

JOHN PARKER
U.S. EMBASSY
ISLAMABAD

21 FEB 97

DEAR MR. PARKER,
GREETINGS FROM COLORADO. IT HAS BEEN SOME TIME SINCE WE LAST TALKED ABOUT HELMAND...SOMETHING OVER A YEAR. THE POLITICAL SITUATION HAS CHANGED SOMEWHAT SINCE THAT TIME WITH THE TALIBAN IN KABUL. I HAVE VISITED PAKISTAN THREE TIMES SINCE OUR TALK AND HAVE KEPT IN TOUCH WITH ENGINEER JAWED OF H.A.F.O., RECENTLY PROVIDING HIM WITH THE COMPLETE PLAN OF CANALS AND DRAINS IN SHAMALAN AS IT WAS BEFORE THE WAR. HE TOLD ME THAT YOU MAY BE LEAVING PAKISTAN FOR A NEW ASSIGNMENT IN THE NEAR FUTURE. I PLAN TO COME TO PAKISTAN IN MID-MARCH AND I WAS WONDERING IF WE MIGHT MEET AGAIN? I BELIEVE THAT OPIUM POPPY CULTIVATION CAN BE REDUCED AND EVENTUALLY ELIMINATED IN THE CONTEXT OF AN IRRIGATION SYSTEMS REHABILITATION PROGRAM.

ENG. JAWED TOLD ME IN MID-DECEMBER '96 THAT AT THE AFGHAN DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE IN ASHKABAD, NO ONE EXPRESSED AN INTEREST IN WORKING IN HELMAND BECAUSE OF THE OPIUM POPPY ISSUE. THE ARTICLE IN THE PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER BY KAUFMAN ON 19 JAN 97 CERTAINLY PAINTS A NEGATIVE IF A NOT COMPLETELY ACCURATE PICTURE OF THE SITUATION. HE WAS NOT AWARE OF THE AREAS THAT GREW POPPY BEFORE THE WAR IN HELMAND AND AREAS THAT DID NOT. SANGIN IS AN AREA THAT HAS ALWAYS GROWN POPPY. HISTORY IS IMPORTANT IN PLANNING FOR FUTURE ACTION. I READ WITH INTEREST THAT MERCY CORPS HAS INITIATED A CROP SUBSTITUTION PROGRAM. CROP SUBSTITUTION ALONE HAS NOT BEEN VERY PRODUCTIVE IN AREAS IN WHICH I HAVE WORKED OR MONITORED IN THE PAST...TURKEY, AFGHANISTAN (BEFORE THE WAR), PAKISTAN. AND THE REPLACEMENT CASH CROP FOR OPIUM HAS BEEN ELUSIVE. THE OPIUM BUYERS, WHO IN SOME CASES CONTRACT FOR A CROP AT PLANTING TIME, CAN RAISE THE PRICE SIGNIFICANTLY FOR THE FARMER WITHOUT EFFECTING THE PRICE ON THE INTERNATIONAL MARKET.

AS I NOTED IN OUR DISCUSSION AND IN MORE DETAIL IN MY LETTER/PROPOSAL OF 25 FEB 95 TO SULTAN AZIZ, I BELIEVE A MORE AGGRESSIVE PROGRAM COMBINING VILLAGE/COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION, IRRIGATION SYSTEMS REHABILITATION, TRADITIONAL CROP SUPPORT (COTTON BEING THE CASH CROP) AND OPIUM POPPY REDUCTION WOULD BE EFFECTIVE. BUT IT MEANS SOME INVESTMENT IN AT LEAST ONE AREA TO START TO REHABILITATE THE IRRIGATION AND DRAINAGE SYSTEMS. ONE OF THE PROBLEMS IN THE PAST IN HELMAND WITH FOCUSING ON ONE AREA AS A TEST HAS BEEN ASSOCIATED WITH AREA/TRIBAL/POLITICAL RIVALRIES. THE IMPLEMENTING AGENCY (H.A.V.A.) BEING ACCUSED OF NOT BEING NEUTRAL, A BIG ISSUE WITH PASHTUNS AT ALL LEVELS. HOWEVER, TO GET FARMERS TO THINK IN TERMS OF MOVING AWAY FROM OPIUM POPPY, THEY MUST SEE SIGNIFICANT INCOME PRODUCING CHANGE IN PROCESS, I.E., SUFFICIENT WATER, GOOD DRAINAGE (REDUCED SALT IN FIELDS), AN INCOME PRODUCING CROP WITH A READY MARKET (COTTON).

TO QUOTE MULLAH ABDUL HAMID AKHUNDAZA (AKHUNZADA?) OF TALIBAN FOREIGN RELATIONS IN KANDAHAR FROM KAUFMAN'S ARTICLE, "WE CANNOT BANISH THE POPPY UNTIL OUR PEOPLE HAVE OTHER CROPS TO GROW AND WORK TO DO." THE BROAD SCOPE APPROACH PROPOSED CAN MEET THE MULLAH'S REQUIREMENTS AND BRING THE TALIBAN GOVERNMENT INTO THE ISSUE. THE APPROACH IS OUTLINED BELOW:

1. THE GEOGRAPHIC AREA(S) OF FOCUS WOULD HAVE THE FOLLOWING CHARACTERISTICS:

A) NOT AREAS OF TRADITIONAL OPIUM POPPY CULTIVATION, E.G., SANGIN BUT AREAS OF PAST U.S. INVOLVEMENT WHERE THERE WAS AN UNDERSTANDING THAT POPPIES WERE NOT TO BE GROWN IN U.S. FUNDED IRRIGATION WORKS....AREAS SERVED BY THE BOGHRA CANAL OR DARWISHAN CANAL, E.G., NAD-I-ALI, SHAMALAN. OPIUM POPPY IS NOT A TRADITIONAL CROP IN THESE AREAS. THIS UNDERSTANDING IS WITHIN LIVING MEMORY OF MANY OF THE PRESENT FARMERS.

ENG. JAWED HAS INDICATED THAT THE BOGHRA CANAL IS FUNCTIONING AT PERHAPS 50 PERCENT OF CAPACITY. SOME FARMER GROUPS ON THIS CANAL ORGANIZED FUNDING TO INITIATE SOME RE-CHANNELING OF THE HELMAND RIVER TO IMPROVE THE BOGHRA INTAKE IN 1995 DEMONSTRATING RECOGNITION OF NEED, WILLINGNESS TO PARTICIPATE IN ORGANIZED EFFORT AND COSTS. INITIAL FOCUS SHOULD BE ON THESE SORTS OF ORGANIZATIONS, AS INFORMAL AS THEY MIGHT BE, AND ACTIONS. THE STOP-GAP WORK THEY ACCOMPLISHED WAS NOT THE ANSWER TO THE PROBLEM WHICH REQUIRES GREATER ENGINEERING SKILLS IN RIVER RE-CHANNELING. (NOTE: T. ASSIFI REPORT, 1992)

BEFORE THE WAR, THE GOVERNMENT WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR WATER DELIVERY AND SYSTEM MAINTENANCE THROUGH THE MAIN DITCHES AND CANALS. THE FARMERS' ORGANIZATIONS WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR WATER DISTRIBUTION AND MAINTENANCE THROUGH THE FARM SYSTEMS WITH A LOCALLY SELECTED WATER MANAGER, MIRAB. IN AREAS WHERE THE WATER STILL FLOWS, ASSUME A LOCAL WATER ORGANIZATION IS

PRESENT , IF INFORMAL. AGAIN, THESE ARE THE ORGANIZATIONS OF FOCUS.

B) FOCUS ON AREA(S) WITH SIGNIFICANT PROBLEMS OF WATER ACCESS AND DRAINAGE TO INSURE LOCAL INTEREST AND INVOLVEMENT IN THE REHABILITATION WORK. MAKE CERTAIN THE WORK IS CLEARLY DEFINED AND WILL HAVE THE EXPECTED RESULTS. THE ENGINEERING ASPECTS MUST BE CORRECT. NO STRUCTURE FAILURE. AND THE FARMERS' GROUPS MUST CLEARLY UNDERSTAND WHAT IS TO BE DONE. NAD-I-ALI AND MARJA HAVE ALWAYS BEEN AREAS WITH DRAINAGE PROBLEMS, THE RESULT OF TIGHT CLAY SOILS AND AN IMPERMEABLE CONGLOMERATE (LIKE A LAYER OF CONCRETE) AT ABOUT 6 FEET BELOW THE SURFACE. SOME AREAS IN SHAMALAN HAVE WATER LOGGING PROBLEMS. THE POTENTIAL PROBLEM OF A SHAMALAN CANAL WASHOUT, WHICH WOULD COMPLETELY CUT THE FLOW IN THE NEAR FUTURE BELOW BASHARAN, WOULD CERTAINLY BE A REHABILITATION ACTIVITY OF STRONG INTEREST FOR MUCH OF THE LARGE SHAMALAN REGION.

THE POTENTIAL BRIDGE WASHOUT PROBLEMS AT BOTH LASHKAR GAH AND DARWISHAN, WHILE NOT DIRECTLY ASSOCIATED WITH AGRICULTURE PRODUCTION, WILL RESULT IN MAJOR REGIONAL COMMUNICATIONS PROBLEMS, AND WOULD BE OF INTEREST TO THE RESIDENTS AS WELL AS THE TALIBAN GOVERNMENT..

AFTER SOME 17 YEARS OF NO OR LIMITED PATCH-UP MAINTENANCE, IT SHOULD NOT BE DIFFICULT TO IDENTIFY MANY AREAS IN NEED OF MAJOR WORK. THE SURPRISING THING IS THAT WATER STILL RUNS THROUGH THE SYSTEM.

C) FOCUS ON AREA(S) WITH STRONG TRADITIONS OF TRIBAL/POLITICAL ORGANIZATION. AGAIN NAD-I-ALI AND MARJA WERE SETTLED IN RELATIVELY LARGE TRIBAL AND SUB-TRIBAL BLOCKS FROM VARIOUS PARTS OF AFGHANISTAN DURING THE 1950's AND '60's. THE TRIBAL LEADERS PLAYED A MAJOR ROLE IN GOVERNMENT RELATIONS. EACH SETTLEMENT GROUP HAD AN OFFICIAL REPRESENTATIVE. SHAMALAN IS MOSTLY AN INDIGENOUS TRIBAL AREA OF HISTORIC ORIGINS IN THE HELMAND FLOOD PLAIN. (THE INDIGENOUS SETTLED AREAS LIKE SHAMALAN HAVE THE ADDED PROBLEM OF FRAGMENTED AND SMALLER LAND HOLDINGS THAN THE MORE RECENTLY SETTLED AREAS.) A FEW PLACES WERE SETTLED IN THE 1970's WITH GROUPS OF MIXED TRIBAL ORIGINS AND THUS, WITH QUESTIONABLE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES. (NOTE: SANGIN HAS THE SMALLEST AVERAGE LAND HOLDINGS OF ANY HELMAND DISTRICT.)

THE STRONGER THE TRIBAL/POLITICAL ORGANIZATION , THE BETTER THE POTENTIAL FOR ORGANIZING GROUP ACTION. OF COURSE, THIS CAN ALSO WORK AGAINST AN UNWANTED ACTIVITY.

D) FOCUS ON AREA(S) THAT EXPRESS STRONG INTEREST IN PARTICIPATING AS ORGANIZED GROUPS IN THE REHABILITATION WORK, CROP SUPPORT ACTIVITIES (INCLUDING INCREASED COTTON PRODUCTION), ELIMINATING POPPY PRODUCTION IN THEIR AREA AND CONTRIBUTING TO THE REHABILITATION WORK. A CONTINUOUS DIALOG MUST BE INITIATED AND MAINTAINED WITH THE PARTICIPATING GROUPS THROUGHOUT THE ACTIVITY. AGREEMENTS MUST BE FORMALIZED WITH THE PARTICIPATING GROUPS THAT STATE THAT THE FARMERS WILL NOT GROW POPPIES IN THE AREAS REHABILITATED BY THE ACTIVITY. THEY ARE THE RESPONSIBLE BODIES. THE AGREEMENTS MUST BE FORMALIZED BEFORE ANY ACTIVITY BEGINS IN A PARTICULAR AREA.

2. THE REHABILITATION WORK WOULD REQUIRE BOTH MACHINE EXCAVATION AND HAND LABOR FOR EFFICIENCY AND DIRECT LOCAL INVOLVEMENT. APPARENTLY THERE ARE TWO SMALL DRAG-LINES STILL OPERATIONAL AND A THIRD THAT COULD BE REPAIRED WITH SOME SPARE PARTS. THE CLEANING OF CANALS AND DRAINS IS NECESSARY TO BRING THE REGION BACK INTO FULL PRODUCTION. THE NEED FOR EFFECTIVE DRAINAGE CANNOT BE OVERSTATED. THE TRADITIONAL CROPS OF WHEAT, MUNG BEAN, CORN (ALL CONSUMED LOCALLY) AND COTTON REQUIRE WELL WATERED AND DRAINED FIELDS, WHICH MAY NOT ALWAYS BE THE CASE WITH POPPY.

MUCH OF THE WORK CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED WITH HAND LABOR...PICKS AND SHOVELS. APPARENTLY THERE REMAINS A SUPPLY OF FARM LABOR IN THE REGION THAT CAN BE UTILIZED. THERE WERE NO PROBLEMS OF RECRUITING HAND LABOR IN THE 1970's FOR THE HELMAND DRAINAGE PROJECT ALTHOUGH THE GOVERNMENT AT THE TIME PREFERRED HEAVY EQUIPMENT. IN ONE FIELD TEST IN FARM DRAIN CONSTRUCTION, WE FOUND THAT THERE WAS VIRTUALLY NO DIFFERENCE IN TIME OR COST BETWEEN USING FARM LABOR WITH SHOVELS AND USING HEAVY EQUIPMENT FOR THE REQUIRED EXCAVATION WORK. AFGHAN FARMERS WITH SHOVELS CAN MOVE A LOT OF EARTH IN A DAY. LOCAL PARTICIPATION IS IMPORTANT BOTH TO BE WORKING TO REPAIR "THEIR" IRRIGATION SYSTEM AND TO EARN MONEY. IN THE PAST, THERE WAS A CERTAIN DISASSOCIATION FROM LOCAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE MAINTENANCE OF THE MAJOR PARTS OF THE SYSTEM. THIS CAN BE CHANGED. AND THE GROUPS MUST ALSO CONTRIBUTE TO THIS OVER ALL ACTIVITY...A CONTINUATION OF WHAT THEY DID AT THE BOGHRA INTAKE IN 1995.

3. SUPPORT FOR THE TRADITIONAL CROPS OF WHEAT, CORN, MUNG BEAN AND COTTON SHOULD BE

INITIATED OR EXPANDED PERHAPS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE PRESENT CROP SUBSTITUTION PROGRAM.. THE COTTON GIN IS ALREADY THE SOURCE FOR SOME SEED AND PERHAPS FERTILIZER, AS IN THE PAST. THIS SUPPORT WOULD BE IN THE FORM OF FERTILIZER AND SEED... IMPROVED SEED. THIS WAS BEGINNING TO OCCUR ON A GRAND SCALE THROUGH A.S.S.P. AT THE TIME OF THE U.S. WITHDRAWAL FROM THE AFGHAN U.S.A.I.D. PROGRAMS.

FOCUS ON COTTON AS THE MAJOR CASH CROP. THERE IS AN ESTABLISHED MARKET AND THE MEANS TO PROCESS THE CROP. IT WOULD BE USEFUL IF THE BRITISH WHO BUILT THE TWO COTTON GINS IN HELMAND WOULD COME IN FOR AT LEAST THE REHABILITATION WORK ON THE GINS. IT IS MY UNDERSTANDING THAT SPARE PARTS FOR THE LASHKAR GAH COTTON GIN CAN PERHAPS BE BOUGHT IN PAKISTAN. THE BRITISH APPARENTLY SUPPLIED EQUIPMENT IN BOTH COUNTRIES.

THE HELMAND FARMERS KNOW AND UNDERSTAND COTTON AS A CASH CROP AND THE INFRASTRUCTURE IS LONG ESTABLISHED TO PROCESS THE COTTON, COOKING OIL, SOAP, AND SEED CAKE. PAKISTANI BUYERS, I UNDERSTAND, BUY THE PROCESSED COTTON. THE OTHER PRODUCTS ARE CONSUMED LOCALLY.

ACCORDING TO COTTON GIN SOURCES, THEY COULD IN THE PAST PROCESS 25,000 M.T. AT THE LASHKAR GAH GIN ANNUALLY. UNDER PRESENT CONDITIONS, THEY CAN PROCESS 18,000 M.T. IN MY LETTER TO SULTAN AZIZ IN 1995, I NOTED A BIG DROP IN PROCESSED COTTON BETWEEN 1992 AND 1994 FROM 2,101 M.T. TO 464 M.T. THIS TREND HAS CHANGED WITH 4,608 M.T. IN 1995 AND AN ESTIMATED 9,000 M.T. IN 1996. THIS TREND CAN BE ACCELERATED WITH THE PROGRAM OUTLINED. THE SECOND COTTON GIN IN GIRISHK COULD BE ACTIVATED IN THE FUTURE BUT THE MACHINERY MUST BE PROTECTED. IT IS MY UNDERSTANDING THAT SOME PAKISTANI BUYERS TRIED TO BUY THIS EQUIPMENT. FOREIGN SUPPORT FOR THIS ESTABLISHED INDUSTRY WOULD LIKELY END THIS POTENTIAL PROBLEM.

4. A COLLABORATIVE EFFORT BETWEEN THE NGOs FUNCTIONING IN HELMAND AND WHAT REMAINS OF H.A.V.A., INCLUDING THE COTTON GIN AND THE EQUIPMENT YARD AT CHANJIR (SP), EACH WITH ITS SPECIALITIES AND CONTACTS, COULD JOINTLY FIELD THE ACTIVITY I HAVE OUTLINED. IT WOULD LIKELY REQUIRE SOME ADDITIONAL PERIODIC TECHNICAL INPUT TO INSURE SUCCESS. FOR EXAMPLE, THE BRIDGE AT LASHKAR GAH RECEIVED SOME NECESSARY ATTENTION IN 1995 BUT THE CONSTRUCTION FAILED AND THE BRIDGE REMAINS IN SERIOUS TROUBLE IN THE FACE OF THE SPRING FLOODS, AS IS THE NEAR BREACH IN THE UPPER SHAMALAN CANAL PREVIOUSLY NOTED.

THE COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE GROUPS, I BELIEVE, REQUIRES A COORDINATOR OR A COORDINATING UNIT. ASIDE FROM INITIATING A PROGRAM THAT WOULD REDUCE OPIUM PRODUCTION IN HELMAND AND EVENTUALLY ELIMINATE IT IN THE MAJOR AREAS, THIS PROGRAM WOULD BEGIN THE MOVE TO PUT THE MAINTENANCE OF THE HELMAND IRRIGATION SYSTEM BACK IN THE HANDS OF THE AFGHAN GOVERNMENT, PERHAPS A NEW H.A.V.A. IT TAKES A LARGE, FOCUSED ORGANIZATION IN COLLABORATION WITH THE FARMERS WHO USE IT TO OPERATE AND MAINTAIN A MAJOR IRRIGATION SYSTEM. AT THE PRESENT TIME, NEITHER THE REMAINING PERSONNEL OF H.A.V.A. NOR THE STAFFS OF THE NGOs WORKING IN THE AREA CAN LIKELY HAVE A MAJOR IMPACT ON THE SITUATION. TOGETHER THEY HAVE A BETTER CHANCE.

ON THE LONG TERM, DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE ORGANIZATION IN HELMAND WILL REQUIRE TRAINING. THIS MIGHT BE ADDRESSED BY THE LARGE IRRIGATION SYSTEMS TRAINING FACILITIES IN PAKISTAN OR BY VARIOUS U.S. ORGANIZATIONS AND INSTITUTIONS. BUT THIS IS IN THE FUTURE.

5. THE PROGRAM OUTLINED WOULD BE IMPLEMENTED IN A PHASED APPROACH. THE FIRST PHASE FOCUSING ON AREA ORGANIZATION, IDENTIFYING REHABILITATION PROJECTS, INITIATING MEANINGFUL AGREEMENTS AND WORK START UP. FOCUS ON SHORT TERM GOALS BUT REMAIN FLEXIBLE TO CHANGE AS THE SITUATION REQUIRES. THE INITIAL REHABILITATION PROJECTS MUST REFLECT THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE PROGRAM. CREDIBILITY WITH THE FARMERS IS ONE OF THE KEYS TO FUTURE SUCCESS.

NONE OF THIS OUTLINED METHODOLOGY IS NEW. BUT IT MEANS A COMBINATION OF ACTIVITIES AND ORGANIZATIONS WORKING TOGETHER. AS NOTED, I THINK THAT THIS APPROACH COULD RESULT IN THE REDUCTION AND ELIMINATION OF OPIUM POPPY PRODUCTION IN AT LEAST THE AREAS IRRIGATED BY U.S. FUNDED CANALS AND DRAINS. I THINK IT COULD ALSO CATCH THE INTEREST AND ATTENTION OF THE TALIBAN GOVERNMENT WHICH IS A KEY TO LONG TERM OPIUM CONTROL.

I WILL SEND BY MAIL COPIES OF MY LETTER TO SULTAN AZIZ WHICH I THINK WE DISCUSSED EARLIER AND A COPY OF MY STUDY OF THE DISTRIBUTION OF TRIBAL GROUPS IN HELMAND WHICH IS IMPORTANT IN PROJECT FOCUS. I HOPE TO SEE YOU IN MARCH WHEN WE COULD HAVE FURTHER DISCUSSIONS ON THIS ISSUE. BEST WISHES,

RICHARD B. SCOTT