

10 October 2014

HELMAND FOLLOW UP XXXXII

"the U.S. has already spent nearly \$7.6 billion to combat the opium industry.

Yet, by every conceivable metric, we've failed."

J.F. Sopko

Special Inspector General For Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR)

12 September 2014

Richard B. Scott

Helmand Analyst

This is to repeat what Inspector General Sopko has been reporting on numerous occasions over the past several years. Question: If the SIGAR officially makes such observations including that there apparently is no counter-narcotics strategy to address the issue and that the counternarcotics effort is not a top priority during this critical transition period and beyond, and nothing changes, what is the function of the SIGAR? Is it only a reporting agency? No doubt these numerous reports are costly to produce. The opium industry in Afghanistan is at the base of much of the government corruption and undercuts the legitimacy of their government in the eyes of the people. It funds an illegal international narcotics industry, as well as the Taliban. It undercuts US political and development interests and reconstruction efforts.

Given the long term failure of the national and international counter-narcotics programs, that I have been commenting on for some 10 years, the various bureaucracies responsible for the failed programs should be held responsible for the failures. The responsible personnel should be replaced and new, effective integrated programs planned and put in the field...if it is not too late. After 10+ years, the narcotics industry in Afghanistan is well established and institutionalized. The farmers have accepted opium poppy as the primary cash crop and the base of their agricultural economy. They are involved in the informal credit system and appreciate the reliable cash crop market. Under the present conditions and system, it would be difficult to compete with the illegal narcotics industry...but not impossible with an effective broad scoped program, and people (bureaucrats) that focus on helping the farmers to get out of the opium industry rather than punishing them. The farmers are not evil people but cash crop farmers who are responding to a reliable international market through a well established economic system, without a viable alternative. And many are in debt through crop failure, disease and corrupt local government and police.

According to a recent report (TOLONews, Sharif Amiry, 30 Aug. 14) "The United States has (just) awarded \$16 million to 17 provinces of Afghanistan that have decreased and/or maintained a poppy-free status..." this year. While this program apparently has some effect in keeping some provinces "poppy-free", it also no doubt supports government corruption through mis-use of "development" funds. A lot depends on how closely the use of these funds is monitored in the field, which is not likely given the security situation. These funds would be more effectively used in the major opium producing areas like Helmand focused on developing and supporting a legitimate agriculture economy that effectively competes with the illegal narcotics industry. This is something needed since 2002.

SIGAR must become more than a research and reporting agency. In its present role, it is relatively ineffective. Words are cheap and no one related to the US counter-narcotics programs seem to be listening. With all the various SIGAR reports critical of the failed counter-narcotics projects, programs and wasted funds, nothing much has changed. The farmers in Helmand for example still produce some 30-40% of the WORLD'S opium. And this was an area that was perhaps the most pro-American region in the country before the Soviet occupation having benefited from a massive regional and irrigation development program from 1946-79, mostly US funded.

And today SIGAR issued a report that states "...that USAID has implemented more than 80 percent of all SIGAR audit and inspection recommendations." In July a similar report stated "...that State Department had implemented nearly 75 percent of all SIGAR..." recommendations. Assuming that this included some of the counter-narcotics projects, why has opium poppy cultivation continued to increase? Apparently it relates to a reduction in mis-used funds and not developing a new and effective strategy.

And again after 15+ years of participating in, observing, reading about and writing about what has and has not been happening in Helmand relative to opium poppy, and offering to help plan, organize and field an effective counter narcotics program in Helmand, I remain frustrated by the accumulated insanity and double talk. When are we going to start doing something right in Helmand relative to the opium poppy industry?? Is it too late??

Please feel free to forward this message to anyone you think might be interested. All past e-mail memos and papers on the same subject are available on request or in my website noted below. And I appreciate any and all feedback.

Richard B. Scott
2598 W. Hwy. 34
Drake, CO 80515
Tel: (970)586-8485
Email: scott@scottshelmandvalleyarchives.org
Website: www.scottshelmandvalleyarchives.org

Scott's Helmand and USAID Experience:

USAID/Afghanistan, Research and Evaluation officer, 1971-78.

USAID/Mali, Project Manager, Mali Rural Works Project, 1979-81.

USAID/Pakistan, Project Manager, Tribal Areas Development Project 1982-84.

Pashto Service Chief, VOA, 1984-90.

USAID/DAI/Pakistan, Chief-of-Party, Kala Dhaka Area Development Project, 1990-93.

INL/MCI, Project Manager, Helmand Irrigation Rehabilitation Project, 1998-99.

USAID/CADG/Afghanistan, Consultant, Cotton and Alternative Crops Project, 2002.

USAID/DAI, Officer-in-Charge, Helmand Drainage Rehabilitation Project, 2002-03.

USAID/Chemonics, Rural Development Specialist, (Helmand) Alternative Income Project, 2004-05.