

**Richard B. Scott**  
**2598 Big Thompson**  
**Drake, CO 80515**  
**Tel/Fax: 970-586-8485**  
**Alt. Fax: 970-586-6685**  
**Cell Tel: 970-215-6488**  
**E-Mail: bmt@frii.com**

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Dr. Lowry Taylor  
Narcotics Affairs  
American Embassy  
Islamabad, Pakistan

Dear Dr. Taylor:

This past week I have been in contact with Eng. Jawed and he mentioned that recently he had been in discussions with you. As you know, Eng. Jawed and I have worked together and have maintained an on-going dialogue about Afghanistan for some years, since 1995. He mentioned that the embassy is presently discussing the alternatives between working in Nangahar and Helmand with the limited funds available. Both were centers of opium poppy production but Helmand has the greatest potential for major and immediate impact.

**HELMAND:** My strong but unsolicited opinion is that primary funding should first be focused on central Helmand. The reasons follow:

- With limited funding, any project action should be first focused on the region that is the center of the primary problem and with the greatest potential of immediate impact.
- The area of greatest opium production was Helmand. The greatest loss of income from the poppy ban is being realized in Helmand. The greatest impact for funds expended would be in Helmand.
- Central Helmand farmers have living memory of a time when narcotics were ban and other cash crops were the basis of the economy, e.g., Cotton, melon, vegetables. With assistance, the adjustment to the loss of poppy can be rapid.
- The knowledge and understanding of these and other (peanuts) alternative cash crops are present in the region and are still grown, without assistance. With some assistance, these traditional cash crops can be re-developed into real economic alternatives to poppy.

- The infrastructure for processing cotton (2 cotton gins, one of which is functioning) is present in the region. The one functioning gin in Lashkar Gah, while in need of spare parts and perhaps some technical assistance, has continued to function throughout the past 23 years of turmoil, without aid. The other gin in Girishk is basically a 22-year old gin with unused equipment. The British completed this gin in 1979 just before the Russian invasion. It stopped functioning in about 1980 when the Mujahadin took out the power line from Kajaki. I am in contact with the chief engineer that built the gin, now living in Scotland.
- A large food-for-work project (see repeat of an attachment you saw in October 2000) focused on rehabilitating the central Helmand irrigation system, the largest irrigation system in the country, would:
  1. Put traditional migrant labor from regions to the north that has been so affected by the drought to work on a very productive enterprise, allowing them to remain in their homes rather than become out-migrants with their families. Very large numbers of this migrant labor population has been sustained by working for several months of the year through the labor-intensive nature of poppy cultivation, weeding, thinning and harvest. Many have now lost work. Many may have already moved on but news of a major hand labor project would spread rapidly and quickly attract workers from needy areas.
  2. Put additional income into the pockets of local farmers that have sustained great economic losses with the poppy ban.
  3. Increase the overall productivity of the region (that had been known as the breadbasket of Afghanistan) through an improved irrigation system.
- The U.S. worked in the Helmand Valley building and improving the irrigation system and the regional agricultural system between 1946 and 1979. There remains a strong trust and friendship in the region for Americans, despite our rocket attack in 1998. Through the work season of the winter of 1998-99, trust and a good working relationship was established with the local Taliban administrators, most of who are still there. Complete cooperation of the farmers and the Taliban can be correctly anticipated, assuming thoughtful and positive project management. These are important elements in the equation of project impact.

As a result of the long-term farmer settlement program in the region, Helmand farmers represent a relatively good cross section of Afghan ethnic groups although the indigenous population is Durani Pashtuns.

The Helmand River (40% of the country's surface water) continues to provide water for this major irrigation system, as it did during the drought of 1971-72. Helmand can continue to produce bumper crops for national consumption during this time of shortage. Production can continue to increase with irrigation system improvement and assistance with the alternative cash crops listed above.

**NANGAHAR:** I know little about the Nangahar irrigation project region except that the Russians built much of the modern irrigation system, and that it was chosen by UNDCP as one of their project sites, phased out last year. It was not the major area of opium production in the country prior to the ban. The region had extended years funding for the UNDCP project with little or no impact on opium production. As I pointed out to Mr. Geddes, the alternative crops expert for UNDCP, the project did not focus on the region of potential greatest impact for funds expended: Helmand. I was told indirectly that the UNDCP choice of project sites (Nangahar and Kandahar) was in part influenced by unspecified political considerations. I would imagine that UNDCP will be pressuring to have U.S. funding focused on these areas in which they worked...even though it failed in its goals.

I would be happy to discuss or communicate with you or anyone else about any of the points noted above. I have a relatively good knowledge and understanding of the Helmand agriculture economy and the people of the region. And I have a wide range of contacts both in the region, Pakistan, England and the U.S. with knowledge of Helmand. As I have noted elsewhere, I probably know the Helmand irrigation system better than I know my own hometown.

I am not unbiased in my orientations and views on Helmand. I like the geographical region. I like the people that live there. I like the Taliban that I worked with previously. All of these elements are a challenge for successful projects. And I would be happy to organize, field and manage any project focused on central Helmand, large or small.

Sincerely,

Dick Scott

P.S. For those working on any project outline/proposal for Helmand, please remind them not to forget the alternative crop seed element...and the need for at least some quick project action. Marginal farmers anywhere in the world, including Helmand, cannot afford the luxury of waiting after the loss of their primary cash crop. Most are in debt and have been for most of their adult lives. And they are always appreciative of good quality (U.S.) seed of crops they understand. I now have a list of the vegetables that can be planted for the cool weather crop season. Scott