

31 JANUARY 2000

TO: KARL F. INDERFURTH  
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SOUTH ASIA  
DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

FROM: RICHARD B. SCOTT  
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SUBJECT: UNSOLICITED COMMENT ON NARCOTICS IN AFGHANISTAN

I READ WITH INTEREST YOUR RECENT COMMENTS TO THE NEW YORK COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS ABOUT AFGHANISTAN, THE TALIBAN AND NARCOTICS. AS A STUDENT AND PARTICIPANT IN AFGHAN AFFAIRS SINCE 1971, I WOULD LIKE TO OFFER A COMMENT AND MAKE SOME SUGGESTIONS. MY C.V. IS AVAILABLE IN YOUR SECTION OF STATE.

TO MY KNOWLEDGE, BASED ON CONVERSATIONS WITH TALIBAN OFFICIALS AND FARMERS IN HELMAND PROVINCE (THE CENTER OF THE NARCOTICS PRODUCTION) OVER THE PAST FOUR YEARS, THE TALIBAN HAVE BEEN REQUESTING HELP WITH THE REORGANIZATION OF THE AGRICULTURAL ECONOMY AWAY FROM OPIUM POPPY PRODUCTION. BOTH THE FARMER LEADERSHIP AND THE TALIBAN HAVE SAID THAT THEY WOULD STOP OPIUM PRODUCTION IF THEY RECEIVED HELP TO RETURN THE REGION TO THE PRE-WAR ECONOMY WHEN THE PRIMARY CASH CROP WAS COTTON. THEY CONSIDER OPIUM AN EVIL CROP. THEY KNOW THE DAMAGE IT DOES BUT IT IS THE BASE CROP OF THIS AG ECONOMY. THEY HAVE ASKED THE U.S. GOVERNMENT AND THEY HAVE ASKED THE U.N. FOR HELP.

THE U.N.D.C.P. PROPOSED AN OPIUM REDUCTION PROJECT FOR HELMAND IN 1998 TO POTENTIAL INTERNATIONAL DONORS WITH NO RESULTS. WE, THE U.S., HAVE BEEN SUPPORTING A FEW VERY LIMITED REHABILITATION PROJECTS IN THE REGION FOR TWO OR THREE YEARS BUT NOTHING SIZABLE ENOUGH TO HAVE ANY IMPACT ON THE

REGION'S ECONOMY. I WORKED IN HELMAND FOR FOUR MONTHS LAST WINTER,

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WITH U.S. FUNDING, ON A PROJECT TO DESILT AND TO REPAIR THE BOGHRA CANAL, THE LARGEST CANAL IN THE REGION. WE HAD A FARMER AGREEMENT TO REDUCE OPIUM PRODUCTION BUT THE AUGUST 1998 MISSILE ATTACK SIDE TRACKED THIS AGREEMENT.

THE BOGHRA CANAL IS THE HEART OF THE HELMAND IRRIGATION SYSTEM, THE LARGEST IRRIGATION SYSTEM IN AFGHANISTAN. IT WAS BUILT BY THE U.S. GOVERNMENT: A COMBINATION OF MORRISON-KNUTSEN CONSTRUCTION COMPANY, U.S.A.I.D., BUREAU OF RECLAMATION, SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE AND OTHERS BETWEEN 1946 AND 1978. BY MUTUAL AGREEMENT, NARCOTICS WERE NOT GROWN IN U.S.-FUNDED PROJECT AREAS. THE BRITISH SUPPORTED COTTON PRODUCTION IN THE REGION BUILDING TWO COTTON GINS IN THE REGION IN THE 1960'S AND THE 1970'S, ONE OF WHICH STILL FUNCTIONS.

THE TALIBAN AND THE FARMERS NEED HELP WITH THE REHABILITATION OF THE IRRIGATION SYSTEM THAT WILL ALLOW THEM TO RETURN TO THE PRE-WAR CROPPING SYSTEM. THE TALIBAN NEED HELP WITH THE COTTON INDUSTRY IN AG EXTENSION, COTTON GIN REHABILITATION AND MARKETING. THEY ARE NOT BUREAUCRATS, TECHNOCRATS NOR DIPLOMATS, AS WE ALL KNOW. THEY ARE MULLAHS WITH LIMITED TRAINING AND EXPERIENCE OUTSIDE RELIGION. BUT THEY DO KNOW THAT THEY CAN NOT BAN OPIUM POPPY PRODUCTION, THE PRESENT BASIS OF THE LOCAL AG ECONOMY, WITHOUT OFFERING THE FARMERS A VIABLE ALTERNATIVE...IN THIS CASE COTTON, A CROP THE FARMERS KNOW, UNDERSTAND AND IN MANY CASES STILL GROW. THIS IS ONE OF THE REGIONS FROM WHICH THE TALIBAN RECEIVE MUCH OF THEIR POLITICAL SUPPORT.

AS I HAVE NOTED BEFORE, THE TALIBAN ARE NOT OUR ENEMIES BUT EACH MONTH THAT PASSES BRINGS OUT MORE STATEMENTS LEANING IN THAT DIRECTION. I WAS IN HELMAND WORKING LAST YEAR WITHIN THREE MONTHS AFTER OUR MISSILE ATTACK ON AFGHANISTAN AND EXPERIENCED NO NEGATIVE ATTITUDES FROM TALIBAN OFFICIALS OR FARMERS. THERE WERE NO SECURITY PROBLEMS, ONLY COMPLETE COOPERATION. THEY STILL TRUST AND RESPECT US BASED ON THE 35

YEARS OF DIRECT CONTACT. THIS IS NOT THE CASE WITH THE U.N. ORGANIZATION.

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THE TALIBAN IN THIS REGION, AT LEAST, HAVE LITTLE RESPECT FOR OR TRUST OF THE U.N. GIVEN SOME OF THE U.N. OFFICIALS I MET, MANY APPEAR TO BE THIRD WORLD POLITICAL APPOINTEES...THIRD STRINGERS WITH LIMITED ABILITIES AND MOTIVATION. AND NO ONE I MET THINKS THAT THE SIX PLUS TWO GROUP WILL EVER PRODUCE A PLAN TO END THE WAR. SEVERAL OF THE PARTICIPANTS HAVE VESTED INTERESTS IN KEEPING THE WAR GOING, INCLUDING RUSSIA THAT HAS AN AX TO GRIND.

IF A SOLUTION IS TO BE FOUND FOR THE PROBLEMS OF AFGHANISTAN, WE WILL HAVE TO TAKE THE LEAD. WE HAVE THE RESPECT, SO FAR, THE POWER AND THE CAPABILITY TO HELP THE AFGHANS FIND A SOLUTION TO THEIR PROBLEMS. THIS INCLUDES OPIUM POPPY PRODUCTION. OR WE CAN WAIT.

THE FIRST STEP IS TO ELIMINATE THE ECONOMIC SANCTIONS THAT ARE POINTLESS IN THIS CONTEXT. INITIATE A CONTINUOUS , NOT PERIODIC, AND MEANINGFUL DIALOGUE WITH THE TALIBAN WHO HAVE ALWAYS SUGGESTED DIALOGUE TO FIND A SOLUTION TO PROBLEMS. FEW PROBLEMS CAN BE SETTLED WITH AFGHANS BY TRYING TO ISOLATE THEM OR WITH COERCION. ASK THE RUSSIANS. AND THE PASHTUNS OF AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN HAVE A LONG HISTORY OF FINDING A CONSENSUS ON PROBLEMS THROUGH OPEN DISCUSSION. THE TALIBAN ARE PASHTUNS. BUT PATIENCE AND DISCUSSION ARE THE KEY TO PROGRESS AND A SOLUTION.

I WOULD BE HAPPY TO DISCUSS WITH YOU OR ANYONE ELSE THE POINTS MADE IN THIS FAX AT YOUR CONVENIENCE. I HAVE DISCUSSED THEM WITH THE TALIBAN AND FARMERS OF HELMAND. (end)