

PRIORITY (Security Classification) FOREIGN SERVICE DESPATCH

889-2614 Helmand  
153160

FROM : Amconsul MESUED  
TO : THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON.  
REF : Tehran Despatch No. 636 of April 9, 1960

34  
DESP. NO.  
May 31, 1960  
DATE

2 For Dept. Use Only	ACTION	DEPT.
	REC'D	OTHER
6-6	RM/R-2 REP-1 IRC-8 ICA-11 E-7	CL-10 COM-10 IN-7 O-8 AIR-7

SUBJECT: The Helmand Delta Problem as Seen from Sistan.

MAY-3 OSD-4

CONTENTS

	Page
SUMMARY	1
CURRENT CONDITIONS IN SISTAN	2
Agricultural Conditions	2
Attitudes toward Afghanistan	4
The ROLE OF ITALCONSULT	5
CONSULATE COMMENTS ON WATER APPORTIONMENT	8
PROSPECTS OF SOLUTION	9

SUMMARY

This year's winter crops in Sistan (wheat and barley) appear satisfactory despite the fact that the flow of Helmand water into Sistan during the winter was abnormally low.

The attitude of Iranians in Sistan toward Afghanistan is strongly colored by the water problem. Iranians think the Afghans capable of controlling at will the flow into Sistan and believe the Afghans deliberately use this power to inflict harm on Iran.

Italconsult engineers are busy on a development program for Sistan. Their work is still chiefly in the stage of survey. By the end of 1960 Italconsult intends to present the Plan Organization with its proposals, which will probably include an estimate of Sistan's water needs as well as alternative development programs depending on what, if any, agreement may be reached between Afghanistan and Iran on Helmand water apportionment. Italconsult's report will probably find that Sistan, if it is to be developed according to its potential, requires an average annual flow considerably in excess of what Afghanistan has so far offered.

ETHomas/ry

CONFIDENTIAL

REPORTER

INFORMATION COPY

Retain in divisional files or destroy in accordance with security regulations.

The question of water apportionment should be a technical rather than a political one since all available evidence indicates that the total Helmand runoff is sufficient, at least in normal years, to meet all the present and anticipated needs of both countries. But while there seems little likelihood that the total annual flow into Sistan has been or will be cut too low for Iranian needs, it appears probable that Afghan works on the upper Helmand can adversely affect the seasonal flow into Sistan. Therefore a technical study is needed to determine how the flow can be regulated to the best advantage of both countries.

There are strong incentives, both economic and political, pressing Iran to seek a solution of the Helmand waters issue. Referring the problem to an international organization would be one possibility. If further bilateral negotiations are to be attempted, it is up to Iran to make the next approach. It might well be advantageous for Iran to accept on an interim basis the best Afghan offer obtainable on average annual flow into Sistan in return for Afghan agreement to make a joint technical study. The United States might encourage the Iranian Government to make such an approach at an appropriate time, and perhaps also encourage the Afghan Government to consider such an Iranian approach sympathetically. An additional stimulus toward reaching an understanding might be provided if the United States announced its willingness to consider sympathetically the possibility of assisting in the construction of works which the two countries, as the result of a technical study, agreed upon as necessary or desirable in order to regulate the Helmand flow to the best interests of both countries.

#### CURRENT CONDITIONS IN SISTAN

##### Agricultural Conditions

In Sistan the major crops are wheat and barley, which are planted in the fall and harvested in the spring. Harvesting of barley was in progress at the time of the reporting officer's visit to the region in late April, while harvesting of wheat was due to begin in about two weeks. Although he could not supply statistics, the Director of Agriculture and Irrigation for Sistan, Engineer (fnu) MANAVI, estimated that this spring's crops would be slightly larger than last year's. This would indicate that 1960 crops are likely to be better than average as compared with recent years. Chiefly responsible for the improvement, according to Mr. Manavi, was the opening of a new course for the Azar canal, which carries water from just above the Kohak (or Miankangi) diversion dam northward to the fertile Miankangi district. (The course formerly followed by the Azar canal had become blocked by sand dunes.) Even with the re-aligned canal in operation it is only possible to irrigate a part of the Miankangi district. The yield on this land, however, was apparently sufficient to raise Sistan's total crop yield despite a slight decrease in another district, Shibab. (The Mayor of Zabol, Mr. FIROZJEDI, stated that 33 of about 75 villages in Shibab were deserted because of the lack of water reaching that district. However, much of this exodus, which may in any case be exaggerated, probably took place in past years rather than just recently.) In the other two districts (bakhshs) into which Sistan is administratively divided, Posht-Ab and Shahreki-Narui, the yield this year is expected to approximate that of last year.

In view of the paucity of water reaching Sistan during the past winter, the relatively satisfactory condition of the area's crops is remarkable. With an

CONFIDENTIAL

average annual rainfall of only 2.07 inches, Sistan is overwhelmingly dependent upon the Helmand waters which reach it from Afghanistan. Normally the river flow builds up during the fall months to reach its highest rate during February and March, after which it gradually falls off to its nadir in the late summer. From the spring of 1959 this cycle apparently proceeded more or less normally until near the end of 1959, when the flow, instead of continuing to increase, began to subside. According to Iranian officials in Sistan, the rate of flow reached a low of 16 cubic meters per second in February and early March, just when the greatest flow is usually needed and expected. (According to the Report of the Helmand River Delta Commission, the average diversion requirement for Sistan during February is 66 and during March 62 cubic meters per second. These two months alone account for almost half of the total annual requirements computed by the Commission. See Commission Report, p. 95.) In the third week of March, Iranian officials state, the flow rose to 38 cubic meters per second, but then subsided again to 18. At last in April an adequate flow (over 40 cubic meters per second) began to arrive.

Engineer Manavi estimated that the total amount of Helmand water received by Sistan during the Iranian year 1338 (March 22, 1959-March 20, 1960) was 40% less than that received in the previous year. Even allowing for probable inaccuracy in this figure, as well as in those reported above for water flow, it is certain that the flow of water reaching Sistan during the past winter was considerably below normal. This fact was corroborated by Italian engineers attached to Italconsult, an organization engaged by the Plan Organization to work on a development program for the whole Sistan-Baluchestan area. What saved the crops from ruin was, on the one hand, the increased flow which finally reached Sistan and, on the other hand, abnormally high rainfall in the latter part of March and in April.

The total population which Sistan supports has apparently not diminished in recent years; in fact any change seems to have been in the direction of growth. Estimates given to the reporting officer this spring were in the range of 145,000 to 150,000. This may be compared with the estimate of 100,000 to 125,000 furnished Consulate officers visiting Sistan five years ago. One is still informed by local officials that many people have had to leave the region, most of them going to the Gorgan plain east of the Caspian Sea. It is probable that some migration of this type did take place some years ago but that in recent years little has been added to it. In any case movement of this nature is probably largely seasonal, some persons supplementing their incomes by working part of the year in the Gorgan area. Local officials state that there is no migration from Sistan across the border into Afghanistan. On the contrary, they claim that some movement in the opposite direction takes place.

Estimates of the total area of land under cultivation in Sistan vary so widely that it is impossible to determine whether there has been any significant change in recent years. Engineer Manavi stated that about 75,000 hectares were under cultivation during the 1959-1960 season. The Governor of Sistan, Mr. (fnu) FORUQI, gave the figure as 60,000 hectares. From a study of aerial photographs, Italconsult engineers estimate that the total area currently irrigable is about 100,000 hectares, of which in any given year only one half or less is actually cultivated, the remainder lying fallow. With these figures may be compared the 70,000 hectares reported to Consulate officers in 1955 and the estimate of 62,000 hectares arrived at by the Helmand River Delta Commission in 1950.

CONFIDENTIAL

Desp. No. 34  
From Meshed

CONFIDENTIAL

Whatever the true figures may be, it seems probably that a slightly larger area was cultivated during 1959-60 than had been cultivated the previous season, owing simply to the additional land in the Miankangi district which was irrigated by the re-aligned Amer canal. However, there is no indication that there has been any substantial change in area under cultivation since the study made by the Helmand River Delta Commission.

Iranian officials report that, as a result of the subnormal flow of water, there is considerably less water than usual in the hamun (lake) area. As a result, they claim, fewer cattle can be supported by the grazing land around the lakes. Engineer Manavi estimated that there were now about 60,000 head of cattle in Sistan, a figure far below the 150,000 reported by a previous Director of Agriculture in 1955 and 1956. However, on this subject too accurate statistics are lacking.

### Attitudes toward Afghanistan

It is not surprising that in Sistan sentiments toward Afghanistan, and to some extent toward the United States and the Soviet Union, are profoundly colored by the water problem. The conviction encountered in the Iranian portion of the Helmand delta is that Afghanistan, by means of its new works on the upper Helmand, is able to control almost at will the flow of water into the delta, and therefore into Iranian Sistan. For having made this possible by aiding the Afghans with their upper Helmand projects, the United States comes in for a heavy share of blame. It is further believed that Afghanistan uses its power over the water flow not merely without regard to Iranian needs but for the deliberate purpose of inflicting harm on Iran. In so doing the Afghans are presumed to be carrying out the purposes of their Soviet masters, for Afghanistan is regarded as essentially a Soviet satellite.

Lacking any reliable information about conditions in Afghanistan, Iranians in Sistan are not in possession of facts which would tend to modify the prevalent type of attitude described above. They do not know, for example, to what extent the upper Helmand projects are really capable of controlling the flow into the Delta; nor do they have any information as to the way the Afghans are operating their works. Weather conditions in the Helmand basin in Afghanistan, which also profoundly affect the flow of water into the Delta, are also unknown. As at the time the Delta Commission was studying the area, and again in 1955 and 1956 when Consulate officers visited Sistan, there is still today no exchange of hydrological or meteorological data across the border between Afghanistan and Iran. Under such circumstances Iranians in Sistan are free to ascribe either shortages or surpluses of water entirely to Afghan action without reference to natural causes beyond Afghan control. In the spring of 1955 the problem was flood, which the Afghans are supposed to have caused by storing up a vast quantity of water behind their dam (presumably the Kajakai), then releasing it all at once. The argument that the Afghans would not have deliberately done such a thing since the resulting flood would have passed through hundreds of miles of Afghan territory, causing much damage there before reaching Iran, makes little impression on Iranians. The present Governor of Sistan expressed the belief that the Afghans were quite capable of inflicting some damage on their own territory simply to cause serious trouble for Iran.

CONFIDENTIAL

Disp. No. 34  
From Meshed

CONFIDENTIAL

Since 1955 there has been no major problem of flood in Sistan. This past winter, however, the opposite type of difficulty was encountered—shortage of water. Again the prevalent conviction is that the low flow was deliberately caused by Afghan management of the upper Helmand works. In support of this theory several Iranian officials pointed out that the rate of flow rose from a low of 16 cubic meters per second to 38 cubic meters per second just at the time Afghan Prime Minister DAUD was visiting Tehran (March 17–March 21, 1960). One official, the mayor of Zabol, even opined that it was no accident that the rate of flow was at its lowest while Soviet Premier KHRUSHCHEV was visiting Kabul (March 2–March 5, 1960).

While Iranian views are based more upon conjecture than upon fact, it is significant that an Italian engineer for Italconsult, Mr. (fnu) PIRO, who is a specialist on water questions, also attributes both the flood of 1955 and this year's low flow to Afghan operation of the upper Helmand works, in particular the Kajakai dam. He suggests that in 1955 the Afghans were perhaps so impressed and pleased by the accumulation of water behind the newly completed Kajakai dam that they were unwilling to let any escape despite the advice of American engineers working for Morrison-Knudsen Afghanistan (MKA). Finally, however, they began to fear that the dam was likely to crack, and for this reason suddenly released a great quantity of water. As regards this year's paucity of water, Mr. Piro alleges that a basin of the size and nature of that of the Helmand must necessarily provide even in the most unfavorable seasons a much greater supply of water than has been reaching Sistan during the past season, and that therefore the abnormally low flow must have been caused by Afghan control measures.

The Iranian attitude being what it is, construction of a dam on the lower Helmand in Afghanistan, near Sistan, would naturally be of great concern to Iranians. The Governor of Sistan stated that, according to his information, the Afghans had intended to construct such a dam and a team of Soviet engineers had even come to survey the site. However, he understood that pressure by MKA, which had threatened to stop work on the upper Helmand and withdraw, had obliged Afghanistan to abandon this project, at least for the present.

#### THE ROLE OF ITALCONSULT

Since 1958 an organization called Italconsult, a combination of Italian firms, has been engaged by the Plan Organization on a basic development program for the whole Sistan-Baluchestan region. Inevitably some aspects of the work Italconsult is doing in Sistan are closely involved with the question of the flow of water reaching the region from the Helmand River. Italconsult projects may be divided into those applicable to the Sistan-Baluchestan province as a whole and those concentrated upon particular sections of the province. The following projects for the entire region have been undertaken:

1. Meteorological and hydrographic service. Numerous stations have been established throughout the province and the data is being processed regularly.
2. Research for underground water. (Preliminary studies indicate that there is little possibility of using underground water for irrigation in Sistan.)
3. Potable water supply to villages. (Several water points have been set up in Sistan.)

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

From Meshed

4. Health and sanitary assistance.
5. Multipurpose technical training program.

For Sistan in particular Italconsult is engaged in the following projects:

1. Flood control and irrigation plan. In connection with this a laboratory has been established at Zabol to analyze soil samples, hydrological stations have been installed and data is being processed, and maps of the area based largely on an aerial survey made by the Fairway Company in 1956 have been prepared.

2. Geodetic survey. This project has been completed.

3. Agricultural development. An experimental farm north of Zabol is under construction, and the Ministry of Agriculture's experimental garden at Zabol has been taken over. Some pilot extension service has been started, and agricultural equipment has been acquired. A veterinary campaign involving mass inoculations and pest control has been carried out.

4. Land reclamation. Construction of 60 kilometers of second-class land reclamation roads is under way, the contract being held by the FREDEROS Company, a joint Dutch-Iranian firm.

5. Control of shifting sand dunes. Surveys are being made.

6. Protection dikes. Surveys are being made.

7. Reconditioning of the Azar canal. A field survey is being carried out.

In the course of carrying out some of these projects, Italconsult has been collecting considerable information about the flow of water entering Sistan, the land currently irrigated, the land which might be irrigated if an adequate supply of water could be ensured, the water requirements of the soil of various parts of Sistan in order to produce the best yield, and other related subjects. Before the end of 1960 Italconsult hopes to present its recommendations to the Plan Organization. While Italconsult's purpose is not to prepare a case for Iran vis-a-vis Afghanistan in the Helmand dispute, it is probable that Italconsult's report will include an estimate of the flow of Helmand water necessary to allow the best development of Sistan. Actually Italconsult may propose several alternative development programs based on differing water flows obtainable from Afghanistan, including one program based on the assumption that no agreement with Afghanistan is reached.

For information on actual water flow Italconsult has been largely dependent on data furnished by the Sistan Department of Agriculture and Irrigation. Analysis of these data has made it clear that some inaccuracy exists; however, Italconsult apparently believes that the Iranian data gives a fairly true overall picture. Iranian measurements of water flow are made on the Sistan River at a point below the Kohak dam. Virtually all the Helmand water entering Sistan comes in via the Sistan River. At some time in the past the Parian River, which forms the boundary between Afghanistan and Iran for some distance after the Helmand divides at the border into the Sistan and Parian Rivers, entered Iran further north than the Sistan River, thus constituting a second source of Helmand water entering Iran. However,

CONFIDENTIAL

Desp. No. 34  
From Meshod

CONFIDENTIAL

a change in the course of the Parian probably caused by shifting sand dunes has cut Iran off from this source of Helmand water. Thus measurements of water flow on the Sistan River should indicate closely enough the entire Helmand runoff reaching Iran.

Now, Iranian measurements on the Sistan River going back as far as 1942-43 testify that the traditional average annual flow has been somewhere in the neighborhood of 100 cubic meters per second. During the Iranian year 1337 (March 21, 1958-March 21, 1959) the average flow is said to have been about 80 cubic meters per second, still far more than necessary to meet all of Sistan's irrigation needs. As mentioned earlier, however, during the past winter the flow was very much below average, particularly for a season when the flow is normally at its highest.

Italconsult has also made some river flow measurements of its own which, while not frequent enough to constitute a reliable record, have been useful in verifying the Iranian data. For example, Italconsult found that in February, 1960 the flow on the Sistan River below Kohak was, as Iranian data showed, only 16 cubic meters per second. At the same time Italconsult measured the flow on the Parian River where it forms the international boundary, finding it to be 39 cubic meters per second. (Measurement of the Parian's flow is not undertaken regularly or openly since it involves crossing to the Afghan side of the river, and there is no agreement with the Afghans permitting such data collection. Italconsult has felt justified in making such measurements occasionally without Afghan knowledge since the data thus acquired is necessary in connection with its study.)

This information is of interest in that it seems to show that, at least at this time of low flow, most of the Helmand runoff in the Delta was not reaching Iran. To the 16 cubic meters per second on the Sistan River below the Kohak dam can be added the flow into the Azar canal just above the dam, about 2 kilometers inside Iran; at the time of the above measurements this was found to be 3 cubic meters per second. Thus it would appear that Iran was receiving altogether about one-third of the Helmand runoff reaching the border, the remainder flowing along the border and thence back into Afghanistan; this despite the fact that Afghanistan's needs in this region (Chakhansur) are much less than those of Iranian Sistan. (According to the Helmand River Delta Commission Report, p. 120, Sistan in 1950 required almost four times as much water as Chakhansur.)

It is possible that operation of the Kohak (Mankangi) dam on the Sistan River two kilometers inside Iran from the point of bifurcation of the Helmand into the Sistan and Parian rivers has played a part in increasing the water flow in the Parian relative to that in the Sistan river. The Delta Commission pointed out that this dam could be used to divert an appropriate share of water into the Parian. What may have happened is that it has diverted so much water into the Parian as to cause a lowering of the Parian's bed, thus leaving too small a share of water for the Sistan river at times of low flow. In any case Italconsult engineers believe this dam's usefulness to Iran is quite limited. It is so close to the border that at times of high flow closing it merely diverts the water into the Parian river and thus away from Iran, rather than storing the water inside Iran for later use. The dam does make it possible to divert some water into the Azar canal, but this canal is too small to take off any large quantity of water.

CONFIDENTIAL



Page 10  
 Desp. No. 31  
 From Meshed

CONFIDENTIAL

It is not yet clear what proposals Italconsult will make to the Plan Organization for further irrigation development in Sistan. Engineer Piro suggested that one possibility would be enlargement of the Azar canal. He also mentioned that the most desirable way of dividing the Helmand waters between Iran and Afghanistan would be by means of a jointly-operated diversion dam at the point of bifurcation of the Helmand into the Sistan and Parian rivers. It would be a simple matter to divide the waters there in any desired ratio. He thought the ratio should be four parts to Iran for every one part to Afghanistan, apparently basing this division on the Delta Commission's findings as to the requirements of each side (Delta Commission Report, p. 120).

Italconsult engineers state that their analysis is not yet far enough advanced to permit them to estimate the average annual flow of water required in Sistan. Nevertheless it seems certain that their estimate will be considerably above the Afghan offer of 22 (or 26) cubic meters per second. Engineer Piro said he had heard that Senator (and retired Lieutenant General) Amanollah JAHANSANI was proposing that the Iranian Government agree to a figure of 25 cubic meters per second. Mr. Piro thought this would be much too low an amount to meet Iran's needs.

#### CONSULATE COMMENTS ON WATER APPORTIONMENT

Analyzing the information reported above in the light of what is already known about the Helmand River Delta, it is possible to make certain observations which bear on the question of apportionment of the Helmand waters between Afghanistan and Iran. While information available to the Consulate, particularly on conditions in Afghanistan which affect the lower Helmand flow, is not complete, it is believed that the following tentative conclusions are justified:

1. In most years, at least, the total annual Helmand runoff is sufficient to satisfy all the present and foreseeable future irrigation requirements of both Afghanistan and Iran in the river basin and delta. This was the judgment of the Delta Commission (p. 113 of their report) and also of the Tudor Engineering Company, which prepared a report in 1956 for I.C.A. on the Development of the Helmand Valley, Afghanistan (pp. 21-22 of the Tudor Report). If this conclusion is tenable, then the questions of regulation, use and apportionment of the water are technical ones which should be decided by technical experts.

2. The total annual Helmand runoff reaching Sistan in past years, even since the Afghan works on the upper Helmand have been in operation, has been more than sufficient for Iranian irrigation needs. The average annual flow into Sistan appears to have been in the neighborhood of 80 to 100 cubic meters per second, far above not only the Delta Commission's estimate of Iranian Sistan's needs but also the highest Iranian demands. Even if a season like the past winter, when water flow was abnormally low, be included in computed a yearly average, it is probable that the total runoff for the year would be sufficient for Sistan's requirements.

3. The upstream irrigation works in Afghanistan, even if they do not reduce the total Helmand runoff reaching the Delta to an amount too small to satisfy Sistan's needs, are apparently capable of affecting the seasonal flow to such an extent as to be detrimental to agriculture in Sistan. This statement can be made only tentatively since little information is available to the Consulate on conditions

CONFIDENTIAL



Desp. No. 34  
from Meshed

CONFIDENTIAL

in Afghanistan and the operation of the Afghan works. Judging by the known capacity of the Kajakai Reservoir as reported in the Tudor Report, however, it would appear that the Kajakai dam could be operated in such a way as to reduce the flow into the Delta below the amount necessary at seasons when the requirements there are greatest. Whether or not the dam has been so operated is not known to the Consulate. However, it is certain that during the past winter the flow into Iranian Sistan was well below the normal requirements at that season, and it is the opinion of an Italconsult engineer that the flow could only have been reduced so low by being blocked by man-made obstacles.

4. The Kohak (Miankangi) dam on the Sistan river just inside Iran from the border has not been of great benefit to Iran because its use has forced water to back up into the Parian river and thus escape from Iranian hands. Moreover, it may have contributed to lowering the bed of the Parian river so that at times of low flow the Sistan river does not bring into Iran its necessary share of the Helmand waters. Even Afghans complain about this dam, saying it has caused flooding in Afghan Chalkansur. (See Kabul Despatch No. 78 of September 10, 1959.)

5. Basing their views on Italconsult's studies, the Iranians will probably continue to want considerably more water than the average annual flow of 22-26 cubic meters offered by Afghanistan. At least as important as the average annual flow in any agreement satisfactory to Iran would be proper seasonal distribution of the flow.

#### PROSPECTS OF SOLUTION

The Consulate is not competent, of course, to suggest possible solutions of the Helmand waters problem. However, in the course of preparing the present report certain points have come to the Consulate's attention which might have a bearing on the prospects for eventual resolution of the problem.

In the first place, it is clear that early solution of this problem is of vital importance to Iran for a number of reasons. For one thing Iranians fear that Sistan's water needs may in the future be even less well met than at present as development on the Afghan side continues. Particularly they fear that the Afghans may undertake some new project, such as a dam on the lower Helmand, which will drastically reduce the flow of water into Sistan if not cut it off altogether. Moreover, Iran is interested in more than simply maintaining present conditions in Sistan. As evidenced by the engagement of Italconsult, the Iranian Government is seriously interested in the possibility of developing the region. No realistic development program can be undertaken in Sistan unless it is known how much Helmand water the area can expect to receive in future years.

Political considerations also motivate Iran to seek a solution to this problem. The extent of Soviet influence in Afghanistan is a cause of genuine fear to Iranians, who see themselves flanked on the east as well as on the north by a hostile, or potentially hostile, power. Improvement of Iranian relations with Afghanistan might contribute to relaxing the closeness of the Afghan-Soviet relationship. Solution of the Helmand waters problem would be a major and probably essential step in improving Afghan-Iranian relations.

Afghanistan, being the upper riparian and in possession of the entire Helmand

CONFIDENTIAL

Disp. No. 31  
From Meshod

CONFIDENTIAL

except for a portion of its delta, presumably feels much less than Iran the need for arriving at agreement on the issue. Under these circumstances it would be natural that Iran should be the party to make the greatest concessions. In Iranian eyes this has been the case in the negotiations so far conducted. While Afghanistan has only budged slightly from its original offer of an average annual flow of 22 cubic meters per second (up to 26), Iran has come down in its demands from 57 to 35 cubic meters per second. In view of the fact that the traditional annual flow into Iran has been far greater (apparently in the neighborhood of 80-100 cubic meters per second in recent years, on the average), and considering Iran's desire to develop Sistan, Iranian willingness to accept an annual average flow of as little as 35 cubic meters per second must seem to Iranians a most generous concession. Certainly it was the reporting officer's impression during his recent visit to Sistan that Iranian officials sincerely believe Sistan really needs more water than this.

The question now facing Iran is whether to reduce her demands still further or to seek another way of resolving the issue. An official of the Iranian Foreign Ministry recently suggested bringing the subject before some international organization. If both countries would agree to this procedure, it might indeed offer some hope of breaking the present impasse in a way more satisfactory to Iran than acceptance of the present Afghan offer. Making use of data which has become available since the Delta Commission's study, particularly that collected by Italconsult, Iran might be able to show that Sistan, if it is to be developed according to its potential, will require a greater flow of water than that computed by the Delta Commission in 1950 (upon which the Afghan offer of 22 cubic meters per second is based). At the same time it might be possible to show, using the data contained in the Tudor Report and other data which may have been subsequently collected in Afghanistan, that even after all Afghan needs are met sufficient Helmand runoff remains to furnish Sistan with all the water it requires.

If solution continues to be sought through direct negotiation between the two countries, then it seems inevitable that Iran must make the next approach with reduced demands. Distasteful as this may be to the Iranians, they might still consider it worth trying in order to get Afghanistan to agree to further studies which might lead to a more comprehensive agreement allaying Iranian fears and permitting realistic Sistan development. The Iranian approach might be along the following lines:

1. Both countries naturally wish to make the best possible use of their natural resources to benefit their peoples. Iran appreciates Afghanistan's efforts to harness the waters of the Helmand for such beneficial purposes, and is sure that Afghanistan reciprocally appreciates the Iranian desire to develop the region of Sistan, which has always been dependent upon Helmand water for irrigation.

2. On the basis of the limited data now available to her, Iran is inclined to believe that the total Helmand runoff, at least in normal years, is sufficient to meet the present and anticipated future needs of those parts of both countries which can be served by these waters. Therefore Iran believes that the question of proper distribution and regulation of the Helmand flow is a technical matter which should be determined by qualified technical experts.

3. Iran is quite willing to accept the report of the Helmand River Delta

CONFIDENTIAL

Page 34  
 Deep. No. 34  
 From Meshed

CONFIDENTIAL

Commission as a basic document containing data which should be considered in determining proper regulation and distribution of the Helmand waters. However, as the Delta Commission itself pointed out (p. 123 of their Report), the technical information available at the time of the Commission's study was not sufficient to allow the immediate definition of a workable agreement. During the ten years since the Delta Commission studied the subject much new data has become available on the actual flow of water, the water requirements of both countries, and the operation of works on both sides (particularly the Afghan side) which were only under construction or contemplated at the time of the Commission's study.

4. Iran therefore proposes that a technical study now be undertaken making use of the Delta Commission Report plus the additional data which has since become available as well as any other pertinent data which may be collected in the course of the proposed technical study. The body which would make the study could be chosen as jointly agreed upon by the two countries. It might, for example, consist of one Afghan, one Iranian, and one impartial specialist (representing, for example, the World Bank). Or it might be the joint Washington committee, reactivated for the purpose; in this case, however, it would be necessary to appoint a subcommittee to make investigations in the field. Still another possibility would be an impartial body including representatives of neither side. Whatever might be its composition, this technical body would study and report upon the following:

- (a) The total Helmand runoff.
- (b) The present and anticipated future needs in both Afghanistan and Iran which could be met by Helmand waters.
- (c) The best means of controlling and regulating the flow so as to meet in the most effective way the requirements of each side.
- (d) Recommendations as to any additional works which might be constructed either individually or jointly so as to make it possible to regulate and distribute the Helmand waters properly, in accordance with (c).

5. Iran believes a technical study such as that suggested above absolutely necessary before any lasting agreement can be reached. However, should Afghanistan be unwilling to participate in such a joint study unless an interim accord is first reached, Iran, in order to show her good faith and because of her desire to reach agreement so that a major development program for Sistan can be undertaken, would be willing to conclude an interim agreement (e.g., for three years) on any reasonable basis. Such an interim agreement would not, of course, prejudice the position of either side in reaching a lasting agreement based on further technical study.

In this connection Iran would point out that the Delta Commission made no recommendation as to the flow of water Iran should receive either in an interim or in a final agreement. The Commission did estimate the present water requirements of Iranian Sistan as well as of Afghan Chalkansur, finding that the former area required an average annual flow of 22 cubic meters per second while the latter required only 6 cubic meters per second. All available evidence, including that assembled by the Delta Commission, indicates that the average annual flow into the Delta has always been far greater than 26 cubic meters per second, the total of the requirements estimated by the Commission. This would appear to be the case

CONFIDENTIAL

Disp. No. 34  
From Meshed

CONFIDENTIAL

even today, with the Afghan works on the upper Helmand in operation. Thus there is no reason to suppose the Commission intended these estimates to be used as the basis of an agreement according Iran an average annual flow of only 22 cubic meters per second; it might equally well be argued that the estimates should be used as the basis of an agreement providing Iran with about four-fifths of all the Helmand water reaching the Delta.


Iran believes that further study such as that proposed above will establish that Sistan's water requirements are greater than 22 cubic meters per second, especially if the region is to be developed as Iran desires. Iran further believes that additional study will in all probability show that the runoff of the Helmand River is sufficient to provide Iran with considerably more than 22 cubic meters per second even after all present and future Afghan requirements are met.

Nevertheless, if Afghanistan requires that an interim agreement be reached before further technical study is undertaken, Iran is ready to consider sympathetically Afghanistan's suggestions regarding the terms of such an agreement.

---

In the reporting officer's opinion, Iran would gain far more by getting Afghanistan to agree to further technical study than she would lose by agreeing to accept temporarily an average annual flow of even as little as 22 cubic meters per second. Actually it is doubtful whether the Afghans could hold the flow this low even if they wished to. If an interim agreement were reached at the level of 22 (or some higher figure such as 26), it would be important that the agreement include provisions as to monthly distribution in accordance with the findings of the Delta Commission (p. 95 of their report). In this way Sistan would be assured of receiving a flow of over 60 cubic meters per second during the months of greatest need, thus obviating conditions such as prevailed during the past winter. Probably in certain other months the flow would be much greater than necessary, so that the average annual flow would be considerably above 22 cubic meters per second.

Whether the United States could or should play a role in bringing Iran and Afghanistan closer to an understanding on this issue is a question beyond the competence of this post to answer. Perhaps the United States could suggest to the Iranian Government the desirability of trying an approach along the lines described above at an appropriate time (such as during Prime Minister EQBAL'S visit to Kabul). If feasible, the Afghan Government might also be encouraged to consider sympathetically such an approach on the part of Iran. Greater stimulus toward reaching agreement might result if the U.S. Government were able to announce to both sides its willingness to give sympathetic consideration to assisting in the construction of new works which, as the result of further technical study, the two countries agreed were necessary or desirable in order to regulate and distribute the Helmand waters for the greatest benefit of both countries.

  
Edward H. Thomas  
American Consul

Copies sent Ambassies Tehran, Kabul Amconsulates Isfahan, Khorramshahr, Tabriz

CONFIDENTIAL