

“I am privileged to do what I love and have dreamed of for many long and uncompromising years of exile: To regain my country and serve my people.”

- Said T. Jawad

SAID T. JAWAD

Golden Gate's Ambassador

By Robert Hite

It's a long way from Kandahar to San Francisco. But out of a love for liberty, necessity, resilience, determination, desire, and possibly fate, our esteemed alumnus, His Excellency Ambassador Said T. Jawad, traveled that long distance. There were significant stops along the way. His journey began in Kandahar, Afghanistan with stops in Kabul, Muenster, Germany, and New York City before finally reaching San Francisco. You will learn later how he came to be Afghanistan's ambassador to the United States.

It was in San Francisco that Said enrolled at Golden Gate University and earned his Executive MBA, which provided him with the practice-based skills he is using in his current position. To understand Ambassador Jawad, it is important to know something about the place where his formative years began, and that place is Kandahar.

Let us begin with some basic facts about Said's birthplace. Kandahar is the seat of old Afghan empires, and today the third largest city in Afghanistan with a population of 400,000. It is the capital of Kandahar province located in the south of the country on a plateau about 3,300 feet above sea level. Founded in 330 B.C. by Alexander the Great, the city is a major trading center with an international airport and extensive roadways linking cities to the west, the capital city Kabul to the northeast, and the nation of Pakistan to the south.

The Soviet Union occupied Afghanistan from 1979 to 1989.

During this period, Kandahar as well as Kabul were under Soviet command and witnessed heavy fighting. Soviet troops and the Afghan resistance groups surrounded the cities, subjecting them to heavy artillery and air bombardment. Property was destroyed and many civilians lost their lives. After almost thirty years of destruction and no development, Kandahar, along with the rest of Afghanistan, is being rebuilt, its orchards and vineyards restored and historic monuments and parks repaired.

Kandahar's major highways have been repaired and completed, including the highway to Kabul. Its residents have access to clean drinking water and twenty-four-hour electricity. Up to 20,000 single-family homes and associated infrastructure such as roads, water and sewer systems, and community buildings including schools, are under construction in Kandahar with the assistance of the US. Just east of the city, a huge industrial park with modern facilities is being built, and a rail line from the Pakistani town of Chaman to Kandahar is planned for the near future. The advocacy for the planning and groundwork laid for many of these improvements is directly attributable to the thoughtful and skillful work of Ambassador Jawad.

His birthplace was known for its verdant fields with an abundance of farms, orchards and vineyards. To read about Kandahar (and the country of Afghanistan in general) and to hear it described, Kandahar was like the Bay Area's own Santa Clara Valley. "The Valley of the Heart's Delight," as it was called before developers bought the land and cleared the farms and orchards to make way for housing developments.

That in a nutshell is the story of Kandahar.

Although born in Kandahar, young Said had a second home in the capital city of Kabul, where his father served as a dean and professor at Kabul University. It was there that Said's parents

enrolled him in the French Lycee Esteqial, one of the most prominent high schools in Central Asia, where he completed his studies, all taught in French. After passing his baccalaureate at the Lycee, Said turned to higher education studying law and political science at Kabul University.

Said grew up in an environment of prosperity. His country was known for its rich cultural history, precious works of art, beautiful scenery, and productive farms and orchards. Unfortunately, this calm, beautiful life was disrupted by the decade-long Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan, which caused massive upheaval in Kandahar, Kabul and the rest of the country. Entire cities and infrastructure were leveled, and farms and orchards destroyed. It was not a safe place to raise a family.

Because of the tyranny of the Marxist regime and the disruption and upheaval throughout the country, first Said and then his father made the difficult decision to uproot the family from their home. They were clearly in harm's way. Shortly after he had finished law school in 1980, Said went into exile in Germany where he continued his legal studies at Westfaelische Wilhelms University in Muenster. Said remained in Germany for nearly six years; his family later left for Pakistan.

While living in Germany, Said made several trips to New York City during his summer holidays to visit a beautiful young woman, Shamim—a former classmate at Kabul University—who would later become his wife. They were married in New York on October 14, 1986. That same year, Said moved to New York where he was employed at a Wall Street firm. While they were living in New York City, Said and Shamim traveled several times to San Francisco where Shamim's family was living.

Thanks to those trips, Said and his wife developed a fondness for San Francisco, especially Lake Tahoe and the Napa Valley.

They decided to move to San Francisco and Said accepted a job with Steefel, Levitt & Weiss, where he worked from 1989 to 2002. Meanwhile, Shamim, who was determined to complete her education, learned of Golden Gate University's program for working adults. She enrolled and completed her undergraduate degree.

Said became acquainted with Golden Gate University and its reputation for practice-based education for working adults because of his wife's experience. Thanks to his positive educational experiences and having grown up as the son of the dean of Kabul University, Said had a natural love of education and enjoyed being in an academic environment. He thought it would be a good idea to get an MBA at Golden Gate University at the same time his wife was pursuing her degree. "The first thing that attracted me to Golden Gate University was the fact that it was one of the oldest academic institutions for working adults. That and the feedback I got from my wife further enticed me," he recalls. Said investigated the university's offerings and settled on the Executive MBA program in 2000 after learning about its content and flexibility.

Because classes were held on weekends, the program enabled him to continue working while earning his degree. "It was a program that I enjoyed tremendously. In fact, I probably learned more through my Executive MBA program than I learned in the law schools in Afghanistan and Germany. The EMBA program was designed specifically for executives, and we were dealing with a group of experienced and seasoned students from many walks of life who brought different types of expertise and exposure." One classmate was the spokesperson for the mayor of San Francisco; another managed a steel mill; yet another was a Japanese colleague who was an airline executive.

“When we were discussing operational management issues, I was more focused on the legal aspects, while another student who had managerial experience focused on public relations and union issues, and still another would focus on liability and risk management because of his experience in those areas. The program gave me exposure to a variety of real-life factors involved in management decision-making.”

Said completed the EMBA in 2001 and recalls vividly the excellent faculty, his classmates with whom he continues to keep in touch, and the international study trip that was an integral part of the program. He and his EMBA cohort went to Chile and Argentina and he and a few friends took a side trip to Brazil. He credits that trip with helping him carry out his current ambassadorial duties, which include being ambassador to Argentina, Brazil, Colombia and Mexico, as well as his primary role as Afghanistan's ambassador to the United States.

Shortly after earning his Executive MBA and six months after the 9/11 attack, Said returned to his home country to assist in the difficult and ongoing state-building process.

Before being named ambassador on December 3, 2003, he served as President Karzai's press secretary, chief of staff, and director of the Office of International Relations at the Presidential Palace. He worked closely with the Afghanistan president in formulating strategies and plans, developing and implementing policies, and building national institutions such as the widely respected Afghan National Army. He also played a key role in drafting Afghanistan's foreign-investment laws and served as President Karzai's principal liaison to the constitutional commission throughout the drafting of Afghanistan's constitution.

Since being named ambassador, Said has worked to make the Embassy of Afghanistan one of the most innovative and respon-

sive embassies in the country. Indeed, it is emerging as one of the most successful missions in Washington, DC. Ambassador Jawad regularly speaks with media: He has been quoted in *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Washington Post* and has appeared on a number of news shows. He also appears frequently at many universities and think tanks, and has spoken at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the Center for Strategic and International Studies and Harvard University. In late 2008, Ambassador Jawad received the Global Citizen Award from Roots of Peace, a California-based NGO that works on de-mining projects in post-conflict countries.

In carrying out the management of the embassy, Said relies a great deal on the management concepts and tools he learned in the Executive MBA program. He has been a leader and an innovator, incorporating technology to reach out to the world. His goal is to help educate people about his beautiful country, the challenges it faces, and the creative solutions that are being brought to bear to help solve some of the nation's problems. The fact that he is fluent in a number of languages—French, German, Farsi, Pashto, and English—is a distinct advantage in his work.

Thanks to the ambassador's work, the media have rated the embassy as "one of the most responsive, well-run, and fastest growing embassies." Said remarks that in spite of its small size and limited resources when compared to the larger embassies, his office has published extensively and he has done scores of interviews. The Afghanistan Embassy was the first to have a Facebook account with multiple articles and information published on the site. A visit to the embassy website is an impressive learning experience.

His is a hectic schedule. He has traveled to twenty-five states in order to help the American people learn about his majestic

country, the issues it and the Afghan people are facing, and how its leaders are strategically developing solutions to many serious and complex challenges.

He speaks passionately about one particular incident in which a poor Kabul museum worker risked his life to hide precious national treasures so the Taliban could not destroy them. “When you are starving and it doesn’t seem like there is a future for you or your country, yet you put your life on the line to save a piece of art or a piece of the museum, it demonstrates the good nature of human beings everywhere.”

Ambassador Jawad has made appearances on all the major television news venues: *60 Minutes*, *Meet the Press*, *Face the Nation*, as well as programs on CNN, BBC International, and Bloomberg. (He had returned to the embassy from an interview with Bloomberg just minutes before our interview.) “A lot of what I do has a direct connection with the education I received, including my EMBA from Golden Gate.”

The embassy website includes a number of the ambassador’s speeches, including a major presentation at Harvard University in which he addresses many crucial issues: the Taliban, fighting the narcotics trade, the critical role of Afghanistan’s relations with its important neighbor to the south, Pakistan. He also speaks of the progress that has been made in Afghanistan with the help and perseverance of both the people of Afghanistan and the people and government of the United States. He points out that with the strong support of the United States some 6.4 million children—36 percent of them girls—are now back in school in Afghanistan; there is a democratically elected president and 28 percent of parliament is composed of women); there is a vibrant and free media, with hundreds of private radio and TV stations; schools and health clinics have been built in far-flung villages

that had never had them; women have been elected as senators and ministers. He concluded his Harvard speech by observing: “The Afghan people are determined to rebuild their country and are grateful for the support and friendship of the United States.”

The ambassador and his wife live in the official ambassador’s residence in Washington, DC, but occasionally return to the Bay Area to visit their parents. Shamim works as a financial consultant and their son Iman is a student at Tufts University, studying international relations and international security. Said is duly proud of his son and hopes he might choose to follow in his footsteps.

In October 2007 the ambassador and his wife hosted a reception for GGU alumni, which the GGU president and his wife attended. There were approximately a hundred alumni and guests. Said recalls the evening vividly: “It was a tremendous joy and we had a wonderful time meeting alumni from the ‘60s and ‘70s who demonstrated that the alumni of GGU are doing well and are everywhere beyond the Bay Area.” Two years earlier Said had taken time out of his hectic schedule to speak at GGU’s Centennial Campaign Opening Gala at the Sir Francis Drake Hotel in San Francisco.

Said’s life journey began in Kandahar, moved on to Kabul where he received his educational foundation, then to Muenster after the Soviet occupation of his country, and then on to New York and San Francisco, and ultimately Washington, DC. That journey has served him well in executing his duties as the ambassador from Afghanistan to the United States of America. And while it is certain that this amazing man would not publicly take credit for the positive and strategic plans and activities in rebuilding his war-damaged country, it is equally clear that he has played an integral part in working with President Karzai and

others in these significant efforts.

Ambassador Said Jawad readily acknowledges Golden Gate University and how what he learned through the EMBA program has been so useful in his role as ambassador; we acknowledge our pride in claiming him as our “GGU Ambassador.”

*Ambassador Said T. Jawad was interviewed on April 10, 2009
by Vice President of Business Affairs and Chief Financial
Officer Robert Hite.*