

**RESTRICTED** *Afghanistan - Iran*



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No. 346

AMERICAN LEGATION

Recd.  
Nov. 4, 1947

Kabul, Afghanistan, October 16, 1947

ACTION  
NEA

Subject: Report on Helmand River Water Level in Chakansur Area.

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THE HONORABLE  
THE SECRETARY OF STATE,  
WASHINGTON.

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I have the honor to enclose a memorandum concerning the effect of the current drought on the water level of the Helmand River in the Chakansur Area. The memorandum is based on data compiled by Louis STANLEY, hydrologist of Morrison-Knudsen Afghanistan, Inc., the American engineering company now under contract to the Afghan Government for the construction of roads, irrigation projects, etc.

The Chakansur area includes that part of Afghanistan where the Helmand River forms the international boundary between this country and Iran. Disputes about the division of water for the adjacent irrigated areas of both countries have arisen periodically for many years. A particularly serious dispute has arisen this year because the severe drought which is now affecting most of Afghanistan has caused the level of the Helmand River to fall so low that there is no water for the irrigation ditches. The Iranian press has charged that Afghan farmers diverted all the water upstream so that none was left for Iranian areas. The Iranian farmers are reported to have threatened to invade Afghanistan and stop this diversion. Also, Iranian officials apparently are not well informed of conditions in this country. For instance, they have indicated that they believe a canal 30 meters wide and 1 1/2 meters deep has been a major factor in diverting the water of the Helmand River. They undoubtedly mean the Boghra Canal near Girishk which is now under construction and will not be ready for use until the year after next.

Each year an Afghan mission meets an Iranian mission at Band-i-Kamal Khan on the Helmand River to divide the water available for irrigation. This year the Afghan mission was accompanied by Mr. Stanley. The Mission waited several weeks for the Iranian mission, which it knew to be on the other side of the boundary. It was

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only when the Afghan Mission threatened to return to Kabul that the Iranian Mission was finally persuaded to join it.

The Iranian Mission then claimed that the water should be divided at a point about thirty miles above Band-i-Kamal Khan, although that had never been done before. The Afghan Mission refused this claim. During the discussions one of the non-official members of the Iranian Mission slipped away clandestinely and rode off in the direction of the irrigated area above Band-i-Kamal Khan. Although the Afghan military authorities spread a cordon to find him, they apparently did not succeed -- not surprising considering the rugged desert area in that section.

Mr. Stanley's data were compiled for the use of his company and of the Afghan Ministry of Public Works.

Respectfully yours,

Ely E. Palmer

Enclosure:

MEMORANDUM dated September 24, 1947

Copies sent to: Tehran  
Kabul MA (2)

Forwarded to Department  
in original & hecto.

File no. 716  
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## MEMORANDUM

September 24, 1947

The Legation has received information as noted below from one of the field engineers of Morrison-Knudsen Afghanistan, Inc., who, as hydrologist for this American firm in Afghanistan, returned late in August from a four week trip into Chakansur Province in Afghanistan where he had been sent by the firm to observe the flow of the Helmand River and the several canals from the Helmand to Afghan lands.

The furthest upstream point visited was the diversion of the Chahar Bujack canal, 26 miles above the village of Chahar Bujack. From this point the river flows northwesterly for about 40 miles and then swings to the north for about 36 miles to the Iranian border. The river meanders through a valley generally about a mile wide, with the valley floor in some places widening into quite large irrigated areas. In many places the river is divided into two or more channels. The central valley floor is quite sandy, characterized by river bars overgrown with brush and bench lands two to four meters above the river level varying from good, irrigable soil to blow sand with many extensive areas of dunes. The valley is bordered by low hills of irregular soil to blow sand with many extensive areas of dunes. The valley is bordered by low hills of irregular pattern, becoming lower as they progress downstream and tapering into flat desert and arable lands a few miles above the border.

Most of the irrigated lands in Chakansur Province lie on the right side of the river, that is, to the north and east of it. There are five canals diverting to the right and two smaller ones to the left. Some brief data concerning these canals, derived from some of the people in the Province, is to follow. Attention is called to the probability that some of these data are far from correct.

<u>Name of Canal</u>	<u>Length</u>	<u>Acres Irrigated</u>	<u>Built Years Ago</u>
Chahar Bujack	41 miles	35,000	150
Kala Fateh	40 "	50,000	Very old
Bandar	34 "	7,000	200
Daka Dela	6 "	2,500	47
Kwabga	20 "	10,000	100
Shie	22 "	36,000	40
Mah Runji	22 "	170,000	80

The first inspection of the river on this trip was made at Kohawk, just above the Iranian border, on July 25. A discharge measurement was made on that date and

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showed 47 second-feet, all of which was going down the Seistan branch into Iran. The right branch, known locally as "Common River", which forms the boundary between Afghanistan and Iran, was dry and blocked by sand dunes. The Shie, Kawbga and Mah Rungi canals were dry and had been so for some time.

On July 28, the diversion of the Chahar Bujack canal was visited. The canal was dry and had been so for several days. The flow of the Helmand at that point was 60 second-feet. The diversion of the Kala Fatch canal was visited on the following day, July 29. It was carrying an estimated 3 second-feet, too little and spread out for a current meter measurement.

A measurement of the Helmand River at Bandar-i-Kamal Khan was made on August 11. The discharge was 5 second-feet.

On August 12, the diversions of the Kala Fatch and Daka Dela canals were visited. Both canals were dry.

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