

**Testimony of  
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Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Central Asia**

**House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform  
Hearing on “Rebuilding Afghanistan: Oversight of  
Defense Department Infrastructure Projects”  
March 16, 2016, 9:00 AM  
2154 Rayburn House Office Building**

Chairman Chaffetz, Ranking Member Cummings, and Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to discuss Department of Defense (DoD) infrastructure projects in Afghanistan. I am honored to have the opportunity to update you alongside my colleagues Mr. Howard Stickley from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Mr. Randy Brown from the Air Force Civil Engineering Center, and Mr. John Sopko, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR).

I also want to thank the members of this Committee for your attention to our efforts in Afghanistan. All of the witnesses before you today take seriously our responsibility to be good stewards of U.S. taxpayer dollars and to ensure our DoD personnel – military and civilian – as well as our diplomats and other U.S. Government personnel in Afghanistan, have the resources, authorities, and guidance they need to accomplish their mission. We are forever grateful to and honor the 2,236 U.S. service members who lost their lives while serving in

Afghanistan, the 20,129 military personnel who were wounded, and the thousands of families who have sacrificed for this important mission. Their efforts represent a strategically significant contribution to the security of our homeland as we work to prevent Afghanistan from once again becoming a safe haven from which terrorists can plan attacks against the U.S. homeland, U.S. interests abroad, or our international partners.

Within DoD, my office is responsible to provide overall policy guidance for and oversight of the mission in Afghanistan, including reconstruction efforts funded by the Afghanistan Security Forces Fund (ASFF), the Afghanistan Infrastructure Fund (AIF), and the Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP). We have daily contact with key personnel in theater at the Combined Security Transition Assistance Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A) and U.S. Forces-Afghanistan (USFOR-A) Joint Engineers, which have primary responsibility for the execution of DoD infrastructure projects in Afghanistan. In addition, we work closely with the Joint Staff, U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM), the Department of State, and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and others as we continually assess the status of our efforts in Afghanistan. My office also supports the efforts of the Office of the Lead Inspector General (IG) for Afghanistan – the DoD IG – as well as the Office of the SIGAR, the Government Accountability Office, and other audit agencies, ensuring

they have the information and appropriate context they require to fulfill their respective statutory mandates.

Today, I will briefly discuss the policy framework in which DoD conducts its overall mission in Afghanistan, describe DoD's current approach to infrastructure projects, and describe how DoD manages and oversees those projects. In doing so, I will also describe our dedication to accountability and transparency regarding how DoD spends U.S. taxpayer dollars in support of Afghanistan's reconstruction.

Over the previous 14-plus years, U.S. forces have worked with our international partners and the Afghan government to improve security and stability in Afghanistan. In this contingency environment, our mission focus has evolved over time – from a combat mission focused on counterterrorism and counterinsurgency that ended in December 2014, to our current non-combat mission. Currently, DoD is conducting two complementary, but narrow missions in Afghanistan as part of Operation FREEDOM'S SENTINEL: a counterterrorism mission against the remnants of al Qaeda and other extremist groups that threaten the United States – such as the Islamic State in Khorasan Province (IS-KP) – and a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)-led train, advise, and assist mission with the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF), known as Resolute Support.

Rather than the more than 100,000 U.S. military personnel at hundreds of locations during our former mission, today there are 9,800 U.S. military personnel at a handful of locations. The era characterized by large investments in infrastructure projects, which coincided with the U.S. troop surge and an emphasis on counterinsurgency and stability operations, largely concluded with the end of our combat mission in December 2014.

Over the last ten years, DoD completed over \$9 billion in infrastructure projects for the Ministries of Defense (MoD) and Interior (MoI) and their forces. For the MoD, we completed more than 380 projects providing barracks, dining facilities, training sites, and other basing infrastructure. This work now supports 24 Afghan National Army (ANA) combat brigades, 3 combat air wings, 24 branch and basic training schools, and a number of support facilities, such as depots, hospitals, and other training facilities.

For the MoI, we completed more than 730 projects. These included station houses for provincial and district-level police headquarters located throughout all the provinces of Afghanistan, six border police zones, eight Afghan National Civil Order Police brigades, and five regional training zones, along with other such facilities like warehouses, hospitals, and recruiting collection points.

On a smaller scale, DoD also executed projects through AIF and CERP. With AIF, DoD partnered with the Department of State, USAID, and the Afghan

government to implement a small number of long-term infrastructure projects with a focus on providing electricity to millions of Afghans in restive parts of the country. The lack of reliable, affordable power is one of the biggest impediments to Afghanistan's economic growth.

With CERP, local commanders completed thousands of small-scale humanitarian and reconstruction projects to improve security and stability in their areas of operations. For example, U.S. forces used CERP to construct or repair thousands of village wells, repair roads damaged by improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and build security walls around schools and clinics.

At the height of combat operations, the annual appropriations for ASFF, CERP, and AIF reached \$10.6 billion, \$1 billion, and \$400 million, respectively. Our current funding levels are substantially less, and our allocations for infrastructure are a mere fraction of current appropriations. For fiscal year (FY) 2016, Congress appropriated \$5 million for CERP and \$3.7 billion for ASFF, of which one percent is allocated for infrastructure. Further, we have not requested any funds for AIF since FY 2014.

Since FY 2013, DoD has sharply reduced funding requests for ANDSF infrastructure, as our efforts in Afghanistan have evolved from establishing the force to sustaining the force. Large-scale construction projects are no longer the norm. Today, ASFF infrastructure dollars go to the upkeep and repair of existing

facilities. DoD is now focused on the completion of a small number of remaining planned projects, such as a munitions storage facility for the Afghan Air Force A-29 aircraft, and projects intended to enhance the participation of women in the ANDSF. CSTC-A engineers are now focused on training the ANDSF to design, contract, oversee, and deliver their own facility requirements, although the ANDSF will still require CSTC-A contracts to perform the most complex projects until they develop the capacity to do so for themselves.

To be sure, there remains a need for basic infrastructure in Afghanistan and, fortunately, the international community continues to invest in major power, water, and transportation initiatives which are critical for Afghanistan's economic development. However, consistent with our current counterterrorism and train, advise, and assist missions, DoD has appropriately curtailed its role in funding and building new infrastructure.

With respect to how the Department implemented past projects in Afghanistan—and continues to execute ongoing infrastructure projects—I'd like to explain DoD's system of processes and procedures to ensure we use our limited resources to build only what is needed to advance our mission, to meet the appropriate standards of quality, and to mitigate the risks of waste, fraud, or abuse.

Infrastructure requirements are typically generated and validated long before the President submits a budget request to Congress and are later re-assessed according to funding levels authorized and appropriated by Congress, changes to the mission, and ANDSF operational requirements, as validated in theater. Requirements for individual projects are reviewed and approved taking into account projected costs, which include not only construction costs but also the estimated annual costs for operations and maintenance of the project. Project approval also takes into account the ability of the Afghans to sustain the infrastructure and fund operations and maintenance. In accordance with the requirements set forth by Congress for each funding source, many projects are approved at the highest levels of the Department and notified to the appropriate congressional oversight committees.

Within the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), large projects funded by ASFF, AIF, and CERP are approved and overseen by the Afghanistan Resources Oversight Council (AROC), established by the Deputy Secretary of Defense in 2011. I am one of chairs of the AROC, along with senior officials from OSD Comptroller and Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics. AROC members include the Joint Staff, the Office of Army Financial Management and Comptroller, USCENTCOM, CSTC-A, USACE, and others.

Project approval, however, is only the first step. As my colleagues can explain in further detail, various offices, interagency working groups, and individuals at all levels – from the AROC in the Pentagon, to USACE engineers in theater – continue to monitor and oversee projects until they are completed.

This is not to say that all projects are a success. As Mr. Sopko will describe, some projects do experience problems, delays, cost-overruns, and other setbacks. As you are all aware, Afghanistan has been at war for decades and has an active insurgency. It remains a challenging and dangerous environment, and while it is improving, there is a long history of corruption. Beyond the obvious security threats and the risk to the lives of U.S. personnel—military and civilian, alike—many infrastructure projects have a long lead-time and face significant obstacles in the staging of projects.

After decades of war, the ability to source construction materials locally is difficult due to the lack of existing production and manufacturing capacity. As a land-locked country without viable rail transport for commercial goods, most materials must be imported and delivered by trucks across the Pakistan border. Importing construction materials increases costs and puts delivery schedules at the mercy of underdeveloped roads and highways, corrupt border officials, insurgent activity, and common criminals.



In order to develop local Afghan construction and engineering capacity and reduce security costs, we often use local contractors, enabling them to develop critical management capabilities and technical skills. As my colleagues can describe, we mitigate the risks of this approach by working closely with the contractors to manage problems, control costs, and forecast project completion. USACE also successfully developed an Afghan Quality Assurance Personnel Program to train local experts to conduct on-site inspections and tests at USACE construction sites that U.S. personnel cannot regularly visit.

In a handful of cases, projects have failed. For example, Mr. Sopko and his inspections team recently published a report about an Afghan police training facility, which cost nearly \$500,000. According to a U.S. mentor who alerted authorities, the walls dissolved or “melted” in the rain. That is unacceptable. And we appreciate the efforts of SIGAR, the DoD IG, the Government Accountability Office, and others for shining a light on these problems so we can take corrective action. We have worked closely with auditors on more than 500 audits, inspections, and other oversight projects, and have taken action to improve the execution of our reconstruction efforts. This includes continual reviews of projects, which have resulted in the cancelation of hundreds of millions of dollars in proposed planned projects. When we do fail, we work to learn from these mistakes – many of which we have identified ourselves – and implement changes.

In fact, in a recent compilation of SIGAR's past infrastructure reports, SIGAR notes that, of the 95 recommendations spanning 36 infrastructure inspection reports between July 2009 and September 2015, "DoD implemented 86, or 90 percent" of those recommendations. SIGAR goes on to say, "DoD generally took action to improve efficiency and effectiveness in its reconstruction activities, and to correct construction deficiencies."

These facts only serve to underscore DoD's commitment to a responsible effort in Afghanistan. Nobody in the Department of Defense is satisfied with a failed project. It hurts the mission, undermines confidence in the Department, and wastes taxpayer funds. Fortunately, failure is rare. The vast majority of infrastructure projects – from the replacement of broken windows in a village school, to the emergency repairs that prevented the closing of the Salang Tunnel, from the restoration of irrigation capacity at the Dahla Dam, to the construction of the ANA garrison at Gamberi – were completed successfully and used as intended, to the benefit of the Afghan people and long-term U.S. interests.

DoD personnel continue to work tirelessly and often at great personal risk to help our Afghan partners successfully build critically needed infrastructure in a dangerous environment. Success in Afghanistan does not come easy, but we pursue it because of the strategic importance of our mission.

Notwithstanding some mistakes, overall, DoD's infrastructure programs – particularly those focused on Afghanistan's core security needs – have been highly successful and critical to the Afghan government's ability to provide security across Afghanistan. I want to stress that we are committed to ensuring U.S. taxpayers funds are used efficiently and invested wisely. The American people have made a generous and important contribution to the ANDSF and the future of Afghanistan. This support has enabled the United States to step out of a large-scale combat role and enable the Afghans to defend their country.

In closing, I want to again thank the Committee for this opportunity to discuss our efforts to develop necessary infrastructure in our support our mission and to ensure we are doing so responsibly.

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## OFFICE OF THE UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR POLICY

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Christine Abizaid was appointed Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Central Asia in July 2014 and later appointed Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense in December 2014.

Prior to joining the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Ms. Abizaid served on the National Security Council Staff as both a Director for Counterterrorism and Senior Policy Advisor to the Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism. She also served for seven years with the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) Joint Intelligence Task Force Combating Terrorism as the Senior Intelligence Analyst in the Afghanistan-Pakistan Division and the Iraq/Middle East Division. During this time she deployed several times throughout the Middle East, including a tour as the senior DIA counterterrorism representative in Iraq.

Ms. Abizaid holds a B.A. degree in Psychology from the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) and an M.A. degree in International Policy Studies from Stanford University. She has received the Office of the Director of National Intelligence Award, the National Military Intelligence Association John T. Hughes Award, and DIA Meritorious Civilian Service Award.