

Diary Entry 4

The following diary entries are Ron Hamilton's personal observations, musings and thoughts while commissioned by World Bank to review governance and monitoring in the SOE sector in Kabul during 2009.

"If you don't know where you are going, any road will lead you there." – unknown

9 May

Saturday. A working day for most though, it seems, not for my escort, N. Friday is a standard holiday but some local professional staff also have Saturday off, unless there is some important task to perform. N's absence today is not unexpected as he was not on deck to receive the schedule of meetings the Ministry has been arranging. I received that schedule of meetings this morning – with the first one within two hours. So, into "uniform" and car-ordering. Had to go on my own and, fortunately, the SOE man had a young guy there as interpreter. Answers were not clear cut – and whether this was due to my phrasing or to their obfuscation, I don't know. The Director-General did tell me that "they" had trouble with my accent. At least, unlike the US people, I don't have to wear body-armour when I go out. Today is somewhat warm and it would be terrible to wear.

Interesting street scenes. Dust is heavy today, though I think it is vehicle-created, not the climatic version that upsets people's respiratory systems. Mind you, my system is a bit slow today as I stayed awake to midnight to see if the Highlanders would save the day in the last minutes. And no, they didn't. Bugger!

10 May

And now it's Sunday, with at least one meeting today. It started well, with a Skype call from Leith. And one of the cats.

My guestie (as against "roomie) said there was an earthquake this morning. At least, he thought it was an earthquake. "If it is a bomb, the windows rattle, and they didn't." Part of the Bank campus has a new office building being finished. Apparently it was thought that I would be located in it but it is slightly behind schedule. There is a large gate nearby – apparently the location of a bomb a year or so back. Did I mention the large sand bags in previous notes? Huge bags of sand each encased in a metal cage to hold it firm. En masse, they give the impression of castle walls. Stacked high like containers on the wharf.

Evening

I am just back from the ADB. Bumper to bumper driving and much dust. If I travel to here again, I will bring a small camera. Mine is a bit bulky. However, I am ready to chance it on some of the trips. Not

to the US compound, of course. But interesting sights – some familiar to people who have visited Asia, of course. Open-fronted butcher shops with goat and sheep carcasses hanging in the dust. The usual tailors and other service shops. We stopped next to a baker. So much bread hanging in racks! My attention was caught by a line of peacocks perched on a railing, each obviously for sale. Also, a stall selling decorated pedal cycle mudguards. Now that's innovative!

We spend much time waiting for the cars. Very hot and sunny today and would be extremely pleasant if it were not for the dust.

While waiting for the car to take us to the ADB, three well-equipped American-manned Hummers entered the protected street. We knew they were US-owned as the guy in the top, open turret asked us for directions. They had taken a wrong turn – which is a bit interesting to think about. Perhaps the GPS satellite was off-line today? But great looking machines! As my Afghan colleague observed, they were new models and “our army gets the old ones!” I'd love to look in one, though. Photographing is not an option, I was told. But they do look menacing! Just the vehicle needed to combat Auckland women in (badly-driven) SUVs!

My offer to run a session on ownership structures has been accepted and I will need to cobble a presentation together from the power points I brought with me.

I understand we have more guests arriving today. I doubt that they will be women as, according to my fellow guest, women hate staying here because of the toilet smell. True, the nose is hit by the results of bad sewer seals as soon as one comes upstairs.

It seems I have committed a faux pas in entering Afghanistan last week. No one told me that I had to go to an airport office to complete an immigration form. I was so relieved to get my suddenly non-machine readable passport back and my suitcase from the utter shambles of the sole carousel for three incoming flights, I never noticed the office. If the worst happens, and I am denied boarding, please watch out for the address to send food parcels to! It is not entirely a joke – it does happen! For just this reason!