

Harris, E.

1989

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Matt -

Wasn't there an
Ed McWilliams involved in
collecting yellow Kari samples
in the Bangladeshi Embassy seven
or eight years ago? And
didn't Oakley's name figure
in at one point?

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U.S. Envoy Reassigned In Afghan Policy Clash

Diplomat Doubted Quick Guerrilla Victory

By Steve Coll
Washington Post Foreign Service

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan, Aug. 9—An American diplomat who until last month was the chief specialist in the U.S. Embassy here on the war in Afghanistan has been transferred away from Afghanistan-related work, at least partly because he voiced doubts about the wisdom of U.S. policy, according to sources familiar with the situation.

In classified cables intended for Washington, the diplomat, Edmund F. McWilliams, wrote that U.S. hopes for a quick military overthrow of the Kabul government were unrealistic, that American policy makers were depending too much on Pakistani intelligence officers for their assessment of the war and that the United States was directing too much of its political support to the rebel Afghan Interim Government based in Pakistan, the sources said.

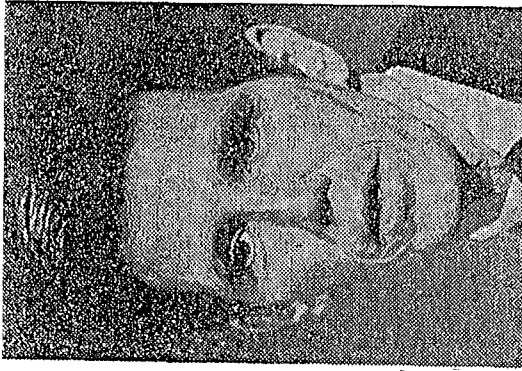
McWilliams's views were seen as

challenging those of U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan Robert Oakley, the sources said, leading to a series of disagreements between the two.

McWilliams, who speaks fluent Persian and had wide contacts among Afghan rebels, told colleagues that he was ordered earlier this summer no longer to meet with rebel leaders. Last month, he was transferred from Islamabad without being told what his next assignment would be, according to sources.

An embassy spokeswoman here said the diplomat's transfer was routine, but she declined to comment on reports of dissent within the U.S. mission, citing State Department policy.

McWilliams was reassigned to Washington in late July after serving for one year as special envoy to the Pakistan-based Afghan Moslem guerrillas, known as *mujaheddin*, who receive military and financial support from the United States, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. The *mujaheddin* are seeking the overthrow



ROBERT OAKLEY

... sparred with Afghan specialist

of Afghanistan's Soviet-backed government in Kabul.

McWilliams, described by friends and colleagues as an ardent supporter of the *mujaheddin*, began earlier this year to raise doubts about several important aspects of U.S. policy toward the Afghan guerrillas, according to sources.

Sources here close to the situation expressed the view that, if it were not for the policy dispute, McWilliams's tenure here would have been extended or he would

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have been placed in another position in the mainstream of U.S. policy making on Afghanistan. The sources stressed that the State Department has few officers with McWilliams's language ability and experience on the Afghan issue.

Angier Peavy, a spokeswoman for the U.S. Embassy here, said in a prepared statement that McWilliams's reassignment was routine and that it followed the appointment earlier this year of a special ambassadorial-level U.S. envoy to the Afghan rebels, Peter Tomsen.

"The new administration agreed with the Congress that following the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and the establishment of the Afghan Interim Government, it made sense to upgrade the level of our representation to the Afghan resistance," Peavy said. "Ambassador Peter Tomsen was nominated by the president and has now taken over the portfolio previously held by Mr. McWilliams."

In the statement, Peavy praised McWilliams as "an able and energetic officer who contributed valuably to embassy reporting on Afghanistan over the past year." Asked to comment on the reports of McWilliams's clashes with Oakley, Peavy said State Department policy precluded her or anyone else at the embassy from discussing "internal deliberations on policy matters." Peavy said that Oakley was not available to discuss McWilliams's policy views or the circumstances of his transfer.

[Reached by telephone in Washington late last night, McWilliams referred a reporter to Peavy's statement and declined to comment further.]

Disagreements between McWilliams and Oakley as well as other senior embassy officials reportedly deepened in the spring, following a failed attempt by rebel forces to capture by frontal assault the eastern Af-

ghan city of Jalalabad. McWilliams warned, according to sources, that U.S. hopes for such a conventional military victory by the rebel guerrilla bands were unrealistic and that the United States was relying too much on the military and strategic assessments of the Pakistani intelligence service, which has developed a close advisory and supply relationship with certain rebel military groups.

The *mujaheddin* failure at Jalalabad is still being felt within the ranks of the Afghan rebels and their supporters. The continuing military stalemate inside Afghanistan has touched off a growing debate about the effectiveness of U.S. policy and intelligence in Afghanistan. The debate has exposed disagreements not only within the U.S. Embassy, but between Western Europeans and Americans, between the United States and elements of the Pakistani government of Benazir Bhutto and among the rebel factions, according to Western diplomats, Afghan rebel leaders and Pakistani officials.

While all of the governments and parties involved continue to agree on the need to dislodge the government of President Najibullah in Kabul, disagreements have arisen over how best to achieve that objective. The clash within the U.S. Embassy between McWilliams and Oakley was symptomatic of those disagreements, sources said.

Before arriving in Islamabad last summer, McWilliams served at the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, where he was acting deputy chief of mission. While in Kabul, McWilliams developed expertise on Soviet counterinsurgency tactics in Afghanistan, according to a number of people who knew McWilliams but asked not to be identified.

These people said McWilliams, who earlier served in Vietnam, felt a deep personal commitment to the efforts by the Pakistan-based Moslem rebels to overthrow the Kabul regime. One person described McWilliams as "a red-blooded cold warrior."

Some sources said that McWilliams's troubles at the embassy arose mainly because he began to challenge the assumptions underlying U.S. policy toward the rebels. Since the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan in February, the United States has emphasized the importance of a rebel military victory over the Kabul forces. McWilliams, however, is said to have believed that such a quick victory was not possible and that the United States should begin to develop alternative strategies.

In his cables to the State Department, McWilliams wrote that U.S. policy makers were paying too little heed to the complex tribal, ethnic and religious identities that have shaped Afghanistan in the past and that by concentrating heavily on a military solution, Washington was allowing political initiative to pass to Najibullah.

McWilliams's cables argued that Washington should more aggressively push the Afghan Interim Government to broaden its political base beyond the seven guerrilla parties based in Pakistan.

Other sources, while acknowledging policy disagreements between McWilliams and Oakley, said problems within the embassy began when Oakley grew concerned that McWilliams, because of his unusual status as a sub-ambassadorial special envoy, had built up independent lines of communication to Washington. These lines of communication, while authorized, undermined the coherence of embassy reporting on Afghan matters and contributed to confusion in Washington and Islamabad, some sources said. "You must have a line of command," one person familiar with the situation said.

By all accounts, the professional relationship between McWilliams and Oakley was complex and ambiguous, touching on the most sensitive areas of U.S. intelligence and diplomacy in Pakistan.

Last February, for example, when Soviet

troops withdrew from Afghanistan, U.S. and Pakistani intelligence agencies predicted that the Kabul government would collapse quickly, perhaps within weeks. To prepare for that event, the United States and Pakistan encouraged the Afghan rebels to form an interim government that could hold transitional power and organize elections once Najibullah's government fell.

The interim government was selected at a council, or shura, attended by representatives of the seven rebel political parties based in Peshawar, Pakistan. While the shura elected leaders of the political parties to head key interim government ministries, it failed to win the support of Iran-based rebel groups or of many mujaheddin military commanders operating inside Afghanistan.

At the time, according to diplomatic sources here, the Pakistani intelligence agency played a significant role in organizing the shura and brokering closed-door negotiations over how the interim government ministries were to be divided among the loosely allied rebel political parties.

According to a number of sources, officials in the U.S. Embassy were divided over the shura's outcome. McWilliams, sources said, voiced concerns that the Pakistani intelligence agency had manipulated the council and alienated key Afghan rebel constituencies.

Oakley, backed by senior U.S. officials in Washington, offered cautious support to the new interim government. The United States has declined to extend diplomatic recognition to the new government at least until it is established inside Afghanistan, and it has urged the interim ministers to broaden the base of their political support. But the United States consistently has backed the interim government as the only vehicle through which rebel groups can be unified politically and militarily.

Led by Oakley, senior U.S. officials have continued to express hopes that the muja-

heddin will achieve a significant military victory before next winter, or that Najibullah's government will collapse under the weight of its own factional infighting. U.S. officials have expressed concerns about the massive amount of arms supplied to Kabul by the Soviets since February and they have vowed to match the Soviets with increased supplies to the mujaheddin.

"The Afghan [rebels] are convinced that ultimately they can prevail and defeat Najibullah militarily," a Western diplomat here said, voicing what is widely perceived as the foundation of U.S. policy toward the rebels. "Najibullah feels convinced that his regime can hold on to what it has. There can be no political solution until one or the other side's theory is proved false."

McWilliams partially disagreed with that assessment, sources said, arguing that unless the United States actively considered alternatives to an outright military victory by the Afghan rebels, it might later find it difficult to negotiate an acceptable political solution with Kabul and the Soviets.

"There is a case to be made for thinking again [about Afghanistan] and acquiring the moral high ground by moving quickly toward elections and building a transition toward those elections now," a senior diplomat here said. "By autumn, if you've failed, you make it very difficult."

In the aftermath of McWilliams's reassignment, sources said, U.S. decision-making about such issues is likely to be dominated by Oakley and Tomsen, who are said to have a cordial relationship. On a tour through Pakistan last month, Tomsen publicly expressed support for Oakley and for present U.S. policy toward the rebels.

Oakley, a career diplomat, was named as the U.S. envoy to Pakistan last year, following the death of former ambassador Arnold Raphel in a plane crash that also killed Gen. Zia ul-Haq, the Pakistani leader who had taken power in a 1977 military coup.