

From these indicators of a hurting stalemate, we formulate the following hypotheses, all pertaining to the objective referents of the MHS, and a holist ontology.

> *MHS I – An increase in absolute, relative or opportune costs will induce the parties to enter negotiations.*

MHS II – An increase in casualties will induce the parties to enter negotiations.

MHS III – Decreased support from allies will induce the parties to enter negotiations.

With regard to the subjective notion of the MHS, we have to look at the agents and on how they express their beliefs and intentions. This is thus an *individualist* proposition. Official and unofficial statements from leadership figures recognising or addressing the objective referents above can be seen as an indication of a perception of a hurting stalemate.

MHS IV – Statements recognising pain in terms of costs, casualties or decreased support from allies will precede the initiation of negotiations.

In Zartman's terms, only the subjective perception of the stalemate (MHS IV) have to be true for the MHS to be present. However, he also emphasises that the objective referents are cumulative – so if we see proof of the existence of one or more objective referents, we should expect the likelihood of entrance into negotiations to increase. This is also true if we can see proof of an impending, past or narrowly avoided catastrophe. The catastrophe refers to the same objective referents as above but constitutes a precipice in contrast to the hurting plateau of the stalemate. To capture this difference, we formulate the catastrophe hypothesis as:

C – An impending, recent or narrowly avoided <u>sharp</u> increase in absolute, relative or opportune costs; or in casualties will induce the parties to enter negotiations.

What constitutes a "sharp" increase, or an unprecedented situation, will have to be determined from case to case.

With regard to the second element of ripeness, the perception of a way out, we have to use an individualist ontology. The focus will lie on the parties' willingness "to look for a joint solution as an alternative to the pursuit of escalation and victory" (Zartman and Soto 2010:24). As indicators of this willingness we will analyse the parties' expressions of the same – either statements or actions – illustrating their perception of a way out. The hypotheses read as follows:

WO I – Statements expressing a willingness to pursue alternatives to escalation will precede the initiation of negotiations.

WO II – Cooperative actions will precede the initiation of negotiations.

Statements can include the reformulation of interests and demands, from more abstract and extreme to more detailed and pragmatic, in addition to explicit willingness or openness to negotiation, as well as towards the other party. Cooperative actions can include exchanges of prisoners or wounded, mutual ceasefire agreements or repatriation of refugees (Zartman and Soto 2010:24-7).

3.4 Readiness theory

Zartman argues that ripeness theory merely explains the incidence of negotiations, although it is not a sufficient condition in itself (2000:227). The ripe moment has to be seized by the conflict parties if negotiations are to continue and lead to fruition (ibid.:231), however Zartman gives us few clues to why this would happen, merely stating that objective referents "likely" increase parties' willingness to negotiate (2000:229). Readiness theory is in essence a critique of these shortcomings, and an endeavour to better understand parties' willingness to negotiate.

Readiness let us focus on individual conflict parties. While the ripe moment is necessarily a joint state – a mutually shared experience and perception – readiness theory let us analyse the asymmetries that real conflicts contain regarding perceived cost and opportunity (Pruitt 1997:238). Pruitt further argues that the conditions explaining why parties enter negotiations should also encourage the parties to move toward agreement (ibid.), in contrast to ripeness theory's focus on the incidence of negotiations.

Although not acknowledging the fact in terms of the agent-structure debate, Pruitt criticises ripeness in a similar way. The beliefs and intentions of agents are extremely important factors in ripeness theory, yet Zartman does not address the factors contributing to willingness in detail.

Pruitt's solution to this problem is the introduction of two psychological variables, motivation and optimism. Motivation to end conflict results from firstly the perception that the conflict is unwinnable or that it is being lost, secondly that it is costly, and thirdly that it is perceived as dangerous to perpetuate it (Pruitt 2005:7). The decision to enter negotiations should in this regard be seen as a "last-ditch tactic", used when attempts at escalation, seeking new allies or continuing current hostilities have all been exhausted (Pruitt 2007:1525-6). Motivation to negotiate can fourthly be created as a result of third-party pressure from either mediators or allies (Pruitt 2005:7).

However, motivation by itself cannot induce a party to enter negotiations. Optimism, a belief in that the eventual settlement will satisfy one's goals, is also necessary (Pruitt 2007:1529). Optimism firstly results from either lowered – more easily obtainable – goals, secondly from working trust, a belief in that the other party is also motivated to negotiate and to make concessions, and thirdly a "perceived light at the end of the tunnel". This entails the perception that one's opponent is ready to make concessions, and that an acceptable agreement, on a more detailed level, is possible (ibid.).

Furthermore, motivation is linked to increasing optimism, while optimism, in turn, has to increase during the course of negotiations if it is to be sustained (Pruitt 2005:8, 19-22). The two variables are also compensatory to some extent. The value of one can be exchanged for another, with the same result (ibid.:10).

3.4.1 Propositions of readiness theory

Readiness theory induces us to look within the parties to conflict. Ripeness theory implicitly necessitates us to do so but has us grasping at straws when it comes to understanding the mechanisms at work. Through motivation and optimism, we get two concepts complementing the story that ripeness theory tells, giving us a more complete picture of the overarching narrative of peace negotiations.

Both motivation and optimism, as psychological variables, follow an individualist ontology. Although agents draw on external facts in their perceptions, such as number of casualties, perceived risk in continuing conflict etc., motivation and optimism are still found within, and perceived, by agents. Furthermore, in applying these concepts, we have to use an understanding epistemology. This makes it hard to determine how big a change in, for instance, optimism is needed for de-escalation to proceed, or which factors contributed the most to optimism (Schiff 2014:117-9). However, this is merely an inherent feature of an understanding epistemology – it compels us to use an heuristic approach. In contrast to ripeness theory, this fact is at least explicit in Pruitt's theory.

The basic proposition of readiness theory is that, as "readiness (or the components of readiness) become stronger on both sides of a conflict, negotiation is more likely to begin" (Pruitt 2005:9). But in contrast to ripeness theory it is not necessarily a joint state: one side can be more "ready" and interested in negotiations, which by itself "should enhance the likelihood of agreement" (ibid.:12-3). The theory furthermore has causal claims with regard to the success of negotiations, where increasing optimism is a necessary feature for continued negotiations (Pruitt 2015:126).

3.4.2 Readiness theory: hypotheses

The hypotheses concern the antecedent conditions of motivation and optimism, described above. All hypotheses pertain to an individualist ontology.

> *MOT I – Expressions or indications of a perception that the conflict is unwinnable or being lost will precede negotiations.*

> *MOT II – Expressions or indications that the party recognises the conflict as costly will precede negotiations.*

> *MOT III – Expressions or indications of a perception that continued conflict is risky will precede negotiations.*

> *MOT IV – Pressure from third parties will induce the conflict parties to negotiate.*

These hypotheses are quite similar to the subjective notion of the MHS in ripeness theory, although perhaps more detailed in terms of specific conditions. Also, Zartman induces us to specifically look at unofficial or official statements, while Pruitt does not describe in detailed terms how one should determine the presence or values of these variables. It is up to the researcher to interpret different types of expressions as indications of the presence of any antecedent conditions.

With regard to optimism, the hypotheses read:

> *OPT I – Expressions or actions indicating lowered aspirations will precede negotiations.*

> *OPT II – Expressions or indications of working trust toward the other party will precede negotiations.*

> *OPT III – Expressions or indications of the perception that an acceptable agreement is being outlined will precede negotiations.*

Actions in OPT I refer to concessions which decrease the distance between the parties' conflicting positions. For example, Pruitt brands the British government's approval to include Sinn Fein in the Northern Ireland peace negotiations as an action which increased optimism on the republican side (2007:1530). Working trust concerns one party's belief that the other party is also motivated to negotiate an end to the conflict and is ready to make concessions (Pruitt 2015:126). OPT III concerns the development of a framework for agreement, bridging the divergent positions of the parties. Many points can still be vague, but the outlines of agreement point to which issues are to be negotiated, where concessions will have to be made, etc. (ibid.:126-7).

3.5   Categorisation of hypotheses

Building on Hollis' and Smith's two-by-two matrix (1991:215), visualising how ontological and epistemological approaches relate to each other, the hypotheses and their underlying propositions are categorised as follows:

Fig. 2: ontological and epistemological approaches

	Explaining	Understanding
Holistic	*External structures (1)* MHS I MHS II MHS III C	*Collective rules (2)*
Individualistic	*Rational choices (3)* (MHS I) (MHS III)	*Reasoned choices (4)* MHS IV WO I WO II MOT I MOT II MOT III MOT IV OPT I OPT II OPT III

Some things to note. If MHS I refer to relative or opportune costs, and MHS III refer to decreases in tacit support, the hypotheses conform to cell (3). The individual agents and their choices based in cost-benefit analysis, concerning, for example, increased relative costs, are in focus. This could be comparable to MOT IV, but this argument is different, as Pruitt emphasises that agents under comparable pressure from third parties will not necessarily act the same way (2005:7-8). Third-party pressure is one potential source of motivation but does not create it in every instance.

4　The Tajik civil war
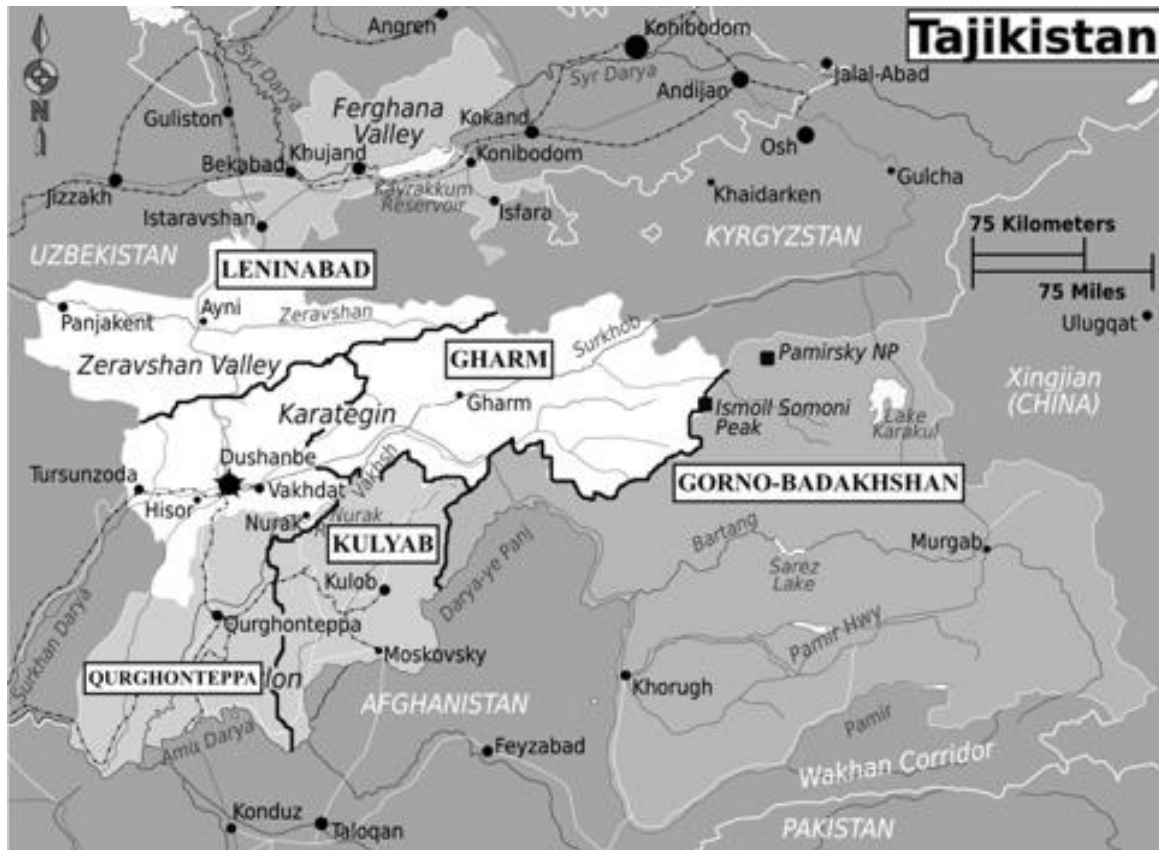
Map 1: Soviet-era regional borders and names superimposed on a map of present-day Tajikistan.

4.1　The path to war

In the aftermath of the failed Soviet coup attempt on 19 August 1991, Tajikistan followed the example of fellow Soviet republics, declaring independence on September 9, 1991. Demonstrations against the communist leadership had already begun in the Tajik capital, Dushanbe, in August, but after independence, these grew in size. The Supreme Soviet, the parliament, dominated by anti-reform communists, and its new acting president Rakhmon Nabiyev, made clear it had no intention of giving up power. The political confrontation between communists and the opposition, representing a disparate alliance of democratic, islamist and nationalist groups became all the more severe, culminating in the spring of 1992 (Brown 1998:88-91; Epkenhans 2016:146-74).

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Two rival demonstrations sprung up in Dushanbe in April 1992. Government supporters gathered on Ozodi (freedom) square, while the diverse opposition assembled on Shahidon (martyrs') square. On April 27 over 100,000 people protested on Shahidon (Epkenhans 2016:237). This prompted the Nabiyev government to arm its supporters on Ozodi square. Tensions rose further, finally erupting in violent clashes on May 5 (Ibid.:277-8). During the following days intense violence erupted in the Kulyab region (Brown 1998:91-3). The security structures of Tajikistan had completely broken down. Local self-defence groups formed throughout the country, while criminal gangs or militias with allegiances to strongmen, different opposition groups or the government fought for regional influence (Akiner 2001:37-8).

4.1.1 Causes of the war

The causes of the war are disputed. The islamist opposition have frequently termed the conflict as an ideological one, where communists faced a resurgent popular, islamist movement. However, Oliver Roy disputes this, writing that the conflict emerged mainly as a result of ethnic and regional cleavages, where the government supporters mainly came from the Kulyab and Leninabad provinces, while the islamist opposition were almost entirely from the Gharm Valley and the eastern Gorno-Badakhshan region (1998:136-40). During Soviet times, these regional divisions had been institutionalised, with regional-based solidarity groups fighting for wealth and influence within the state apparatus (Epkenhans 2016:32).

Dov Lynch chiefly names state weakness in terms of state capacity and legitimacy as the most prominent cause of the war. In 1991, 46 percent of Tajikistan's government revenue came from the Soviet budget (2001:49-54). In this vein, Shirin Akiner brands the economic collapse that followed Tajik independence an important cause of the conflict. The cataclysmic economic downturn after independence lay the foundation for large youth unemployment, extensive corruption and the formation of criminal gangs (Akiner 2001:25-6). The Tajik state was too weak to tackle these issues, contributing to the descent into chaos.

4.2 The inter-Tajik negotiations

After Nabiyev was ousted as Communist Party chief on November 18, 1992, Emomali Rakhmonov – a former collective farm director from Kulyab – was elected to power by the Supreme Soviet. With the support of Uzbek forces and the Russian 201st Motorised Division (MRD), stationed in Tajikistan since Soviet times, Rakhmonov managed to retake Dushanbe in late 1992 (Lynch 2000:159). He then launched a large-scale offensive against the opposition in the central and southwestern parts of the country. These setbacks forced the opposition to flee the country. The leadership of the democratic opposition took refuge in Moscow,

while islamist leaders moved to Iran, Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia (Zviagelskaya 1997).

In 1993 the divergent islamist groups formed the Movement for Islamic Revival in Tajikistan, with the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) and its leader Sayid Abdulloh Nuri at its core (Olimova and Olimov 2001:27). In early 1994, the islamist front joined forces with the democratic opposition, forming the United Tajik Opposition (UTO). Olimova and Olimov pose that this unlikely alliance was feasible as ideological differences were overshadowed by the catastrophic political and military situation faced by the opposition in 1992-1994 (2001:26). Nevertheless, the IRP soon came to dominate this coalition, both enjoying the support of Iran (Clark 2014:105) and local warlords in northern Afghanistan, providing the IRP with arms and training (Akiner 2001:48-9).

Table 1: the inter-Tajik negotiations

Meeting	Date	Venue
I Round	4–19 April 1994	Moscow
II Round	18–28 June 1994	Tehran
Consultative Meeting	12–17 Sep. 1994	Tehran
III Round	20 Oct.–1 Nov. 1994	Islamabad
Consultative Meeting	20–26 April 1995	Moscow
Meeting between Rakhmonov and Nuri	16–17 May 1995	Kabul
IV Round	22 May–2 June 1995	Almaty
Meeting between Rakhmonov and Nuri	19 July 1995	Tehran
V Round	30 Nov.–22 Dec. 1995 26 Jan.–21 July 1996	Ashgabat
Meeting between Rakhmonov and Nuri	10–11 Dec. 1996	Khos Deh
Meeting between Rakhmonov and Nuri	10–23 Dec. 1996	Moscow
VI Round	5–19 Jan. 1997	Tehran
Meeting between Rakhmonov and Nuri	20–21 Feb. 1997	Meshed
VII Round	26 Feb–8 Mar. 1997	Moscow
VIII Round, part 1	9–16 April 1997	Tehran
Meeting between Rakhmonov and Nuri	16–18 May 1997	Bishkek
VIII Round, part 2	21–28 May 1997	Tehran
Meeting between Rakhmonov and Nuri	26–27 June 1997	Moscow

4.2.1 First round: 4–19 April 1994

After routing the opposition in 1992, Rakhmonov considered, the UTO to be more or less defeated (Zviagelskaya 1997). Why then, did the government agree to meet with the opposition?

The answer might be puzzling: it did not want to. Beginning with structural factors, it is evident that the government was in a very good position throughout 1992-1994. The economic situation was still catastrophic but did not yet pose a sufficient cost (MHS I) for the government to consider negotiation. Militarily the situation was bad. A UN report describes the situation in Tajikistan – especially along the Afghan-Tajik border – as "unstable and explosive" (UN 1994a:1). However, the government was firmly in control of the greater part of Tajik territory, keeping the opposition largely on the Afghan side of the border.

The most significant reason for the government's unwillingness to negotiate was, however, the significant support it received from the Russian Federation. From April 1993, the Russian Ministry of Defence (MoD) started transferring arms to Tajik forces, while in May, a "Friendship Treaty" was signed, providing Rakhmonov with extensive Russian military and economic support (Lynch 2001:57-8). In addition, the approx. 10,000 soldiers of the Russian 201st MRD were still stationed in the country, mainly in Dushanbe and along the Afghan-Tajik border, where an additional 14,000 Russian border troops were stationed. At the same time, it has been estimated that the opposition forces numbered around 4,000-5,000 (Lynch 2000:154).

Contextual conditions can thus not explain the incidence of negotiations in April 1994. While it can be argued that the UTO was firmly in a hurting stalemate – having been forced out of the country while facing a significantly larger force – this stalemate was in no way mutual.

Turning to willingness factors, Lynch argues that the UTO realised that it could not achieve an all-out victory by military means quite early (2001:57) – perhaps after the catastrophe (C) it arguably experienced in late 1992. According to Lynch, the UTO leadership therefore realised that it would have to cooperate with the Rakhmonov government to some extent (ibid.). During the talks, this was expressed through the introduction of power-sharing mechanisms as a way to solve the conflict (UN 1994b:1-3). This can be considered as the UTO lowering aspirations (OPT I), reconsidering its previously uncompromising approach. Also, leading up to the negotiations, the UTO showed some indication of cooperative behaviour (WO II), not least in agreeing to hold the talks in Moscow, which was earlier rejected as the UTO preferred either Tehran or Islamabad (UN 1994a:2-3).

The government, on the other hand, was largely pressured into negotiating by the Russian Federation, although being unwilling to actually partake. To explain this, we have to note that the Russian Federation, in the case of Tajikistan, was not a unitary actor. The Russian MoD and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) each pursued their own, respective goals and strategies (Lynch 2000:161).

The MoD's strategy of unconditional support to Rakhmonov dominated during the first months of the war (Jonson 1997:7). However, after a devastating attack on a Russian border post on 13 July 1993, the limitations of a purely military approach became evident. After this partial catastrophe (C) on part of the Russians, achieving stability in the region became the primary concern for the MFA (Jonson 1997:8). The memory of the Soviet-Afghan war still loomed large. As such, the MFA started to pressure Rakhmonov to enter into negotiations with the UTO.

Rakhmonov could not ignore his patron's calls to enter into negotiations but did so unwillingly and without real commitment. As an indication of this, the leader of the government delegation during the first round was the minister of Labour and Employment (UN 1994b:1), far from the representative the UTO and UN mediators had hoped for.

In parallel with efforts to pressure Rakhmonov to negotiate, the MoD continued to support the regime militarily and economically. Pressure from the Russians (MOT IV) did in other words not also coincide with decreased actual support (MHS III), which perhaps could have induced the government to act more conciliatory. Lynch writes that the Russians' "contradictory approach […] undermined [the] talks" (2000:164-5).

Despite this, the parties managed – with the help of UN Special Envoy Ramon Piriz-Ballon – to agree on an agenda for subsequent meetings and on three "clusters" of issues to discuss further: a) political settlement; b) refugees; c) structure of the Tajik government (UN 1994b:2). No progress was made on the first and third points, but both parties agreed on the establishment of a joint commission tasked with handling problems relating to refugees (ibid.:5).

In sum, despite neither party having fully abandoned unilateral strategies, and with particularly low willingness to pursue agreement from the government's side, the first round of talks was in some respects still successful. If we treat the outcomes of the first round of negotiations as independent variables, referring to subsequent instances of negotiation, we can see the results in the following light. The three clusters of issues constituted a rough outline of an agreement, arguably increasing optimism (OPT III), while the joint commission on refugees can be seen as cooperative action (WO II), creating a foundation for non-conflictual interaction.

4.2.2   Second round: 18–28 June 1994

The two parties met again in June. Practically nothing had changed since the first round of negotiations: daily fighting continued along the Afghan-Tajik border while the economic situation was deteriorating further (UN 1994c:1). Akiner writes that the negotiations "seemed to be losing momentum", with no particular interest in sustaining them from either side (2001:54).

Perhaps the light optimism produced by the few points of agreement during the first round at least induced the parties not to abandon the talks. However, the lack of actual motivation to participate in the talks, especially from the government's side, was once again evident. A UN report notes that the government's delegation did not include a full representation of influential factions within the government (UN 1994d:3), essentially constituting wholly "invalid" spokespersons for that side. Although the design and monitoring of the ceasefire were agreed upon, no agreement could be made with regard to when it should come into effect (UN 1994d:1).

After negotiations in Tehran ended inconclusively, Rakhmonov continued to pursue a unilateral strategy. The government announced that a presidential

election and a referendum on a new constitution would be held in September 1994 (Pannier 2017a). The UTO viewed this decision as catastrophic, with the potential of dismissing it from all political participation. As a result, it decided to increase its military activities along the Afghan-Tajik border (Zviagelskaya 1997).

The peace process was now undoubtedly derailing. Conscious of this fact, the UN decided to threaten to suspend any further talks, putting pressure (MOT IV) on the conflict parties to come back to the negotiating table.

The increased intensity of UTO attacks mainly targeted the Russian troops stationed on the border. Although Moscow still supported Rakhmonov, these developments were worrying and endangered significant numbers of Russian troops (Vukovic 2016:74). Iran had supported the Tajik opposition from the beginning, although not to a significant extent. The Iranian regime's foremost priority was to maintain friendly relations with Moscow. Therefore, "Iran moved in a way as not to disturb Russia" (Clark 2014:89). However, as the situation deteriorated, it became obvious that for Iran to have any influence in the future of Tajikistan, a peace agreement was essential (ibid.:107). In sum, the interests of Iran and Russia – the respective patrons of the two conflict parties – converged in de-escalating the conflict. After the UN threatened to suspend the peace talks, both countries therefore acted to bring the parties back to the table.

According to Hay, the Russian and Iranian efforts "were instrumental in convincing the respective Tajik delegations" to return to the talks, which they did in September 1994 (Hay 2001:40). This was preceded by cooperative actions (WO II) by the government, such as an amnesty decree, the release of political prisoners, upgrading the level of the delegation, as well as the postponement of the election and referendum (UN 1994e:1). At the September consultative meeting, the parties signed the UN-drafted ceasefire agreement, to take effect on October 20. Once again, third-party pressure (MOT IV) had induced the parties to come back to the table, this time with some positive results.

4.2.3 Third round and beyond: escalation

The cooperative actions and signing of the ceasefire agreement set the stage for the third round of negotiations, to be held in Islamabad, October 1994. The parties agreed to an extension of the ceasefire agreement, and the UN decided to launch its observation mission, UNMOT (UN 1994f:1-7). However, from here, the situation deteriorated quickly.

Both ceasefire agreements (Sept. and Oct.) never took hold, according Pannier (2017a), as both parties pursued unilateral strategies in parallel, systematically breaching the agreements. I would argue that the government in particular still was not at all committed to the talks. It had in no way abandoned unilateral strategies and lacked optimism about the conclusion of the talks. There is an inherent lack of statements or indications from the side of Rakhmonov or similar high representatives of the regime that they in any way perceived the situation as costly (MHS I; MOT II), that alternatives to escalation were seriously considered (WO I) or that the conflict was unwinnable (MOT I).

Lynch poses that Rakhmonov's only priority up until the end of 1996 was to consolidate power (2001:57). The negotiations were important to the extent that they helped him stay in power until he had secured his own position. The UTO frequently criticised the government's lack of legitimacy as a means to undermine it. Rakhmonov was, after all, still governing under the Soviet-era constitution. Therefore, ensuring a legitimate mandate to govern through elections, ensuring his own political – and perhaps also actual – survival was of utmost priority.

Rakhmonov's position was also challenged by internal rivals. When Rakhmonov rose to power in 1992, he had set out to purge Leninabadi influence within the state apparatus while increasing the Kulyabi hold on power (Driscoll 2015:150-3). The Leninabadis constituted the political elite during Soviet times, and many of them were still very influential within the Tajik state (Roy 1998:136-40). This can be considered a huge impediment for entering negotiations. From Rakhmonov's perspective, continued conflict was in many ways less risky than achieving peace (MOT III). Before he had secured his power base any power-sharing arrangements could soon see him outmanoeuvred by both internal and external rivals.

The elections were held in February 1995. Rakhmonov narrowly beat his Leninabadi rival and former prime minister Abdumalik Abdullojonov in a fraudulent election (Akbarzadeh 2001:30). Rakhmonov's position was now secured. This contributed to a more confrontational stance toward the opposition (Zviagelskaya 1997). Jonson writes that Moscow "became Rakhmonov's hostage" after the elections (1997:10). Support of the Rakhmonov regime became the only alternative for ensuring Russian influence in the region. Thus, when the fifth round of negotiations began in Ashgabat in December 1995, the government, confident in its position, rejected all discussions on power sharing, insisting that the "existing constitutional framework" be respected (ibid.).

Although the parties met five times between 20 April and 22 December 1995, this happened against a backdrop of escalation and conflict. As the UTO felt the government was not committed to the negotiations – any prior working trust (OPT II) or optimism about agreement (OPT III) had now been erased – it launched intrusions into central Tajikistan, culminating in a large-scale offensive in the souther Gharm region in early 1996 (UN 2000). It was obvious that the peace talks were *de facto* dead (Iji 2011:7-10). The UTO's second-in-command, Akbar Turajonzoda, said in 1995 that "when we talk of military activity, we mean that we will only use our military operations as a lever to pressure Russia and the regime in Dushanbe to find a political solution" (Lynch 2001:56). Indicating the UTO's realisation that if something of substance were to happen, the contextual conditions had to change. The UTO's willingness to explore alternatives to escalation (WO I) had obviously not induced the government to attain an equal motivation for engaging in the peace talks.

4.2.4 Breakthrough: the Khusdeh agreement

It was in 1996 that peace would finally become conceivable, induced by contextual conditions. The first major development occurred in spring 1996. Abdullojonov, having been defeated in the presidential election, fled to Moscow. There, he formed the National Revival Movement (NRM), a Leninabad bloc lobbying for inclusion in the inter-Tajik negotiations. The rise of NRM greatly concerned Rakhmonov, who were afraid of the influence Abdullojonov wielded, even in exile (Akbarzadeh 2001:30-1). His fears were confirmed when large demonstrations broke out in several Leninabadi cities in May 1996. With demonstrations in the nation's industrial heartland, the costs of continued conflict (MHS I) as well as the risks associated with it (MOT III) seemed to increase.

Another development was the Russian Federation's increased concern for the continued war. Escalating violence and military victories on part of the UTO in Gharm and Gorno-Badakhshan put pressure on the Russian and Tajik leadership. It is estimated that the size of UTO forces had increased significantly from mid-1995 onwards, to between 10,000-12,000 soldiers (Lynch 2000:154). This constituted a significant challenge. In January 1996, President Boris Yeltsin said that Russia was "tiring of holding Tajikistan in its arms" (Pannier 2017a). Perhaps an indication of a perception of a hurting stalemate (MHS IV). Either way, the one-sided military strategy had become visibly inefficient in 1996, inducing the Russians to pressure Rakhmonov (MOT IV) into action (Lynch 2001:59).

The final variable that induced the parties to meet in December 1996, was the Taliban's conquest of Kabul. One reason for Russian government's all-out support of Rakhmonov until 1996 was its concerns regarding islamist fundamentalism. With islamist insurgencies in the Northern Caucasus, securing other unstable regions in the near abroad became of utmost priority to the Russian leadership (Jonson 1997:30). As the Taliban conquered Kabul in September 1996, continuing their advance north, the worst fears of Russian policymakers seemed to come true.

This can arguably be termed as an impending catastrophe (C) for the Russians and the Rakhmonov regime. Pannier (2017a) writes that the Russians were extremely worried that the UTO's islamist leadership would strike a deal with the Taliban to pursue a military victory in Tajikistan. Achieving peace in Tajikistan, transforming it into a stable buffer zone against islamist fundamentalism, thus became a new priority for the Russian government (Vukovic 2016:77). Although these fears might not have been justified – the IRP's relations with the Taliban were not good, the IRP being more moderate in their view of islam (Pannier 2017b) – Moscow took the threat very seriously. They thus resorted to heavily pressuring the parties (MOT IV) to negotiate (Vukovic 2016:78).

Iran was also concerned with the rise of the Taliban, as the brutal sunni extremist group displayed a deep hatred towards shiites (Clark 2014:118). In the end, the interests of the two patrons converged, creating enough pressure on both

parties to induce them to negotiate (Vukovic 2016:78). This was no small feat, as the UTO was making significant military gains in 1996. However, it can be conceived that the UTO viewed continued conflict as risky (MOT III) following the Taliban advances in Afghanistan, as the relationship between the two groups was unclear. As the war entered its fifth winter, war-weariness was also prevalent in the UTO. One local commander said that the UTO leadership does not "care about peace because they live their comfortable lives in Talegan and Tehran […] They would think twice on the continuation of the war if their own sons would be fighting here" (Djavadi 1996). Indicating at least a local perception of the conflict as costly (MHS IV; MOT II).

On 10-11 December 1996, Rakhmonov and Nuri met in the village of Khusdeh, northern Afghanistan. Against the backdrop of the last year's rapidly deteriorating situation, the two leaders managed to agree on a ceasefire and initialed a draft peace agreement (UN 1997a:1). This was a huge development, not least the draft agreement, which outlined the creation and powers of the Commission on National Reconciliation (CNR), the power-sharing body that were to accommodate the interests of the conflict parties. Nuri made important concessions (Olimova and Olimov 2001:27) to the government, perhaps increasing working trust (OPT II). Either way, the detailed outlines of a mutually acceptable agreement (OPT III) set the stage for the rapid resolution of the conflict that was to come.

4.2.5 Peace at last

After signing the Khusdeh agreement in Moscow on 23 December 1996, the parties met again in Tehran in January, further outlining the details on the functioning of the CNR (Iji 2011:13). In February, Rakhmonov and Nuri met again, this time agreeing on the exact number of members in the CNR and amount of senior government posts guaranteed to the UTO (UN 1997b:4). It is clear that a sense of optimism was growing. Both parties made concessions in the talks in late 1996 and early 1997, indicating sequentially lowered aspirations (OPT I), while working trust also seemed to increase (OPT II) as more details of the eventual settlement (OPT III) were outlined.

As the eighth and final round commenced in Tehran in April 1997, the parties were getting closer to agreement. Issues of military integration of UTO forces were resolved, and the parties agreed that CIS forces were to remain in the country, ensuring stability, while the UN and neighbouring Central Asian countries would monitor the implementation of agreements. Whenever talks stalled, the Iranians and Russians quickly pressured the parties to return to the table (Iji 2011:15).

On 27 June in Moscow, the Tajik civil war finally came to a close. Rakhmonov and Nuri signed the General Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and National Accord in Tajikistan, formally concluding the negotiations that had taken over three years to complete.

5 Conclusion

Summing up the inter-Tajik negotiations, UN special envoy Ramon Piriz-Ballon said that the participation of the UN had been essential, but that had not there "been a will from both sides to come to terms […] the efforts of the UN would have not been fruitful" (Pannier 2000). However, throughout the course of the inter-Tajik negotiations, evidence of this mutual willingness to resolve the conflict was strikingly absent. Both parties preferred to pursue unilateral solutions, frequently breaking ceasefires and not implementing concessions agreed upon – up until late 1996.

It can be argued that a ripe moment finally occurred in late 1996. The Rakhmonov regime found itself in a stalemate, challenged internally by competing power centres in Leninabad, and externally by the UTO's advances. Mark Feigin (1998) writes that, in early 1997, around 40 percent of Tajik territory was controlled by the opposition, with some forces being only kilometres away from Dushanbe. Notwithstanding the prospect of a Taliban advance to the Tajik border, an opposition advance on the capital was therefore equally feasible. In itself perhaps constituting an impending catastrophe. The UTO had not been in a similar position since 1992. With these contextual factors as "objective referents", it can be argued that the Russians managed to convince the Tajik government to perceive a hurting stalemate, as well as a way out. Rakhmonov also had to keep in mind that a failure to comply with Russian wishes could induce them to withdraw their support, essential to the regime's survival.

Turning to the UTO, the contextual factors listed above seem to contradict the eventual outcome. Against the background of significant military victories and a war-weary Russia that had rejected to increase its military presence throughout 1996-1997 (Lynch 2000:166), the sudden conciliatory stance of the UTO in 1997 seems puzzling. This fact is underlined as Nuri's concessions in Khusdeh in 1996 created significant conflict within the UTO leadership and "deep frustration among many IRP members" (Olimova and Olimov 2001:27).

It is conceivable that, after five years of conflict, the UTO leadership could have perceived themselves to be in a hurting stalemate. That continued conflict, even when advances were made, constituted an unbearable cost. However, the difference in contextual conditions for the government and UTO still point to the limitations purely contextual explanations. We have to look within the UTO leadership to try to understand why they were willing to compromise. Perhaps Rakhmonov's significant concessions during the 1997 talks induced increased optimism in the UTO that they would achieve many of their goals. Akiner poses that the successful outcome of the peace process largely depended on the similar leadership qualities and personalities of Rakhmonov and Nuri (2001:51). Perhaps the chemistry between the two leaders contributed to a significant increase in

working trust and optimism when they personally took over the negotiations in 1995. It is also conceivable that Russia, and most importantly Iran, as the UTO's patron, managed to convince the UTO leadership to perceive a hurting stalemate.

It is also conceivable that the UTO was motivated to negotiate throughout the final years of negotiations. Keeping in mind the quote from the IRP's second-in-command Turajonzoda in 1995, that UTO military actions should only be seen "as a lever to pressure Russia and the regime in Dushanbe to find a political solution" (Lynch 2001:56), this motivation to negotiate is clear. Instead of pursuing a risky continuation of the conflict in 1997, the UTO was thus perhaps set on using any military gains as negotiation leverage.

Vladimir Goryayev gives credit to the UN for the successful outcome of the negotiations. Through its long engagement and recognition by the parties as a trusted coordinator and lead mediator in the talks (Goryayev 2001:37), the UN arguably managed to maintain a level of motivation for both parties to engage in negotiations. Despite constant setbacks and no progress whatsoever for significant periods, the parties still came back to the table. When the proper contextual and willingness factors arose, there was already a well-functioning framework present, enabling optimism to increase rapidly, and for significant progress to be made.

In the end, the hurting contextual factors in concert with the impending catastrophe of the Taliban advance – which converged the interests of Iran and Russia – seem to have been the most significant factors in explaining why the Tajik civil war finally came to a close. However, as the brief discussion above show, the contextual aspects of the conflict does not provide us with the whole story. Willingness factors seem to provide an equally feasible explanation for why the parties acted as they did, especially in explaining why the UTO chose to abandon its unilateral strategies.

Studying willingness and focusing on the agents also provided us with a comprehensive explanation for why negotiations continued to occur 1994-1997, although extremely limited progress was made until late 1996. Although the parties were seemingly interested in negotiating, a closer look show that they – the government in particular – were not at all motivated or optimistic about constructive peace talks. Instead being pressured to attend by allies, more or less keeping up appearances.

In conclusion, this study of the Tajik peace process can be seen as an example of how the different "sorts of story" that the social sciences tell complement and enrich each other. Although providing different solutions to the agent-structure problem, individualist, holist, explanatory and understanding stories all contribute to the overall narrative of how we are to understand and explain the transition from conflict to peace.

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