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Dear Sultan Aziz,

Greetings from Colorado and congratulations on your position with UNDP. The last time we talked was in 1993 when you were down on a visit to Islamabad from your assignment in Mazar. I have been in Pakistan on two occasions since that time, the last in November when I tried unsuccessfully to contact you through Nancy in Peshawar. I wanted to discuss the present status of the Helmand irrigation system with you and some ideas for its rehabilitation.

As you may remember, I have had a long term interest in the Helmand Valley where I worked for USAID through most of the 1970s. Through friends, reports and publications I have attempted to keep informed on events in that region. And since the first indications of a potential Russian pullout in the late 1980's, I have been proposing at least a planning exercise for the re-organization and rehabilitation of the Helmand irrigation system, first with USAID, with various Afghan and foreign NGOs, and more recently with UNDP/Peshawar last May. Except for two Afghan NGOs, Farouq Azam and Engineer Jawed, there appears to be little interest in a closer look at Helmand at this time, the result of problems relating to an Afghan central government, security and poppies. I understand that UNDP does not consider regions for development work in which the UN narcotics organization is focused, e.g., Helmand. But I would like to share with you some of my ideas on how a possibly productive phased approach could be generated for the reorganization and rehabilitation of the Helmand irrigation system without another generation of delays. Time is a key element in the search for a solution to the impasse in the Helmand and much of Afghanistan. Some of the ideas, although not new, may also be of interest to the UN narcotics group as well as INM of the Department of State. If a viable solution is found for Helmand rehabilitation, perhaps parallels for action may be found in other locations in Afghanistan as well.

I believe that now is the time for a development organization like UNDP, FAO or some other national or international group (Asia Development Bank or Japan?) to focus on, initiate very specific and goal-oriented local dialogue and start the planning process for the reorganization and rehabilitation of the Helmand irrigation system which was becoming one of the most productive regions of the country before the war. This is not a proposal for an immediate all-out rehabilitation program involving large sums of money. This is a proposal for a phased approach that, if possible through a series of steps, would work toward a fully functioning irrigation system organized around a regional organization with

full local involvement. Unless the local leaders (tribal, political and commanders) understand and agree that the reorganization and rehabilitation of the irrigation system is to everyone's benefit, and agree to participate, nothing much can happen. The farmers already know.

Most if not all the international organizations capable of initiating this proposal normally require a central, stable government with which to sign agreements which does not exist at the present time in Afghanistan. This would certainly be true for loans from the international banks. Given some of the post-war construction activities in Helmand and in Nimroz, as I understand it, this requirement may not be an absolute when it comes to smaller programs and activities. For example, someone is doing some work in the area of the Boghra intake.

An expanding opium production in Helmand is another serious problem blocking potential foreign support for Helmand rehabilitation. However, rather than reject the idea of potential development and rehabilitation activities in that region because of the expanding opium production (some estimate 70 % of land in production in that crop) I propose that the reorganization and rehabilitation activities be initiated as the method for reducing and eliminating opium production from the region rather than having the elimination of opium production as a prerequisite to rehabilitating this previously productive area. The longer opium production remains in the areas that did not previously (pre-war) grow the crop, the more difficult it will be to eliminate. Farmers will more and more see opium as a traditional and legitimate crop and/or become more dependent on it as the established source of income. The buyers will become even more entrenched. Given the feed-back from a variety of sources, this does not appear to be the case at the present time. But it is getting late. The rapid reduction in cotton production in the region over the past three years, discussed below, may be an indication of the entrenchment of opium as a crop. Although I do not know the present status of the "Taleb" movement in the Helmand region, they apparently did make some early statements against the continued production of narcotics. This could be another plus for pursuing this proposal with their support.

Farouq Azam and I did the last pre-war Farm Economic Survey of the Helmand. Only two areas were noted for major opium production at that time: Sangin and Musa Kala. Both areas were "out of project" areas relative to U.S. investments in the region. The government did not have the political will to attempt to eradicate the crop in those areas and the U.S. did not press the issue. There was a brief expansion of production into "project" areas (primarily central Shamalon) in the crop year of 1973, just before the first coup, but this was quickly noted and eliminated with U.S. urging. It was made clear to the farmers that there would be no opium production in "project" areas: a precedent established within living memory of many farmers.

During the first year of Daoud, even the opium production in Sangin and Musa Kala was greatly reduced but it returned to these traditionally opium growing areas with the lack of government pressure. According to local sources at the time, most farmers assumed that the Daoud government was going to be more strict about narcotics than that of the King in its final years. Without indications of a forceful central government, opium production returned to pre-coup levels within a couple of years but, again, in limited out-of-project areas.

As a side note, Sangin and Musa Kala have the smallest average land holdings of all the regions of Helmand making opium poppy a particularly logical crop. Opium produces maximum and much greater income on these marginal sized plots than is possible if they are planted in other traditional crops like wheat and corn. Reduced cropping area and lower production may be factors in the rise of opium production in the present situation in Helmand where the irrigation system of canals, ditches and drains has not been properly cleaned and maintained since 1979/80 and in some locations damaged during the war. The surprising thing is that the system continues to function at all. Centralized sources for high yielding varieties of traditional crops seed and fertilizer are missing and these inputs are expensive. According to a satellite imagery assessment completed in 1993, 20 percent of the irrigated agriculture land cultivated in 1973 (pre-war) was not cultivated in 1990 in the Helmand region. Total production for the region is apparently well below pre-war levels.

This combination of factors could perhaps produce a situation conducive to opium poppy eradication when combined with irrigation system rehabilitation. That is, a rehabilitation program with a focus on local involvement and agreements that farmers benefiting from the program will stop opium production. But there are at least three other elements that must be put into this Helmand rehabilitation equation: 1) A known alternative crop that will be income producing through a known and guaranteed market; 2) some element of a centralized authority even if only a loose federation of local government, tribal/sub-tribal groups, commanders and mullahs bound by a serious Islamic economic development common interest and 3) some kind of technical and administrative coordinating unit with similar functions to the old HAVA. The Helmand irrigation system is large and extensive that requires centralized management.

An alternative cash crop to opium does not imply one that would compete with opium for total income. With rare exceptions, the miracle crop to replace opium has not yet been identified. Nothing will compete with opium for income since buyers can likely double or more the amount paid to farmers with little effect on the greater international market. An alternative crop would be one that the farmers know and understand, that can be produced with present technology and skills and for which there is a ready cash income market. A crop support program would need to be established to provide quality seed and fertilizer at reasonable prices and some form of loan system, e.g., fertilizer to be paid for at the time of harvest.

1. For the Helmand region at this time, cotton is one possibility of an alternative to opium poppy. The cotton gin in Laskar Gah is still functioning. Some basic data on Helmand cotton production since the change of government follows:

	Raw cotton Purchased	No. Farmers Cultivating	Oil Produced	Processed Cotton Sold
1992	2101 tons	9784	359,201 kg.	1,073,671 kg.
1993	853 tons	5985	136,947 kg.	442,902 kg.
1994	464 tons	2287	20,570 kg.	21,570 kg.

Primary producers are in regions of Nad-i-Ali, Nawa Barakzai, Babaji, Aynak, Bollan and some in Marja (water short area at the end of the Boghra Canal) and Garmsir (water short area at the end of the Shamalon Canal)

Oil Seed Cake
Produced

1992	1,030,995 kgs.	sold @ Afs. 184 per kg.
1993	284,140 kgs.	sold @ Afs. 341 per kg.
1994	6,488 kgs.	sold @ Afs. 385 per kg.

Source: Eng. Sayed Jawed and HAFO staff. There appear to be some typo errors in his data.

Clearly some farmers are growing, the governor is purchasing and the gin is processing a rapidly shrinking quantity of cotton. Baled cotton, oil seed cake and Helmand Gee were produced. The system for the development of cotton into an alternative crop for opium is in place and functioning although in need of rehabilitation as well. The new cotton gin completed in Girishk just previous to the Russian invasion was still in place but not functional in January of 1995, with some damage to the building. Apparently some Pakistani businessmen have approached the Governor of Helmand to purchase and remove this machinery. If the machinery were rehabilitated, this gin could be an element in this alternative crop proposal. The new gin was built in response to the increases in cotton production at the time in the upper Helmand which might include Sangin and Musa Kala. The Lashkar Gah gin could not effectively process the increasing production at that time. Prices were good. The British foreign aid program should be approached as a potential donor for a cotton program since they built, supported and provided technical assistance for the existing cotton processing system. The U.S. would not likely participate because of restrictions imposed by the cotton lobby, as in the past. Cotton remains a good crop for the international market.

The reasons for the great reduction in cotton production in the region are not clear. It could relate to the rapid expansion of opium as a cash crop with local pressures to grow it, reduced support for cotton production, and/or reduced incentive to grow cotton, ie., the government price for raw cotton may not have kept up with the falling value of the Afghani.

②. As the historian Witfogel noted long ago in his classic Oriental Despotism, a centralized authority is needed to mobilize, build and maintain a major irrigation system like that of the Helmand. Farmers have taken some action in the region to meet small and local needs like cutting small ditches directly from the river in

lower Shamalon to by-pass dysfunctional sections of the canal. They have dug ditches in the bottom of the silt clogged lower Boghra Canal to move some water into this previously served area. And they are pumping water for irrigation from Marja drains. (This information comes from Engineer Jawed, HAFO, who works in Helmand.) But to rehabilitate and maintain the system to anything approaching pre-war efficiency will require a major mobilization effort that cannot be accomplished with local resources or organized by an NGO. Although some attempt was or is being made to rehabilitate the ailing intake of the Boghra Canal (FAO?) and the Helmand River channeling at that point, the problem still requires major engineering attention. Many of the water control structures require repair or replacement. All of the canals and drains require major cleaning. This will take funding, organization and technical skills that may not be presently available in Afghanistan.

A serious attempt is needed in the field to establish a loose federation of regional power figures through which to organize the required rehabilitation work. An extended cease fire between the political parties and commanders would help as would a new central government about which all parties would agree. The combination of government representatives (the Governor of Helmand), and the Talib movement, if applicable, would be involved elements. Mullah involvement would be needed to sanction the organization and to condemn the continued production of narcotics. Commander participation is needed in addressing the very serious security problem. Their participation may be problematical since apparently some are directly involved in the narcotics trade. Tribal and sub-tribal representatives must be directly involved. But again, to assume a regional organization would be possible from the start would be wishful thinking. It would be the goal of this dialogue. This federation of elements would be taken one step at a time and all elements in the equation must be included.

- ③. A technical and administrative coordinating unit is required for the systematic rehabilitation of the Helmand irrigation system and its future operation. It would gather the required information about the system, set priorities, organize the required work and implement the necessary actions, including water control through the system. This unit would serve the same necessary functions as the past HAVA and would be totally Afghan.

Surveys
A first step to carry out this proposal would be to coordinate the efforts of several of the Afghan NGOs with knowledge and backgrounds in the area, like Engineer Jawed, Farouq Azam and whoever is working on the Boghra intake, to accomplish "quick and dirty" surveys of: ① The status of heavy equipment in the region, if any, that may be available or rehabilitated for use, eg. drag-lines and dozers. HACU equipment yard at Chah-Angir near Lashkar Gah would be the first place to look. It seems unlikely that any of the equipment that was introduced in the '70s would still be functional, e.g., self-loading scrapers and dozers with relatively complex hydraulic systems that require relatively sophisticated maintenance, and 1950's drag-lines rehabilitated in the 70's. There were also several new less complex Soviet drag-lines used in the construction of the new canal in Nimroz province in the '70s; ② The status of the system of ditches and drains. A small team of knowledgeable engineers with maps of the total system traveling by motorcycle could make the initial survey and identify

initial priorities; ③ The status of the potential labor force in the area or that might be drawn from the camps in Pakistan. This would include a quick survey of Helmand villages and camp populations for an estimate of a manual labor force and attitudes toward work on the irrigation system. In the 1970's with the Helmand drainage project, much of the manual labor force was drawn from the mountainous regions just to the north of Helmand, e.g., Oruzgan where the harsh winters provided free time for the migratory laborers. This survey would include a search for potential equipment operators in the region or outside willing to work in Helmand. If a large labor force could be recruited, much of the work could begin relatively quickly. In the mid-70's, an experiment was conducted comparing hand labor with machine excavation on some new large drains in the Nad-i-Ali region. The conclusion was that the two methods of excavation were comparable in both cost and time.

But some heavy equipment is needed to accomplish the required work in a timely manner. The Japanese might be a potential source of some limited pieces of equipment. They were briefly involved in the earliest phases of Helmand re-development, along with the Germans, between the two world wars. The Russians might also be a potential source for drag-lines (crucial equipment). There are also many skilled Afghan tractor drivers with tractors in Pakistan that might eventually be drawn back home. With the blades and buckets on these light pieces of equipment, they are capable of moving great quantities of earth.

At the same time the initial surveys are being conducted, an open and very specific goal-oriented dialogue with the leadership groups noted above and the farmers would need to be initiated about the potential for participation and support for the general rehabilitation plan. The structure of the needed central organization or governing committee would be determined as a result of this dialogue. Some funding would be needed early to start work in selected areas to indicate the seriousness of the effort...not just talk.

The surveys and dialogue can be accomplished through the coordinated efforts of a number of the interested NGOs already noted. The necessary skills are present. The unification of the NGOs efforts in this initial stage would be the embryo for the establishment of the technical coordinating unit noted above and perhaps housed in the HAVA building in Lashkar Gah which is apparently still standing. This unification of NGOs into a functioning unit in itself would be a complex but necessary undertaking. The systematic rehabilitation of the Helmand irrigation system demands a unified organization and a coordinated effort of all involved elements: a governing body, a technical coordinating and action unit and the farmers who will use and benefit from the rehabilitated system.

Aziz, this is a simple sketch of a proposal. I have ignored many of the details, problems and unknowns that would have to be addressed in implementation. But as noted, it appears to be time for some specific actions to be initiated for the over all planning and implementation of a Helmand irrigation system rehabilitation program. It is a program to be initiated through a coordinated effort of Afghan organizations, the people and the government, when this becomes possible. But it is a program to be initiated perhaps under the wing of a UN organization with some limited initial funding, with the skills to attempt to help coordinated the efforts of the existing Afghan organizations and to be able to call in outside

expertise as required. The program would need to be a phased, step-by-step approach, with the flexibility to stop, wait and shift focus as the local situation dictates with a final goal of the Helmand irrigation system rehabilitation and an Afghan organization in place with the skills and authority to keep the system fully operational.

I hope to be in Pakistan some time this spring to further pursue my interests in the Helmand irrigation system and perhaps visit the area. I would like to discuss with you the ideas presented in this letter at that time. If the UN were interested in pursuing this or any part of this set of ideas, I would be very interested in being involved in some capacity. I have included a couple of additional documents that you may find interesting, along with my CV.

You are likely aware that there are quite a number of people, not already noted, with years of experience in the maintenance and operations of the Helmand irrigation system. For example, Tawab Assifi, residing in California, who was brought in by USAID in 1991 to make an assessment of the problems with the Boghra Canal intake; and Engineer Aman, residing in the D.C. area, who was responsible for the annual maintenance program for Helmand for years. There are many more, both Afghan and foreign, that might be utilized in order that past mistakes may not be repeated.

Sincerely yours,



Richard B. Scott