

commentary

from other pens...

Northern alliance has unsavory past

By George Gedda

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — The Amnesty International report on Afghanistan was unsparing: Violations against civilians “were numerous and included rape, extra-judicial executions and torture, as well as long-term detention of prisoners of conscience.”

In the present context, it would be easy to conclude the Taliban, known for its heavy-handed rule, was responsible. Instead, the comments were directed at northern alliance rule in Afghanistan between 1992-96.

From the U.S. perspective these days, the northern alliance are the “good guys,” the same group which, with a large assist from American military bombardment, has helped to seize power from the Taliban.

Without the northern alliance, the Taliban probably would still be running the country and the capture of presumed terrorist mastermind Osama bin Laden would be far more of a long shot than it is.

Jeffersonians the northern alliance are not. Concepts such as majority rule and minority rights are not part of their doctrine.

Nowadays, the Bush administration and its European allies are using diplomatic muscle to convince the northern alliance that power sharing with other ethnic groups is the way to stability. The alternative, diplomats believe, is another minority government — and continued warfare with its harvest of death, destruction and uprooted families.

The northern alliance attitude toward a broad-based government is grudging acceptance at best. After days of arm-twisting, alliance leader Burhanuddin Rabbani agreed to take part in a U.N.-sponsored power-sharing conference in Berlin.

He later described the meeting as “symbolic” and said substantive decisions on the country’s political future must be made in Afghanistan itself, where his people have the upper hand.

Apprised of Rabbani’s comments, Lakhdar Brahimi, the top U.N. envoy for Afghanistan, said, “That’s not what they told us.”

State Department spokesman Richard Boucher believes the situation is on the right track.

Asked about northern alliance intransigence, he said Tuesday, “I don’t think it’s something to make a big deal of. ... Things seem to be moving in a direction that was set toward a broad-based government.”

Based on its Cold War experience, the United States knows all about disreputable allies. Anti-communist strongmen in Zaire and elsewhere were often abusive but they served Washington’s purposes. The northern alliance, which consists of five loosely aligned factions, may be about to join these ranks, albeit in a post-Cold War context.

The Amnesty International report on the northern alliance continues: “Women were often treated as the spoils of war. Armed groups affiliated with the northern alliance were responsible for widespread torture, including the rape of women and children, a practice condoned by leaders as a method of intimidating the vanquished and of rewarding soldiers.”

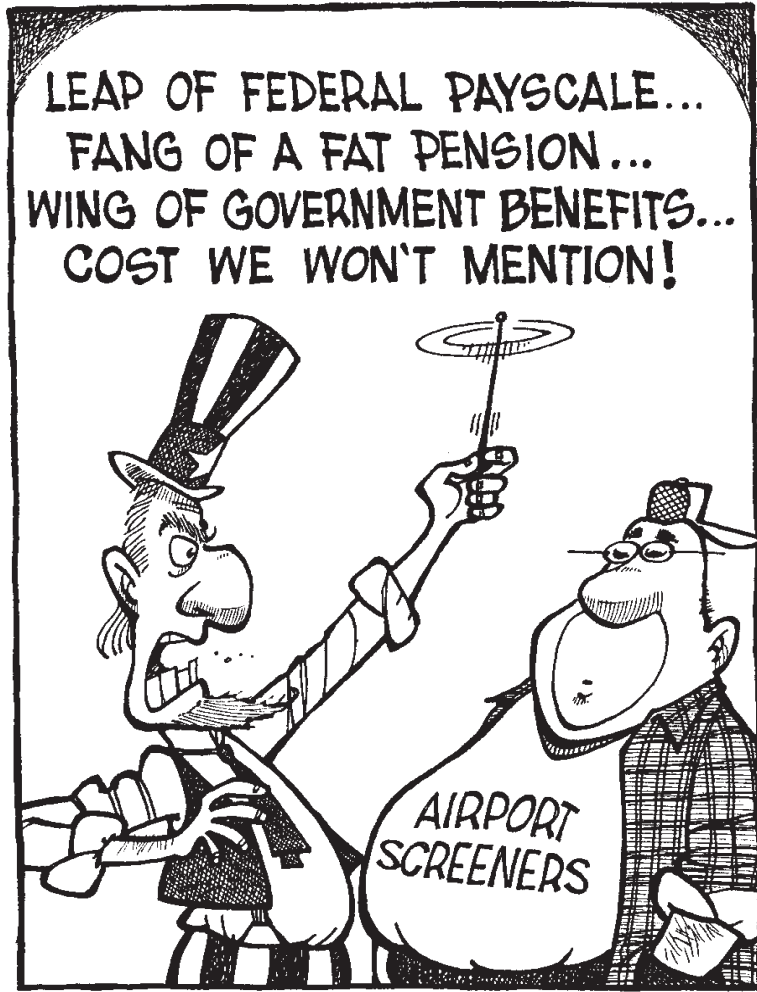
T. Kumar, an Afghan expert at Amnesty International, said Rabbani “did not take any steps to stop these abuses” even though, he said, Rabbani had a duty to do so as head of state.

Still, the scenes from Kabul and other areas of Afghanistan seized from the Taliban suggest that, whatever the abuses under the northern alliance, the Taliban was worse.

Taliban policies toward women were chronicled in a 4,000-word State Department document released Saturday.

“The Taliban,” the report said, “has prohibited schooling for girls over the age of eight, shut down the women’s university, and forced women to quit their jobs. It has restricted access to medical care for women, brutally enforced a restrictive dress code, and limited the ability of women to move about freely. The Taliban has stripped a society in desperate need of trained professionals of half its assets.”

EDITOR’S NOTE — George Gedda has covered foreign affairs for The Associated Press since 1968.



With winter coming time for a laugh or two

I don’t know about you, but I’m sitting here safe and warm on a beautifully sunny Sunday afternoon, looking out my window as a chilly, fall wind is blowing.

It is definitely heralding a coming winter. We can complain about the wind, but if we live in Kansas, we must learn to put up with it.

It’s one of the ways you can usually know you’re in Kansas.

Hope you’re in a tolerant mood; here’s some other ways (from an unknown author) to know you’re from Kansas:

- During a storm you check the cattle before you check the kids.
- You are related to more than half the town.
- You can tell the difference between a horse and a cow from a distance.
- Your car breaks down outside of town and news of it reaches back to town before you do.
- You don’t put too much effort into hairstyles — due to wind and weather.
- Your quarterback is hurt, and you’re hoping it’s the first thing on the 6 o’clock news.
- There’s a tornado warning, and the whole town is outside watching for it.
- The local gas station sells live bait.



lorna g. t.

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- You don’t buy all your vegetables at the grocery store.
- You go to the State Fair for your family vacation.
- You’re on a first name basis with the county sheriff.
- You go to the river because it’s almost like going to the ocean.
- You have the number of the Co-op on speed dial.
- All your radio pre-set buttons are country.
- You try to find the cheapest room rates when you’re going out of town.
- Using the elevator involves a corn truck.
- Your mayor is also your garbage hauler, barber, and insurance salesman.
- You know you should listen to the weather forecast before picking out an outfit.

- You are walking knee-deep in snow.
- You call the wrong number and talk to the person a half-hour anyway.
- Your excuse for getting out of school is that your cows got out.
- You know cow pies aren’t made of beef.
- You wake up when it’s dark and go to bed when it’s still light.
- You consider a romantic evening driving through Hardees and renting a hunting video.
- You listen to Paul Harvey every day at noon.
- You can tell it’s a farmer working late in his field and not a UFO.
- Your nearest neighbor is in the next area code.
- You leave your snow tires on year-round.
- You know the difference between field corn and sweet corn when they’re still on the stalk.
- You pick up all the free stuff at the State Fair.
- It takes 30 seconds to reach your destination, and it’s clear across town.
- You can tell the smell of a skunk and the smell of a feedlot apart.

Well, some people may think we Kansans are hicks, but aren’t we glad we were living and working here last September instead of on the East Coast? Contact Lorna at <lornagt@nwkansas.com>

We always have family adventures on the road

Going anywhere with my mother and/or sister is always an adventure.

Mom’s great-niece and our second cousin, Laurie Corbin, dropped dead at her Kansas City, Mo., home last week. Laurie was 37, the mother of three young girls, and had not been sick. They said it was a heart attack or stroke.

What it really was was a tremendous shock to the whole clan.

Mom called. My sister Marie and I rearranged work schedules. If we left from Concordia just after lunch on Friday, we could make it to the rosary that night and the funeral the next day.

I had to start three hours earlier to get to Concordia, but I was only 20 minutes late. We stuffed suitcases into Mom’s car and took off.

I had the first shift driving. After an uneventful hour and a half on I-70, I gave the wheel to my sister, telling her I would take it back as we left Topeka. Since her son goes to school in Topeka and she visits him fairly often, I thought she wouldn’t have any trouble getting through town on the freeway.

It seems my sister has never driven through Topeka on the freeway. Her son’s school is on the west side of town and that’s as far as she ever goes. She was scared to death, but got us to the toll booth to get on the turnpike.

Steve’s instructions — since none of the three of us had a clue where we were going — were to take the turnpike to the K-7 exit just past Lawrence. From there, we were to get on K-10. This would take us to I-435 which, if we went west or south, would dump us off at State Line Road at 105th. The



cynthia haynes

• open season

funeral home was at 122nd.

These directions sounded pretty simple until you have a driver, like me, who has trouble telling her right from her left; a navigator, like Marie, who likes shortcuts; and a second navigator, mother, who is mostly deaf.

We did fine until it was time to get from K-7 to K-10. I ended up in the wrong lane when it came time to turn.

“We’re in the wrong lane, mother.”
“No, you have to go left and you’re in the wrong lane.”

“Right.”
“No, left.”

So, with cars on my right and left, I went straight figuring to turn around in the service station at the next intersection.

At the station, Marie spotted a frontage road and suggested we could stay out of the traffic if we took a parallel route.

Talk about the garden path. The parallel route took us a block down the road and headed for Oklahoma. We turned around and finally got on K-10.

By this time, it was 5 p.m. and it was rush hour in Kansas City. While it wasn’t my favorite time to be traveling the freeway, we did quite well and found State Line and the funeral home without

problems. Of course, we went past the funeral home before identifying it, so we had to go another mile before finding a turnaround.

We got where we were going and greeted our relatives, a few of whom had come from farther than we had.

After the rosary, we headed for a hotel one of the cousins had suggested.

It turned out to be a nice place after we found it. Her directions were good. It’s just that the hotel was hiding.

We cruised by it twice before spotting the sign about two blocks off the main road. By then it was nice and dark.

On the second trip down the road, we spotted the hotel too late to make the turn. (We’re really good at that.) We drove on until Marie spotted a landscaping business with a nice driveway.

“Look,” she said. “Turn there.”
“Stop!”

I had already seen the chain across the drive. In the daytime, it would have been perfectly visible, but at night it required our headlights to be seen. Of course, by then I was headlight-to-chain with the tail of the car sticking out onto a main street. Luckily, traffic had thinned and I was able to turn us around — there were, of course, ditches on each side of the drive — and get us headed back toward the hotel.

After the funeral the next day, we drove home and made plans to drive Mom to Texas at the end of the month.

Luckily, our mother has a good sense of humor and nerves of steel.

Red Cross deserves continues support

To the Editor:

The American Red Cross has spent \$154 million in less than seven weeks since Sept. 11, an unprecedented charitable effort. We have helped 25,000 families who suffered losses in the Sept. 11 tragedies.

The extraordinary relief effort is financially the largest disaster response in the history of the American Red Cross. In addition to direct assistance, the nation’s oldest and most trusted humanitarian organization has provided more than 10 million meals and snacks (more than 100,000 per day) to families, police officers, fire fighters, recovery personnel, rescue workers, and investigators.

Red Cross mental health workers also have provided emotional support for more than 144,000 people affected by these horrific events. Put in perspective, the Red Cross has provided more funding to victims’ families than all other major charities combined.

In summary, the Red Cross has:
• Expeditiously provided financial cash assistance to 25,000 families.



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- Launched an aggressive outreach program to identify and assist families, including contacting families of foreign nationals who perished in the tragedies.
- Continues to provide respite centers for construction workers, police, fire personnel and emergency medical technicians at the site of the World Trade Center.
- Of the 46,000 disaster relief workers helping at these sites, 43,000 are volunteers.

The American Red Cross was chartered by Congress in 1905 to maintain a system of national and international relief and to help people prevent, prepare for and respond to emergencies. The organization responds to 67,000 disaster each year.

Although chartered by Congress, the agency operates with no government money, but solely by the

generous donations of the American public.

On behalf of those assisted, we say thank you to our community for your outpouring of caring to those affected by the events of Sept. 11. We encourage you to also continue supporting your local Sherman County Red Cross in the months to come.

Sherman County Red Cross Advisory Committee

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