

TAJIKISTAN

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EDMUND MCWILLIAMS Chargé d'Affaires Dushanbe, Tajikistan (1992-1994)

Chargé d'Affaires Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan (1992)

A native of Rhode Island, Mr. McWilliams was educated at the University of Rhode Island and Ohio University. In the course of his diplomatic career he served in several South East Asia posts including Vientiane, Bangkok and Djakarta. Other assignments took him to Moscow, Managua, Kabul, and Islamabad. In 1992 Mr. McWilliams was engaged in opening US Embassies in the newly independent states of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. While his assignments were primarily in the Political and Economic fields, in Washington he dealt with Labor and Human Rights issues. Mr. McWilliams was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2005-2006.

Q: What was the reception, what was the situation in Tajik-

MCWILLIAMS: Tajikistan.

Q: Tajikistan, in Dushanbe?

MCWILLIAMS: Well, that was an entirely different situation, very interesting time. Whereas the leadership had been very solid and well established in Kyrgyzstan, in Tajikistan the old

communist leadership had already faced challenges the previously fall from Islamic elements and more democratic elements. We sensed that coming in, and in the first week or two we took the opportunity to travel extensively in Tajikistan and I think did some good color reporting, but also at the same time picked up growing tension in Tajikistan from these Islamics and also democrats who were united with them against the old communist leadership. What developed within I'd say two to three weeks of our presence there, we moved into a hotel as our embassy, one floor of a hotel which we gradually expanded into, but a demonstration began in the central square, not unlike what we saw in the Ukraine in Kiev last year, people just basically not leaving, protesting the government and the very shaky communist apparatchik regime was unable to really deal with this threat and, ultimately, I recall--just a second--we were very troubled by this and I think this is a failing in Washington, we had very little response from State Department to our reporting, I think rather good reporting, of this developing crisis of authority in Tajikistan.

I recall one afternoon the foreign minister, whom I had become quite close to, took me on a walk in the sort of enclosure where the Soviets used to run things but basically it was almost like a green zone as in Baghdad, a safe area for the government, and he called me out there and we went for a long walk. He said we're not going to talk in my office. And his question very directly to me was how will Washington react if we use force against this massive demonstration which is now we feel threatening our government? And I said that I had no instructions but that my understanding would be what I would anticipate is that our feeling, our position, would be that they should not use force, that they should seek to negotiate and that by all means not turn what had been a Soviet-style security force against the people who were up 'til that point demonstrating peacefully.

Q: I might say this is about three years after Tiananmen Square? And so Tiananmen Square was very much-

MCWILLIAMS: We got our ambassador- I moved in and we opened the embassy in March and then we had our ambassador, Stan Escudero, come out in July. He'd served in Iran and spoke Farsi and I think that was very important. He was a very sociable man, bigger than life figure not unlike Nick Thorne, whom I think I mentioned earlier. But I think in many ways a lot more circumspect than Nick. But because he spoke Farsi he made a great hit with the Tajiks. I should say perhaps before he arrived there was a very interesting period.

The United States, both when I was in Bishkek but also in Dushanbe, sought to establish a good relationship with these new governments by providing assistance essentially entailing bringing in an air transport with all sorts of foods and medicines and so on basically stuff I think that we didn't really need because the quality of the stuff brought in was of some question. But what they would do is every two or three weeks send in one of these air transports which we'd go out to the airport, unload, put into trucks and then take around to various places in Tajikistan to deliver. Now, this was at a time when conflict had begun. We had a very confused picture throughout Tajikistan with different lines of control, certain factions would control this town, others would control this road to this town and so on, and what we did was to essentially with our convoys of five or six, seven or eight trucks actually move through these lines to our destination to deliver these humanitarian supplies. And what struck me as impressive at that time and still was that invariably, no matter who was manning these lines, whether it was the old communist

government apparatchiks or the democrats or the Islamics, we would be able to negotiate our way through these checkpoints essentially to make our deliveries. And two things seemed to be important. One, that it was humanitarian assistance and of course they would inspect what we were carrying, but then the second thing was that we were Americans. And at that point all elements seemed to appreciate the fact that they wanted to deal well with the Americans. I thought that was impressive at that time.

Q: Well, what was going on there?

MCWILLIAMS: It was essentially a fight. Initially we thought a democratic-Islamic fight against the old communist apparatchiks and to some extent, of course, I think many of us were sympathetic with that, the old Soviet representatives were being thrown out – it was a natural evolution. But it became very clear after the old Soviet elite fled Dushanbe for the north and the Islamic nominated opposition took over that there was a very heavy Iranian hand in this. The Iranian embassy expanded broadly. There began to be marches in the street in which the Iranians were seen to be participating. Iranian hymns were being hummed and sung as they marched along and so on. It became to some extent menacing for us, not so much that it was anti-American, but it was clearly a fact that we were not on close ties with this emerging opposition that had already gained control of the capital of Dushanbe.

Q: Well now, were the Turks trying to do anything at the time? Because this is, you know, they were talking about a greater Turkish influence throughout there.

MCWILLIAMS: Our strategy in Central Asia early on had been to essentially use the Turks as our advancement. The Turks under then-Prime Minister Ozal were very anxious to play this role. I think that they had aspirations of even displacing the Soviets, the Russians in Central Asia with U.S. backing and with NATO backing. In ultimate terms, I think this is very unrealistic. Turkey simply didn't have the diplomatic strength, certainly not the economic strength to, by any stretch of the imagination, replace the Russians who still maintained a very important influence in that region. I recall in specific instances where the Turks were under the impression that their language would be mutually intelligible in all of the capitals save Tajikistan, which was Farsi dominated, was Farsi language for base, but in point of fact their language was not intelligible to the local people. But that was our intent, basically, to use the Turks as our advance people, but in point of fact the death of Prime Minister Ozal, the sudden death of the prime minister, pretty much ended that whole notion but that was the initial expectation.

Q: Now, both in Bishkek, but particularly in Tajikistan, did you find yourself running head on against now the Russian embassy and all? I mean, was this a problem there?

MCWILLIAMS: The Russians were slow to reestablish - well, they didn't open an embassy while I was in Bishkek and they were very slow to reestablish in Dushanbe, but I think in point of fact that reflected the sense in Moscow that they were not prepared to open an embassy and acknowledge, perhaps, the fact that Tajikistan was no longer theirs. They still obviously had direct with all of the leadership elements, KGB remained a very strong force in Tajikistan so I think that they didn't see a need to actually open an embassy all that soon.

One of the early things that I should reflect on though is as this confrontation between the old Soviet client leadership and the democrats and Islamics grew there was a significant exodus of Russians, Jews, Ukrainians, and Germans who had formed a fairly significant element within, particularly the city, a lot of the professional services were run by these people. And I think the growing, as they saw it, threat by this Islamic Democratic force propelled a lot of them to leave. And I recall we had initially acquired a staff which was significantly Russian, German and Ukrainian, I guess a few Ukrainians, but very much a minority of Tajiks and that was because our staff, the people that had gone in could speak Russian, we could speak Russian, we couldn't speak Tajik, I had limited Dari, Farsi, Tajik capacity. But as a consequence we used Russian as sort of the second language of the embassy and as a consequence we were in direct communication with a lot of these Germans and Russians as they and their families contemplated having to go back to Russia because of the growing threat. So we were quite sensitive to the problems faced by the minorities in Dushanbe and Tajikistan.

Q: Well now, getting to Tajikistan, had there been much Islamic fundamentalism going on there before?

MCWILLIAMS: I had, when I was in Moscow, I had had the portfolio for Central Asia and I had visited these areas, this was '83-'85 period, and I recall from reporting from that period that particularly in Tajikistan you had more of a, not so much Islamic fundamentalism as we would call today, most of Islam was much more oriented toward--let me stop for a second--a lot of the religious influence that frankly the Soviets have never really concerned about in Tajikistan and generally in Central Asia was Sufism, which essentially entailed what I think analytically would be the analog in Christianity would be a veneration of saints and so on because you would have certain specific spots where individual religious leaders had been buried and so on which were a source of great adoration. And you had huge movements of people often to these sites independent of Soviet control which had the Soviets very concerned. So that was the way religion pretty much had manifested itself in Tajikistan.

However, I noticed in Bishkek and also as I say in, when I was in Dushanbe the Saudis were particularly in flooding that area with Korans. Their influence, their money was moving in very quickly, restoration of mosques and so on but at the same time, particularly in Tajikistan you had an Iranian influence and of course that would be much more the Shiite than the Sunni. But it was a political Islam that gradually took over, I would say rather quickly took over in Tajikistan. But underlying this distinction between the old Soviet apparatchiks and this rising Islamic tide you had, I think, a much more important divide in Tajikistan and indeed throughout Central Asia. You had regions which were integrated into these nation states, Tajikistan and so on, which were never really brought together as a nation. You had in particular in Tajikistan you had people in a place called Garm who were antagonistic to the people in the neighboring area called Kulob. And you had other regions similarly that were divided. You had also an Uzbek minority up in the north, ethnic Uzbek, which was antagonistic to the people in Garm and so on. So what played out was really almost at a tribal level, a really ferocious conflict in which over 50,000 people were killed ultimately.

Q: Ooh.

MCWILLIAMS: But although the, at one level it clearly was anti-communist Islamic democrat, at I think a more fundamental level it was more of a regional conflict among elements within Tajikistan.

Q: Was there any spillover from the problems of Afghanistan?

MCWILLIAMS: Sort of in the reverse. You had some of the Tajik refugees fleeing from Tajikistan into Afghanistan. And I can recall, because of my interest in Afghanistan, I had established contact with some Afghans who were actually in Dushanbe to get some sense of what was going on in Afghanistan and reporting on that basis. And through them I was able to make contact with the leader in Mazar-e-Sharif area. And he controlled the area into which a lot of these Tajik refugees were flowing. He was clearly anxious to make contact with any American official that he could and that relationship, that contact between him and I was much more aggressively sought on his part than my part. But I recall at one point sending a message as these Tajik refugees were fleeing into his territory across the Amu Darya River that America would be very impressed, very concerned with how they were treated, that it would be, it would reflect well on him if these Tajik refugees were well cared for. And in point of fact he did take care of these people, he did send supplies out and so on. But it was only subsequently, quite a few years subsequently as the situation deteriorated in Northern Afghanistan that we began to be concerned about the flow of chaos and insecurity in Afghanistan towards Tajikistan.

Q: Today is the 9th of January, 2006. Ed, you want to talk a little about your Tajikistan experience before we move on.

MCWILLIAMS: Yes, just couple of things, sort of broader points that I wanted to make. One of the things that I learned as a lesson in Tajikistan was the critically important role of local staff, whom I think I suspect like many of my fellow officers sort of took for granted, that is to say their contribution, but we were fortunate in getting an extremely good staff, selecting carefully in Tajikistan and as a consequence when we evacuated for about four-and-a-half, five months we were able to keep the embassy running in virtually all of its functions simply by monitoring their progress by telephone and actually slipping payments in through the ICRC, things of that sort. But it was a lesson to me that the local staff can be a vital asset.

I would also say though there was a mistake made and it was mostly mine because I did the selection for these new staff as the chief of mission. It was a very strange situation in which the Tajik population was very concerned about their position in society and yet the people who came to us to apply for jobs tended to be the few English speakers in the country and those who could speak Russian, which most of my staff and I could speak. And as a consequence we had mostly Russians and ethnic Germans, a few Jews, for example were on our staff and not that many Tajiks. And that became not a problem but a concern later on. So I think in a situation like that you have to give concern when you're hiring local staff not only to their skills of course but also to ethnic and communal questions that might arise from how you hire a staff. So I want to make that point.

The other point I wanted to make was the whole evacuation episode. We evacuated subsequent to that but this was the first real evacuation of the entire embassy that I'd been involved with, the only one in my career, and I just wanted to make the observation that initially as chargé I had resisted ever stronger recommendations from Washington that we consider evacuating as the civil war developed in Tajikistan. Ultimately the ambassador who had just come in a week earlier made the decision to evacuate, I actually voted against evacuation, he invited us to vote on it. I just wanted to point out that inevitably in these situations the Washington experts tend to lean very heavily on evacuation, which I think people in those circumstances should consider because it's not always the right choice. And then also in returning to a place after it's been evacuated that can be extremely difficult because no one back in Washington essentially wants to sign off, take responsibility for saying yes, you can go back in, notwithstanding the circumstances on the ground there's a great reluctance, bureaucratic reluctance to see an embassy re-staffed, at least that's been my experience, because as I say people are reluctant to assume responsibility, in Washington, for repopulating an embassy.

HENRY L. CLARKE
Ambassador
Uzbekistan (1992-1995)

Ambassador Clarke was born in Georgia in 1941. He attended Dartmouth College and enlisted in the US Army. He later entered Harvard University and then entered the Foreign Service. His career included positions in Germany, Nigeria, Romania, the USSR, and Israel. He was later appointed Ambassador to Uzbekistan. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1998.

Q: What about the influence of Iran or Afghanistan? Both of these places by this time had very solid, radical fundamentalist Islamic governments. Was that a concern of ours in Uzbekistan?

CLARKE: The Taliban really came into power after 1995, after I left. I followed that subject at the National War College along with others. It was fun to speculate on its chances of coming to power. But the Taliban was not really a potential threat from Uzbekistan's point of view during the time I was there. Iran was initially. The Uzbeks came to the conclusion that because of what Iran was trying to do in Tajikistan, they needed to keep the Iranians at arm's length. Although the Iranians were allowed to open an embassy, they were more carefully watched than most other foreigners. The Uzbeks were very suspicious of Iranian activities in Tajikistan, partly because of the linguistic affinity. But the Tajiks were mostly not Shiites. There was only one part of Tajikistan that was Shiite, so the religious affinity question was not so clear. But the Uzbeks thought there was some evidence of gun running and military support for the opposition. Iran did offer a haven for some of the more religious opposition in Tajikistan, when they left the country.

Afghanistan was a major problem for the Uzbeks the whole time I was there. Even though the Taliban had not arrived, the fighting between various other groups was going on all the time. It could not help but concern the Uzbeks that radical movements, especially Tajik nationalists, might somehow combine with those in Tajikistan and be destabilizing to Uzbekistan.

Uzbekistan's largest minority are Tajiks. They used to say the largest minority was Russian, but I believe that if it was ever true, it isn't now. But the Tajik minority was of that scale: a million or two, at least, and concentrated in areas which were awkward for Uzbekistan, such as along the border, in Samarkand and Bukhara. So there was great concern about what might happen, and at the same time, a desire to stay out of Afghanistan.

Q: Before we leave Uzbekistan, let's talk about its relations with the other countries in Central Asia. How were they? Let's start with Uzbekistan. Who are its neighbors and what is its role in Central Asia?

CLARKE: One of the funniest introductory speeches I've ever heard somebody give was when they were addressing an audience here in the United States and said, "Of course a few of you here might not know where Uzbekistan is, and so let me clarify that. It's south of Kazakhstan and it's west of Kyrgyzstan and it's north of Turkmenistan and Tajikistan. So now you know exactly where it is."

I was there during a period of great tension over the civil war in Tajikistan, which did have some foreign involvement from Afghanistan, and also from Iran. The Russians, not the Soviets any more, were also playing a key role in trying to stabilize the situation. But it was a kind of Soviet concept anyway that the Russians needed to worry about Tajikistan's borders with Afghanistan. The Uzbeks were terribly nervous because they saw this conflict as potentially spreading throughout Central Asia and they were next in line. Nor did they want the Russians to use Tajikistan as an excuse to resume control in Uzbekistan.

EDWARD HURWITZ
Ambassador
Kyrgyzstan (1992-1994)

Edward Hurwitz was born in New York in 1931. He received his bachelor's degree from Cornell University in 1952. After serving in the US Army from 1953-1955 he entered the Foreign Service in 1956. During his career he had positions in Moscow, Seoul, Washington D.C., Afghanistan, Leningrad, and an Ambassadorship to Kyrgyzstan. Ambassador Hurwitz was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in August 1996.

Q: What about relations with Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan?

HURWITZ: The relations with Kazakhstan were good, they are similar in many ways. Language is extremely close. The border is right there.

Q: While you were there, there was a guerrilla war going on.

HURWITZ: There was fighting in Tajikistan.

Q: What was that over?

HURWITZ: That was over factions. That never extended into Kyrgyzstan. The Russians had sent in peacekeepers and Kyrgyzstan had sent a brigade to help out. I think the Kazakhs were also involved.

Tajikistan, of course, was a problem. The same thing holds there with the border being very porous having been really non-existent during Soviet times. You have a lot of ethnic Tajiks living in Kyrgyzstan and vice-a-versa. So, if things get upset in Tajikistan then there is the question of the problem spilling over.

Afghanistan was also a problem because you get arms and drugs coming into Kyrgyzstan and that is part of the problem now. The only stories you read about Kyrgyzstan in the American press have to do with drugs and drug traffic. That whole area now is becoming a transit point. It has never been a big consumption area, but it is a transit point. The drugs come up from Afghanistan into Tajikistan. From there, they go up the road to Osh, on the western border of Kyrgyzstan, and then into Russia and across to Uzbekistan. I am sure some of it gets diverted, but very little of it.

R. GRANT SMITH
Ambassador to Tajikistan
Tajikistan (1995-1998)

R. Grant Smith was born on Long Island in 1938. He graduated from Princeton University in 1960. He later earned a master's degree from Columbia University. He joined the Foreign Service in 1963 and held positions in Pakistan, Nepal, and India. In 1995 he began his ambassadorship in Tajikistan. Ambassador Smith was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1999.

Q: It is September 2, 1999. Grant, in the first place, how did you get your assignment as ambassador to Tajikistan?

SMITH: Well, it's a very complicated process, but it goes through the D Committee in the State Department and then over to the White House. And it went to the D Committee, as I recall, in probably June of '94, and then over to the White House, and it did it. It took a while to send everything over to the White House. It didn't go over right away, and it took some urging to get them to send over - there were two of us who wanted to have as much language training as possible before we went out, and we were then able to get a Presidential decision in late August, as I recall, so that I was able to start Tajik in early September.

Q: Well, how did you get the appointment? Did you lobby for it? Did somebody come out to you?

SMITH: Can I say yes, all of the above? You have to do a fair amount of lobbying with the people who are on the D Committee, or their staff assistants, as the case may be. And people may talk about putting your name forward for several, and you need to state a preference, and it's always, Where do you want to go, where do your qualifications give you the strongest shot at going?

Q: Tell me about Tajikistan. Could you give us the location and the history of the place?

SMITH: It's directly north of Afghanistan, and in fact it was the easternmost part of Tajikistan that was closest to India, and in the 1890s, when the Russians and the British drew the map, they drew a tongue of Afghanistan that goes out and which separated Russia and British India. That's the Wakhan Corridor, and that part of what was then under Russian control is now Tajikistan. So this was the "Great Game" territory, and some adjacent areas. Parts of what is now Tajikistan were under Russian control in the late 19th century - the north and the Far East - however, the major bulk of the south was part of the Emirate of Bukhara, which was a Russian protectorate but not under direct Russian control. When the Soviet Union was formed, I think it was in 1924 they created a Tajikistan Autonomous Republic, and then in 1929 it became a full Soviet republic, with the current boundaries. It's one of the cases where - and Stalin has been accused of doing this elsewhere - the boundaries were drawn in a way that there were major irredenta left on both sides. The centers for Tajik culture and population at that time were the cities of Samarkand and Bukhara, which remain in Uzbekistan. But even today, those cities are Tajik-speaking. You go there, you can speak Tajik and get around quite well. There's no problem whatsoever. So they created a republic for the Tajik nationality, in the Soviet sense, but the two key centers of that nationality are not in it, plus of the current population of five and a half million, about a quarter of that is Uzbek. So there were significant concentrations of Uzbeks left within Tajikistan. And the area is 90-some percent mountains. The Pamirs are there. I guess its major natural resource is water, which means it has plenty of irrigation water for growing in the valleys and under the Soviets was a producer of cotton, with some of the highest yields in the former Soviet Union.

Q: Had the Soviets done what they had done in Afghanistan and other places, of sort of ruining the soil, or was there enough water so they didn't?

SMITH: It was a cotton monoculture with very heavy doses of fertilizer and pesticides; however, way down the line, there was plenty of water, so you hadn't had the kind of degradation that you had in the Aral Sea area. And since independence, since they haven't had any money to buy fertilizers and pesticides, that part of the situation has probably gotten better. Tajikistan has some minerals. They'd like to say that they have every mineral that's in the periodic table, which is probably true, but the problem is that either the way it is found or the location of it makes it very expensive to get out, and whether they have every mineral in the periodic table that can be profitably mined is an altogether different question. They do have some gold. They have significant deposits of silver. Uranium - they like to say that the uranium for the first Soviet bomb came from Tajikistan.

Q: When you arrived there in '94, was it –

SMITH: I was in language training. My wife and I were the only two people in the class. We began language training here at FSI in September of '94. We continued in language training through June of '95 and went out there in July of '95.

Well, it's interesting how FSI came to teach Tajik, in the sense that FSI has on its permanent staff a Dari instructor - the language of Afghanistan - and there was great demand for learning Dari back in the late '70s and the '80s - much less demand now, since we have no embassy in Kabul. We have one position or two positions in Peshawar that are Dari-speaking, but not much demand for training people in Dari. So they asked the Dari instructor to teach Tajik. What they didn't know was that their Dari instructor was an ethnic Tajik, and Tajik was his mother tongue. So that worked out quite well. The problem was that he knows Tajik of northern Afghanistan as it was when he grew up. There is the Tajik of Tajikistan. It's the same language, but being part of the Soviet Union, there are a lot of concepts which were translated from Russian into Tajik which really don't mean anything to somebody who doesn't know the Soviet Union and where that concept came from - the concept of "village economy" or even "collective farm." Or the Soviets, now the Russians, use tractors with tracks, like small Caterpillars, which they don't use in Afghanistan. And all these things, when you translate the Russian word or concept into Tajik, becomes something that was foreign to our Afghan-born Tajik language instructor.

Q: As you were reading your way, going through the corridors, talking to people, what were you seeing as the situation in Tajikistan and American concerns there?

SMITH: Well, our major concern then, and it has continued, has been the civil war and, because of our interest in the region, that this be resolved. The civil war broke out in 1992. It was basically between groups with strong regional identities, although there were other overlays there, in the sense that one of the groups, primarily from the area to the east of Dushanbe, also was the most Muslim, and included the leadership of the opposition as it is now in the Islamic Renaissance Party. But there are other members of that opposition also. Then the other group, from the area south of Dushanbe and also from the northern part of the country has much more of a sort of old Communist association, although the Communist Party, which still exists, opposed the government on a number of points.

Q: Can you talk a bit about you and your wife living in Dushanbe?

SMITH: I think by then Dushanbe was the only place where the embassy and the living quarters were still in the hotel. That was the way it was, I believe, in all of the posts of the former Soviet Union when they were first opened. People came in and set up shop in a hotel, and you had an office in the hotel and you lived in the hotel. But this was, by then 1995, four years after independence, and in Dushanbe the embassy was still living and operating out of a hotel. This was the old Communist Party hotel, the Hotel October or Oktoberskaya, where the embassy, by the time we got there, had the whole top floor. The top floor was divided up. About half of it was offices and American living quarters, and the other half was FSN offices. When we arrived, I

think with one exception, the entire staff lived there. Essentially, officers were on one side of the corridor, and rooms were on the other side. I had an office that was about 9' by 12' maybe. Fairly small. The Chinese ambassador when he returned my call on him, sort of looked around the office and there was a pause, and he said, "This is a very small office for an ambassador." And across the hall I had a living room and a bedroom, and then we had a common officers' mess. We had a cook, and each of us had consumables where we'd contribute things for the officers' mess. We used to joke that the Soviet Union had to fall before we really found out about Communism, because that was essentially how we were living. However, very quickly we managed to get the staff out, and I think that within a year we had everybody but ourselves out of the hotel.

Q: A question I forgot to ask was how did Tajikistan leave the Soviet Union. I know about the same time I spent three weeks in Bishkek in Kyrgyzstan, and the Kyrgyz were sort of yanked squealing from the womb of the Soviet Union. They were getting more out of it than they were putting in, and it was very obvious that they weren't coming out particularly ahead on this. How about with the Tajiks?

SMITH: I think basically the same thing was true in the case of Tajikistan, that the Tajiks didn't want independence, and economics was one of the reasons, because Tajikistan, as Kyrgyzstan, was one of those republics, which, according to Soviet statistics, were a net drain on the center. The center financed a lot of things, and under Soviet times, they had things in Tajikistan which they wouldn't have had except for that support for Moscow. They had an Academy of Sciences. They had an opera, a ballet. Even at the district level they had cultural centers and did operas and plays, orchestra. So there was an infrastructure there that came from the center, that came with being a republic, an educational structure, that strictly on the basis of their own production they probably wouldn't have had.

Q: I'll go back to Bishkek, where there was a big helicopter factory, which they were trying to figure out what to do with because they were no longer making helicopters.

SMITH: That's true. They had in their economic system factories which were totally tied in to other parts of the Soviet Union, that would make one part for something, and unless they were integrated into that they had no reason to exist. They also had things which could only exist because of the peculiarities, or mainly existed because of peculiarities, of the Soviet economic system. One of the world's largest aluminum smelters is in Tajikistan, and it's there because of hydroelectric power. But all the raw materials have to come from the Ukraine or farther. And under the Soviet transportation pricing system, this made economic sense. However, after independence, when transportation costs became real costs, it suddenly became - depending on whose economics you use - marginally profitable or unprofitable. And it was totally integrated, and then being torn off or being put aside and having the economic system elsewhere collapse, it left Tajikistan and the other small countries in a very strange situation. They said to me that the one person who had served as prime minister under both the opposition and then the current government, and that the reason he had been kept on in the position is that the prime minister position in Tajikistan, as in many other of the former Soviet republics, is an economic position. The reason he had been kept on was that he was the one who had the contacts and he could keep this system operating. He could call up people in other republics and cut deals. You know, we'll

send you so many wagonloads of cotton or of aluminum in return for X, Y, or Z, because everything had degenerated to barter.

Q: Could you talk about dealing with the government there, on your part?

SMITH: Yes. First let me say that the ten months of learning Tajik were very well spent because the number of English-speakers among the senior level is very small. There are a younger cadre that know English, particularly those who've participated in one of our programs, like the Bradley Program, but at the government level very few, so you're working in Russian or Tajik. In the case of Tajikistan, they had always kept their language, and they felt very strongly about that language, and as early as 1989, although they didn't want to leave the Soviet Union, they did want to have their language, and they had a language law beginning in 1989 pressing the use of Tajik. So having studied Tajik I was able to do a lot of my business in Tajik, and in I kept working it, so by the time I left I could have private meetings in Tajik without an interpreter necessary. And since my predecessor had also been a non-Russian speaker-

Q: Who was that?

SMITH: Stan Escudero, a Farsi-speaker, mutually intelligible - we got a lot of credit for speaking the national language rather than Russian. The first independence day I was there, a big meeting, the whole government, the president gets up and gives his speech; the Russian ambassador gets up and gives his speech, how Russia will always support the government. Well, we can't say that - we're in a much more neutral position vis-à-vis the government of the opposition - but I get up and read the President's message in Tajik: I got as much applause as the Russian, because I'd done it in Tajik. And I think that in general, being able to work in Tajik was a tremendous advantage. There are people who even maintained that in some meetings, for some people the nature of the conversation would change depending on the language you were in, that the Russian tended to be a much more formal and set-piece kind of thing, and you couldn't have the -

Q: Well, I'm sure, because this was what you used when you deal with officials.

SMITH: That's right. The Tajiks are a very hospitable people, and we even used to like to joke that they engaged in "hospitality terrorism." They would sort of kidnap you, and a five-minute cup of tea, if you were really pushy, you could get out in half an hour, but it usually involved a full meal and going on for hours. So you had to be very careful. There was not any problem in having direct relationships with the Tajiks. You didn't have to do everything through the government, and you didn't have the feeling that everything was controlled. You could invite people for dinner, get invited for dinner or tea, and move basically around as you would in another place - which we greatly appreciated. I'm not sure I would have liked a totally controlled atmosphere.

Q: Say you'd go in and see government officials. Were they much interested in what the United States was about, and all? Did you feel you were playing much of a role there, or was it -

SMITH: Tremendous interest in the United States, some of it misplaced, in the sense that they seemed to think that we were going to replace Moscow and that money which used to come from Moscow would now come from the United States. Well, yes, we were going to provide, and are providing significant economic assistance, but it isn't the same way that it used to come from Moscow at all. Not much understanding of the United States. I'd often felt that the concept to understand a colony you have to understand the mother country, at least for the first few years after independence.

Q: As you were reading your way, going through the corridors, talking to people, what were you seeing as the situation in Tajikistan and American concerns there?

SMITH: Well, our major objective, as I alluded earlier, in Tajikistan, has been to support the peace process there, to prevent Tajikistan from being a source of trouble in the region or a conduit for trouble in the region. And therefore, the best way to do that is to have the reconciliation process - the Kosovo War and Reconciliation Process - work, and we were working at a number of levels to achieve that. There was a UN-sponsored mediation going on, which had begun in '94, which we strongly supported. We were not one of the countries that were officially part of that. In other words, there were certain countries that were officially associated with it. We were not one of them, and the Russians probably would have objected to our official associations. On the other hand, we played a more active role than any of the countries that were directly associated with it, except for Russia and Iran, simply by whenever there was a meeting making sure that we had high-level representation in the corridors and able to influence. And our influence was through lobbying. Before there was a meeting, we would lobby both sides. Before, we would make public statements, sometimes quite specific, being critical of one side or the other, working closely with the United Nations on the whole mediation process and also with the Russians - obviously not with the Iranians, who were another major player. And as the process proceeded, in June of 1997, they finally had a peace agreement, or a group of peace agreements that had been negotiated over the previous few years and were finally put together in a package and the total package signed and approved in June of '97. We designed programs to support that, or supported programs which were supporting the peace process. We pushed the World Bank and the IMF to come in with some post-conflict credits. The World Bank, I think partly under our pressure, moved with surprising speed, and the IMF. The Bank and the IMF announced their credits within six months of the signing of the peace accords, which is light speed for them and much faster than they generally act. And we had a lot of programs of our own that supported this, both USIS programs - again, USIS has an advantage that it can move fairly quickly... In '97, we brought to the United States, for example, two groups of politicians to learn about political parties. In both groups you had both opposition and government. In fact, we had senior members of banned political parties included in these groups, with the government's knowledge.

Q: I would have thought that dealing there would be quite difficult because, one, you have Iran, which had pretensions of becoming the great Islamic influence, and then you also had these very fundamental Afghans, who were still fighting a civil war, for one thing, and messing around there. And I would have thought that these would be two very disturbing factors.

SMITH: They were, and they certainly influenced the security situation. The Iranians, for their own reasons, particularly in '95-'97, were working closely with the Russians, each pushing their respective client in the direction of peace, because the Iranians, of course, were concerned about what was going on in Afghanistan, with the Taliban, and I think the Iranians recognized that a successful peace in Tajikistan would prevent the spread of what was going on in Afghanistan to the north. The Russians and the Iranians both knew that. And of course now you had this situation where the Russians and the Iranians are both helping to resupply the opposition to the Taliban through Tajikistan.

Q: Did they have Russian flight from Tajikistan?

SMITH: No. You are really asking about the Russian community or the Russian presence. Well, of course, the biggest part of the Russian presence was military. When the Soviet Union broke up, they left the 201st Motorized Rifle Division in Dushanbe as a Russian division. In some other places the units became part of the local forces. In the case of Tajikistan, this is still a Russian division, which is there as part of the peacekeeping force, but which doesn't function as we would think a peacekeeping force would function. It's more of a presence. Plus Russian border troops. Now Russian border forces in Tajikistan are 80 or 90 percent Tajik. When they have a draft, some of the draftees go into the Tajik army, some of them go into the Tajik Ministry of the Interior, some of them go to the Russian border forces. But the command and control of those border forces is in Moscow, and not the Russian Ministry of Defense, not the Russian Ministry [of Interior] - a separate entity. So you had roughly at some point I think it was the figure they were quoting was about 20,000, although by the time I left it was significantly less than that, Russian border forces - plus a motorized rifle division - each with separate lines of command and control to Moscow, separate from the Russian embassy. The Russian community itself, other than this, had dropped dramatically from pre-independence to post-independence. In Tajikistan, the Russian community was always one of the smallest in the former Soviet Union. The figure I heard from the Russian ambassador was that before independence it was 450,000, which is nine percent - that's about right. After independence it had dropped to 70,000, and most of those were pensioners, particularly sad cases. So this was roughly the Russian community there. And you were asking about flights -

Q: I noticed in Kyrgyzstan the Russians were the entrepreneurs. They were running boot shops and things of this nature, whereas the Kyrgyz were going into government offices with briefcases. But really, the Russians, those that were left, were kind of running the underpinnings of living in the country.

SMITH: In Tajikistan there were some Russian businessmen left, but of course, Tajikistan had always had a bazaar community, and even under the Soviets they'd had very active markets. And they continued that.

Q: Well, the Kyrgyz were horse people, and the -

SMITH: The Tajiks were settled. Now of the Central Asians, the Tajiks and the Uzbeks were their Sarts, which were the settled ones; and the Kyrgyz and the Kazakhs and the Turkomen were all the nomads. And that was the key distinction before the Soviets, anyway. The Russian community in Tajikistan was an awful lot of technical people, experts in certain fields. With the breakup of the Soviet Union - I think this was true everywhere - a portion of Aeroflot's planes were given to the country, which then set up its own airline, and that airline then provided the connections to Moscow. The only flights out of the country were to the former Soviet Union. There were occasions when there were flights beyond them. The flights were to Moscow, one a week to Bishkek, and sometimes one a week to Ashgabat.

Q: How Muslim in truth was Tajikistan?

SMITH: Well, in a cultural sense, the Tajiks were very Muslim. They had done a good job of retaining their language and their festivals and traditions. By the time I left, the last meeting of Parliament that I attended was totally in Tajik. They had all of their festivals, many of which had been repressed during the Soviet period and even the non-religious traditional festivals had been repressed. On the other hand, AID sponsored a public survey, one of the questions of which was how many times a day do you pray? I think only two percent played five times a day. It was a very low number, in any case. So these are people who think of themselves as Muslim, but much more in a cultural way than in a strictly religious way. But it does vary with parts of the country, and there are some fairly serious Muslims, particularly among the opposition.

Q: In this sort of same light, what about the spillover from Afghanistan, where things got very religious there? I was wondering.

SMITH: Well, the Taliban were far too fundamentalist for even the opposition - at least that's my view. There were some differences of opinion within the opposition about the Taliban, but certainly you would hear the opposition saying things like, "Well, we'll still need some Russian troops on the border because of the situation in Afghanistan." The fundamentalism of the Taliban is basically not fundamentalism... Well, it is the way of life of very religious rural Afghanistan, whereas many of the Tajik opposition leaders, although they may have come originally from rural Tajikistan, were in fact literate in Russian as well as Tajik and comparatively well educated. I mean, Tajikistan is a country with over 90 percent literacy - like the rest of the former Soviet Union.

Q: What was the rationale for the United States being concerned about the peace process in a place way in the middle of Central Asia?

SMITH: The rationale was not specifically about Tajikistan but about the effect of what was going on in Tajikistan and what effect that could have elsewhere. The threat of this conflict, particularly with the Islamic fundamentalist aspects of it, spilling over into the neighboring part of Central Asia was quite a concern. And right now, you may have noticed that recent articles about the problem in Kyrgyzstan - well, these are people who were in Tajikistan. They were Uzbeks who were in Tajikistan and trying to go back to Uzbekistan and were caught trying to

traverse Kyrgyzstan and took some hostages and had a standoff there. That's a small-scale example. But a real concern that if this is not successfully solved you will have a spread of the problem to elsewhere in the former Soviet Union. And of course, the way we would phrase it was that our objective is to see Tajikistan successful as an independent, economically viable, and democratic state. That says a lot of different things, but it also says that the Soviet Union won't be reestablished in a different guise in this part of Central Asia, which just has to be another thing at the back of our minds.

Q: By the time you left there, did you feel that Tajiki spirit or something had taken hold - it was no longer a possibility of a recreation of the Soviet Union, as far as this Central Asian country was concerned?

SMITH: There certainly were people in Tajikistan still who looked back to life in the Soviet Union as having been better, and therefore would have liked to return to it. However, for the same reason that they were interested in it, the Russians were not interested - in the sense that to have that better life required a transfer of resources from Moscow, and that was the last thing that the Russians wanted to do. However, on the other side, certainly the institution of a successful independent government of Tajikistan had been much more established by the time I left, and with all of the equities that various players get in that kind of thing.

Q: And a new generation was growing up, I suppose. What about a feeling of "We want Samarkand and Bukhara," and that sort of thing? Was there a feeling of -

SMITH: This is something that observers like to toss out and the Uzbeks like to mention as a potential source of problem. You didn't really hear very much of that. Occasionally, there would be some reference to it in a statement often used - Uzbekistan and Tajikistan sort of needling each other, Uzbekistan president Karimov would say something like, "The president of Tajikistan shouldn't forget who put him on the throne, since Uzbekistan had helped the current government win the civil war, and the president of Tajikistan then replied something that, you know, "We might have to reconsider our policy on various things." But not very much discussion of that. There are certainly stellar links, particularly to Samarkand - there are groups in Tajikistan who are known in Samarkand, who just go back and forth to Samarkand. There are some people there who do feel strongly about this issue, one of whom was on a commission of national reconciliation, and the Uzbek community saw his presence there as a potential problem.

Q: Between Uzbekistan and-

SMITH: A lot of travel, but it's very hard, because the Uzbeks are very tough at the border, and it's a constant source of friction with the Tajiks. It's very hard to get across that border.

Q: Why?

SMITH: Well, the Uzbeks say it's because they're concerned with narcotics flows and things like that. In fact, I think that it's because Pakistan, after having helped the government win in 1992, has never been happy about its degree of influence over the government and has therefore, in

various ways, periodically done things to remind the government of the Uzbek strength, either by controlling the border, cutting off gas supplies - things like that. There are no air flights between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Q: Really? Were there still signs of the old Soviet almost 'shakedown' system of roadblocks with police? If you try to travel around, they'd stop you, and if you weren't an official car or something, a little money would change hands and that sort of thing?

SMITH: That's right. Their idea of control was roadblocks. And roadblocks, in many or most cases, were in fact revenue-raising operations, and some of them very explicitly so.

Q: Well, by the time you left there, Grant, in your impression, whether Tajikistan and, by inference, that whole area?

SMITH: I've actually written article that appeared in Central Asian Survey, the last number, which gave my opinion about the peace process. In fact, the peace process in Tajikistan, compared to some other peace processes, had been relatively successful, and certainly one of the lowest-cost ones around. Success per dollars was quite high there. On the other hand, the peace process has been late, behind schedule, and parts of it have not yet really been implemented. It's hard to know whether they're going to succeed in really implementing it. Right now the parliamentary elections, which were supposed to have happened last year and now are supposed to happen early next year - the year 2000, which will be, really, a year and a half behind schedule - and that will be probably the best test of whether it's going to happen. They had made significant success. The fighting stopped for the most part. The refugees came home from Afghanistan. The opposition got in the government. The opposition leaders' families are in Dushanbe. On the other hand, they haven't done everything else that they were supposed to. The demobilization of opposition fighters really hasn't been successful. And there is a significant problem that there are some elements that are left out of the peace process, that were never part of the peace process. And the way to engage those, we always argued, was to have early fair elections. Those elections haven't occurred yet, and it isn't clear that when they occur they're going to be timely enough or run fairly enough to really give those elements that were left out a sense of participation. Plus, some of those elements are significantly armed, and you have this whole problem of spoilers or obstructionists. Some of them have significant interests, probably criminal or trafficking drugs, that would mean that for them it's hard to show that peace is enough of an incentive because they're doing quite well under the current system. You know, in Angola, you have diamonds and oil, and it's very hard to persuade the two sides that they're going to gain more by reconciling. In Tajikistan, it's narcotics, with some individual obstructionists that can be a major problem. But it has got along a lot farther than people would have expected four or five years ago, and you have the opposition functioning in the government now.

Q: What about narcotics?

SMITH: Yes. When I was doing the narcotics job, I always used to explain to people that every time we had seen a transit country, we had seen that there were two threats to that country because of the transit of narcotics through the country. One was consumption, because sooner or later you began to get consumption in every transit country. And secondly, the influence of the trafficking organizations on the government could in the most extreme result in a government that was totally controlled by the trafficking organizations. And in the case of Tajikistan, we saw both of these going on. First of all, according to our statistics, Afghanistan is the second largest producer of opium in the world. According to the UN statistics, it's the first largest, larger than Burma. (we say it's smaller than Burma). The major growing regions are down close to the Afghan border, near Kandahar in the Helmand region, but some is grown in the north, a smaller crop is grown in the north in the Badakhshan province of Afghanistan, adjacent to Tajikistan, and when I arrived, there was a significant flow of opium from Badakhshan, Afghanistan, to Badakhshan in Tajikistan, almost entirely in the form of opium. We did some calculations, and you know you could - I'll try to remember the statistics now, but I think we figured out that - these could be off significantly, but - if they produced 50 tons of opium in Badakhshan, Afghanistan, some of that was consumed there, but say 40 tons came through Tajikistan. Each kilo you got a profit of \$500. I think that works out to something like \$20 million profit for transiting Tajikistan. That was at that time mostly - meaning 90 percent, were the estimates I heard - going through the eastern part of Tajikistan, the Gorno-Badakhshan Province there, on a road or other routes, up into Osh in Kyrgyzstan. I remember when I first arrived I heard there was a Mercedes dealer in Osh. Well, you can imagine what that Mercedes dealer is getting his money from.

By the time I left, the trade had changed significantly, with probably 50 percent of the flow across into the western part of the country and a significant portion of that in heroin, not in the form of opium. We never were very sure about whether there were labs in Badakhshan, Afghanistan, but surely some, if not all, of that heroin was coming from the areas farther to the south, now in fact controlled by the Taliban. So you had a very different situation. You had not just opium but heroin, with much higher value, much more addictive, and trafficking organizations tend to be much stronger. And most of this as coming through the western part of the country, up to Dushanbe and then going off from there, and with some of those private armies on the government side involved in that traffic. We had people, not Americans, from one delegation who had been down along the border and said you'd see these Tajik border forces down there. The individual soldiers might not even have shoes, but the person in charge might have a Mercedes or a BMW in his garage. Again, you can draw your own conclusions. On the other hand, at least parts of the opposition in the eastern part of the country, had been and probably still were involved in trafficking through that area, with essentially what were private armies on their side.

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Q: Every country has its survivors.

MAUTNER: Yes. Well, these people have been overrun before in their history and they survived. You bend and go on. But a lot of them will maintain very close ties with Russia. Some of them are dependent on the Russian military for security purposes. Tajikistan is a case in point because it cannot defend itself against foreign incursions. You can make a good case that defending the Tajikistan/Afghan border is a legitimate security concern for Moscow. So that has to be taken into account. On the other hand, the Ukraine, for instance, will not give up its independence lightly. Belarus is different. It never really had much of a sense of separate identity and so the trend now is to return to closer ties with Moscow, although the Russians don't want to incorporate Belarus because it would be an economic burden. The country is in economic ruin and has little infrastructure.

End of reader