

III. International

Helmand Valley Authority: The TVA Approach, Not British Geopolitics

by David Shavin

Aug. 13—Seventy-five years ago, Afghanistan embarked on a great project, counter to the British-imposed feudalism which had been imposed in the entire region. In 1946 the government initiated the building of a tall dam on the Helmand River, conceived as the initiation of what would be a set of coordinated waterworks and development projects in southern Afghanistan, on the model of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). To build the structure—the Kajaki Dam—the government hired the U.S. firm Morrison-Knudsen, famous for its role on the team that built the Hoover Dam (and later, built the Cape Canaveral space launch project).

The concept was for eight dams to impound water and supply hydro-power on the Helmand which, at 710 mi (1,150 km), is the longest river within the nation. Capturing and directing the flow from the Himalayas and Hindu Kush, would transform the downriver Registan Desert (1-3 in. per year of precipitation) into a garden, through systems of canals and irrigation. In 1952 the Helmand Valley Authority (HVA) was formed, then expanded in 1965, into the Helmand and Arghandab Valley Authority (HAVA), to integrate the Helmand tributary, the 250 mi (400 km) Arghandab River, into the TVA-type river basins program.

The ruler of Afghanistan who initiated the infrastructure-building, Mohammed Zahir Shah (king from 1933-1973), who also founded the nation's first modern university, had no problem in challenging Russia, as well as the Americans, to show what they could do in

furtherance of Afghanistan's modernization mission. From 1946 to 1971, U.S. private firms and government agencies actively helped construct the TVA-type projects in Afghanistan, including programs for agriculture, education and public health.

Fifty years ago, however, the U.S. approach, denounced as an "America in Asia," ended. These exact



A topological map of Afghanistan showing the Sistan/Helmand River basin.

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words had been articulated by Arnold Toynbee, policy chief for the British Foreign Office, in a personal visit to the HVA in May 1960. He spoke against the TVA approach and American arrogance to promote it. British agencies and their global institutional influence did everything in their power to stop TVA-diplomacy in Afghanistan—the heartland of the British Great Game approach of perpetuating conflict in Asia, and to stop it

anywhere else in the world. In effect, Toynbee advocated for perpetuating the conditions that prevailed during imperial British rule over India and southern Afghanistan, when the area was productive of little but opium.

The British anti-USA/TVA campaign was successful. After the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr., and the disaster of the imperialist Vietnam War, the model HAVA project in Afghanistan was all but buried in the dust. U.S. development diplomacy was thwarted here and everywhere. It is now urgent to reverse course. Resume the TVA-approach, with infrastructure building and international collaboration by major powers, with all possible speed.

The Tennessee Valley Authority

Initiated by Franklin Roosevelt's Administration to conquer poverty in the largest impoverished area of the United States, the TVA was begun in 1933. It would erect 32 dams on the Tennessee River, providing electricity and water management. Prior to TVA, Chattanooga had been flooded four different times in 70 years. The untamed river also harbored a large mosquito population, and the area had been beset by malaria and yellow fever. Malaria affected about one-third of the population.

The electricity brought industry, rural electrification, modernized agriculture, lighting, refrigerated food, better health, better education and, for the workforce, better skills. Alcoa Aluminum was made possible, as cheap, plentiful electricity could be applied. Combustion Engineering would rise to produce massive steam boilers for coal and nuclear plants. The new science city of Oak Ridge was created out of nothing, strictly as a result of the energy-dense environment. And the Chattanooga Symphony was also created in 1933.

When the TVA was announced, this author's grandfather had lost his home in the Depression and was running a junkyard in Chattanooga with his teenage son. But city codes were changed as part of the upgrading of



USAID Afghanistan, 2007

The Kajaki Dam and power plant on the Helmand River, built by the U.S. firm Morrison-Knudsen. Completed in 1953.

life, outhouses gave way to indoor plumbing, and there was a run on second-hand bathtubs and fixtures in junkyards. They were able to leave the junkyard for a plumbing parts supply company downtown. This author grew up with no knowledge of malaria, but with the everyday reality of visitors from around the world coming to Chattanooga to see and learn from the TVA miracle. TVA was indeed the case of a rising water level lifting all boats, and the proof of the reality of a way forward.

The Helmand Valley Authority

The Helmand Valley Authority (HVA) officially came into existence in 1952, and the 1953 opening of the 52 MW capacity Kajaki Dam was indeed a revolutionary development. It would be the largest dam by far in Afghanistan until the Soviet-built Naghlu Dam in the 1960s. With a capacity of 100 MW, the Naghlu is on the Kabul River, 40 km east of the nation's capital, in the Surobi District of Kabul Province.

The Kajaki became the centerpiece of a top-down development of the whole region, centered upon electricity, irrigation and water management. The canals of the irrigation projects marked out the patterns of rolling back the desert, and farmers graduated to much more efficient, mechanized agriculture, allowing broader acreage available to be tilled. Opium production gave

way to grain and cotton, becoming staples of the nation's economy. Textile mills joined the power plants.

Of some note is that the HVA effort in those early days of the 1950s, was not undermined by the U.S. intelligence community, despite certain British networks. In 1954, the U.S. National Security Council became rather concerned that the Soviets might benefit by out-doing the U.S. efforts in Afghanistan. Their "Staff Study on Afghanistan," marked "Secret," read:

Recent Afghan-Soviet economic agreements permitting Soviet construction of important capital projects in Afghanistan and entry of considerable numbers of Soviet technicians provide evidence that the Soviets may be desirous of drawing Afghanistan out of its present buffer status into the Soviet orbit.

But the staff concluded that the Afghans were interested in the Russians for physical-economic, and not ideological, reasons.

Further, on the ground, U.S. security officials assessed that the U.S. could out-do the Russians economically but, in far off Afghanistan, not militarily. So, the "small program of technical assistance in Afghanistan of about \$1.5 million annually and the Export-Import Bank" loans of "approximately \$40 million primarily for the Helmand River valley development project" should now be supplemented by economic projects between Afghanistan and Pakistan, with a "program of stepped-up United States aid...."

The various projects centered upon the extension of power from the Kajaki and Arghandab dams to neighboring areas of Pakistan and the expansion of Pakistan's Warsak hydro-electric project for areas of northeast Afghanistan. Also added were railway links, locomotives and rolling stock for Afghanistan. This was considered national security for the United States.

The NSC staff provided this summary, as of 1954:

Since the end of World War II Afghanistan has been engaged in an ambitious program of economic development. The Afghans intend to develop their own basic natural resources at the maximum rate possible. The effort may be described broadly as natural resources development (largely in Southwest Afghanistan and largely by the government) and industrial and

power development by private investors mostly in the northern and eastern parts of the country.

The U.S.'s goals are spelled out:

[T]o aid the Afghan Government in the reclamation, development and settlement of new agricultural land especially in the Helmand River Valley, to give assistance in improving primitive agricultural practices ..., to aid the Afghan Government in establishing and strengthening schools to train technicians required in the economic development efforts ... and to assist in raising the level of technical competence by awarding grants for training in the United States and elsewhere.

Finally, the achievements up to that point are listed:

[T]echnicians in the Helmand Valley working with the Helmand Valley Authority have trained men in stream gauging, have established experimental and demonstration farms, have demonstrated improved irrigation techniques, and are assisting the Helmand Valley Authority itself to become an effective administrative body able to regulate the use of land and water resources and to provide service to the people already there and to the nomads who are settling on newly irrigated lands.

Also, teachers, equipment and training programs for agriculture and "sub-professional health workers" were provided.

The Afghans established their own affiliate company of Morrison-Knudsen, and Afghans proudly gained facility and skills in the new construction techniques. A new city, Lashkar Gah, was erected where the Helmand and Arghandab Rivers meet. It included the HVA headquarters, but it also featured a top-quality hospital, the only coeducational high school in Afghanistan, and an alabaster mosque. There was modern housing, with homes equipped with indoor plumbing and electricity, situated on wide roads with sidewalks.

The HVA Meets the British Empire

Lashkar Gah had a special visitor in May 1960. The long-time head of research for the British Foreign Office, Arnold Toynbee, made a special side trip from

Kandahar, travelling 90 miles down the new highway to Lashkar Gah. Toynbee had initiated his career with the British Foreign Office 45 years before, with his work on the proposed division of Afghanistan between the Russians and British (divided by the Hindu Kush), so as to better manage affairs amongst the natives. The British would concentrate upon managing the Pashtuns.

When Toynbee visited, the new town had only about 8,000 residents. Toynbee, completely steeped in the British tradition, during a century of British attempted control of Afghanistan, by keeping the natives as backward tillers of opium, must have dropped the proverbial eye-monocle. He wrote:

The domain of the Helmand Valley Authority has become a piece of America inserted in to the Afghan Landscape.... The new world they are conjuring up out of the desert at the Helmand River's expense is to be an America-in-Asia.

Toynbee's acerbic comments were followed by his cynical warning for the rambunctious Yankees, comments attributed to a passage from the Greek tragedian, Sophocles: "The craft of his engines surpasseth his dreams." There was a double message here. First, the higher cultural and skill levels then present in the American republic were reduced to a certain craft, expressed in their technological toys; and second, the American culture could never catch up with their mechanical inventions. And, sure enough, with the wave of pessimism of the late 1960s and the colonialist warfare in Vietnam, the U.S. did walk away from the Helmand Valley and Afghanistan development in the 1970s.

Toynbee's Deal with Hitler to Handle Non-Whites

However, it should be understood that Toynbee was more than simply a little averse to American methods. He was a classic "liberal-imperialist" whose racial arrangement with Adolf Hitler illustrates the deep-seated ideology that opposes a solution today for Afghanistan—opposes one based upon America's TVA approach or upon China's Belt and Road Initiative.

Toynbee was the Director of Studies at Chatham House, the body heading up research for the British Foreign Office, from 1924 to 1943, when he became the Director of the Research Department of the British Foreign Office itself. His fundamental concern as a liberal imperialist was that the imperial powers could avoid



CC/Atyahasir

Arnold Toynbee began work in the intelligence department of the British Foreign Office in 1915. For decades, he was a leader in intelligence in the Royal Institute of International Affairs or directly in the Foreign Office.

another military conflict like World War I by proper agreements to divide up the colonial looting, to share amongst the European powers.

When the Nazis took power in Germany, Toynbee made multiple visits to confer with various Nazis, notably including Alfred Rosenberg, the head of the Nazi government's Foreign Affairs office and, otherwise, Hitler's notorious race theorist. (Toynbee's associate Rosenberg was hung at Nuremburg about the time that Afghanistan began its dam project.) Discussions revolved around the Nazis curtailing their expansion in Europe in exchange for Britain restoring German colonies in Africa.

Amidst Toynbee's negotiations, he brought a Nazi professor, Carl Brinkmann, to lecture the British that simply being a superior white race was not enough. Rather, they must "recognize ... the need for conscious, strenuous action" to eliminate populations that Mother Nature was too slow to do on its own. The white race is compelled by circumstances "to shape what in former ages seemed to us to be the outcome of automatic forces." The Darwinian struggle for survival is well enough, but the white race must help such inexorable laws of nature along.

In February 1936, the years of Toynbee's back-channel meetings culminated in a two-hour session with Hitler. (Toynbee also gave a public lecture on that trip, approving of a Nazi liberation of ethnic Germans in neighboring states such as Czechoslovakia.) Hitler told Toynbee of his desire for British understanding and cooperation in his limited expansionist drive. He would ally with Britain in their plans for Asia if only Britain

would arrange for Germany to reclaim her colonies in Africa.

Toynbee's confidential memorandum to Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin and Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden reported that Hitler thought that the "key to European appeasement and cooperation" was mutual understanding and goodwill between Britain and Germany, and that he "emphatically disclaimed any hostility to, or designs against, the British Empire." In fact, Hitler "regarded the Empire as Europe's best asset for the struggle" against the non-white world. Hence, Britain must agree "that Germany must be readmitted to her pre-war share in the common colonial work of Europe...."

Toynbee added his personal testimony in support of cutting a deal:

In spite of *Mein Kampf* and in spite of the "Rosenberg Plan," I have a very strong conviction that, on this rather vital point, Hitler was quite sincere in what he said to me. [Hitler also now realized that he shouldn't confront Russia alone, and instead wished] to change his role and to appear as "the good European" and "the associate of England." [So,] [A]ny response from the English side to his overtures for our friendship would produce an enormous counter-response to us from Hitler.

Shortly after Toynbee met with Hitler, the Wehrmacht marched into the Rhineland. One assumes that Hitler did not confide this plan to Toynbee, but Toynbee's subsequent memo was not altered by Hitler's actions.

Apparently, Toynbee actually first reported his meeting with Hitler privately at Lord Lothian's dinner party on March 7, 1936. (Lothian was a key member of Lord Astor's set of appeasers that usually met at Astor's Cliveden estate—though on this particular evening, Astor was at Lothian's.) Even though Hitler had seized the Rhineland that very day, Lothian's group proceeded on the following morning to telephone Toynbee's recommendations to Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin. They emphasized that Hitler was acting in good faith and that appeasement was the path to pursue. Two years later, Neville Chamberlain's appeasement deal with Hitler in Munich was simply the icing on the cake for this gang. That is, Toynbee was "Neville Chamberlain" long before Chamberlain.

The Downfall, But Elements of Hope

Part of Toynbee's discussions with the Nazi professor Brinkmann had revolved around the risks involved in the unavoidable interaction with natives in administering an empire. In particular was the danger of the natives acquiring a taste for modern ways, and so, leading to revolts against colonial control. What must Toynbee have thought, seeing a bit of "America-in-Asia"?

The United States abandoned support for the TVA-in-the-desert in the 1970s. The Russian-built Naghlu Dam fell into disrepair in the 1980s and 1990s. Opium made a dramatic recovery. In 1998, a major drought displaced 100,000 nomads; they were relocated to what were called temporary settlements. Up to 100 villages were submerged by windblown dust and sand. The



U.S. Military staff, 2003

Grishk Dam and power plant on the Helmand River near Grishk, built by the United States for the HVA in 1945.

dunes occupied former farmland and roads. A temporary success in replacing opium poppy cultivation from 1999 to 2000, under the efforts of the Director of the UN Drug Control Program, Pino Arlacchi, was then reversed as of Fall 2001, with the attack by the U.S. and allies. The U.S. Air Force even put the Kajaki Dam's powerhouse on its bombing list, and in 2007, the Taliban directly assaulted the dam itself.

However, there are elements of hope. In 2013, India committed \$273 million to complete the long-delayed 42 MW Salma Dam on the Hari River in the western Herat Province. Even though its feasibility study had been initiated way back in 1957, actual construction did not begin until 1976. Then warfare halted its completion. In 2016, it was opened, now named the Afghan-India Friendship Dam. Both Indian President

Narendra Modi and Afghan President Ashraf Ghani were present.

Meanwhile, the Russian-built Naghlu Dam experienced a rebirth. In August 2006, Russia's Technopromexport got a \$32.5 million contract to rehabilitate the two inoperable generators and to replace the transformers. One generator became operational in 2010 and the transformers were replaced in 2012. The second generator became operational in 2018. By April 2019, all four generators were operating.

At the U.S.-built Kajaki Dam, the attempts by China's Machine Building International Corporation to install an 18.5 MW turbine/generator were frequently delayed, but Kajaki was finally recommissioned in 2016. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has plans to repair Kajaki's intake structure, along with the valves (both roto and jet valves) of the irrigation tunnel. They also have plans to improve the Southern Electrical Power System overall, but progress has been slow. One of the contracts to extend the power lines belongs to Perini Management



Afghan President's Office
Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India (left) and Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, President of Afghanistan, jointly inaugurate the Afghan-India Friendship Dam, a hydroelectric and irrigation project on the Hari River, June 4, 2016.

Services of Framingham, Massachusetts.

Thus, there are elements from China, India, Russia and the United States to defeat Toynbee's cynical approach to the underdeveloped world.

The institutions in the region have initiatives in the development direction. In 2019, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) established its Liaison Group on Afghanistan, regarding economic development projects for stabilizing and growing Afghanistan. This summer, China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi addressed the SCO on the need for economic development as the key for peace negotiations. Subsequently, Indian Defense Minister Mohammad Singh addressed the SCO's defense ministers, reporting on the \$3 billion of Indian investments in 500 projects in Afghanistan as being an expression of the SCO's spirit.

Overall, China's Belt and Road Initiative has the active continental framework in which long-planned and new projects can flourish in Afghanistan and Central Asia, for example in railway connectivity, as well as vast new supplies of power. The special impetus is the COVID-19 pandemic, making health care infrastructure a priority.

Afghanistan's decision in 1946 to pull itself out of feudal and colonial conditions must be honored today, on its 75th anniversary. The road to war has been the lack of economic development. The road to peace is economic development. This is the right and only way to end the wrongful and terrible decades of war.

The image shows two items related to the Executive Intelligence Review (EIR). On the left is the cover of the EIR magazine, featuring a blue header with the EIR logo and the text "Executive Intelligence Review". Below the logo, it says "There Are No Limits to Growth" and shows a photograph of the Earth from space. On the right is a document titled "EIR Daily Alert Service" with a list of news items, including "China Agrees to 2021 World Economic Daily Agenda Meeting for January", "U.S. Prepares for Next Round of Talks with Financing Partners", and "U.S. Prepares for Next Round of Talks with Financing Partners".

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