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Attitudes toward the Shamalan Canal Project in the said village, Aynak, the “crisis syndrome”, and the continued need for public information

The Said village in Aynak is located just to the south of the tomb of Mir Salim (son of Mir Sahdad) which sits on a kind of peninsula jutting out into the Shamalan valley at about N40 on cadastral maps. Mir Salim was a Said (descendent of the Prophet Mohammad) who was settled in the area by the Barakzai tribe, given land, some 400+ years ago (according to the grave stone in the tomb he died on 978 of the lunar calendar or 1571), and was the local Pir or religious leader or guide with apparently a wide following. His tomb is a place of pilgrimage. His descendents presently live in the Said village and several of these men serve a similar Pir function of religious guide in the Shamalan as well as in the northern provinces, e.g., Mazar, which they visit yearly. The villages they serve in this way are Pashtun villages which were resettled in the north, from the Lash-Kandahar area some 60-70 years ago. Apparently this contact has been continuous. These Saids receive economic support from their followers, at an apparently comfortable level, for their religious role.

While other memos and reports will come out of the studies made in this village, this memo focuses on the Said's attitudes toward the Shamalan canal project.

The Said village sits half on the desert escarpment, just north of the Nad-i-Ali waste-way, and half on the land just below the escarpment. The present Aynak ditch runs between the two sections and there are a series of narrow gardens and alfalfa plots also between the two sections of housing. The tentative line for the canal runs roughly through the center of the village which is likely to miss most of the housing. Some time ago, when the first round of surveying occurred for the canal line, there was an encounter between the survey crew and some farmers who were objecting to the canal passing through the middle of the village. Later a group – or groups – talked to “Tawab Khan”, (Mr. Asifi) and possibly the governor, about their objections. The exact timing on the discussions is not clear. Since that time, however, there has been little or no official contact but the presently stated memories of the results of these early contacts are interesting. First, the justification for the project was that it was basically an American scheme and was in a sense out of the hands of the local government to do anything about – a transfer of responsibility. Second, the Saids apparently were left with the impression that the canal will likely by-pass the village via the desert: discussions with the technicians in the BuRec indicate that this is highly unlikely because of the costs involved. At other points in the present discussions there were stated feelings of the inability of the farmers to do

anything about events vis-à-vis the power of the government. More recently, however, I was given some assurances that if the canal was to come through the village, there would likely be resistance. Given the small sizes of the average holdings, the subject of a later report, the alternative route through the fields below the village, a line which would probably cut through the center of the vineyard section of the holdings, would not be much more acceptable to those households more highly dependent on farming. These various points sum to the potential of further confrontations between villagers and canal work crews, something that would be difficult to predict with any exactness. The possible test of this hypothesis of resistance will likely be when the present survey activities, putting down a less tentative canal alignment, come to the village.

There is, of course, no question of the canal not coming through the area, and, considering the technical difficulties and expense, virtually no possibility of a desert bypass. The question is on having the canal pass through some section of the village with the least friction between project personnel and the village inhabitants. As has been pointed out in some of my previous memos, the usual approach to such potential problems and problem areas has been one of delay in facing the problem in advance, little or no advance systematic preparation of the people for the changes about to occur, and as little face-to-face contact as possible until the issue is more than a technical problems on the ground but a point of controversy with the farmers. In short, unless a crisis occurs in the relationships between the farmers and project personnel, a minimum or no contact is maintained. To repeat a previous memo, the area of our (U.S. and HAVA) present interest should not be limited to the most advanced point of the construction activity including canal alignment survey work, in terms of public relations and information, but well in advance of it, as well as in the areas already passed. We must not limit ourselves with the view that the project is a technical feat to be accomplished but an activity that deeply involves the people of the Shamalan and will have permanent and major social and economic results. At every stage in the process these people to be affected must be directly informed and involved in project developments. This is a joint U.S.-HAVA responsibility which is being only partially faced and unsystematically approached. USAID has a special responsibility since we have continually pressed for the implementation of the Shamalan Project.

There remains a need for a broad public information activity in the entire Shamalan, and especially along the route of the canal line. Where topographic and demographic features of the line indicate potential complications relative to fields, people and housing, a concentrated effort should be made in advance to solve the differences. Concerted, effective planning and systematic effort do not result in the "crisis syndrome" described above. Hopefully, the Aynak is not to be our next crisis.

During my last visit to the Lash area, I discussed the details of the Aynak situation, as I understand it, with numerous persons involved in the implementation of the project at nearly every level. But this does not solve the problem outlined; that someone or, preferably, some group in HAVA with the responsibility of public information for the Shamalan. While the crises to date have been dealt with rather effectively as they developed, the question remains why we, apparently, insist on a crisis before any action

is taken. It is not because of a lack of awareness of potential problem areas but seemingly just the reverse.

Those in HAVA responsible for the canal line, right-of-way, and construction (like Aman Khan) are doing a commendable job of dealing with the “people problems” as they develop. But this is hardly the responsibility of the technicians who have their share of worries in dealing with the technical and administrative aspects of the project. There should have been and must be a responsible section in HAVA, if not in AID, to deal with the social-information aspects of this project: a) before the project ever gets into the field (which of course is not possible now), b) in the immediate area of canal survey and construction, c) well in advance of the canal on the approximate right-of-way, d) in the areas to be leveled and otherwise developed, in the areas already passed or to be passed by the completed project, and f) in the Shamalan in general, if not in the Helmand Valley, to inform the general populations about developments. Since the masses generally do not read, and this includes many, if not most, rural Khans, the Helmand newspaper would not be a particularly effective tool for information. The Pashtun speaking radio would be a secondary tool but the emphasis must be on face-to-face contact – a more personalized approach.

The need for such a research-information arm in HAVA relating directly to the Shamalan in more specific detail has been outlined in virtually every memo I have submitted on the Shamalan and may be the cure for the “crisis syndrome” outlined here and, of which, everyone is aware.

Drafted by: AD/DP:RBScott:fa4/4/72

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