PAKTYKA MISSION

INTERIM REPORT

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Mohammed Ahmed Mao
Michael Day-Thompson
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Islamabad
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1 OVERVIEW

By August 1990, several Salam Mobile Units (SMU) had been on missions to Paktyka and Ghazni provinces. Meetings with shuras, commanders and others had resulted in a spread of project proposals, most of which had not been implemented, mainly for lack of funds. Considerable resentment against the UN for this apparent non-fulfilment of promises was manifesting itself in letters from shuras and commanders demanding either action or that the UN stay out of the area in future.

It was against this background that the mission, whose work is here described, was detailed to go to the two provinces.

2 MISSION COMPOSITION

After reviewing the composition and tactics of previous SMUs, it was decided to take a new approach. Instead of taking a motorcade of UN Landcruisers with several internationals representing their various agencies, we took one radio-equipped Landcruiser with two internationals, an interpreter and a driver. We were fortunate in also having the services of Mr Etebari, the Manager of the UN offices in the area.

It was arranged with the various UN agencies in Pakistan that any visits by their staff to the area would be approved and coordinated through the SMU, in order to avoid further confusion.

3 MISSION OBJECTIVES

3.1 Decide & supervise Seed Distribution.

Taking the main tasks in the order of ease with which they were accomplished, the first was to assess, for FAO, the needs and arrangements for wheat seed and fertiliser distribution in two areas - Gomal and the Katawaz plain.

The former turned out to be an area largely inhabited by Kuchi people, most of whom are currently moving with their camel trains, animals and families towards Pakistan for the winter. In those places where static farmers existed, agricultural projects were being undertaken by NGOs. The area of the former government gardens below Gomal fort was untended and deserted except for the mujahadeen post on top of the hill. It may be that the people seen there in the summer were themselves Kuchis. It was decided not to recommend distribution of seed and fertiliser. Later, it may be a site for rehabilitation as a fruit garden.

The Katawaz plain, with Zarghun Shah as its centre, was a different case. Here, the fertiliser was particularly warmly welcomed and farmers agreed to plant the FAO winter wheat on an experimental basis, while expressing a preference for spring wheat. After several false starts caused by FAO's discovery that the composition of stocks in Peshawar were not as they had originally indicated, as well as a problem caused by transhipment of the seed and fertiliser at Azam Warzak - the original shipment
from Peshawar had been by Pakistani trucks which could not cross the border - the consignment was distributed under very able arrangements made by the shura and a local employee of the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA).

3.2 **Ascertain needs and scale of displaced persons resulting from Pushtoon-Hazara conflict.**

The next task, which had a high priority because of its nature, was to move to the rear areas affected by the fighting between Pushtoon and Hazara in Ghazni and Zabul provinces, to assess the problems of those displaced by the conflict.

Enquiries were made in Qara Bagh, Moqor and Shah Joye where the *shuras* gave us details showing an estimated total of some 31,678 persons displaced. Subsequent information indicates that, as in most refugee situations, these figures were almost certainly inflated. However, we decided to accept them, largely because the refugees were scattered among the local population and, with our very limited resources, it was impossible to try counting them.

Though being helped by the local people, they were short of food and had fled without possessions. Arrangements were immediately made to set up three food depots with distribution to be supervised by the *shuras*. Requests were also made to consider the possibility of supplying blankets and some tents on an emergency basis.

Happily, a successful *jirga* was held in the area which has solved the situation. The fighting has ceased, refugees are returning to their homes; and there is even talk of possible reparations by the Hazara for damage done. It is recommended that the plan to set up Rubb Hall portable warehouses in Moqor, Qara Bagh and Shah Joye should not be abandoned but that they should now be used as depots for the kind of food-for-work schemes which will be described below.

3.3 **Re-establish confidence in UN assistance programme.**

This was by far the most difficult and, eventually, the most rewarding part of the mission. It is described in detail in paragraph 4 below.

4 **CONFIDENCE BUILDING - STAGE ONE**

4.1 **Initial situation and mission's approach.**

As has already been reported, several SMUs had previously visited the area on survey missions without much practical evidence of results. We therefore expected and were not surprised to encounter a solid wall of antagonism behind the traditional Pushtoon hospitality. Initial meetings with *shuras* showed considerable anger and resentment. Nor was the situation eased by
the fact that they had seen convoys of assistance passing through their areas on its way to Bamyan, an area they felt to have been little involved in the Jihad. Their main irritation was caused by what they had taken as promises of assistance by previous UN visitors.

In face of this situation, we adopted the following approach. At the initial meeting, we pinned our ears back, accepting the criticism with understanding but mainly listened. The second session, which usually started on the same lines, was quickly interrupted by an unequivocal apology for past misdeeds and misunderstandings: followed by an immediate suggestion that we could all use our time better by using the occasion for positive planning. With the odd growl, usually quickly suppressed by the shura leader, this approach worked well.

4.2 Shuras' objections.

4.2.1 Non-fulfilment of promises.

It has already been noted that the shuras felt strongly that previous UN missions had made undertakings which had not been implemented. We found it of little use to try explaining the bureaucratic process between survey and fulfilment. In Pashtun society, to suggest you will give something is to have made a pledge - no ifs or buts. We were very careful not to make any promises that we could not immediately be certain of promptly meeting.

4.2.2 Funds spent outside Afghanistan.

A major area of concern to the shuras and others inside the country, is the perception that most of the aid money given for the rehabilitation of Afghanistan is being spent outside the country. This includes supplies which could be purchased in country, the maintenance of UN offices in Pakistan with considerable payrolls of Pakistani staff, the transport costs of missions and supplies from Pakistan to Paktyka and beyond via Wana (an unnecessarily long route, anyhow), and - maybe most of all - the continued support of NGOs (particularly the Afghan variety) in Peshawar when it is perceived that they should be operating from bases within the country.

One demand constantly expressed by the leaders of the Urgun shura was to be allowed to see the detailed cost estimates for projects being performed in their areas by NGOs using UN funds.

4.2.3 NGOs as implementors.

The objections to NGOs as UN-funded implementing agents fell into two categories.
The first criticism was directed towards the international NGOs who maintain offices in Peshawar for the direction of their operations from which the management seldom if ever visit the Afghan side of the border to monitor and supervise their activities. The result is that small groups of Peshawar-recruited employees are sent, usually under-equipped, across the border to carry out often ill-defined tasks. Many of these groups appear simply to go-to-ground like hibernating moles. Others try hard to carry out tasks without support or advice.

The second criticism is directed against the Peshawar-based Afghan NGOs. These are seen as parasites, taking funds donated for Afghanistan to maintain offices and a life style in Pakistan. The question constantly asked is, 'If they are Afghans and want to use their skills to help their country, why don't they come here to do so?' It is a hard argument to counter, especially when those putting the question are doing just that.

A third criticism is that the UN itself does not pay sufficient attention to monitoring whether these projects are being properly carried out.

An additional problem for many NGOs is that they entered the country under the patronage of particular commanders. This has resulted in them working under the direction of these commanders as opposed to being answerable to the local shura. Although this may have worked previously, it has now become an irritant.

4.3 Shuras as partners.

Having spent much time listening to these arguments - and, inevitably finding ourselves in general agreement with most of them - we came to the conclusion that the best logical solution would be to make the shuras themselves our implementing partners in the rehabilitation process. Not only would it make them responsible for results - thus preventing all the blame landing at UN's door; it would also help re-build the shuras as the basis for the district, provincial and national infrastructure. For their part, the shura leaders with whom we discussed the idea, have responded wholly positively.

The added advantage of such an approach is that it aims the programme towards self-reliance rather than towards dependency.

No doubt there will be bureaucratic objections and hurdles raised against such a solution. They should be over-ruled.

4.4 Food-for Work.

Throughout our days of preparation in Peshawar and Islamabad, we had been told that there was a chronic shortage of funds for project implementation. It was suggested we come up with a menu of projects which might help release cash from the donors. But we had also seen pages of stalled projects compiled by UNDP, awaiting such funds when released.
What had we got to offer? The answer seemed to be wheat. So we decided to work with what was available. This was explained, first to the Urgun shura, then to that in Zarghun Shah.

The proposition was that the shuras should organise local people to work on agreed priority projects. The shura would be given a capital sum in wheat to pay for this work. They could sell it to raise cash or they could use it as direct payment - whichever they found most appropriate. But that it was up to them to get the optimum results from the amount of wheat they had to play with.

It is interesting to note how the approach of these two initial shuras has varied. Urgun has tended to see the wheat simply as a capital sum which can be used to pay for labour and, turned to cash in part, used to purchase materials. Zarghun Shah, on the other hand, after initially coming up with enormous tonnages of wheat required to carry out their ambitious programme, finally came to the solution of giving a fixed amount of wheat to start each job, on the understanding that the beneficiaries would finish the work at their own expense.

An additional advantage of using wheat without cash and giving the shuras the responsibility for getting the most possible out of their capital stock, is that it is stopping the inflationary spiral caused by agencies meeting greater and greater cash component demands in the food-plus-cash projects. This was beginning to have the effect of putting the price of labour outside the reach of small local employers.

5 CONFIDENCE BUILDING - STAGE TWO

5.1 Permanent UN Presence vs SMUs.

The concept of the SMU was logical in the early stages of the operation. However, with time, it began to take on the attributes of an impotent stallion in a stud farm. We quickly realised that the letters simply became transposed in the Afghan perception into NUS - more useless surveys.

In Paktyka, at least, we have no hesitation in recommending the establishment of a permanent UN office and logistics base. Although there are grounds for considering Zarghun Shah as the most suitable location because of its central location, we recommend Urgun because of its accessibility to the border as well as the gravitas of the senior shura members present there. Both locations have potential as logistics bases. However, once air travel is possible, it may be that Zarghun Shah is the more logical, particularly when the UN can move its whole Headquarters to Kabul. Whatever the case, both centres will eventually have to be reconstructed and developed from the Afghan point-of-view, as they are each important district centres.

The establishment of a permanent UN office inside Paktyka will give an enormous boost to confidence and to UN-Afghan relations. It has become obvious to us that the earlier establishment of so-called UN offices in Urgun, Sharan, Zarghun Shah and Qara Bagh created a confusion. For whereas the local
shuras saw them as some kind of permanent UN presence, they were, in fact, simply overnight staging posts. We therefore decided to close down the 'offices' in Zarghun Shah and Sharan, handing back the premises to the shura. In the former, at least, we are still entirely welcome to stay during visits.

5.2 Security.

Before leaving Peshawar, one noticed that considerable time and effort was given to the question of security. For a newcomer, one began to wonder what one's chances of survival might be in such an apparently hostile environment.

We found the reality very different. To start with, it became obvious that most of the reported brigandage was caused by the sight of assistance passing through to other areas, when those areas through which it moved had received no help. Help-yourself or Hold-to-Ransom had become the rules. We also found that, as long as responsible people were aware of our presence and we had followed etiquette in calling on shura leaders on arrival at locations, we could travel in our vehicle throughout the province with impunity. The occasional illegal road block can usually be negotiated with a few determined words. If it becomes persistent, a word to the concerned shura will usually remove the difficulty. We came away with the conclusion that Paktyka is a much safer place than Peshawar.

We would like to recommend that, while sensible precautions should be taken - and the local rules of etiquette observed - every effort should be made to calm the sometimes paranoid fears which are raised about operating in Paktyka. One is far more likely to be killed by a mine or road accident than to be injured at the hands of an Afghan.

5.3 Access & Communications.

While the situation continues to dictate that the operation is managed from Islamabad and Peshawar, the UN should make all possible efforts to simplify access to Paktyka.

The route through Wana is long, tedious and costly. Immediate efforts should be made to survey and improve the route to Urgun and beyond via Miranshah. The shura in Urgun recommend this route as potentially far more effective than the more southerly route.

Part of the preparation of the permanent base at Urgun should include the rehabilitation of the airstrip. The complete clearing of this area is the next priority task of the Flail Team. The availability of this facility is also an important consideration in the prompt evacuation of mine-clearing casualties.
On the subject of casualty evacuation, there is an urgent need for a vehicle equipped with stretchers at each mine-clearing location. Had our efforts to save and evacuate the ATC driver who died at Urgun on 10th October been successful, he would have had to endure the journey to Wana in an old-model Landcruiser, lying on a bed extemporised from two local mattresses with little possibility of absorbing the shocks of the journey over rocky river beds. Maybe he was luckier to die on the operating table?

5.4 Local Economy & Employment.

As has already been noted, the new food-for-work concept is having the effect of halting the inflationary spiral of wages. However, it is obviously important that everything possible is done to reinforce and re-build the local economy.

The objection to the UN (and others) spending money donated for Afghanistan elsewhere is valid. Every effort should be made from now on to ensure that as much of the funding as possible ends up in the local economy. Apart from moving the operation inside the country, wherever possible materials and supplies should be purchased from in-country sources. For instance, such items as cement and good quality GI sheets are available in the market. We contacted an Afghan brick maker who has been working in Pakistan but is keen to set up kilns in Paktyka and Ghazni. He could be given a short-term interest-free loan to get centres going. Bricks will certainly be needed in quantity; and it will give employment to local people.

There is also an opportunity to introduce a business to manufacture concrete and ferro-concrete products such as roof beams, latrine covers, roof slabs and well-liners. These last may be particularly important as many karez wells have caved in after repair as a result of soil erosion - often caused by previous explosions in the vicinity of the well.

We called into Qari Baba's headquarters in Ghazni to discuss the possibility of entering a partnership to re-build the road between Zarghun Shah and Urgun, linking Paktyka to the main Kabul-Kandahar trunk route. They were very interested, especially if the UN could provide a workshop component and training.

There are many other possibilities for achieving the UN's reconstruction objectives while at the same time reviving the economy and the job market. Zarghun Shah remains a distinct possibility for setting up the basis for reviving interest and activity in small industries such as carpet weaving, carpentry, metal work, animal husbandry and workshops for the repair of tractors, pumps and so on. It is recommended that ILO have another look at this idea.
5.5 Training in-country.

This logically leads on to the felt need among the shuras for training of Afghan workers to be conducted in the country rather than in Pakistan. It is impossible to over-state this feeling that there is a perpetual drain of people and money to the comparative honeypot of Peshawar and beyond. The result is that they are reluctant to allow men to go to Peshawar for training.

The only answer must be to bring the training in-country. This will not be easy but it must be done. Much has been spoken and written about 'Zones of Tranquility'. It is now the time to create a zone of normality, based on the UN presence in Urgun. If we are confident enough to go there, others will follow.

6 MANAGEMENT & SUPPORT

6.1 Premises

If the permanent UN office for Paktyka were to be established in Urgun, the present location could be reconstructed - using local labour - to offer an office and living accommodation within the compound. The garden could also be re-cultivated to provide green vegetables without which the diet becomes unbalanced after a few weeks of nothing but protein and starch. There is an excellent water supply from the deep well in the compound. It is further recommended that the very capable engineer, who has just rebuilt the house in the shura compound, be asked to undertake supervision of the building project.

6.2 Staffing

It would be advisable to have an international head of the office and an international deputy. This enables decisions to be made, free from local pressures which would weigh on an all-Afghan team.

As far as possible, all Afghan staff should be recruited locally as opposed to being brought up from Peshawar. There exists a strong local bias against jobs going to people who have gone to Peshawar. This bias will, no doubt, disappear after they have returned to resume life in Paktyka.

Initially, money and supplies will have to come from Peshawar. However, once the UN is able to operate country-wide from Kabul, that will become the focal point for such sub-offices.

6.3 Equipment

The office will need a large enough generator to permit reliable use of equipment such as photocopiers, small computers, battery chargers etc. It will also provide electric lights throughout the compound.
It would be provident to have a small workshop facility for maintenance of the office’s vehicles and mechanical equipment.

The presence of the airfield would mean that staff could have a break on a regular basis as well as providing a ready means of re-supply and help if needed.

Mission vehicles, of which there should be sufficient to carry out the office’s tasks in relation to the province, should all be to a specification including mud & snow tyres and a winch at least.

6.4 Communications

In such a relatively isolated location, it goes without saying that efficient radio communications are essential. There should be a base radio - preferably with SITOR - as well as radios fitted to all mission vehicles. All radios should have been up-dated to latest pre-programmed standards and tested before being sent to Urgun office.

7 LOGISTICS

7.1 Storage

There is sufficient potential storage space in Urgun - within easy reach of the proposed office - to permit a realistic forward logistics base to be established. The main need is for some repair work to be carried out: particularly on the large German-built steel and corrugated iron warehouse. This should not be a difficult job as it mainly entails replacing CI sheets holed by gunfire. Altogether, the present storage potential - after repairs - in Urgun totals at least three thousand tonnes. The durability of the recently refurbished UNHCR warehouse built by ESAR, will be tested in the coming winter season.

7.2 Vehicles

If the Urgun Logistics Base is to be used to supply projects in Paktyka and beyond, it may not initially be possible to rely on hiring transport locally - although some Afghan operators may move back there when they realise regular loads are available. It would therefore be wise to consider stationing part of the UNLOG-owned truck fleet at the base.

If this were the case, some workshop back-up would certainly be needed (see 6.3 above). POL storage would also be sensible.
7.3 **Escorts**

In view of the number of loads that have been either hijacked or taken from broken-down vehicles, it must have crossed someone's mind that the provision of at least one radio-equipped escort vehicle for each major convoy might be a good idea. Simply entrusting the load to local hadrigars does not necessarily seem to work. Ideally, convoys passing through areas where thefts have occurred, should be accompanied by one radio-equipped vehicle at each end. It might therefore be sensible to consider equipping some UNILOG trucks with radio-sets. Good communications may prove more effective than guns.

8 **THE NATIONAL PLAN FOR REHABILITATION**

8.1 **UN Deployment**

If it does not already exist, the time must be ripe for drawing up a contingency plan for the UN to operate within Afghanistan once the country is unified under one government and control of the operation can be exercised from Kabul.

Such a plan would naturally define those sectors in which the UN intends to assist in national rehabilitation, making a difference between sectors to be handled centrally: Health, Education, main communications routes; and those to be handled on a provincial basis: feeder roads, agriculture, re-building projects etc.

This would logically lead to identifying the intended deployment of UN resources and offices needed to carry out the programme. Such a plan would assist in choosing the best permanent sites for UN presence.

8.2 **Road Communications**

In order to implement the future scale of programme efficiently, there is plainly going to be a need to carry out considerable improvements to the present dilapidated or non-existent road system.

The first pre-requisite will be to clear mines from all existing main and feeder routes. At present, there are some commanders who object to the clearing of roads in their areas. Once there is peace, every effort should be made to clear and rehabilitate these routes. The current need for trucks to grind their way along river beds is plainly insupportable in the longer run. The repair of the main Kabul-Kandahar highway is a priority.
8.3 Health Service Network

The lack of health facilities in Paktyka and Ghazni, which presumably represents the situation in the rest of the country, is not only unacceptable to the population now in the country but must pose a deterrent to refugees considering returning to their former homes. The latter have become used to reasonable health cover in the Pakistan camps.

Once hospitals, such as that in Urgun, have been re-built and staffed, it will be necessary to site out-patient clinics around the districts. At present, patients are having to make a journey which may take several days to obtain treatment. The really sick and, especially, women and children, simply go untreated.

8.4 Education

Educational facilities are a need which is constantly felt and expressed by the shuras. Every effort should be made to re-build the many schools which have been destroyed by the conflict; and to train teachers to work in them.

Nor should the re-building of mosques be forgotten. Apart from their importance in the spiritual life of the people, they also provide an important facility for education of the young.

9 CONCLUSION

The impression gained from our time in Paktyka and Ghazni is that we have reached a watershed, a time for vision and commitment on the part of the United Nations and all associated with the programme.

If we can make the bold step of committing ourselves to work inside Afghanistan instead of cross-border, we shall not only establish a confidence in our ability to work with the people as reliable partners; we shall also create a draw factor - through confidence and results - which will act as a draw for voluntary repatriation.

Above all, we should aim at a programme which primes the pump of Afghan self-assistance, rather than perpetuating a wait-and-see expectation of dependency.