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MR STEVEN CASTEEL
CHIEF OF INTELLIGENCE
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WASHINGTON, D.C.

DEAR MR. CASTEEL:

YOUR RECENT COMMENTS TO THE ASSOCIATED PRESS ON THE OPIUM POPPY BAN IN AFGHANISTAN ARE OF GREAT INTEREST TO ME.

IN THIS COMMUNICATION I WILL ADDRESS SOME OF THE ISSUES YOU RAISED IN YOUR INTERVIEW AND I WILL PROPOSE A DEVELOPMENT ACTION WHEREBY THE D.E.A. COULD ACKNOWLEDGE AND SUPPORT THE POPPY BAN IN AFGHANISTAN. WITH A SLIGHT CHANGE IN ITS USUAL ENFORCEMENT ROLE, THE D.E.A COULD PROVIDE FUNDING FOR A SHORT-TERM ALTERNATIVE CASH CROP PROJECT. THIS WOULD BE A POSITIVE AND PRODUCTIVE DEVELOPMENT ACTION. PLEASE SHARE THIS LETTER WITH THE D.E.A. SECTION CONCERNED WITH DEVELOPMENT ACTIONS.

WHY THE DEA SHOULD SUPPORT THE POPPY BAN:

THE DEA'S PRIMARY FOCUS SHOULD BE HOW TO KEEP THE OPIUM POPPY BAN IN EFFECT. IT IS A CRITICAL FACT THAT HELMAND FARMERS DID NOT PLANT OPIUM POPPY THIS PAST CROP SEASON. THIS IS IMPORTANT AND IS A MAJOR CHANGE FROM THE INCREASED PRODUCTION OVER THE PAST 10 YEARS. WHAT CAN WE DO TO HELP KEEP OPIUM POPPY PRODUCTION FROM RETURNING TO HELMAND PROVINCE, THE CENTER OF OPIUM POPPY PRODUCTION IN THE COUNTRY?

THE WESTERN WORLD, THE PRIMARY CONSUMERS OF THE ILLEGAL OPIUM PRODUCTS, SHOULD RECOGNIZE WHAT THE BAN MEANS ON THE LONG RUN. WE SHOULD SUPPORT IT WITH DEVELOPMENT AID IN THE FORM OF ALTERNATIVE CASH CROPS THAT THE FARMERS ALREADY KNOW, GROW AND UNDERSTAND. TO DATE NO COUNTRY, NO ORGANIZATION HAS HINTED AT GIVING ANY HELP WITH THE NEEDED TRANSFORMATION OF THE AG ECONOMY OF CENTRAL HELMAND PROVINCE. ONLY RECENTLY HAVE WE BEEN WILLING TO RECOGNIZE THAT THE BAN IS IN EFFECT ALTHOUGH WE HAVE KNOWN THE RESULTS SINCE AT LEAST DECEMBER 2000.

AS A SIDE NOTE, THE SYSTEM FOR IRRIGATING POPPY DIFFERS FROM THAT FOR WHEAT ALTHOUGH IT IS PLANTED AT THE SAME TIME. THE POPPY PADDIES ARE CONSIDERABLY NARROWER THAN THOSE FOR WHEAT. ONE CAN IDENTIFY FIELDS OF WHEAT FROM POPPY LONG BEFORE THE SEEDS GERMINATES.

MULLAH OMER AND HIS OPIUM POPPY BAN:

THE REASON FOR THE BAN WAS THAT o/a 29 JULY 2000, MULLAH OMER, THE TALIBAN LEADER, ANNOUNCED THAT THERE WOULD BE A BAN ON OPIUM POPPY PRODUCTION IN AREAS UNDER HIS CONTROL. THE GENERAL INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY'S RESPONSE WAS, "NOT POSSIBLE", FOLLOWED BY A LOT OF SPECULATION ON WHAT HE REALLY WANTED. ACCORDING TO MY SOURCES, THE FARMERS IN HELMAND WAITED TO SEE IF THE BAN WOULD BE WITHDRAWN BY PLANTING TIME (OCT/NOV). THEY WAITED. THEN SEVERAL FARMERS IN NANGAHAR WERE CAUGHT PLANTING POPPY AND WERE PUNISHED. AT THAT POINT, APPARENTLY, THE HELMAND FARMERS UNDERSTOOD THAT THE BAN WAS REAL AND SO THEY PLANTED WHEAT, THE TRADITIONAL FALL CROP. ALL OF THIS WAS NO SECRET.

WHAT IS MULLAH OMER UP TO? IT WOULD BE A MISTAKE TO SPECULATE ABOUT MULLAH OMER'S MOTIVES IN WESTERN TERMS. HE SHOULD NOT BE ANALYZED IN TERMS OF THE "ECONOMIC MAN". AT THE STROKE OF A PEN, HE BANNED THE PRIMARY CASH CROP IN THE REGION - THE VERY BASE OF THE REGION'S AG ECONOMY, IT'S ONLY ECONOMY. CENTRAL HELMAND WAS THE CENTER AND PRIMARY PRODUCER OF OPIUM POPPY IN AFGHANISTAN. AND HELMAND AND KANDAHAR PROVINCES ARE THE CENTERS OF POLITICAL SUPPORT FOR THE TALIBAN MOVEMENT OR GOVERNMENT. THESE REGIONS REGULARLY, IF NOT HAPPILY, PROVIDE MEN FOR THE ON-GOING FIGHTING. MANY OF THE FARMERS WHO PRODUCED OPIUM POPPY CAN ILL AFFORD TO SKIP A YEAR OF PRODUCTION OF THEIR CASH CROP. MOST ARE IN CONTINUOUS DEBT. WHILE OPIUM BRINGS GREAT PROFITS IN THE WEST, FOR MANY FARMERS OPIUM POPPY PRODUCTION INVOLVES A LOT OF WORK AND MARGINAL RETURNS BY WESTERN STANDARDS. DO THESE EXTRAORDINARY ACTIONS MAKE MULLAH OMER AN "ECONOMIC MAN" OR A "POLITICAL MAN" IN WESTERN TERMS? I THINK NOT.

DROUGHT AND POPPY PRODUCTION:

THERE HAS BEEN SPECULATION IN THE WEST THAT THE DROUGHT WOULD REDUCE OPIUM POPPY PRODUCTION IN AFGHANISTAN. IN AREAS THAT DEPEND ON RAIN FALL OR *KOREZ* SYSTEMS FOR THEIR IRRIGATION

WATER, THIS MAY BE TRUE. BUT CENTRAL HELMAND, IN THE MIDDLE OF A DESERT, DOES NOT DEPEND ON RAIN FALL FOR CROPS. CENTRAL HELMAND, THE CENTER OF OPIUM PRODUCTION, DEPENDS ON THE LARGEST IRRIGATION SYSTEM IN THE COUNTRY THAT THE USA BUILT BETWEEN 1946 AND 1979. THAT SYSTEM DEPENDS ON THE HELMAND RIVER FOR ITS WATER. THE HELMAND RIVER REPRESENTS ABOUT 40 PERCENT OF AFGHANISTAN'S SURFACE WATER, MOST OF WHICH COMES FROM THE SNOW PACK OF THE MOUNTAINS IN CENTRAL AFGHANISTAN. AS WITH THE DROUGHT OF 1971-72, WE MIGHT EXPECT BUMPER CROPS TO BE PRODUCED IN CENTRAL HELMAND.

MY BACKGROUND:

MY INTEREST IN AFGHANISTAN AND IN THE HELMAND REGION BEGAN SOME 30 YEARS AGO WHEN I WORKED THERE WITH U.S.A.I.D. FOR ABOUT 8 YEARS, BEFORE THE RUSSIAN INVASION. AMONG OTHER THINGS DURING THAT TIME, TWO AFGHANS AND I COMPLETED THE FIELD WORK FOR THE HELMAND FARM ECONOMIC SURVEY IN 1976. IN CENTRAL HELMAND AT THAT TIME THERE WERE NO POPPIES EXCEPT FOR A SLIP DURING ONE CROP SEASON IN ABOUT 1973. AS THE USAID MISSION ANTHROPOLOGIST AS WELL AS A RESEARCH AND EVALUATION OFFICER, I SPENT A LOT OF TIME IN HELMAND, OUR LARGEST FIELD PROJECT CENTERED ON THE LARGEST IRRIGATION SYSTEM IN THE COUNTRY.

IN SHORT, I AM AN ANALYST AND AREA DEVELOPER. I HEADED THE TEAM THAT DESIGNED THE TRIBAL AREA DEVELOPMENT PROJECT ON THE AFGHAN BORDER OF PAKISTAN IN 1982 AND WAS PROJECT MANAGER FOR THAT PROJECT. I WAS THE CHIEF OF THE VOA PASHTO SERVICE FOR FIVE YEARS DURING THE RUSSIAN OCCUPATION. I RETIRED FROM USAID IN 1990 AND WORKED FOR THREE YEARS AS HEAD OF A TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TEAM IN ANOTHER PASHTUN TRIBAL AREA IN PAKISTAN, KALA DHAKA.

IN 1997 I BEGAN VISITING HELMAND, PHOTOGRAPHING THE DAMAGED CENTRAL HELMAND IRRIGATION SYSTEM, AND TALKING WITH THE TALIBAN AND LOCAL FARMERS ABOUT THE INCREASING OPIUM POPPY CULTIVATION. I EXPLAINED, AS A PRIVATE CITIZEN, THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LACK OF RECONSTRUCTION FUNDING AND OPIUM PRODUCTION. THE TALIBAN HAD NO OBJECTIONS TO ME PHOTOGRAPHING THE DAMAGED SYSTEM WHEN I EXPLAINED THE NEED FOR PHOTOS IN DISCUSSIONS WITH POTENTIAL DONORS. I TALKED WITH ANYONE THAT WOULD LISTEN ABOUT THE PROBLEMS IN HELMAND AND THE TALIBAN - AND FARMER POINT OF VIEW. I DISCUSSED THE SITUATION WITH BOTH MR. JOHN PARKER AND MR. JAMES McHUGH IN THE EMBASSY. I DISCUSSED IT WITH MR. SULTAN AZIZ, HEAD OF U.N. OPS/AFGHANISTAN IN 1996, AND A VARIETY OF PEOPLE IN UNDCP INCLUDING MR. ANGUS GEDDES, THE ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT ADVISOR.

TALIBAN REQUEST REDEVELOPMENT HELP:

TO MY KNOWLEDGE, FROM 1997 ON, BOTH THE FARMERS AND THE TALIBAN WERE ASKING THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY FOR HELP WITH THE IRRIGATION SYSTEM, TO RETURN IT TO SOMETHING APPROACHING ITS ORIGINAL CONDITION. THIS IMPROVEMENT WOULD ALLOW THEM TO RETURN TO THEIR TRADITIONAL DOUBLE CROPPING SYSTEM. THEY CONSIDERED POPPY TOO MUCH WORK, REQUIRING THE HIRING OF ADDITIONAL LABOR. IN ADDITION THEY SAW POPPY AS AN EVIL CROP. MR. JAMES McHUGH OF I.N.L. WAS THE ONLY ONE TO RESPOND TO THEIR REQUEST.

RATHER THAN RESPOND TO THE TALIBAN REQUEST FOR HELP IN HELMAND, U.N.D.C.P. WANDERED OFF INTO TWO SEMI-IRRRELEVANT AREAS, DID NOT FOCUS ON THE KEY PRODUCTION AREA (HELMAND), DIVIDED THEIR RESOURCES, AND FAILED TO MAKE A MAJOR IMPACT.

I.N.L. FUNDING SUPPORTS DEVELOPMENT WORK: DEC '98-MAR '99

THROUGH MR. JAMES McHUGH, I WORKED WITH MERCY CORPS INTERNATIONAL (MCI) FOR FOUR MONTHS IN THE WINTER OF 1998-99. MY TASK INVOLVED WORKING WITH THE TALIBAN AND ORGANIZING HAND LABOR FOR REHABILITATION WORK ON THE CENTRAL HELMAND IRRIGATION SYSTEM. WE EMPLOYED UP TO 3,000 MEN PER DAY WORKING WITH PICKS AND SHOVELS TO CLEAN THE MAIN CANAL. I WROTE A LENGTHY REPORT FOR THAT WORK SEASON ANALYZING SUCCESSES AND FAILURES OF THE PROJECT – AND DOCUMENTING ACCOMPLISHMENTS WITH SEVERAL PAGES OF PHOTOGRAPHS.

UNFORTUNATELY, AND FOR A VARIETY OF REASONS, IN THAT CROP SEASON THEY DID NOT LIVE UP TO THE FARMER AGREEMENT TO REDUCE OPIUM PRODUCTION AND POPPY PRODUCTION NEARLY DOUBLED IN SOME AREAS. REASONS GIVEN FOR THE FAILURE TO REDUCE PRODUCTION INCLUDED:

- WITH THE USA'S ROCKET ATTACK ON AFGHANISTAN ON 20 AUG 1998, THE FARMERS ASSUMED THE AGREEMENT WAS OFF. NO AMERICANS WOULD BE COMING. WRONG. I ARRIVED o/a 7 DEC 98 - WELL AFTER PLANTING TIME.
- THE POPPY CROP OF 1997-98 HAD NOT DONE WELL CAUSING MANY FARMERS TO BE IN DEBT. SINCE THE SUBSEQUENT PRICE OF RAW OPIUM NEARLY DOUBLED, FARMERS PLANTED A LARGER CROP OF OPIUM POPPY AND THIS RESULTED IN THE BUMPER CROP THE FOLLOWING YEAR. AS A RESULT DEVELOPMENT FUNDS WERE CUT AND WORK ENDED.

THE FARMERS AND THE TALIBAN WERE VERY SATISFIED WITH THE WORK WE ACCOMPLISHED DURING THAT WINTER WORK SEASON. BOTH THE FARMERS AND THE TALIBAN SIGNED POPPY REDUCTION AGREEMENTS FOR THE FOLLOWING YEAR (1999/2000) FOR WORK ON THE DRAINS. BUT THE POLITICAL DAMAGE ALREADY HAD BEEN DONE. NO FUNDS WERE MADE AVAILABLE.

PROPOSAL JUSTIFICATION:

THE TALIBAN ALREADY HAVE BANNED THE PRODUCTION OF OPIUM POPPY IN THE AREAS UNDER THEIR CONTROL. THE MOST PRODUCTIVE AREA IS IN CENTRAL HELMAND. THE FARMERS GENERALLY HAVE NOT PLANTED OPIUM POPPY IN RESPONSE TO MULLAH OMER'S BAN AND TALIBAN PROVEN POWER TO ENFORCE THE BAN.

AT LEAST THE WESTERN WORLD SHOULD RECOGNIZE THIS UNILATERAL ACTION AND SUPPORT THE POPPY BAN WITH SOME DEVELOPMENT ACTION TO HELP THE FARMERS MAKE THE TRANSITION TO OTHER CROPS. THERE IS ALWAYS THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE FARMERS WILL BE ALLOWED TO REVERT TO POPPY IF NO SUPPORT ACTION IS TAKEN. YOU CAN BE SURE THAT THERE IS A LOT OF PRESSURE ON MULLAH OMER TO LET POPPY CULTIVATION RETURN.

WHILE MULLAH OMER HAS DECLARED POPPY TO BE UNISLAMIC, HE ALSO HAS ASKED THE OUTSIDE WORLD TO HELP SUPPORT THE CHANGE. WE HAVE AN INTEREST IN NOT HAVING OPIUM POPPY TO BE GROWN IN AFGHANISTAN. THE ACTION NECESSARY IS NOT ONE OF ENFORCEMENT, THE TALIBAN WILL SEE TO THAT. THE ACTION NECESSARY IS ONE OF DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT. NOW D.E.A. SEEMS TO HAVE FUNDS FOR ENFORCEMENT. WHY NOT HELP FUND SOME DEVELOPMENT AND CROP SUBSTITUTION WORK IN CENTRAL HELMAND IN SUPPORT OF THE POPPY BAN? IT WOULD BE USEFUL AND PRODUCTIVE WORK.

PROPOSAL BASIS: ALTERNATIVE CROP SUPPORT

THE SPRING/SUMMER CROPPING SEASON IS ONE FOR ALTERNATIVE CASH CROPS THAT THE FARMERS UNDERSTAND AND GROW TO A LIMITED EXTENT. COTTON IS THE MOST OBVIOUS ALTERNATIVE CASH CROP. COTTON PRODUCTION HAS BEEN INCREASING OVER THE PAST 5 TO 10 YEARS IN CENTRAL HELMAND. THE FARMERS KNOW AND GROW THIS CROP. THERE ARE TWO COTTON GINS IN THE REGION, ONE STILL FUNCTIONING, BUILT BY THE BRITISH STARTING IN THE MID-1960'S. THE GOOD QUALITY OF HELMAND COTTON IS WELL KNOWN. THERE IS AN INTERNATIONAL MARKET FOR GOOD COTTON BUT AFGHANISTAN DROPPED OUT OF THE INTERNATIONAL MARKET WITH THE RUSSIAN INVASION AND THE TALIBAN DO NOT HAVE THE SKILLS TO GET BACK

INTO THE COTTON MARKET. PRESENTLY, PAKISTANI BUYERS AT CUT RATE PRICES PURCHASE MOST OF THE COTTON CROP.

PEANUTS ARE ANOTHER CASH CROP BEING GROWN IN SOME AREAS. THERE IS A GOOD MARKET FOR ALL THIS PRODUCTION IN HERAT AND IRAN.

VEGETABLES ARE ANOTHER ALTERNATIVE BUT AGAIN, THERE IS NEED FOR GOOD SEED STOCK AS WELL AS HELP IN MARKETING TO NEARBY COUNTRIES.

IF NOT US – WHO?

WE NEED TO HELP WITH THE TRANSITION FROM POPPY TO OTHER CASH CROPS. WHO ELSE WILL? THERE IS NEED FOR ACTION NOW. MY PROPOSAL WOULD BE EFFECTIVE AND NOT COSTLY. COULD THE D.E.A. HELP FUND THIS PROPOSAL? IN MY VIEW, WE CANNOT DEPEND ON THE UNDCP TO DO THE RIGHT THINGS, IN THE RIGHT PLACE, AT THE RIGHT TIME.

THE LATENESS OF THIS PROPOSAL IS THE RESULT OF MY MISTAKEN ASSUMPTION THAT THE WESTERN WORLD WOULD SEE AND UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE OF THE TALIBAN BAN ON OPIUM POPPY PRODUCTION. THE GENERAL RESPONSE SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN SKEPTICISM, ANALYSIS OF THE POSSIBLE REASONS FOR THE BAN AND INACTION.

AGAIN, WE, THE U.S.A., MUST SUPPORT THE POPPY BAN IN AFGHANISTAN.
NO ONE ELSE WILL

I WOULD BE HAPPY TO DISCUSS THESE ISSUES WITH YOU OR ANYONE ELSE THAT MIGHT HAVE AN INTEREST IN INSURING THE END TO OPIUM POPPY PRODUCTION IN CENTRAL HELMAND. I AM READY AND WILLING TO ORGANIZE AND FIELD THE PROPOSED ACTION. I HAVE RECENTLY SENT SIMILAR LETTERS TO THE SAME OFFICES LISTED FOR DISTRIBUTION BELOW.

SINCERELY,



RICHARD B. SCOTT

cc: RICHARD ADAMS, INL/ASIA
JEFF LUNSTEAD, STATE/SOUTH ASIA BUREAU