

**Testimony of
ELISABETH MILLARD
Ambassador-Nominee to Tajikistan
Senate Committee for Foreign Relations**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Murphy, and distinguished Members of the Committee,

It is a great honor and privilege to appear before you today as the United States Ambassador-designate to the Republic of Tajikistan. I deeply appreciate the opportunity to testify this afternoon, and am humbled by the confidence President Obama and Secretary Kerry have placed in me. If confirmed, I look forward to working with this Committee and all Members of Congress to advance the interests of the United States in Tajikistan.

For 23 years, I have had the honor to serve as a career Foreign Service Officer, and my work has been defined by a strong commitment to advancing U.S. interests, including universal values of democracy, rule of law, and the protection of human rights and dignity.

Having served twice as Deputy Chief of Mission and once as Principal Officer, if confirmed, I will bring years of substantive and management experience to the position of ambassador to Tajikistan. I have served in Central Asia and covered that area from the Washington perspective as well, and these experiences have prepared me for the unique demands of the region.

I successfully led interagency teams in Nepal, Morocco and Kazakhstan to further U.S. priorities such as advancing good governance and democracy, strengthening counter terrorism efforts, and promoting American business interests. In these and all my previous assignments, my top priorities were to ensure the security and safety of American citizens and to advance the interests and values of the United States and the American people. Mr. Chairman, if confirmed, I will bring the same dedication to our Embassy in Dushanbe.

Tajikistan is a challenging post in a dynamic region. Per capita, it is in the poorest quarter of countries in the world and its GDP is the lowest in Central Asia. Youth under 24 are 53% of Tajikistan's population—a statistic that is only predicted to grow. Tajikistan has a porous 800 mile long border with Afghanistan, and problems like the illegal narcotics trade, trafficking in persons, terrorism and

violent extremism in the region are deeply concerning. If confirmed, I will work to strengthen our partnership with Tajikistan to address these serious challenges.

Tajikistan is a critical partner in the Administration's New Silk Road initiative. Through electricity grids and transit corridors, Tajikistan links Central Asia with South Asia and beyond. With almost half of its national income reliant on remittances from migrant workers, Tajikistan must diversify its economy. But Tajikistan cannot succeed on its own. If confirmed, I will encourage Tajikistan to continue building energy, economic, infrastructure and people-to-people connections with all its neighbors.

Tajikistan, given the threats it faces, is fully entitled to take steps to maintain its security. For that reason, the U.S. has supported Tajikistan's security in a number of ways over the years, including by providing training and equipment to its military and border security forces, police and counter narcotics units. A stable and prosperous Tajikistan is squarely in U.S. national interests.

But we also recognize that the long-term security, stability and prosperity that Tajikistan seeks can only come through a strong commitment to improving governance, respect for rule of law, and protection of its people's rights and freedoms. Without these essential elements, stability will prove elusive in any country.

If confirmed, I will seek to increase our positive engagement with the government and people of Tajikistan, not only with respect to our shared interest in stability and economic prosperity but also on other important issues such as preventing arbitrary arrests, addressing allegations of torture and mistreatment in prisons, and allowing the free practice of all faiths by all people, regardless of gender or age. I will also encourage the government to promote and protect space for civil society and for international and domestic nongovernmental organizations to register and function freely.

Direct engagement with the people of Tajikistan will also be a priority for me, if I am confirmed. People-to-people contact remains at the core of our diplomatic efforts. If confirmed, I look forward to interacting with people throughout Tajikistan and strengthening ties between the American and Tajik people. Public diplomacy efforts, outreach, and educational exchanges promote mutual understanding and foster deeper bilateral ties.

Being an American ambassador is not only a great honor but also a great responsibility. If confirmed, I will endeavor to be a good steward of the American people's trust and property, a caring leader for my embassy colleagues, and a faithful representative of our values and our interests. I will also ensure that our Mission continues to provide U.S. citizens residing in or visiting Tajikistan the highest quality services and our steadfast protection in times of need.

Communication and trust build the best relationships. This applies not only to engagement with foreign governments and societies, but also to engagement with Congress. If confirmed, I will always be available to this committee, its members and staff to discuss and work with you in pursuit of our national interests in Tajikistan.

Again, I thank you for this opportunity, and look forward to your questions.