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# Tajik President Spurns Talk of Arab-Style Unrest

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DUSHANBE, Tajikistan — Tajik President Emomali Rakhmon said Wednesday that an Arab-style revolution is "impossible" in his Central Asian nation because the population does not want a return to civil war.

Many analysts have drawn parallels between uprisings across North Africa and the Middle East, and the situation in the former Soviet republics of Central Asia, where authoritarian leaders have crushed dissent during decades in power.

"Arab-style revolutions are impossible in Tajikistan," the president said in his annual address to parliament. "The country has lived through a five-year civil conflict, which killed more than 100,000 people and turned about 1 million into refugees."

Rakhmon's Moscow-backed government fought a 1992-97 civil war with factions reflecting overlapping political, religious and clan rivalries, including members of the Islamic opposition. A power-sharing peace agreement formally ended the war in 1997.

The former state farm director has run the impoverished largely agrarian country of 7.5 million people since 1992. With an average monthly wage of $93, Tajikistan ranks as the poorest among the Central Asian republics.

Widespread poverty, the growth of Islamist militancy and drug trafficking from neighboring Afghanistan threaten stability in parts of the strategic but volatile region, where Russia, China and the United States vie for influence.

Rakhmon has been criticized at home and abroad for attempts to stifle opposition voices and for Soviet-style crackdowns on deeply religious Muslims in the country, which his opponents say risk fueling radical Islam.

He has accused unidentified foreign forces of trying to spark unrest in his nation, which shares a long and porous border with Afghanistan.

"The experience of the country's civil war shows how the population of a whole country can become a toy in the hands of geopolitical players," Rakhmon said in his address. "Therefore, it is crucial to consolidate all forces of the government and civil society around the central authorities."

Tajikistan's economy relies heavily on remittances from about 1 million migrant workers, many of them young men — the core demographic for protest — living in Russia.

But underlining the country's fragile stability, security forces have been conducting a large-scale operation in eastern Tajikistan to track down and destroy Islamist rebels blamed for killing 28 government troops in an ambush last September.

Officials say they have killed two al-Qaida-linked warlords and dozens of rebels in the raids on the mountains.

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