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## **TAJIKISTAN ACCUSES IRAN OF INVOLVEMENT IN KILLINGS**

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Tajikistan on August 8 accused Iran of backing high-profile killings in the wake of the Central Asian country's 1990s civil war, including the assassination of former parliament chairman Safarali Kenjaev in 1999.

In a 45-minute documentary broadcast on Tajik state television, the Interior Ministry claimed that Tehran was interested in fomenting civil war in Tajikistan and provided financial assistance to the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) and trained militants linked to the party on Iranian soil.

According to the ministry, Iranian financial support and instructions to carry out assassinations were conveyed to IRPT militants through Khoji Halim Nazarzoda, a former deputy defense minister who was one of the Islamic opposition party's commanders in the 1990s. Nazarzoda was killed in September 2015 during an anti-coup operation near the Tajik capital, Dushanbe.

A number of Tajik public figures -- Mohammad Aseemi, a professor; Yusuf Isaki, a doctor; novelist Saif Afardi; presidential political adviser Karim Yuldashev; and a former grand mufti of Tajikistan -- were killed between 1997 and 2004, as were 20 Russian officers.

In the documentary, a man who identified himself as a former Islamic opposition fighter said that he traveled to Iran in 1995 and received sabotage training along with 200 compatriots in the city of Qom. He said he returned to Tajikistan in 1997 with clear instructions to kill political and public figures.

There was no way to immediately verify the man's identity or the authenticity of his statement.

Documentaries on state TV are sometimes used in former Soviet republics to make accusations against government critics or opponents.

Iran and Russia acted as mediators in the negotiation process that ended the five-year civil war in 1997.

The documentary aired amid tensions between Tajikistan and Iran over Iranian support for the IRPT, which was represented in the Tajik parliament for 15 years after the war but was outlawed and branded a terrorist organization by the Tajik Supreme Court of in 2015.

Several IRPT leaders have been convicted and sentenced to long prison terms on charges they say are politically motivated, prompting criticism from the UN and human rights groups.

Tensions have flared between Tajikistan and Iran in the past, with Dushanbe accusing Tehran's diplomats of carrying out excessive activities in the country.

But the documentary represents the first time Dushanbe has openly accused Iran of financing and directing political killings following the civil war.

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Kaynak/Source: