

Note: Page 1 re-typed 4 Sept 11

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

MEMORANDUM

To: Mr. Ernest J. Barbour, A-D

From: R. B. Scott, DP

Subject: Comments on "Central Helmand Drainage and Irrigation Improvement: Helmand-Arghandab Valley" Project Paper, and the Social Context Within Which the Project Must Function.

Like most basic construction projects that relate to irrigation systems, this paper leaves a great gap between the technical description of what is to be done and how it is to be implemented within the context of the social structure of the Helmand Valley. The justification is that the project will benefit a large number of farmers but it does not face some of the most basic issues that have been recognized as having hampered the Valley development for the past 20 years, i.e., village-Government relationships, and maximum utilization of the irrigation system constructed. In most cases, when these issues are noted, they appear as assumptions of villager cooperation or as assurances on the part of the GOA that these issues are of interest. The point is that if we are to construct new drains, major and farm, and if the farmers are to be involved as labor as well as settlers being settled on newly drained but perhaps never previously farmed land, then there needs to be a social science input in the implementation aspects as well as the monitoring. There is no mention of such an activity, that I can find, except that the field technicians in their periodic reports will note farmer cooperation.

From past experience in Helmand, it is necessary to have a USAID employee, of whatever category, researching, working directly with and monitoring the construction activities as they relate directly to villager mobilization, cooperation, project-villager relations, land holdings and compensation for losses directly associated with project activities. This kind of input is required from the start, from the planning stages of project development, if not from the preplanning stage when study and consideration of alternatives is necessary. This is not being done.

We cannot assume that HAVA officials will deal fairly with the farmers in these matters, nor use other than purely authoritarian methods to accomplish project ends. This has been the pattern in the past. There have been no apparent major changes in these aspects since the coup. The government people to be involved are in many cases the same as in the past. And we cannot assume that as governor and president of HAVA a professional soldier of the Muslim world trained in Russia by training or experience will be aware of the need for or sensitive to aspects of basic human rights that should be part of any USAID project. Further, based on experience from the past, USAID cannot assume that the U.S. technicians involved at any level will be aware of the social context of the project as it develops vis-a-vis the farmers, either through personal inclination, training, or local contact, nor should USAID expect them to be. This is not their job nor responsibility. Technicians are trained into a set of technical skills which will be used to the maximum. Their counterparts are not likely to point out the details of the methods being used to enlist villager-project involvement since in many cases the counterparts are aware of at least the U.S.-stated values that relate to public relations. These details must be spelled out in the opening discussions with the GOA and included in the project paper in terms of background, USAID intent, and in the form of specific personnel input. Then, they must be included in the project agreement. If they are not clearly spelled out from the beginning, any leverage for having such an input added (too late) will be lost. The final Afghan position will likely be that they know how to and will handle the farmers' problems and that USAID need not be involved.

There are some details in the project paper that relate to USAID-GOA relations and strategy that require further comment since they likely raise questions that will have to be faced at some point in the future. Some comments will relate to the background statements on the Valley necessary to present a clearer picture to those unaware of the local scene and for those in the future who will likely evaluate our present activity.

GOA Desire for U.S. Involvement and Assurances of Future Support:

USAID should not doubt the strong desire on the part of the GOA for continued U.S. involvement in the Valley. Except for past difficulties presented by the Minister of Agriculture (now out of the picture as far as

HAVA is concerned) there have been continued statements at all levels of bureaucracy of such a desire. In the field there were similar statements made to me by local influential farmers. This desire, however, may not relate to the ability or willingness on the part of the GOA to live up to the assurances of support in the area of recruiting the large numbers of needed trained staff for this project, increased budget support, administrative changes, and the removal of bottlenecks in procedures long established in the organization of government. Assurances and agreement in principle do not guarantee real action in the future, whether they are oral or written. This point should be clearly recognized in advance to reduce future frustration levels. Administratively, this can be programmed for, if desired, by having a gradual phase-in with required actions on the part of the GOA before USAID action. But great care must be taken not to raise requirements that the GOA cannot meet and from which USAID would then have to back away.

In the above paragraph it may appear that I am being over-critical of the GOA. In fact, at least half the problem outlined lies with USAID. As noted, the GOA has priorities in the Helmand, general as they may be. These priorities do not exactly mesh with USAID directions, but there are apparently some points of overlap. The point is that in the discussions, the problems in the Helmand, manpower, equipment, maintenance, and drainage, will be acknowledged. Changing government administrative procedures, increasing budget support, recruiting more skilled counterparts in relatively large numbers and developing a talent in village-government relationships acceptable to the U.S. mind, all may lay outside GOA possibilities and recognition of importance. On the counterpart problem, it may mean reducing necessary skill levels from some other irrigation project through recruitment of key people. In short, the resources of skilled men and funds are very limited. I would imagine that the Minister of Agriculture will not be in a cooperative spirit if it comes time to give up trained, experienced irrigation engineers for the Helmand. Is USAID pressuring for assurances that in the future cannot be met and lead to a further erosion of U.S.-GOA relations in the Valley? The GOA will give the assurances. They want the project.

Heavy Equipment in the Helmand:

Paragraph 5, page 9, gives the impression that the Valley is mainly mechanized with old equipment. The Shamalan Land Development Project

(1970-73) was basically a \$2 million equipment loan for heavy equipment. Some of this equipment was diverted from the Shamalan Project construction as USAID phased out its involvement in 1973/74 to work in the lower Helmand (Chakhansur) where a land development project has been under way for the past 2-3 years, including the construction of a main canal. Perhaps this equipment could be rediverted back to use in the upper Helmand (USAID project areas) for development purposes. In considering the use of this plus other heavy equipment in the lower Helmand, the GOA priority of land development for new settlement is again emphasized. In this case, the development is occurring without any direct foreign aid.

Water Distribution at the Farm Level:

Paragraph 3, page 18 discusses irrigation practices as a major problem which has to some degree been pointed out by various technicians as one of the major causes of waterlogging and salting. At no place in the paper are the technical details presented of how this problem is to be faced, nor is there any obvious technical input, an advisor with the responsibility, in this most important area. But in this paragraph there are references to rehabilitation of the irrigation systems down to farmer turnouts, water needs would be determined and irrigation schedules fixed. By whom? The rules in force in the Valley relative to water control state that after the water leaves the main canals, water distribution is in the hands of indigenous systems of water control. The maintenance and control of the water distribution systems at the farm level comes under the indigenous mirab, a local man paid for his work by the farmers. At least in the past, there has been great hesitancy to become involved in these sometimes complex and highly-organized systems on the part of HAVA. Apparently, there is no legal base for such involvement. New decrees or laws would be required to take over water distribution at the farm level. The local power structure would likely object to such government intervention. Not only are the present government employees not likely to have the skills necessary to operate the system, they do not have the manpower, and they are probably not inclined to become involved in the potentially volatile details of the politics of water distribution in the Valley. Last, it is a lot of full-time hard work.

In short, involvement in water distribution could be a project paper in itself. But this would assume GOA's real desire for such a project. I am

aware of no GOA action that would suggest such a desire. USAID past involvement in this sphere of activity has been verbally acceptable to the GOA but has received little support. Water control and distribution at the farm level under GOA control cannot be considered a government priority. The systems operate and maintain themselves at some acceptable level of efficiency.

If USAID is to be involved in new attempts at water control at the farm level through this project, definite manpower with expertise in the field should be added. It will be a full-time job. Second, the focus for such work would probably have the greatest chance of success in newly settled areas where the settlers have not yet established their own system of distribution and where the GOA could insist on involvement. The question here is, of course, desire for involvement.

A Change from the Past and GOA Priorities:

There are statements in the project paper that indicate that this project, the GOA desire for it, and the people involved are some kind of change from the past. If what is being requested, and how, is carefully considered, there is little new in the present request. It is a request for more heavy equipment and the means to maintain it through technicians and spare parts. It is a request, mainly, for the technical aid to develop the drainage system which will allow the development of more land. It is not a request that will lead to a more efficient utilization of the total system, which rests on government-farmer relations and cooperation. The areas where drainage work is being suggested in parts of Nad-i-Ali, Marja, Shamalan, and Darwasha, are mainly underdeveloped areas of government-owned land where settlers can be put, or have been put on marginal land. Virtually all statements coming out of the GOA on Helmand Valley priorities indicate new settlement is first. There should be no quarrel with such GOA stated priorities, but if we are not to repeat what we have generally done in the past (focused on the construction while leaving the major problems of proper use of the constructed system to the GOA or indigenous organization) we should begin by being involved in the total scene rather than only with the technical details. The total scene includes project-farmer relations which are not being squarely faced in this project paper.

USAID is going back into the Valley, but it should go back on a slightly different footing from that of the past, relative to the farmer relationships and USAID direct interest in them. This means a direct input in terms of personnel, perhaps some variety of social scientist on the staff to work with the technicians in the field, as well as with Aziz Gul in the statistics and research section of HAVA.

A careful consideration of the style of life of employees and USAID operations in the Valley are also important, but they will not address the issues focused on in this memo.

In this project paper, for whatever reason, USAID has still not focused on the major problem faced in development in the Valley as spelled out by Lloyd Baron in his various reports, which is in the full and efficient utilization of a system of irrigation that the U.S. has helped in constructing over the past 20-25 years. USAID continues to construct and increase the ability to construct on the part of the GOA rather than focus on the perhaps greater problem of how to get HAVA and the farmers to use the system that they have to the maximum. Perhaps this project paper is a focus on what the U.S. does best, a focus on the technical details. It is not a focus that has proved fruitful in the past. Perhaps it is unrealistic to search or push for some level of perfection in irrigation systems beyond the expectations, hopes, or understanding of the GOA and the local farmers. If it is unrealistic, USAID should question its basic involvement in the development of relatively complex irrigation systems

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