

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

9-11 Commission Interview

Interviewee: **David Sedney, Charge d'Affaires, U.S. Embassy Kabul**
Date: Tuesday, October 21, 2003
Location: U.S. Embassy Kabul
Participants: Philip Zelikow, Kevin Scheid, Mike Hurley, Dylan Cors
Drafted by: Mike Hurley
Reviewed by: Philip Zelikow
Additional: None

Sedney said that the overarching goal of the U.S. Mission in Afghanistan is to "build a stable, secure, and prosperous Afghanistan." This entails denying its use as a sanctuary for al-Qaida and safehaven for Taliban and other terrorists. A democratic Afghanistan will be an ally of the U.S. and a supporter in the UN. Sedney explained that by prosperous the U.S. does not imply an intention to turn Afghans into middle class Americans, which would be impossible. Realistically, it means progressing to the point where the Afghan people have faith in their economic futures and no longer live in fear that their lives and personal freedom can be randomly threatened by lawless elements.

Afghans are talented and can help in the building of the needed economic infrastructure. Sedney said that Afghan Minister of Finance, Ashraf Ghani, whom he described as one of the brightest and most capable officials in the government, estimates that the effort will require USD\$30 billion over five years—roads, power, and irrigation systems alone will demand \$6-8 billion. There is some question whether Afghanistan can absorb this much capital.

The overarching goal is not in question, but the devil is in how best achieve it. The way the war was fought in 2001-02 did not involve massing of U.S. forces. Afghanistan had a government starting in December 2001 and the Coalition has been making some progress since then.

Operational Objectives for the Coming Year

Achieve visible progress on a number of projects across a wide enough area of Afghanistan that Afghans will see that the Central Government is delivering what is needed for the country:

- Develop the Kabul – Kandahar road;
- Deliver visible assistance to schools, hospitals and clinics;
- Increase number of police to 17,000 by 2004;

--Have an Afghan National Army (ANA) of 10,000 by 2004 that is fully trained and effectively lead.

Continuation of Bonn Process:

- Adopt a constitution;
- Hold national presidential elections by June 2004;
- Ensure that political measures are broadly viewed as legitimate;

Sedney said that the Taliban in recent months had been mounting an aggressive and in some cases effective insurgency campaign in the southern, and southeastern provinces. "The Taliban is coming back," Sedney said. NGOs, UNAMA, and ISAF regard the south as dangerous at this time, even the "Swedish Committee", a relief effort that has been operating in Afghanistan for 25 years has pulled its people back from these areas.

Taliban adherents are not attacking Coalition soldiers so much as soft targets. For example, they have been blowing up girls schools, issuing "night letters" throughout villages making clear that Coalition forces will eventually leave Afghanistan and that those who have been cooperating with the infidel and sending their daughters to schools will be severely punished if not killed. The letters also castigate village men who have cut their beards. The basic message is that we, the Taliban, are coming back, and we will make you pay for your collaboration with the West. Their time frame is not ours, Sedney said, and they are making clear to a fearful population that they will wait the West out. But they are also distributing farm implements and medicine to the people. In some areas they give village elders as much as \$50 to buy their loyalty, turn them against the West.

There is also more sophisticated criticism of the West by Islamicists. The Taliban enemy is good at this form of propaganda, and their campaign is spreading fear among the people. One example is the widespread distribution of a photo showing a U.S. soldier physically searching a burka-wearing Afghan woman, a physical intrusion that is taboo and repugnant in Afghan-Muslim culture. What is not clear from the photo is that the soldier conducting the search is a female.

Sedney said that the Coalition must aggressively counter this. The Afghans must see visible progress, visible gains. He is cautiously optimistic about the future. A strong NATO commitment will help he said. He pointed out that our program in Afghanistan is directly affected by growing strength of fundamentalists in Pakistan. Therefore, U.S. Afghan and Pakistan policies must be closely coordinated and calibrated.