



Integrated Country Strategy

Tajikistan

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I. Chief of Mission Priorities

After more than 25 years of U.S. government engagement in Tajikistan, the U.S.-Tajik partnership continues to support security, stability, and connectivity in Central Asia while improving the lives of Tajik citizens. The U.S. South Asia Policy positions Tajikistan, with its 800-mile border with Afghanistan, to make an even greater contribution to U.S. strategic interests. By engaging the Tajik government and citizens to develop a strong, sovereign, and independent nation that can defend its borders, we will strengthen regional stability and increase prosperity. Simultaneously, Tajikistan will expand economic connectivity with Afghanistan and other Central Asian states, combat transnational threats including violent extremism and narcotics trafficking, and contribute to regional cooperation on shared energy and water resources.

U.S. interests in Tajikistan have evolved since the end of the country's civil war in 1997. Since then, the United States provided humanitarian assistance to stabilize the country after a conflict that killed over 50,000 people and displaced 1.2 million. When the United States launched military action against Afghanistan in 2001, we deepened our cooperation with Tajikistan as part of an effort to maintain transit routes in Central Asia. Today, Tajikistan is stable but poor, with underdeveloped state institutions, and much of our support is designed to enhance the capabilities and professionalism of the country's law-enforcement and security agencies, expand economic opportunities, and improve regional connectivity.

Challenges undoubtedly will remain in Tajikistan, and continued U.S. engagement is imperative to maintain a positive development path. The poorest country in Central Asia, Tajikistan's remittance-dependent economy has been hard hit by the economic downturn in Russia. Remittances have declined 30 percent since 2015, and migrant laborers who return to Tajikistan find few opportunities at home. The banking sector has hovered near collapse as a result of non-performing loans, illiquidity, and a systematic lack of trust and transparency. The investment climate remains poor, marked by corruption, nepotism, and predatory tax authorities. Tajikistan's autocratic government continues to harass and restrict civil society, the media, and other independent voices in the country. Investment in the country's human capital has been limited, with the educational system particularly ailing and women afforded far fewer opportunities than men. The flow of narcotics through Tajikistan from Afghanistan is largely unabated. Extremism is a growing threat, and hundreds of Tajiks have joined ISIS in Syria and Iraq.

Despite these challenges, Tajikistan has shown it can play an important role in advancing vital U.S. strategic interests in South and Central Asia. For example, Tajikistan is a committed partner in U.S. efforts to promote greater regional connectivity, including through initiatives such as the C5+1 regional framework and the CASA-1000 regional power transmission project. U.S.-Tajikistan security cooperation is strong and complements our efforts to build a stable, peaceful Afghanistan. If tapped, Afghanistan offers a sizeable new consumer market for U.S. firms and Tajikistan would be a key link on a revitalized north-south trade and commercial corridor.

To address the challenges that Tajikistan faces and realize the opportunities it presents for U.S. strategic interests, Chief of Mission priorities will focus on four key areas:

1. Strengthen Tajikistan's sovereignty and security: We will enhance the capacity and professionalism of Tajikistan's military, border security, law enforcement, justice, and other security agencies to improve regional security and stability. We will continue to partner with Tajik security forces to enable them to effectively understand, identify, deter, and defeat a broad range of legitimate national internal and external threats, while respecting human rights and rule of law.
2. Promote more effective, accountable, and transparent governance institutions: We will provide assistance and support to government institutions to increase transparency and accountability, making them better able to protect public safety and human rights, combat criminal activity, and respond effectively to crises. Recognizing that this goal also requires a healthier environment for independent voices, we will also help to enhance the effectiveness of civil society and the media.
3. Increase regional economic connectivity and social development: Our programming and activities will improve the business climate, promote regional economic integration to mitigate external shocks, and expand diverse and competitive trade markets. We will increase the government's capacity to provide quality health care, education, and social services. We will also promote education and vocational training opportunities for youth, including English-language learning and teaching opportunities, which contribute to domestic prosperity and social stability.
4. Strengthen relationships and build trust between the U.S. and Tajik societies: We will disseminate accurate and culturally-contextualized information about the United States and strengthen people to people ties. These efforts will build greater public understanding and support for the United States and help to counter narratives that falsely depict U.S. foreign policy actions and interests.

As we pursue our Mission goals and objectives, we will continue to balance the promotion of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including religious freedom, while supporting Tajikistan's efforts to counter violent extremism. We will focus on engaging Tajik youth across the entire spectrum of Mission activities, addressing the risk of social instability posed by a growing youth population with limited economic opportunities. To achieve these broad and far-reaching security, economic, and social goals, we must coordinate with the Tajik government, other donors, and development partners to minimize overlap and gaps.

Our Mission goals and objectives contribute directly to the South Asia strategy. As we bolster its security capabilities, Tajikistan will become a more capable partner in efforts to identify and defeat violent extremist groups that seek to destabilize the region. Tajikistan will also be better able to secure its own borders, reducing the flow of narcotics and other illicit goods that finance

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terrorist groups in Afghanistan. Tajikistan's economic growth will develop north-south trade and transit corridors, enhance regional connectivity, and encourage legitimate Afghan trade and commerce. By improving understanding of U.S. foreign policy goals, we will build greater public support for our regional strategic priorities, particularly in Afghanistan.

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II. Mission Strategic Framework

Mission Goal 1: Strengthen Tajikistan's national sovereignty and border security to improve regional security, stability, and cooperation.

Mission Objective 1.1: Enhance the capacity and professionalism of Tajikistan's military, border security, law enforcement, justice, and other security agencies to improve regional security and stability.

Mission Objective 1.2: Deepen the bilateral security relationship to enhance information sharing, build capacity, and improve interoperability.

Mission Goal 2: Build effective and inclusive governance institutions that serve the public good.

Mission Objective 2.1: Strengthen and support state institutions, making them more accountable and transparent and better able to protect public safety and human rights, combat criminal activity, and respond effectively to crises.

Mission Objective 2.2: Enhance the effectiveness of civil society and the independent media in order to strengthen democracy and increase transparency in governance. (USAID DO2)

Mission Goal 3: Increase regional connectivity, broad-based economic prosperity, and human development in Tajikistan to promote competitiveness, energy and water security, and improved livelihoods.

Mission Objective 3.1: Promote Tajikistan's competitiveness in regional and international markets. (USAID DO1)

Mission Objective 3.2: Encourage regional water cooperation and the reestablishment of regional power grids to strengthen Tajikistan's energy and water security. (USAID DO2)

Mission Objective 3.3: Improve the quality of Tajikistan's health, education, and social services so that citizens may achieve their full human development potential and contribute to Tajikistan's social and economic growth. (USAID DO3)

Mission Goal 4: Strengthen relationships and build trust between the United States and Tajik society.

Mission Objective 4.1: Provide public messaging that promotes U.S. foreign policy and assistance to Tajikistan.

Mission Objective 4.2: Strengthen people-to-people ties between Tajikistan and the United States.

Management Objective 1: Reach consensus with MFA on bilateral operational issues impacting Mission efficiency.

Management Objective 2: Ensure Mission has sufficient office space to accommodate staff.

Management Objective 3: Deliver continuous, quality telecommunication services to enhance service availability.

III. Mission Goals and Objectives

Mission Goal 1: Strengthen Tajikistan's national sovereignty and border security to improve regional security, stability, and cooperation.

Description and Linkages: Mission Goal 1 supports the South Asia Strategy by assisting Tajikistan to play a larger role in border security and stability of northern Afghanistan and eastern Uzbekistan. It supports the State-USAID Joint Strategic Plan (JSP) Goal 1 through countering WMD, countering instability, and helping to defeat ISIS by disrupting recruitment networks and reducing the flow of foreign terrorist fighters. It also supports the SCA Joint Regional Strategy Goal 1 to increase Tajikistan's stability, security, sovereignty, and the integrity of national borders. Mission Goal 1 supports the National Security Strategy to defeat jihadist terrorists and dismantle transnational criminal organizations. Additionally, Mission Goal 1 supports the INL Functional Bureau Strategy, and the JRS goal to increase regional economic cooperation that promotes greater prosperity and stability across the region.

Mission Objective 1.1: Enhance the capacity and professionalism of Tajikistan's military, border security, law enforcement, justice, and other security agencies to improve regional security and stability.

Justification: Tajikistan is the poorest post-Soviet state. Independent Tajikistan received no legacy Soviet military equipment, but did inherit an unprecedented amount of poorly secured and aging munition stockpiles. The continued effects of the 1992-97 civil war, inadequate defense budgeting, and a long, porous border with Afghanistan are all challenges. The stability and security of Tajikistan are directly dependent upon effective and capable security forces that can understand, identify, deter, defeat, and eliminate a broad range of legitimate national internal and external threats, including terrorism, violent extremism, illicit narcotics trafficking, proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction, and conventional threats, while respecting human rights and the rule of law. Tajikistan's ability to do so will also contribute to regional security and stability in the wake of the new South Asia Strategy and deteriorating security situation in Northern Afghanistan. Mission assistance will include training, equipping, facilities improvement, and advising of Tajik security forces to provide them the tools and knowledge to defend and secure the country more effectively. We will work closely with international partners, including NPA, FSD, UN, EU, and OSCE, to maximize our combined efforts in these areas.

Enhancing Tajikistan's security role in international partnerships and cross-border collaboration is a vital element of our Mission approach. We will encourage and facilitate increased Tajik

participation in regional and international structures that promote multilateral cooperation and regional stability, and that emphasize international human rights and the rule of law; enhance United States, NATO, and UN interoperability; and support institutional reform, professionalization, transparency, and strategic planning capacity.

Mission Objective 1.2: Deepen the bilateral security relationship to enhance information sharing, build capacity, and improve interoperability.

Justification: Tajikistan is a young country still building and creating institutions, and learning how to best defend itself with limited resources. We aim to build an enduring relationship with Tajikistan's leadership and security forces to help them achieve greater security independence that can keep local and regional threats from becoming global threats. In turn, this will also provide the United States continued air and land access to support operations in Afghanistan. Increasing unit-to-unit relationship building will develop increased trust and confidence between soldiers and leaders, and will expose Tajik security forces to international best practices in national security at all levels. Conducting long-range cooperation planning, including the introduction of comprehensive Bilateral Security Consultations that address the full spectrum of security issues and agencies in Tajikistan, will further build mutual confidence and assure the Government of Tajikistan about U.S. long-term interests here and across the region.

Mission Goal 2: Build effective and inclusive governance institutions that serve the public good.

Description and Linkages: In prioritizing programs that assist Tajikistan to strengthen effective and inclusive governance, the USG is promoting democratic norms, respect for human rights, and the national cohesion necessary to counter subversive external actions and strengthen internal political institutions. The USG will assist government and non-governmental organizations in working to collectively eliminate corruption, support the rule of law, build a business enabling environment, improve public safety, and address the governance weaknesses that are often the root cause of conflict. Improved governance will position Tajikistan to increasingly share the burden of addressing common security and development challenges and will further ICS goals 1, 3 and 4. It also supports the SCA Joint Regional Strategy Goal 3 of creating more inclusive, transparent, and accountable democracy and governance based on international norms, free from malign influence.

Mission Objective 2.1: Strengthen and support state institutions, making them more accountable and transparent and better able to protect public safety and human rights, combat criminal activity, and respond effectively to crises.

Justification: State institutions responsible for law enforcement, internal security, and natural disaster response lack capacity to effectively provide for public safety because of limited government resources, outdated modes of operating, corruption, and lack of accountability to the public they serve. This lack of capacity contributes to a permissive environment for criminal organizations to operate in, limits the country's ability to respond to manmade or natural disasters, and engenders the distrust of the public, all of which could lead to instability. Reform to these institutions will help to ensure that Tajikistan has the capacity to enforce its laws, combat criminal activity, respond to crises, maintain stability, and be held accountable to the public. This Mission Objective links closely with USAID's RDCS DO3, specifically Immediate Result 3.2.

Mission Objective 2.2: Enhance the effectiveness and of civil society and the independent media in order to strengthen democracy and increase transparency in governance.

Justification: Democratic institutions and civil society are weak and do not provide adequate protections for citizens' rights. Promotion of democracy is a core U.S. interest and allows for peaceful and orderly transition of authority and freedom of expression. It also provides an outlet for constructive dissent. The lack of respect for democratic principles and limitations imposed on the media and civil society create conditions for instability and the denial of basic human rights. Reform of government institutions and support for freedom of expression and civil society will help to establish a more stable and effective government that responds well to challenges and enjoys the support of its citizenry. This in turn will set conditions for closer relations with the United States, based on shared values and governmental systems. This Mission Objective links closely with USAID's RDCS DO3, specifically Immediate Result 3.1. Internet freedom – a current administration priority – also supports the free flow of information online that enhances international trade and commerce, fosters innovation, and strengthens international security. As such, Internet freedom and our economic and security interests are inextricably linked. Internet freedom is also a key guiding principle with respect to other U.S. foreign policy issues, such as cybercrime and counterterrorism efforts. In Tajikistan, individuals and groups face extensive government surveillance of Internet activity, including emails, and there continues to be government restrictions on access to Internet websites.

Mission Goal 3: Increase regional connectivity, broad-based economic prosperity, and human development in Tajikistan to promote competitiveness, energy and water security, and improved livelihoods.

Description and Linkages: Our programming and activities will improve the business climate, promote regional economic integration, and expand diverse and competitive trade markets to diversify Tajikistan's trading partners, mitigate external shocks, and limit the reach of regional malign actors per the President's National Security Strategy. To support the SCA Joint Regional Strategy Goal 2, we will strengthen Tajikistan's energy and water security to support an independent, sovereign Tajikistan capable of supplying excess, renewable energy to Afghanistan. We will also support Strategy Goal 2 by promoting an open, interoperable, reliable and secure Internet that fosters efficiency, innovation, communication, and economic prosperity, while respecting privacy and guarding against disruption, fraud, and theft to support the free flow of information online that enhances international trade and commerce and strengthens international security. To further align with SCA JRS Goal 2, we will increase the government's capacity to provide quality health care, education, and social services to promote the State-USAID Joint Strategic Plan.

Mission Objective 3.1: Promote Tajikistan's competitiveness in regional and international markets.

Justification: Tajikistan faces a number of serious economic development challenges. Despite consistently high economic growth rates since the end of the civil war in 1997, remittance driven consumption and government expenditures continue to drive growth rather than inbound investment and exports. Although Tajikistan has made some progress on export diversification, with cement and gold contributing more to overall exports than aluminum and cotton, its industrial and manufacturing sectors rely on Chinese investors and loans, calling the sustainability of its debt into question. As Russia's economy improves, Tajik officials have embraced improved remittance flows rather than reform those policies which previously exposed it to external shocks.

Tajikistan acceded to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2013, but has yet to realize the full potential gains from membership as the government continues to move forward implementing its approved WTO Post-Accession Action Plan. Poor IPR and contract sanctity protections limit Western inbound investments, which further dampens growth and employment prospects. Breaks in regional connectivity infrastructure and its status as a double landlocked nation hamper improved trade ties with countries other than its traditional trading partners of China, Russia, and Kazakhstan.

Tajikistan has many opportunities to improve its investment climate, but none more auspicious than improved regional relationships and a place in a connected Central Asian market. As practices are harmonized, goods and people will move more freely, reducing transit costs,

creating value chains, and diversifying transport corridors. C5+1 is a platform that promotes regional competitiveness.

While agriculture is currently the greatest source of employment in Tajikistan and has potential for growth, the Tajikistan population remains food insecure, with childhood stunting levels of 26%. According to the World Bank, 60 percent of remittances are used for household food purchases and only 62 percent of households reported in a May 2016 survey that they were able to afford adequate food for the household. Tajikistan desperately needs to create more jobs in country to reduce out-migration and the dependence on remittances, but needs better infrastructure (roads, power generation, etc.), improved management practices and better human capital, especially education. If the country can increase and diversify agricultural and private sector competitiveness and achieve harmonized, transparent cross-border trade regimes, trade and market opportunities will expand, stimulating economic growth in Tajikistan and across the region. Enhanced agricultural competitiveness and food security will encourage regional cooperation and prosperity, especially in rural areas, where most people still live.

Mission Objective 3.2: Strengthen Tajikistan’s energy and water security.

Justification: The glaciers of the Pamir mountain range in eastern Tajikistan form one of the world’s largest potential sources of water and hydro-power. At the same time, the Tajik government struggles to consistently meet electricity needs in the winter. In Central Asia, access to water and energy resources is a source of disagreement that has a substantial, negative economic impact on cross border connections and trade. While all countries rely on water for irrigation, the upstream countries (Tajikistan and the Kyrgyz Republic) also use water to generate hydropower. Although transboundary water management has been a source of tension in the past, improved bilateral relations among the Central Asian countries has the potential to promote regional energy security, best practices for climate change resiliency, and cooperation on responsible agricultural water use.

It is essential that all the countries of the region develop basin-wide agreements on water sharing. Central Asia’s economic foundation and future prosperity are predicated on efficient and environmentally-sound exploitation of the region’s hydroelectric potential, and the use of the region’s water resources to support agriculture and preserve its ecosystems. If Central Asian countries can reduce their energy and water related disagreements, they will see improvements in prosperity.

Mission Objective 3.3: Improve the quality of Tajikistan’s health, education, and social services so that citizens may achieve their full human development potential and contribute to Tajikistan’s social and economic growth.

Justification: Since the Soviet Union’s collapse, Tajikistan has faced fundamental questions about the role of the state, of society, and the interaction between them. Systems originally designed to provide elaborate and high quality health, education, and social services deteriorated suddenly and seriously. The weak institutions that survive suffer from numerous impediments, including: years of corrupt privatization; erosion of state capacity; unreliable or insufficient salaries that encourage chronic absenteeism, poor performance, and corruption through unofficial payments for services. Extreme centralization of decision-making and policy formulation combined with limited opportunities for citizen input further lessens the responsiveness of public institutions and disconnects them from real citizen needs. Though in some sectors the situation is improving, government institutions in Tajikistan still face serious challenges in meeting basic human needs. A lack of adequately trained civil servants, lack of transparency and civic engagement, and limited access to information result in non-responsive policy outcomes and poor service delivery — a combination that not only retards development, but is inherently destabilizing. Broad prosperity, equality and stability are not possible without rule of law, strong public service delivery, and equitable access to quality health care, education and social services.

Mission Goal 4: Strengthen relationships and build trust between the United States and Tajik society.

Description and Linkages: The mission will build stronger relations with Tajik society through public engagement and outreach activities that promote the United States’ interests, culture, and values. Disinformation about the role of the United States in the region serves to undermine U.S. strategic interests and threatens to bring instability to the region. Through increased interaction with Tajik press, promotion of English language and exchange programs, the mission will work with key audiences to help dispel false narratives about the United States and bring a greater understanding of American culture and values to Tajik society. These activities to empower the media and to disseminate accurate information about the United States align with SCA JRS Goal 3. In support of the South Asia Strategy, the mission will promote stronger ties between Tajikistan and its neighbors with programming aimed at facilitating people to people ties and other cross-border interactions.

Mission Objective 4.1: Provide public messaging that promotes U.S. foreign policy and assistance to Tajikistan.

Justification: There has been a marked increase in the number of distorted news reports about U.S. foreign policy goals and the role of the United States in the region. The level of disinformation threatens to undermine the United States’ partnership with Tajikistan and

regional security. The mission will conduct social media and traditional media campaigns to promote positive counter narratives that call into question the validity of disinformation about the United States. Through support of targeted media training programs and more robust engagement with media, the mission will better empower local press to more accurately report on the news. The mission also will engage senior department officials to serve as primary sources for journalists, thereby increasing the veracity of reporting. Specialized English language programs for journalists will allow journalists to access non-Russian source material for their reporting and help increase the accuracy of their reporting. Through exchange programs, returned U.S. government alumni will share positive narratives about the United States and help shape the public's view of the United States. The public's engagement with the eight American Spaces throughout the country also provides a forum for positive interaction about U.S. foreign policy and culture.

Mission Objective 4.2: Strengthen people-to-people ties between Tajikistan and the United States.

Justification: The majority of Tajiks still have limited access to reliable and objective information about and limited understanding of U.S. interests and goals in Tajikistan. To remedy this, we expose a broad range of Tajik society, especially youth and future leaders, to democratic ideas and practices through USG-facilitated cultural, academic, and professional exchanges. We directly engage youth, rural communities, business leaders, and civil society representatives to better understand the United States and how its values promote human rights and rule of law, and to oppose violent extremism. Our outreach efforts are often conducted via the eight American Spaces, which are strategically placed throughout the entire country, and which attract over 540,000 visits a year. With its education system near collapse, Tajikistan's literacy rate is falling, poor English language fluency is a barrier for many to participate in the global economy. Our efforts strengthen the capacity of Tajikistan teachers and educational institutions, and implement a multi-pronged effort to expand English language learning opportunities for the Tajik people, especially youth and marginalized populations.

IV. Management Objectives

Management Objective 1: Reach consensus with MFA on bilateral operational issues impacting Mission efficiency.

Justification: The embassy is impacted by the Tajik government's labyrinthine bureaucracy and widespread corruption that impacts all facets of society. These challenges complicate a number of critical embassy operations including accreditation, vehicle registration, residential leases, visas, internet connectivity, and VAT reimbursement for implementing partners of our foreign assistance agencies. Achieving solutions that remove unnecessary bureaucratic obstacles will increase the efficiency of every office in the embassy.

Management Objective 2: Ensure Mission has sufficient office space to accommodate staff.

Justification: The number of personnel in Mission Dushanbe has grown substantially in recent years. This has created densely packed offices and posed challenges with space management - especially for non-CAA areas. The Management and RSO offices are currently working with OBO and DS to procure office space outside of the chancery. This includes one project for a motor pool driver's break room and a second project to expand office space for several agencies such as CDC and USAID that directly support the high level ICS goals.

Management Objective 3: Deliver continuous, quality telecommunication services to enhance service availability.

Justification: Due to the unique challenges facing our telecommunication infrastructure from local telecommunications providers and conditions, it is essential that we have an improved WAN internet link with expanded bandwidth that will provide seamless transition should the local services fail. Increased bandwidth is even more critical with IRM moving more of our services to cloud based solutions.